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## ***At-Risk Youth Programs in South Africa***<sup>1</sup>

*Presenter:*

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Successful sport and recreation programs for the youth of South Africa are a prerequisite for ensuring a safe environment and a prosperous future for all the people of South Africa. (Rita Horn)

### **Background**

South Africa has a predominantly young population. Persons younger than 30 years presently constitute approximately 66% of the country's population. Taking into consideration the widespread involvement of youth in political violence and crime, the threat to the future posed by rampant youth became obvious and could not be rationalized away. Add to this the cultural and ethnic diversity in the country, and it becomes abundantly clear that it is a complex situation which requires delicate management. Therefore it is imperative that youth, many of whom are marginalized, be reached and brought back into the mainstream of society.

Within the South African context, those between the ages of 15 and 30 are loosely defined as youth, and they constitute 29% of the total population. Various social and political factors have contributed to the shaping of the future of South African youth. These factors include inadequate education resulting in unemployment and poverty; the forced removal of people from traditional tribal territories; the pass system (domestic identity document, also called passbook or reference book, carried by black citizens in South Africa); and the system of migrant labor that resulted in family and community instability, coupled with the diminishing role of the parent in the immediate family circle. Because most work opportunities are in the city, parents have to leave home in the traditional Black

townships located outside the cities very early in the morning, and return late at night. During the day they have no idea of the whereabouts of their children. Under these circumstances, violence and crime have flourished.

### **Unemployment**

The number of people who are unemployed in South Africa is disturbing:

	Unemployed	Percent of Group
Whites	209,260	8.4
Blacks	2,968,539	37.1
Asians	66,091	16.3
Coloureds	341,847	23.4

(Official figures in October 1993: provided by National Statistical Services; former independent homelands not included)

Unemployment is high especially among Blacks. This figure is reflected in the overall violence and crime rate. The above figures could be a gross underestimation of the situation for two reasons: first, because the former independent homelands are not included, and unemployment is rife in these predominantly rural areas; and second, no comprehensive head count has as yet been undertaken to determine the exact population of South Africa. Previous census reports failed to accomplish this task. The Human Science Research

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<sup>1</sup> Material is taken edited by Witt, P.A., & Crompton, J.L. (Eds.). (1996). *Recreation programs that work for at-risk youth: The challenge of shaping the future*. State College, PA: Venture Publishing, Inc.

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Council (HSRC) estimated South Africa's population figures for 1995 as being:

Whites	5,168,700
Blacks	35,585,200
Asians	1,030,900
Coloureds	<u>3,528,600</u>
Total	45,313,400

Considering the large percentage *registered* as unemployed in the Black community, the estimates of the HSRC give rise for concern. It *therefore* becomes obvious that strong emphasis should be placed on programs targeting especially the youth belonging to this group in order to present them with quality of life experiences as well as opportunities to improve their physical environment.

### Recognition by Government

In 1987 the President's Council Committee for Social Affairs tabled a comprehensive report on the youth of South Africa. Unfortunately, in spite of all the hard work and submissions by all the persons and departments concerned, the report was basically shelved. Various attempts over the next few years by the Department of Sport and Recreation for example to obtain funding for youth programs were ignored.

Although the African National Congress (ANC) promised youth in the preelection period that they would receive preferential treatment, other seemingly more urgent matters of State had to be dealt with first. In December 1994, however, the ANC adopted a proposal which provides for the establishment of a portfolio for Youth Affairs. The 16th of June has also been declared Youth Day and a national public holiday by Parliament.

At present, the Government of South Africa lacks a formal policy geared specifically towards youth. Although this situation is not desirable, the implementation of national programs is subject to the availability of financial and human resources. These resources have been stretched to their limit even before the election of the present Government of National Unity. Basic needs, such as healthcare, housing, water, electricity, and also education, receive preferential treatment at this time.

The Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP), which has as its goal the uplifting of communities is the yardstick for all expenditures by the Government. This program envisages a national youth service program and the establishment of an autonomous National Youth Council in which youth would be represented.

## Programs

### State Departments

The Department of Sport and Recreation is engaged in development programs targeted specifically at youth. But due to a lack of funds these programs usually operate on an *ad hoc* basis with limited funding. A more holistic approach to the problem as well as sufficient funding by the Government is essential to address the youth problem. A recent meeting hosted by the Department of Education for the government departments involved in youth affairs, was a positive step towards creating an awareness among the various departments for their programs aimed at addressing the youth situation. Departments already involved are sport and recreation, health, welfare, labor, education, correctional services, police services, and environmental affairs.

### Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs)

The National Youth Development Forum (NYDF) and the National Youth Service Initiative (NYSI) are strong NGOs that have focused efforts on training youth in various areas of service. Simultaneously, youth are provided with basic education on-site. These programs include training in building skills, childcare, and catering. The youth earn a stipend and also receive suitable clothing and meals. Trainees receive formal accreditation from recognized institutions after completion of the various programs which last between a minimum of six months and a maximum of two years. Their intention is to establish a closer relationship with the government. For instance, the Department of Public Works should become involved in a building program; the Department of Education in the provision of facilities and training; and the Department of Health in offering training in the administration of health programs, as well as the training of nutritionists and healthcare workers. During their period of training, youth stay in their own communities. They are, therefore, able to contribute on a continuous basis towards the uplifting of their communities.

The former Gold Shield Award, now the President's Award Program, is another NGO which aims at encouraging responsible citizenship amongst youth by way of service, hiking expeditions, skills, and fitness training. The Minister of Sport and Recreation has accepted the position of Chairman of the governing body of the President's Award Program.

Other NGOs that utilize outdoor recreational pursuits to develop leadership abilities with youth are the Wilderness Leadership School, Lapalala Wilderness School, the Outdoor Adventure Association of South Africa, the Rural Foundation, Voortrekkers, Land Service Movement, Boy Scouts, and Girl Guides.

NGOs, parents, and churches need to form partnerships with the state and the private sector to address the needs and problems of youth. This can only be achieved if all the efforts employed complement one another and are coordinated and geared towards developing the youth of South Africa.

### **The Future**

The Department of Sport and Recreation will focus on mass out-of-school youth involvement in sport and physical recreation, catering to marginalized youth. The Department recognizes that sport and recreation have a strong mass appeal and an inherent ability to override social and cultural differences. On the playing fields all people are equal, and this phenomenon may serve as the basis by which other social issues and ills can be addressed. Once attracted by sport and games, the young person can also be exposed to other areas such as health, education, and job training. These could be presented in collaboration with sport and recreation programs.

The Department of Sport and Recreation intends to employ a two-pronged approach. Programs need to be presented on a continuous basis by the existing provincial structures and personnel, in conjunction with sports and recreation governing bodies. These programs may serve to identify sport and leadership talent and also to “keep youngsters from falling into mischief.”

Young people will also need to be taught the skills to effectively function as sport and play leaders and even be employed in this capacity by local authorities, sport governing bodies, and NGOs. To recruit volunteers to assist in this training is of primary importance. Since these qualifications need to be recognized on a national level, formal certification and accreditation of leaders is imperative.