Youth pulling themselves and each other out of poverty through peer learning and support

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Abstract

Of the 2.8 million South Africans between the ages of 18 and 24 who were not in education, employment or training in 2007, 2 million had not matriculated (SNRI, 2009).

IkamvaYouth drives social change in South Africa by enabling disadvantaged learners to lift each other out of poverty and into tertiary education and/or employment. Volunteer tutors (many previously beneficiaries of the programme themselves) provide after-school supplementary tutoring, career guidance, mentoring and computer literacy training free of charge to learners from township schools in grades 8 to 12. Established in Khayelitsha in 2003, the low-cost, high-impact model has been implemented with remarkable results in seven townships in three provinces.

IkamvaYouth provides after-school support to learners in grades 8 to12 three times a week, as well as intensive two- week holiday programmes. Learners self-select and enroll in grades 8 to 11. There are no academic requirements for entry, but learners need to meet a minimum 75% attendance in order to keep their place in the programme.

Learners drive the learning agenda by bringing questions and problems for small group discussion (tutor: learner ratio is 1:5). The pedagogical approach aims to instill a culture of hard work, peer-learning and responsibility.

IkamvaYouth has a democratic youth-led structure.Each branch's management committee (branchcom) is voted annually and everyone (including parents, partner organisations, learners, community leaders) is welcome to participate in biweekly meetings where decision-making is transparent and inclusive.
This has led to community ownership and support of the project, and enabled the beneficiaries of the project to become its leaders. This youth-centred decision-making model builds participants' leadership capacity and work experience.

Matric results have consistently far-exceeded nationalaverages annually since 2005. This is particularly significant given that learners attend poor-performing township schools and make more difficult subject choices. Learners are almost twice as likely to select Maths and Physics (Van der Berg, 2012) than the national averages and yet 44% achieve Bachelor passes. Nationally, only 11.5% of black matriculants achieved exemption or bachelor passes between 2005 and 2008 (National Assembly, 2006 & Snyman, 2011).

The General Household Survey found that only 4,2% of South Africans aged 18 to 29 were enrolled at higher education institutions. Whereas 17,4% of white youth were enrolled at university, this was true for only 3,1% of black Africans and 3,5% of coloured persons.

IkamvaYouth supports learners as they learn about, apply to, secure financial aid for, and enroll in universities, universities of technology, learnerships, internships and jobs. Between 2005 and 2011, 66% of the programme's 403 matriculants have enrolled in tertiary institutions. Overall, 77% of IkamvaYouth's matriculants since 2005 have enrolled in education, a learnership or a job 2.5 months following matriculation.

IkamvaYouth's programmes enable its learners to achieve opportunities that will significantly increase their earning potential. This is achieved at a very low cost by leveraging strategic partnerships and volunteerism. With public libraries, tertiary institutions and community centres providing free access to venues and infrastructure and volunteers responsible for all programme delivery, the overall expenditure per IkamvaYouth learner per year is under R5000. The programme's sustainability is ensured by the matrics who become volunteers, transforming from beneficiaries into benefactors. In 2012, volunteers will provide over 3 million rands' worth of tutoring, career guidance mentoring, computer literacy training and workshop facilitation to over 700 learners.

Tertiary education institutions can make the following important contributions to enable the model's further scale: (i) Providing course credits to students for committed, regular volunteerism; (ii) Waiving application and registration fees for committed learners and volunteer tutors; (iii) Availing campuses for holiday programmes; (iv) Connecting the alumni of IkamvaYouth with on-campus support offerings; and (v) Conducting research.

Introduction

Of the 2.8 million South Africans between the ages of 18 and 24 who were not in education, employment or training in 2007, 2 million had not matriculated (SNRI, 2009).

IkamvaYouth drives social change in South Africa by enabling disadvantaged learners to lift each other out of poverty and into tertiary education and/or employment. Volunteer tutors (many previously beneficiaries of the programme themselves) provide after-school supplementary tutoring, career guidance, mentoring and computer literacy training free of charge to learners from township schools in grades 8 to 12. Established in Khayelitsha in 2003, the low-cost, high-impact model has been implemented with remarkable results in seven townships in three provinces: Khayelitsha, Masiphumelele and Nyanga in the Western Cape; Chesterville and Umlazi in Kwa-Zulu Natal; and Ebony and Ivory Park in Gauteng. The organisation and its supporters are working steadily to expand to more townships across the country, beginning with Grahamstown in the Eastern Cape and another branch in the Gauteng province.
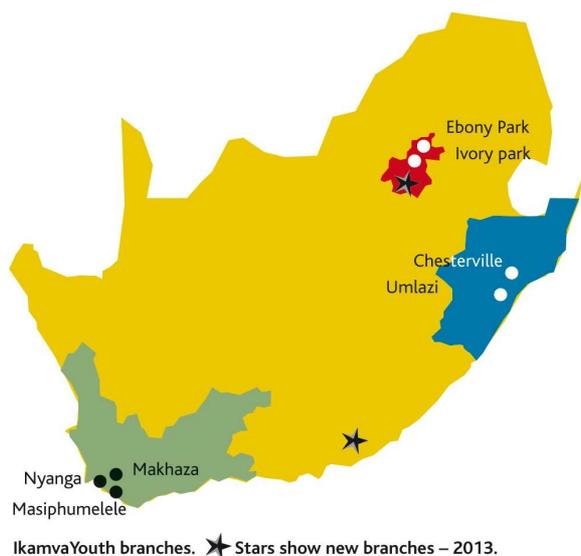
The programme's methodology and pedagogical approach are briefly outlined, and the results illustrated through indicators such as matric results. Levels of access to tertiary education and post-school opportunities indicate the programme's success in achieving its mission. Data is drawn from the organisation's internal reporting processes, as well as Van der Berg, Spaull, Burger, Van Wyk and Dzivakwi's (2012) evaluation of IkamvaYouth, *Against the Odds.*

The paper concludes with five recommendations for ways in which higher education institutions can enable the sustained scale of the model across the country, and play a key role in the reduction of poverty and inequality in South Africa.

IkamvaYouth branches. ✸ Stars show new branches – 2013.

Figure 1: Location of IkamvaYouth branches

Problem statement

The South African education crisis and its implications are widely documented and even more broadly discussed. Indeed, it seems that the general focus of academic and policy efforts in this area is the further explication of just how bad things are. While it is of course important to understand the complexities of a problem as deeply as possible in order to address it, the fast-accumulating numbers of learners whose disadvantage the system is effectively perpetuating requires urgent solutions. IkamvaYouth focuses on the following key challenges faced by learners attending township schools:

- High dropout, particularly in grade 9 and 10
- Poor academic performance in all subjects, and particularly in Maths and Physics
- Poor matric results: Pass rates and quality of passes, particularly the low numbers of bachelor passes required for university eligibility
- Very limited access to tertiary institutions
- Poor access to post-school opportunities including learnerships, internships, job-based training and employment
- Limited opportunities to voice their opinions, develop their self-confidence and build leadership experience
- Lack of social cohesion within and between communities across South Africa

Research has shown that the poor educational prospects of township youth results not only from dysfunctional schooling (where teaching quality is rarely at the appropriate standard and curriculum coverage is low), but also the home environments which are most often not conducive for learning. The pressures to help with household tasks after school leaves little time for homework, and learners are less likely to receive homework support from their parents and guardians; who were themselves disadvantaged by unequal access to educational opportunities. Township environments are typically beset with high levels of violence, abuse, crime, unemployment, poverty and ill health. Given the myriad of problems township

youth face in their schools, homes and communities, it is unsurprising that most township schools produce learners whose academic performance is below grade level. This in turn makes it unlikely that they'll access tertiary and most likely that they'll be unemployed (youth unemployment is estimated at over 60% in Khayelitsha) (Van der Berg et al., 2012).

"Many of the students entering IkamvaYouth come with many of these disadvantages, which few seem able to overcome without support. The myriad of constraints and multi-faceted nature of their problems makes it almost impossible to succeed... It is within this context of multiple constraints that IkamvaYouth tries to make a difference against the odds." (Spaul et al, 2012).

IkamvaYouth model

IkamvaYouth provides after-school support to learners in grades 8 – 12 three times a week, as well as intensive two-week holiday programmes. Learners self-select and enroll in grades 8 – 11. There are no academic requirements for entry, but learners need to meet a minimum 75% attendance in order to keep their place in the programme. IkamvaYouth offers the following programmes:

- Supplementary tutoring and homework sessions to help learners to improve their grades
- Career guidance to broaden their awareness of post-school opportunities
- Mentoring to ensure that learners access these opportunities
- Computer literacy and access to equip learners with essential skills and information
- A Media, Image and Expression programme to create opportunities for learners to express themselves creatively and assertively and build their self-esteem
- Health and leadership programmes to ensure HIV/AIDS, nutrition and broader health awareness

Learners drive the learning agenda by bringing questions and problems for small group discussion (tutor: learner ratio is 1:5). The pedagogical approach aims to instill a culture of hard work, peer-learning and responsibility.

Following matriculation, more than half of the learners become tutors, resulting in a by-youth, for-youth, pay-it-forward model which leverages volunteerism and peer-learning to achieve sustainability, growth and excellent results. The ikamvanites are real agents of change, having transformed from beneficiaries to benefactors. In 2012, volunteer tutors and mentors will provide over three million rands' worth of tutoring and career guidance support across the country.

Van der Berg et al's (2012) evaluation of IkamvaYouth found that the three main ways that IkamvaYouth is able to help learners are:
- By providing a second site of knowledge acquisition, mitigating part of the deficit which is inevitable for those coming from a low socioeconomic background.
- Changing students' expectations about what is possible, providing hope to students who otherwise see no reason for hope.
- By providing structure to students' lives, monitoring academic progress, and helping them with post-secondary applications.

The two most unique aspects of IkamvaYouth's work are not particularly related to what the organisation does, but rather its impressive results (outlined below) and the ways in which it goes about its work. IkamvaYouth has a democratic youth-led structure. Each branch's management committee (branchcom) is voted annually and everyone (including parents, partner organisations, learners, community leaders) is welcome to participate in biweekly meetings where decision-making is transparent and inclusive. The branch coordinators represent their branches on the national committee, which is where decisions that impact the organisation as a whole are made and voted on. This has led to community ownership and support of the project, and enabled the beneficiaries of the project to become its leaders. This youth-centred decision-making model has been recognised by the World Blu List of the World's Most Democratic Workplaces (2012) and the Mail & Guardian / Southern African Trust's Drivers of Change award (2011).
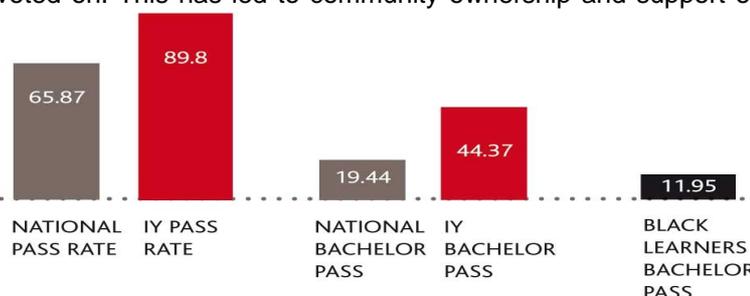

Average Matric results: % (*DoE, 2005 – 2011*); (*IkamvaYouth, 2005 – 2011*); Bachelor passes for black matriculants (*Snyman, 2011*).

Results

IkamvaYouth's matric results have consistently far-exceeded national averages annually since 2005 (figure 2), both through overall pass rates and, more significantly, through the quality of

Figure 2: Overall matric pass rates and bachelor passes

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passes. This academic achievement is particularly significant given that learners attend generally poor-performing township schools and make more difficult subject choices. Learners are almost twice as likely to select Maths and Physics than the national average (see figure 4), and yet 44% achieve Bachelor passes. Data from the National Assembly (2006) and Snyman (2011) show that between 2005 and 2008, an average of 11.95% of black matriculants achieved exemption or bachelor passes.
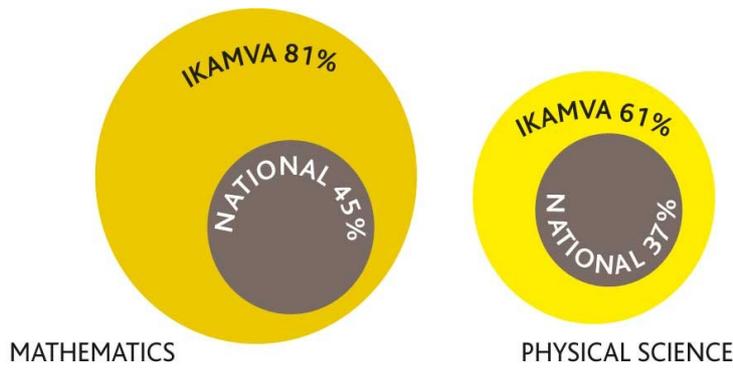
Van der Berg et al (2012) explain that "what IkamvaYouth... successfully manages to do is to encourage learners from across the ability spectrum to raise the bar, by entering for subjects which the typical student from weak schools would usually avoid, and then to achieve success which is at least comparable to that achieved by candidates that often are more selected in terms of ability and from higher socio-economic groups. This is a truly impressive achievement."

Subject selection (*Van der Berg, forthcoming*).

IKAMVA 81% NATIONAL 45% MATHEMATICS
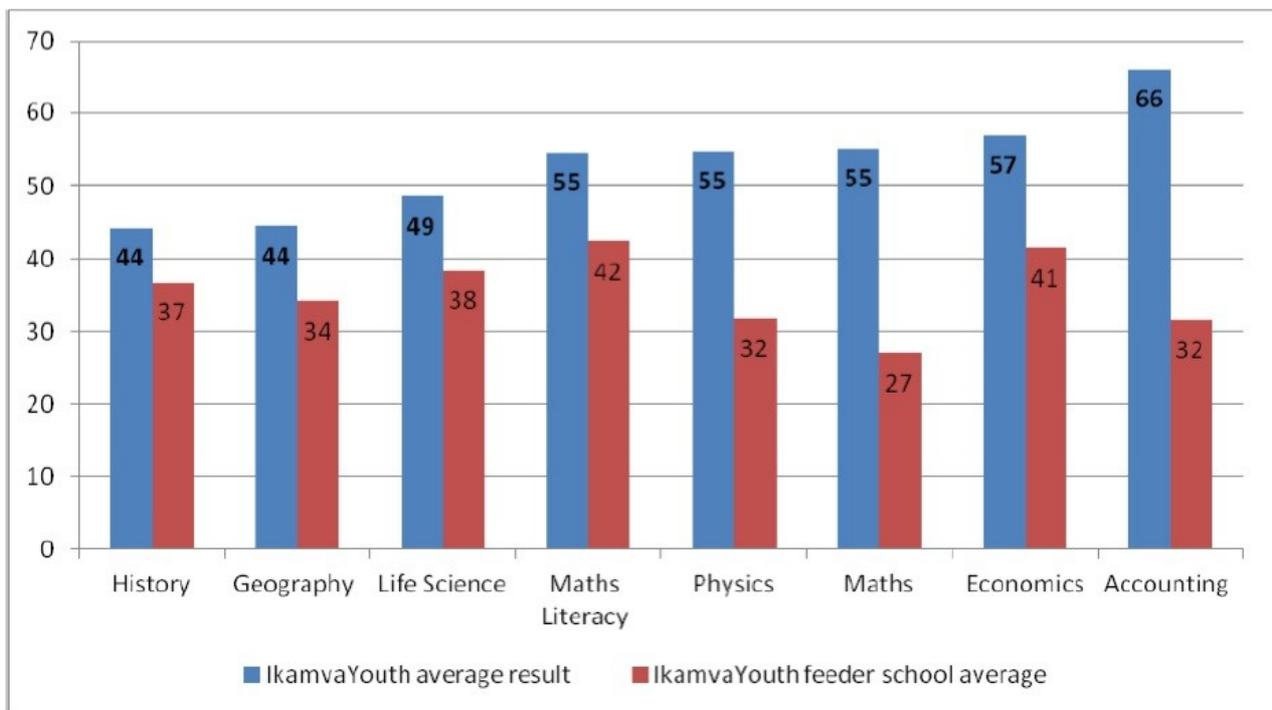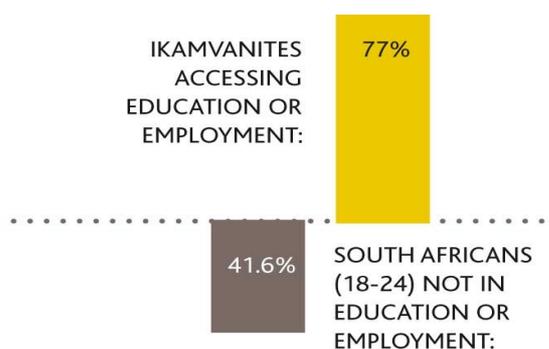
IKAMVA 61% NATIONAL 37% PHYSICAL SCIENCE

Figure 3: Subject selection

Figure 4: Results per subject compared with feeder schools

IkamvaYouth average result / IkamvaYouth feeder school average

Subject	IkamvaYouth average result	IkamvaYouth feeder school average
History	44	37
Geography	44	34
Life Science	49	38
Maths Literacy	55	42
Physics	55	32
Maths	55	27
Economics	57	41
Accounting	66	32

As Spaul (2012) points out, the use of national averages in South African education is "uniquely misleading and overestimates the educational achievement of the majority of students", due to the system's dualistic nature and bimodality of student performance. Figure 4 above shows IkamvaYouth's matric results per subject, compared with the feeder schools across the country (Van der Berg et al, 2012). The average results far exceed those of the feeder schools in every subject, and particularly in Economics (by 16%); Physics (by 23%); Maths (by 28%); and Accounting (by 34%).

While academic achievement is the key objective of the tutoring programme, IkamvaYouth's mission is enabling disadvantaged youth to access post-school opportunities. This is of vital importance in the effort to reduce inequality in South Africa. The General Household Survey (STATS SA, 2011) found that only 4,2% of South Africans aged 18 to 29 were enrolled at a higher education institutions. Whereas 17,4% of white youth were enrolled at university, this was true for only 3,1% of black Africans and 3,5% of coloured persons.

IkamvaYouth supports learners as they learn about, apply to, secure financial aid for, and enroll in universities, universities of technology, learnerships, internships and jobs. Between 2005 and 2011, 66% of the programme's 403 matriculants have enrolled in tertiary institutions. Overall, 77% of IkamvaYouth's matriculants since 2005 have enrolled in education, a learnership or a job 2.5 months following matriculation.

Research has shown (Branson et al, 2009) that with a matric, 25-year-old South African youth are less likely to be unemployed and that the higher their post-matric qualification, the better their average monthly income. Those with incomplete schooling who are employed earn an average of R1000. With a matric they earn R1600, but with a tertiary certificate or diploma this jumps up to R3200. Armed with a degree, young South Africans earn an average of R5 500 per month; over three times the average township household monthly income in Khayelitsha (URDR, date unknown).

IKAMVANITES ACCESSING EDUCATION OR EMPLOYMENT: 77%

SOUTH AFRICANS (18-24) NOT IN EDUCATION OR EMPLOYMENT: 41.6%

77% of IY learners enrol in education or employment. 41.6% of 18-24 year-old South Africans are not in education or employment (*StatsSA, 2007*)

Figure 5: Access to education or employment

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
% IY matrics (all)	70	79.31	80	57.75	67.39	91.43	67.96
% IY matrics (passed)	62	51.85	80	60.34	55.56	72.13	69.32

■ % IY matrics (passed), who accessed tertiary education
■ % IY matrics (all) who accessed tertiary education, learnerships or employment
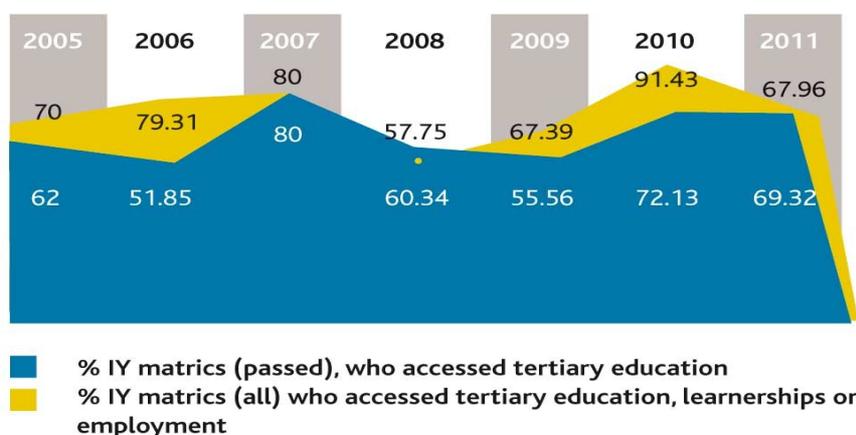
Figure 6: Access to tertiary education, learnerships or employment

IkamvaYouth's programmes enable its learners to achieve opportunities that will significantly increase their earning potential. This is achieved at a very low cost by leveraging strategic partnerships and volunteerism. With public libraries, tertiary institutions and community centres providing free access to venues and infrastructure, and volunteers responsible for all programme delivery, the overall expenditure per IkamvaYouth learner per year between 2004 and 2011 has been R4422.00. The programme's sustainability is ensured by the 50% of matrics who become volunteers, transforming from beneficiaries into benefactors. In 2012, volunteers will provide over 3 million rands' worth of tutoring, career guidance mentoring, computer literacy training and workshop facilitation to over 700 learners.

Lessons learned

An entire book could be written about the many lessons learned during the organisation's nine years of existence. This section outlines a handful of the more interesting pedagogical lessons learned which have informed the development of the IkamvaYouth model.

– Anyone can achieve
   Participation in IkamvaYouth is open to all; without screening of either learners or tutors. The learner enrolment process takes special care not to filter according to academic merit. This policy exists for both idealogical and practical reasons. Firstly, as the organisation aims to level the playing fields by assisting learners who're disadvantaged by their school, home and community environments, it would be counter-mission to further disadvantage them due to poor academic achievement which is largely due to their context. Secondly, poorer-performing learners need the programme's assistance more, and have more room for improvement. IkamvaYouth believes (and has shown) that significant academic gains can be achieved simply through committed hard work. As such, enrolment is through first-come-first-serve and an application form designed through its length to filter for motivation (those without sufficient motivation to complete the form are not accepted). The self-selection

process continues in that learners are required to meet a minimum 75% attendance requirement in order to keep their place in the programme. Attendance results are regularly reported to the learners and their parents, and top attenders are incentivised through prizes and excursions. IkamvaYouth also pays high-attending learners' application and registration fees for tertiary institutions.

In addition to opening up membership to learners, anyone who's enrolled in a tertiary institution or has a tertiary qualification of any sort is welcome to tutor. Again, committed, regular tutoring is incentivised through recognition, prizes and connections to employment and scholarships offered to ikamvanites by our partner organisations and institutions. Van der Berg et al (2012) explain that they "found no evidence that the tutors were particularly well trained or that they were always much better teachers than those in schools; the commitment, positive interaction and additional time were apparently most important in the success of students, not the better teaching."

– Individual attention and immediate feedback builds understanding
A typical IkamvaYouth tutoring session looks and sounds chaotic. Learners self-organise into groups of five according to grade and subject area, and tutors find the group whose needs they're best-suited to meet. The onus and responsibility for the learning agenda is placed on the learners, who're tasked with bringing questions and concerns to the tutoring sessions. The tutors then engage the learners in discussion and task them with writing their responses to questions. The medium of dialogue is most often English, and feedback on spoken and written input is immediate. Due to the small group size, it is easier to engage learners individually, and where a gap in fundamental comprehension becomes evident, tutors can identify the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978), explain these concepts and scaffold towards grade-level understanding.

– The power of peer-to-peer support
The far majority of IkamvaYouth tutors and staff are young. This by-youth, for-youth approach builds an environment of aspiration and possibility, as learners are surrounded by positive role models; most of whom are very near in age and have grown up in their community. Ikamvanites have created an environment where learning is "cool", and where reaching the goals to which one aspires is possible.

Going forward

Many of the country's higher education institutions have already been supporting and enabling IkamvaYouth's work in significant and innovative ways. Going forward, a more coordinated and systematic approach is needed whereby effective efforts are emulated and expanded. There are five important ways in which institutions of further and higher learning can exponentially boost and support the replication of this model and its results:

(i) Providing course credits to students for committed, regular volunteerism

(ii) Waiving application and registration fees for committed learners and volunteer tutors

(iii) Availing campuses for holiday programmes

(iv) Connecting the alumni of IkamvaYouth with on-campus support offerings

(v) Awarding postgraduate scholarships and conducting research

To date, IkamvaYouth's marketing efforts for volunteer recruitment have been limited. Most recruitment is through word-of-mouth and the self-generation of volunteers through ex-learners paying-it-forward. In order to scale the model significantly across the country, many more volunteers will be needed, and universities are uniquely positioned to enable and recognise regular volunteerism. Although the focus of this paper has been on the impact the programme has on its learners, there is no doubt that the tutors also benefit through their experiences as volunteers. Skills are gained not only through tutoring and mentoring, but branchcom members garner important work experience through project management, tracking and reporting programme implementation and results, and organisational management. The promotion and acknowledgement of service learning, community engagement and job-based training through accreditation would not only enable further replication of the model, but promote deeper experiential learning for students.

IkamvaYouth incentivises learners' attendance by covering application and registration fees. For the far majority of learners, the payment of registration fees in particular is a major barrier in their path towards enrolling in tertiary institutions, and although all learners are eligible for funding from the National Student Finacial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), most institutions nevertheless require the payment of registration fees before the NSFAS loans come into effect. In branches with high matric numbers, registration fees are the largest budget line item following transport costs, and heavily effect branches' fundraising burden.

The weight of registration fees is borne not only by the organisation and its learners, but also, importantly, by its volunteers. The opportunity cost for students who spend their spare time tutoring is significant. As most are from the impoverished communities they serve, the income they could be generating during this time through part-time work would make a great difference to their lives. Tertiary institutions could prevent drop-out and promote volunteerism through waiving these students' registration fees; an initiative already

implemented by the Durban University of Technology (DUT). By waiving registration fees for committed learners and volunteers, tertiary institutions could not only enable the reallocation of these funds towards further-reaching programme delivery, but also promote students' volunteerism and the enrolment of disadvantaged learners into their institutions.

UWC, UCT, TsiBA Education, UKZN and DUT have all availed campus property and resources for IkamvaYouth during the June/July holidays. The intensive winter schools are key periods during which learners participate in all six programmes (listed in the section outlining the model above). With two weeks of all-day engagement, and access to campus resources including science laboratories, computer labs and sports fields, learners' experiences are rich and diverse, and the possibility of a future involving life on campus becomes tangible and accessible.

Postgraduate students at UCT's Department of Film and Media Studies have engaged in service learning, whereby the scholarships they were awarded included extensive on-site volunteered internships, which in turn informed and enabled their research. IkamvaYouth benefited not only from their volunteered time, but also the findings of their studies, and there is great scope for extending this initiative to other institutions and fields of study. There are many areas requiring further enquiry, but in particular, there are two important questions which would inform the model's effectiveness in delivering on the objectives outlined for Carnegie III. Firstly, follow-up research is needed to really understand the model's impact through comparisons with baseline data (from before the intervention began), as well as more information to construct a counterfactual: "What would students' results have been in the absence of any interventions, i.e. if Ikamva did not offer its programme?" (Van der Berg et al, 2012). Secondly, in the next two to three years, follow-up research is needed once more significant numbers of IkamvaYouth learners have progressed in their post-school careers. It is only by measuring retention and throughput at tertiary institutions and income levels following employment that the programme's success in enabling disadvantaged youth to escape poverty can be really be assessed.

Conclusion

It is clear that the initiative is making significant inroads in addressing key problems that young South Africans face as they stand at the important crossroads between secondary and tertiary study, trying to navigate their way through an education system in crisis. Given the programme's low cost, high impact and replication in seven townships, it's likely that with continued support from partners and donors, more branches will be established and larger numbers of learners reached.

The National Youth Policy 2009 – 2014 urges interventions to "raise the confidence of youth so that they can contribute meaningfully to their own development and to the broader society". Beyond the implications for addressing disadvantaged learners' poor academic performance, low levels of tertiary enrollment and high unemployment, IkamvaYouth's model provides a means for South African youth to drive the country's transformation.

Higher education institutions are uniquely positioned to significantly boost current efforts and enable wide-reaching replication of the model across the country. The adoption of the recommendations made in this paper at the Carnegie conference would ensure tangible, practical, high-impact outcomes and a significant contribution towards the alleviation of inequality and poverty in South Africa.

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