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**The State of the Youth  
Report for the Free State:  
Evidence from youth surveys in  
2003 and 2008**

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# **The State of the Youth Report for the Free State:** Evidence from youth surveys in 2003 and 2008

By

Motseki Bereng (Free State Youth Commission)  
Jan Cloete  
Molefi Lenka  
Lochner Marais  
Degracia Ranoto (Free State Youth Commission)

For

Centre for Development Support (IB 100)  
University of the Free State  
PO Box 339  
Bloemfontein  
9300  
South Africa

[www.ufs.ac.za/cds](http://www.ufs.ac.za/cds)

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## 1. Introduction

The aim of this survey<sup>1</sup> was to conduct empirical research on youth and youth-related matters in the Free State. It was intended to provide a comprehensive review of the youth's living conditions; perceptions; aspirations; lifestyles; and expectations.<sup>2</sup> There was an especial emphasis on a range of research issues/clusters identified by the Free State Youth Commission (FSYC), the Centre for Development Support (CDS), and other stakeholders during an exploratory youth scan in 2003. The longitudinal nature of the exercise allows for useful comparisons between the 2008 findings and those derived from the research that was conducted in 2003. The project was commissioned by the FSYC who funded it along with an anonymous donor.<sup>3</sup> The actual survey itself was managed by the University of the Free State's CDS, in association with the FSYC.

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## 2. Methodology

Identical sampling procedures were employed for the 2003 and the 2008 surveys. A multi-stage stratified random sample was drawn. In 2003 the sample comprised 383 white youths and 466 black youths, i.e. 849 respondents. The sample for 2008 was almost identical viz. 384 white youths and 458 black. These were the minimum sample sizes required to generalise the findings to the two population strata, and to enable inferential analysis of the data in order statistically to compare differences in perceptions between the two groups. For both the 2003 and the 2008 surveys, the subsample sizes for the white and black cohorts, and the demarcation thereof, were designed deliberately not to

reflect the *overall* demographic profile of youth in the Free State (in respect of population proportions), but to:

- be representative of white and black youths respectively;
- be representative of the spatial spread of black and white youths in the Free State; and
- allow for comparison between black and white youth perceptions in the province.

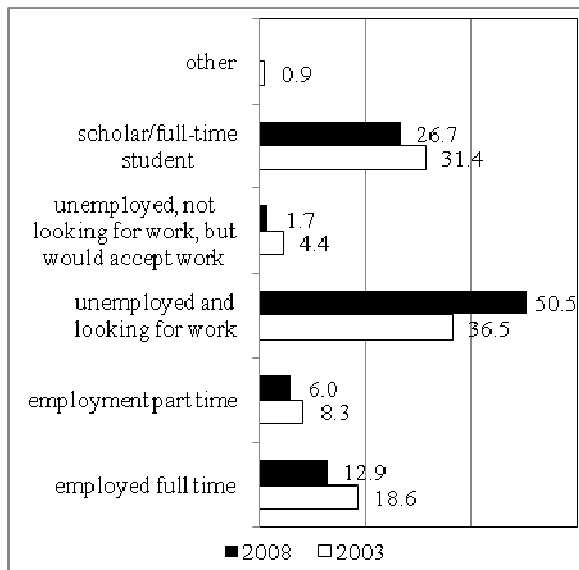
In the first stage, the sample was stratified according to race and proportionately compiled to reflect the urban/rural<sup>4</sup> distribution of the respective population groups. In the second stage, the sample was further geographically demarcated to reflect, proportionately, the population distribution in the five district municipalities of the Free State. The sample compilation is depicted in Table 1.

**Table 1: Sample sizes, 2008 and 2003**

Strata	Sample size 2008	Sample size 2003
Black <sup>5</sup> youth (urban)	294	297
Black youth (rural)	164	169
White youth (urban)	328	329
White youth (rural)	56	54
TOTAL	<b>842</b>	<b>849</b>

## 3. Trends in employment status

There are a number of interesting trends in the employment status of the respective groups. First, the employment status of black youths is considered (see Figure 1 below).



**Figure 1: The employment status of black youths, 2003 and 2008**

The data reflects a decline in both full- and part-time employment between 2003 and 2008. In 2003, 18.6% of black youths were employed full-time, compared with only 12.9% in 2008. For part-time employment, the percentage dropped from 8.3% to 6% between 2003 to 2008. Consequently, the percentage of respondents who were unemployed showed a considerable increase - from 36.5% in 2003, to 50.5% in 2008<sup>6</sup>. This is markedly higher than the average for the Free State as a whole and it confirms the national trend in this respect.

**... in 2003, 18.6% of the black youths were employed full-time, compared with only 12.9% in 2008**

These figures reflect poorly on youth development in the province (especially that of black youth) and suggest a pronounced deterioration in employment since 2003. Although tougher economic trends have emerged since the latter part of 2006, the period 2003 to 2008 was in fact one of significant economic growth which saw progress in the direction of a decrease in overall unemployment. The following questions therefore suggest themselves:

- Is there still significant racial bias towards black youth in the labour market?
- Do black youths have the appropriate skills to access the labour market?
- How difficult is it, from a regulatory point of view, to access the labour market?
- Are policies, such as internships, proving effective, and are they applied widely enough to foster youth employment?
- If there is room for improvement in this respect, how might one achieve this?

In contrast to the trends evident in the employment profile of black youths, the full-time employment of white youths increased from 36.4% in 2003, to nearly 40% in 2008. Part-time employment also increased from 2.9% to 5.5%. This trend could possibly be accounted for by the fact that the sample included a smaller proportion of white youths in the 14-19 year age group. All the same, the fact remains that in stark contrast to the situation with black youth, there was no deterioration. Overall, the picture in respect of employment, points to increasing inequality between black and white youth.

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#### 4. Educational attainment<sup>7</sup>

The survey results illustrate two main findings. First, they reflect a huge discrepancy in respect of highest educational qualification between black and white youth. Despite a decline in the percentage of black youths without a Grade 12 certificate (from 46.1% in 2003, to 35.7% in 2008), this is still considerably worse than the current figure of 5.3% for white youths. This discrepancy is further

confirmed by the fact that only 17.8% of black youths have a post-Grade 12 qualification, versus 49.5% of the whites. These results have serious implications for the employability, and economic opportunities, of black youth in the labour market. Although the challenging socio-economic conditions of black youths surely contribute in this respect, it is also apparent that the quality of education in former 'black township' schools is below standard.

Second, given the importance of education, it is ironic that, notwithstanding an increase in the percentage of black youths with a Grade 12 certificate, the level of employment within this cohort has actually decreased. One wonders why this is so? Although this specific research project did not probe the possible reasons for this, a number of questions present themselves:

- Is the quality of black youths' school and tertiary education substandard?
- Do these learners exit from school, or tertiary education, without the appropriate skills and theoretical background to obtain work?
- Are these students studying the right subjects?

Respondents were also asked whether they had progressed in their education as far as they would have liked. In 2003, only 8.3% of the black respondents returned a positive response compared with 28.2% in 2008. While this confirms the improvements in educational attainment outlined above, it nevertheless stands in marked contrast to actual employment trends. To compound the paradox, the corresponding figures for whites reveal a *decline* in respect of satisfaction with educational attainment, although the percentage of positive responses to the question remains high - in 2003, 67.9% of the white youths returned positive responses, compared with only 55% in 2008.

**Do these learners exit from school, or tertiary education, without the appropriate skills and theoretical background to obtain work?**

## **5. Levels of satisfaction with education**

Respondents were asked how satisfied they were with various categories of education. The main results revealed the following shifts in satisfaction levels, between 2003 and 2008:

- There was a small decline in satisfaction of both black and white youth with their school education (from 4.24 to 4.0 on the Likert scale for black youth, and from 4.58 to 4.55 for white youth, on the same scale).
- Comparatively, the satisfaction levels with FETs have improved from 4.55 to 4.67 for black youths, and from 4.48 to 4.51 for white youths
- Satisfaction levels with Technikons, or universities of Technology, declined for both black and white youths.
- Apropos of universities (other than universities of Technology) there was an increased level of satisfaction on the part of black youth but a decline among white youths.

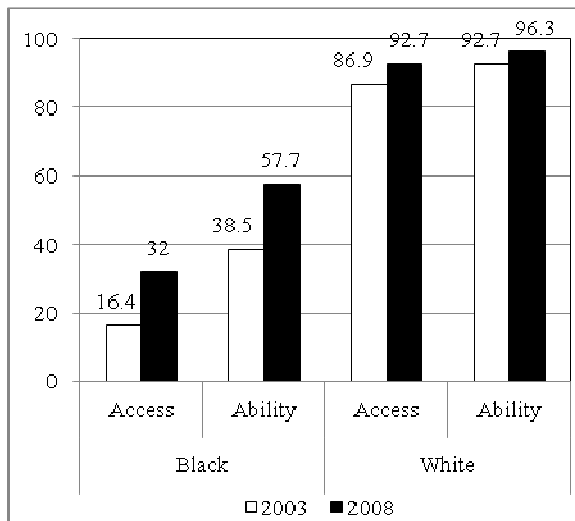
Although the sample size, to determine these satisfaction levels, was small, there seems to be an overall trend of increasing dissatisfaction. This trend should not be seen in isolation from the declining employment levels of especially black youths.

## **6. Computer access**

In this the Information Age, access to, and the ability to operate, basic computer programs are pivotal.



The results indicated growth among black and white youth (see Figure 2) in both computer access and the ability to perform word-processing tasks.



**Figure 2: Access to a computer and ability to do word-processing**

In 2003, 16.4% of the black respondents had access to a computer. By 2008, the percentage of this cohort with regular access to a computer has more than doubled to 38.5%. The same improvement is apparent in the percentage of respondents with the ability to use word processing. In 2003, only 32.0% of the black respondents could use a word processor, compared with 57.5% in 2008. What is also significant, from the results reflected in Figure 2, is that the gap between black and white youth has narrowed, though proficiency levels are still markedly higher for white youth.

**The results indicated growth among black and white youth in both computer access and the ability to perform word-processing tasks**

## 7. Youth and organisational affiliation

The survey results indicated a decrease in the tendency of Free State youth to affiliate with organisations. The most prominent

decrease was in the joining of political organizations. This was accompanied by a reduction in the importance accorded political institutions by these respondents. Similarly, there was a reduced propensity to affiliate with religious organisations. The most decided increase in affiliation, accompanied by a higher perceived importance rating, related to local government structures.

## 8. Crime

Respondents were asked a number of questions concerning their perceptions of crime. These included whether they had been victims of crime; the type of crime involved; whether crime had increased or decreased over the previous two-year period; and questions concerning the efficiency of the police force.

In answer to the question whether they had been victims of crime, black youths reported little change in their experience (dropping from 14.2% in 2003 to 12.4% in 2008). White youths, on the other hand, reported a 20% increase from 37.1% to 44.4%.

The figures suggest that there was an increase in violent crime. Amongst those who had been victims of crime, burglary and theft were down in both groups (from 69% in 2003 to 17.5% in 2008 among black youth, and 87.9% to 66.9% among white youth). But armed robbery showed a massive increase among black youth from 9.9% to 59.6% (coding errors could have contributed to the huge swings in values amongst black youth, however, as the word ‘robbed’ appears to have been understood interchangeably with ‘theft’ by these respondents). The overall trend was confirmed by a further, albeit smaller, increase, with respect to the incidence of assault or abuse (up from 12.7% in 2003 to 14% in 2008). Among white youths there was also a large increase in the number of reports of armed robbery (up from 5% to 23.1%), which further serves to underscore the decided increase in violent crime.

Among black youth there was an increase in the share of respondents (up from 27.3% in 2003 to 41.1% in 2008) who perceived levels of crime as being lower than two years previously. There was a corresponding decrease in respondents who viewed crime levels as having been higher (down from 61% to 48.1%).

White youths, on the other hand, saw a marginal decrease, from 3.6% to 3%, in those few viewing levels of crime as having dropped over the preceding two years. The proportion who regarded the situation as being unchanged declined from 19.3% to 15%. There was a commensurate increase in respondents who perceived the current level of crime as being higher than two years previously (from 71% to 80.3%).

There was an improvement in the ratings accorded police efficiency among black youths (the Likert rating increased from 2.71 in 2003, to 3.29 in 2008), and a decrease in the ratings among white youths (the Likert rating dropped from 2.53 in 2003, to 2.07 in 2008).

**... black youths reported little change in their experience of crime (dropping from 14.2% in 2003 to 12.4% in 2008). White youths, on the other hand, reported an increase from 37.1% to 44.4%.**

## 9. High-risk behaviour

The survey results indicated no significant differences in indicators of risk behaviour, the only exception being a significant decrease in the number of black youths who reported occasionally doing something illegal (down from 12% in 2003, to 2.2% in 2008). White youths appeared to be significantly more likely to engage in occasional ('sometimes') alcohol use (54.5% of whites versus 39.4% of blacks in 2008). This was a more stable result than that yielded by the increase in occasional

use of alcohol amongst black youths (29.9% in 2003 and 39.4% in 2008, compared with 55.5% and 54.5% for white youths in the corresponding years). For both groups regular use of alcohol reportedly decreased (12.9% to 7.8% for blacks, and 10.9% to 7.6% for whites). The extreme use of alcohol (getting drunk), amongst regular users, was slightly more pronounced among black youth (22.6%) than white youth (19.7%). The gap in this respect is closing, however, with white youths reporting a small rise (from 18% to 19.7%) in contrast to black youths' decrease (27.5% to 22.6%).

Despite some of the most stringent regulations in the world aimed at discouraging smoking, both groups saw an increase in the occasional use of tobacco (4.8% to 9.9% for blacks, and 9.8% to 12.6% for whites). Among blacks the share of those who *never* smoke also decreased from 72.3% in 2003, to 68.4% in 2008. Among whites, by way of contrast, the proportion of those who smoke regularly decreased from 21.9% in 2003, to 17.8% in 2008.

**Despite some of the most stringent regulations in the world aimed at discouraging smoking, both groups saw an increase in the occasional use of tobacco.**

## 10. Reproductive health

The following key aspects were addressed during the survey, namely: the number of sexual partners; the age at which the respondents had sexual intercourse for the first time; condom use; and factors relating to pregnancy.

The results revealed that 35% of the black respondents had had more than one sexual partner during the preceding 12 months, while 14.9% of black youths said they had had four or more partners over this period. This finding points to high-risk sexual behaviour, since it exponentially increases

the likelihood of contracting HIV/AIDS. By comparison, only 6.3% of white respondents indicated that they had had more than one sexual partner over the preceding 12 months. The general pattern over time suggests that, though there was a slight reduction in the number of sexual partners among black youths (the category of two to three partners had a decline of 5.1 percentage points, while those with a single partner increased by 3.5 percentage points), there was also a slight increase in the number of sexual partners for white youths (the category of those with no partners having decreased by 4.4 percentage points, while the category of two to three partners increased by 3.6 percentage points).

Respondents were also asked at what age they first had sexual intercourse with another person (see Table 2 below).

**Table 2: Age at first-time sexual intercourse, 2003 and 2008**

Number of sexual partners	Black			
	2003		2008	
	n	%	n	%
12 years and younger	25	6.3	21	5.3
13-15 years	84	21.0	89	22.3
16-18 years	191	47.8	208	52.0
19-20 years	64	16.0	59	14.8
After 20 years	36	9.0	23	5.8
Total	400	100.0	400	100.0
	White			
12 years and younger	1	0.7	1	0.7
13-15 years	9	6.7	14	9.4
16-18 years	36	26.7	51	34.2
19-20 years	21	15.6	37	24.8
After 20 years	68	50.4	46	30.9
Total	135	100.0	149	100.0

While the average age for black respondents remained mostly stable since 2003, the average age of first sexual intercourse for white youths has dropped sharply since 2003. In 2008 white youths were significantly less likely to have waited until after 20 years of age (down from 50.4% to

30.9%), and more likely to have engaged in sex at between 19 and 20 years (up from 15.6% to 24.8%), or most likely to have engaged in sex at between 16 and 18 years of age (up from 26.7% to 34.2%).

**... the average age of first sexual intercourse for white youths has dropped sharply since 2003.**

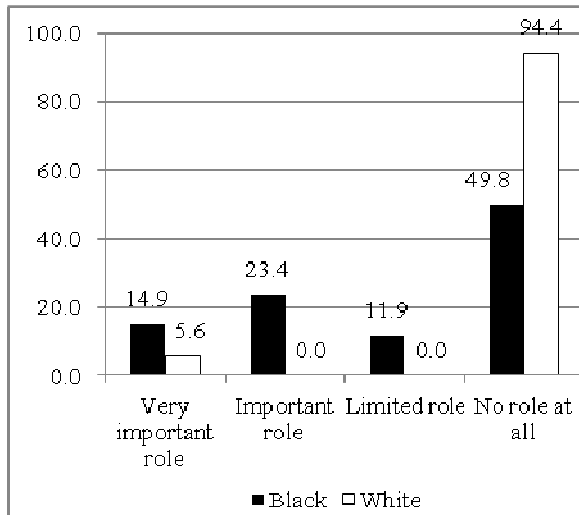
To gain a truer understanding of the condom use of the potentially high-risk group, married respondents, those who had never had sexual intercourse, and those who had only had a single sex partner, were excluded for purposes of analysis.

In 2003, in more than one-third (36.1%) of cases, black youths who were single and who had had more than one sexual partner engaged in unsafe sex (never or seldom wearing a condom). By 2008 this proportion had improved somewhat, with 29.4% engaging in unsafe sex. However, the share of respondents who always wore a condom decreased slightly (from 55.1% in 2003 to 52.6% in 2008). There were only 20 valid cases among white youths, meaning that no generalisations could be made about this group.

Respondents were asked if they had ever either been pregnant or fathered a child (only asked in 2008). Black youths were more likely (52.2%) than white youths (40.4%) to have either been pregnant, or to have fathered a child.

Next, respondents were asked what role the availability of the Child Support Grant (CSG) had played in their becoming pregnant or fathering a child (see Figure 3 below).





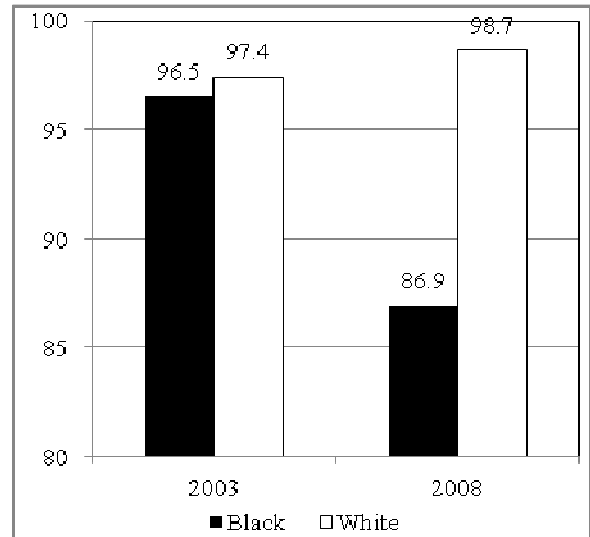
**Figure 3: Respondents' evaluation of the role the Child Support Grant played in their choice to have a child, 2008**

Large differences were detected between the two groups, with 94.4% of white youth versus only 49.8% of black youth indicating that the availability of the grant had played no role in their decision. Amongst black youth, the next most frequently cited response was that the CSG had played an important role (23.4%). Overall, this means that for 50% of black youth the availability of the child support grant played a role either in becoming pregnant or in fathering a child.

**... for 50% of black youth the availability of the child support grant played a role either in becoming pregnant or in fathering a child.**

### 11. HIV/AIDS

This section deals with issues regarding stigmatisation, and the perceptions of the respondents concerning HIV/AIDS. Respondents were asked whether they believed the HIV virus could be transmitted during sexual intercourse (see Figure 4 below).



**Figure 4: Possibility of transmission of HIV virus during sexual intercourse**

In 2003, there was no statistically significant difference between the black and white groups' view as to whether HIV could be transmitted during sexual intercourse. There was, in point of fact, near unanimity that HIV could be transmitted during sexual intercourse. The 2008 survey, however, registered a sizeable reduction (from 97% in 2003 to 87% in 2008) in black youth sharing this conviction.

**The 2008 survey registered a sizeable reduction in black youth who believed the HIV virus could be transmitted during sexual intercourse**

### 12. Awareness of government programmes

Because poverty is more prevalent within black communities than white, one would expect awareness regarding poverty alleviation programmes to be substantially greater within the black youth cohort. In light of this expectation the following trends should be noted regarding the responses of black youths:

- Organisations, or programmes, the awareness of which declined, were: the Free State Development Corporation; poverty alleviation programmes (in general); the Industrial Development Corporation; the Development Bank of Southern Africa; the business referral and information network; and the National Development Agency.
- Instances where there was an increase in awareness included: the community project fund; Umsobomvu (a large increase); learnerships; the Land Bank (not necessarily for benign reasons); community-based public works programmes; the National Youth Service Programme; and the Youth Commission.
- The Youth Commission remains that institution or programme which retains the largest degree of awareness among black youth.

Amongst white youth there was an enhanced awareness of Umsobomvu and of poverty alleviation programmes. This was accompanied by a decline in awareness of all the remaining instances dealt with except for that of the Land Bank which eclipsed the Youth Commission as the organisation attracting the greatest level of awareness.

### 13. Enterprise development

Respondents were asked whether they had previously attempted to set up an enterprise (these questions were directed at respondents who were 20 years and older)

Despite the high percentage of respondents who believed that more money could be made by working for oneself, there was a decline, since 2003, in the percentage of both black and white youth who had tried to establish their own business undertakings. In the case of black youth, there was a marked decline from 51.5% in 2003 to 33.7% in 2008, while with whites the decline was from 36.6% to 28.5%.

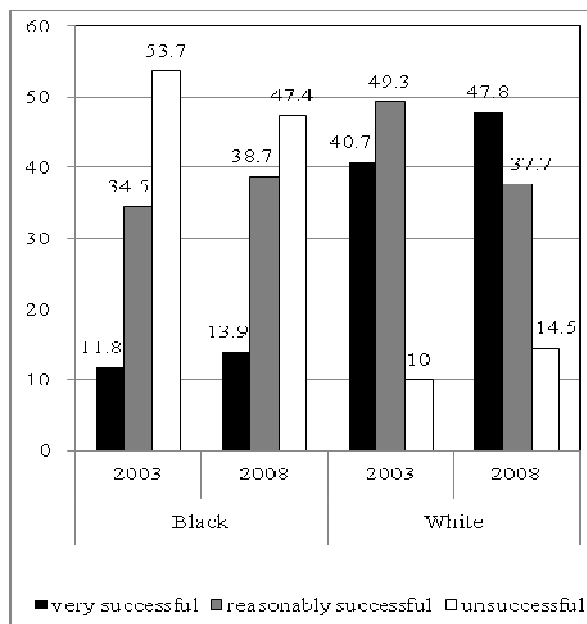
Considering the importance of entrepreneurship development, these results are salutary.

**... there was a decline in the percentage of both black and white youth who had tried to establish their own business undertakings**

In terms of the types of enterprise that were launched, it is noteworthy that:

- Among both black and white youth there was an increase in enterprises that provide services. The results also pointed to a falling off in business initiatives focused on direct sales.
- Among black youths, the selling of food nonetheless remained a popular option, even though this proved to be a sector with limited growth opportunities. By way of contrast, service related undertakings comprised the main type of business venture attempted by white youth. This variation can be ascribed, inter alia, to these cohorts' differing levels of education.
- Overall, the number of enterprises within the manufacturing sector remained limited and even declined for both black and white young entrepreneurs. This is in line with the general trend in the Free State<sup>8</sup>.

Starting up a new business is one thing; making a success of it is quite another. Figure 5 (below) gives some indication of this.



**Figure 5: Success rate of newly established small businesses, 2003 and 2008**

The percentage of black youth who rated their start-ups as unsuccessful declined from 53.7% in 2003 to 47.4% in 2008. Conversely, in the case of white youth, there was an increase in this category (from 10.0%, to 14.5%). The percentage of black youths who were unsuccessful remained significantly higher than was the case for whites though. However, it should also be noted that increases were reported for those respondents (both white and black) rating their ventures as being very successful.

## 14. Conclusion

The report sought to profile the youth in the Free State as of 2003 and 2008. Although more in-depth research would be needed to uncover the dynamics informing the trends that were revealed, there are some policy implications that readily suggest themselves:

- An urgent revisiting of the South African system of education is required in that the results indicate declining employability amongst black youth.
- Education systems should place emphasis on subjects related to life skills and career guidance. Nearly

half of the black respondents felt that they had opted for the wrong subjects or courses at school or at university.

- A framework is required to inform the implementation and desired outcomes of internships. Furthermore, an appropriate M&E system is needed to determine the impacts of these internships.
- Government programmes with a bearing on responsible sexual behaviour should take cognisance of the fact that no appreciable progress has been made in this regard in the Free State.
- Drug abuse appears to be on the increase, and a programme to address this is essential.
- Business-support programmes should incorporate an element of 'out-reach' to youth still attending school.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> This is a summary of a more detailed report that is also available on request.

<sup>2</sup> For purposes of this study, youth refers to South Africans 14 to 35 year of age, thus bringing it in line with the definition used by the National Youth Commission. However, the UN defines youth as being 15 to 24 years of age.

<sup>3</sup> The grant maker specifically requested that the name of the organisation should not be divulged.

<sup>4</sup> Urban areas refer to population concentrations in cities and secondary towns while *rural* areas refer to small towns. These definitions differ slightly from the conventional definitions where urban areas are population concentrations in proclaimed urban municipal areas, and rural areas are areas not sharing a common boundary with a proclaimed municipal area.

<sup>5</sup> 'Black youth' is used here as an encompassing term which includes Coloureds and Asians.

<sup>6</sup> This finding could, however, be partially ascribed to the expanded definition of 'unemployment'. The narrow definition would entail the number in the broad definition *minus* those persons reflected under the category "unemployed, not looking for work, but would accept work".

<sup>7</sup> Only youth 20 years and older were considered in this category in order to exclude those still in the process of acquiring an education.

<sup>8</sup> See Nel, E., Rogerson, C.M. and Marais, L., 2006, "Restructuring manufacturing in South Africa's lagging regions: The case of the Free State", *The South African Geographical Journal*, 88(1): 48-57.