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UCT-led programme responds to critical need for youth support

COVID-19 exacerbating youth challenges

A programme led by the University of Cape Town's (UCT) Southern Africa Labour and Development Research Unit (SALDRU) is providing the basis for the implementation of an intervention to support South African youth who are not in employment, education or training (NEET).

The programme is called the Basic Package of Support (BPS) and was developed in 2019 by a research consortium in consultation with various stakeholders, including young people. The BPS was developed in 2019 and takes a positive youth development approach which recognises young people's agency.

Associate Professor Ariane De Lannoy, chief researcher at SALDRU and BPS programme lead, said: "It works with youth in the ecosystem of available government or non-profit programmes and services to enhance their navigation of the steps needed to realise their envisaged futures. Importantly, the BPS model appreciates that young people need a wide range of support services to deal with the many challenges or deprivations they face."

De Lannoy explained that the BPS approach has two prongs. The first is an ongoing connection with young people through high-quality one-on-one guidance counselling and peer support. This guidance is based on a comprehensive assessment of the young person's needs, goals and challenges, followed by discussions about available pathways, the co-creation of an action plan, and support with active referrals to the necessary services or opportunities.

"Regular follow-up from counsellors supports them along the way and a physical 'starter pack' provides additional resources and enhances their sense of belonging," De Lannoy said.

The second prong consists of local and national partnerships between government, non-profit and private sector role players responsible for the well-being and development of young people. According to De Lannoy, the programme does not aim to reinvent the wheel. Rather, it recognises the intensive investments to date and offers

an interface to help connect existing programmes, services and resources to assist vulnerable youth to better navigate available opportunities.

De Lannoy explained that prior to the lockdown, which began in March, South Africa already had more than 8 million young people (between the ages of 18 and 35) who are NEET. These young people typically experience a multitude of deprivations, including food insecurity, poor health and geographic exclusion. These deprivations also intersect: for example, income poverty influences food security, which impacts health. Together the deprivations and their intersections complicate young people's transitions from adolescence to adulthood.

"COVID-19 is now painfully sharpening the lens on these precarious situations," De Lannoy said.

She explained that while many of the challenges highlighted by the participants were certainly exacerbated by the pandemic, they are not new. Over the last decade, government, civil society and the private sector have invested significantly in numerous programmes and interventions geared toward supporting youth, specifically in their transitions to adulthood. Often, the emphasis has been on education and employment. "Yet, the dial has not shifted," she said.

According to insights from the BPS team, this status quo reflects that research and programmes are not engaging sufficiently with the complexities and linkages in young people's realities and how these impact their life chances.

Thus, to enable young people to achieve their goals, the multifaceted and integrated strategy that is the BPS will be piloted in collaboration and coordination with the National Pathway Management Network stream of the Presidential Youth Employment Intervention.

It will support young people's educational and employment transitions, recognise the interconnectedness of deprivations and seek to support their agency and resilience, which will be crucial following the COVID-19 pandemic.

She concluded: "The need to reach out and provide support to youth who are NEET is now even more critical."

Note to editors

The project – now in its [second phase](#) – is led by SALDRU in collaboration with a range of partners, including UCT's [Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab Africa](#), the University of Johannesburg's Centre for Social Development in Africa, the DG Murray Trust and The Jobs Fund. The Capacity Building Programme for Employment Promotion, which is funded by the European Union and based in the Government Technical Advisory Centre, provides funding and technical support.

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