

# Digital Village, Soweto, South Africa

Community based training centre

## Introduction

For more than four years the Soweto Digital Village has been providing technological access and much-needed training in computers to the previously disadvantaged communities of Soweto. During these years, the needs of the community have presented new and significant challenges in bridging the information technology gap, which exists among the communities. At the same time, the communities have been shown to benefit if advances in information technology are used to serve as a vehicle for skill development, job creation, information access, improved communications, and collaboration. The Soweto Digital Village project is an initiative by the private, public and the community sectors, which is aiming at providing the community with access to and training in information and communications technology.

The centre provides the surrounding communities, schools, students and local entrepreneurs the opportunity to develop their computer skills, access to information and communication technology and take advantage of the power of the Internet. Housed in a community centre owned by the local municipality, and pays for some of the services it receives from it. The centre is primarily a training centre for computer literacy. It offers training on software applications, with Microsoft products enjoying centre stage. Other packages are also offered, depending of the availability of sponsorships and appropriate training.

Currently there are only three projects running, with one (Galeshewe) at the verge of closure.

The purpose of this study is to identify those aspects in programming that contribute towards youth employment (and, consequently, the sectors in which success is evident).

<p><b>SUSTAINABILITY FACTORS</b></p>	<p>Notes from Interviews</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital Villages (two in Gauteng, one in the Northern Cape)</li> <li>• Technical college (one in the North West province)</li> <li>• TeleCentre (one in Gauteng)</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Soweto Digital Village Progress and Status Report – Year 2001/02</li> <li>• Joint Education Trust Evaluation Report May 2000</li> </ul>
<p><b>Objectives</b></p>	<p>The main aim of the digital village is to provide training in and access to information and communication technology to the previously disadvantaged communities in an affordable and sustainable way.</p> <p>To realise one Digital Village, Soweto, is committed to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bring technology closer and within reach of the communities through collaborative efforts of the community, the private and public sectors.</li> <li>• Provide access to and use of information technology resources to the community in an affordable but sustainable way.</li> <li>• Build capacity and empower the community members with information technology skills, which they can apply to improve the quality of their lives.</li> <li>• Increase the level of understanding of Information Technology and its role in society.</li> <li>• Accelerate the local economic growth through application of the computer skills learned by providing technology resources to the community.</li> <li>• Promote the integration and use of technology in education.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Policy environment</b></p>	<p>Policies that influence the landscape of human (and in particular, youth) development include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The National Youth Policy (1997);</li> <li>• Inter-Departmental Committee on Youth Affairs - Guide to Government Youth Development Programmes (1999);</li> <li>• and the Transformation of the South African Child and Youth Care System, an Inter-Sectoral Policy (2000).</li> </ul> <p>These policies are not enacted in law. However, they cannot be dismissed because they form the basis on which government engages civil society, trade and commerce and the outside world on matters related to human capital</p>

	<p>development.</p> <p>National government has facilitated a positive policy environment for projects such as the centre. For instance, previously such projects could not give recognised qualifications unless they were an extension of an educational institute. Currently they can apply for registration as accredited providers. This also opens other benefits such as state subsidies, contracts and subsidised learners under special conditions.</p> <p>In August 2001, Soweto Digital village was registered as an organisation under section 21 of the company's act.</p>
<p><b>Institutional arrangements</b></p>	<p>A board of directors provides governance to centre. The board members are all residents of Soweto.</p> <p>Staff numbers are currently very small, indicative of poor capacity to mobilise financial resources. The small staff complement, consisting of the director (who is the chief trainer) a second trainer and part time workers offering administrative support is responsible for the programmes offered by the centre.</p> <p><u>Organisation roles / responsibilities/ Constraints.</u></p> <p>With the exception of Tsholofelo, no centre has a development plan, although Siyabonga is in the process of developing one. Soweto has identified the need to develop a plan and Alex can be described as being in the initial rollout phase</p> <p><u>Role of Target Group</u></p> <p>Although learners have various activities outside of the learning programmes, these are not formally instituted, because there is no learner formation at the centre.</p> <p><u>Review / evaluation procedures</u></p> <p>Having been sponsored by Microsoft and a number of other companies they consider each of those companies a stakeholder who must be consulted before strategic changes are made. In 2000, Africare commissioned an independent evaluation that was designed to enhance the operation and build capacity. Regularly 6-month reports are sent to the major stakeholders.</p>
<p><b>Target Groups</b></p>	<p>The surrounding communities, schools, students and local entrepreneurs - gives them the opportunity to develop their computer skills, access to information and communication technology and take advantage of the power of the Internet. People sign up for membership which gives a range of services including internet access and training opportunities. The emphasis on membership (and membership fees) was to encourage financial sustainability. However, recently the stakeholders have requested a change of policy to make the centre more open to 'the man on the street'. Also the members tend to be drawn from throughout Soweto rather than the immediate surroundings.</p> <p><u>Poverty and the project</u></p> <p>A recent evaluation pointed to a significant contribution to job creation (both within the centres and with regard to ex-members), skills development and empowerment within the centres. The report concluded that the DV project is a valuable initiative which could continue to make a substantial contribution to local economic development.</p> <p><u>How have they been involved in project design?</u></p> <p>It the beginning there was a community consultation and in theory the community have always been stakeholders in the project. In the last couple of years the community have shown an increasing sense of responsibility for the project.</p> <p><u>Mobilisation working style</u></p>

	<p>Use of marketing by a partnership between Microsoft, New Horizon and YFM has attracted many young adults to register with the Soweto DV for computer training courses.</p>
<p><b>ICT Technology</b></p>	<p>The centre is equipped with standard PC technology, including computers, Internet access and the latest Microsoft software and books.</p> <p>35 computers networked using Windows NT connected permanently to the internet. At any given time approximately 15-20% of the computers have some problem.</p> <p>Main activities and services provided by the centres are: computer skills training, access to computers and the internet, desktop publishing.</p> <p><u>Where are ICTs obtained?</u> All the technology has been donated by large companies. Most of which is brand new. Following a visit by Colin Powell in 2001 Compaq donated 20 new pentium 3 computers. A further 20 refurbished computers were donated by Intel to the Digital villages.</p> <p><u>Technical Support/ Repairs</u> This was originally through a full-time technical support employee. However due to costs this is now outsourced.</p>
<p><b>Financing</b></p>	<p><u>Main funding sources</u> The sponsorship from Africare and Microsoft accounts for the bulk of financial income of the centre.</p> <p>All centres were either no longer being funded or approaching the end of their funding contracts. In the absence of alternatives the mood was that of desperation.</p> <p>The sponsors have played a role in the level and extent of development of all centres. It appears as though the original contract between the sponsor and the agency determined the developmental path of each agency, with each agency's leadership tasked with attaining self-sufficiency within certain timeframes.</p> <p><u>Cost Recovery</u> Fees are charged to learners to create the balance of income.</p> <p><u>How are recurrent costs covered e.g. maintenance, consumables?</u> Microsoft and Africare are the main stakeholders of the centre responsible for its continuance. This relationship is steeped in a commitment (and a belief) in the centre and its contribution towards community development. It can also be argued, though, that Microsoft is eager to fulfil its obligation towards the government by pumping resources into projects such as the centre.</p>
<p><b>The project process</b></p>	<p>Literacy and job training are the most immediate goals. Users have a chance to learn basic database and word-processing packages, accounting and language programs. In its first year, the Soweto Digital Village equipped more than 500 kids and young adults with the computer skills they will need to compete in today's job market.</p> <p><u>Are a variety of technologies offered to communities?</u> The programmes offered by the tele-centres can be summarised as follows</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Basic computer literacy</li> <li>• Office applications</li> <li>• Computerised accounting</li> <li>• Internet applications</li> </ul> <p>These programmes are based on the donated software packages, therefore, the graduates only gain proficiency on the supplied products</p> <p>These centres also provide services such as usage of the hardware and software for a fee, accessing the internet, typing and faxing. To the extent that the programmes offered by other tele-centres are similar to those offered by the centre one can conclude that there are no differences.</p> <p><u>Is there a formal handover of the ICT project?</u>  Consultation with community followed by a slightly donor driven creation of a resource centre. The role of Africare as an INGO who understood the need for community buy in should not be underestimated.</p> <p>Project ownership is now firmly in the hands of the local community with a local board of trustees. Although the donating companies are still considered 'stakeholders'.</p> <p><u>What is done to monitor performance and use of ICTs once installed?</u>  Chilwelo has a strong 'champion manager'. The founder and current manager is very dedicated working all hours and strives to keep the centre running under difficult conditions. Alongside the Board of Trustees he has continually reviewed strategy and evolved to maintain a working and feasible model.</p>
<p><b>Key linkages</b></p>	<p><u>What links does the project have with local organisations (government, non-government, private sector)?</u></p> <p>They are linked in with other Digital Villages outside of Soweto.</p> <p>Links with New Horizons lead to them becoming the supplier of accredited training materials for the Soweto DV. This training material has enhanced the value of the training that DV supplies to the community.</p> <p>The centre does not belong to any formal network. The level and intensity of collaboration and engagement with other entities is negligible.</p> <p>The role of the local council or municipality was not clear in terms of strategic support. For instance in Alex the centre is financially supported by council, but its operations are severely restricted by the same council, while Soweto had whatever lifeline it had from the previous council terminated and is now expected to pay for usage of council amenities. Galeshewe was still housed by council without any other additional support. It seems that councils were not properly briefed regarding the strategic importance of these centres in terms of human capital development.</p>
<p><b>Intermediaries</b></p>	<p>At the beginning there was a community consultation and in theory the community have always been stakeholders in the project. In the last couple of years the community have shown an increasing sense of responsibility for the project.</p> <p>Visits to the center have highlighted the helpful and patient manner in which center staff and management interact with users, and the positive regard that users have for the staff and managers.</p>
<p><b>Capacity</b></p>	<p>The centres were found to be generally outside government policy framework, having serious capacity problems and lacking resources required to improve its situation. The centre was, however, found to be having a strategic advantage in developing niche products and programmes and well suited to addressing the needs of unemployed young people.</p>

	<p>In the first quarter of 2001 the project lost 3 staff in 3 months to the business community. This has led to all staff being issued with 6 month contracts to try to gain some operational efficiency and to provide a better service to the community.</p> <p><u>Staff Training</u> Most employees are graduates of Digital Village. They become members, gain increasingly complex computer skills then become volunteer workers and trainers and when one of the employees leaves to get a job in business the volunteers take a salaried position.</p> <p><u>User Training</u> Learners directly benefit from the programmes of the centre in terms of the skills they acquire and the level of self confidence attained as a consequence of their attending training at the centre. An indirect, but consequential benefit derived is that of extending (and improving) personal relations.</p>
<p><b><i>Development benefits</i></b></p>	<p>Emphasis is on unemployment and the potential of getting a job with computer skills. There is ample evidence that the trainers move into business. The number of people is relatively small.</p>