

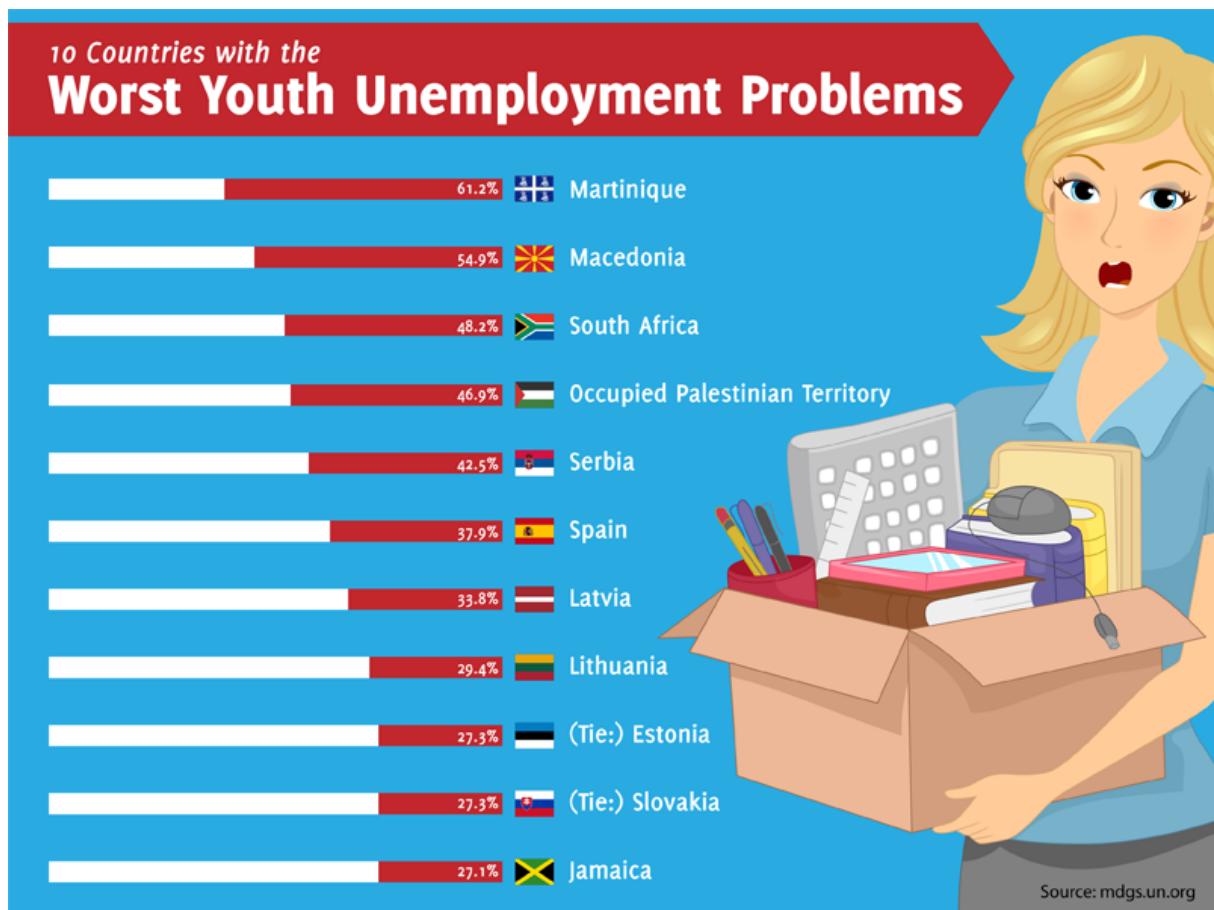
The Value of Internships

By Gill Fenwick, Executive Director, Siyakhula Trust ETD Institute



South Africa has a serious unemployment problem. Official statistics indicate that approximately 26.7% of all South Africans are unemployed. However, in reality this figure is much higher.

It is even more worrying when we look at unemployment figures amongst youth in the 15 – 24-year age group. Both the World Economic Forum (WEF) and the World Bank Group place South African youth unemployment between 47.9% and 52.6%. South Africa is rated as the third highest in the world in respect of youth unemployment.



In the last 20 years there has been a significant growth in black graduates but about 9% of black graduates are unemployed and 6% of white graduates are also unemployed.

Imagine how frustrating it must be for a young person, who has struggled to stay at school to obtain a matric and who has managed to enter a tertiary institution or a technical training facility, only to find that there are no job opportunities on graduation.

The majority of young people spend months knocking on doors and sending CV's only to be told that they cannot be considered because they have no work experience.

It is the proverbial catch 22 situation, that you cannot get a job without work experience but you cannot gain work experience unless you have a job.

One can imagine the levels of frustration, anger and disillusionment experienced by young people who so desperately want to find a job and start entering the main stream of the workplace. The situation is definitely a powder keg waiting to explode.

The government is aware of the seriousness of the situation and has introduced policies and legislation to address the problem.

The current National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS) has committed money to development and has created study opportunities.

However, unless employers play their part, these efforts will not produce any results. Theory on its own will not make a young person marketable.

One of the greatest opportunities you can give to a young person is to create an internship for him/her to acquire skills.

An intern is a young person who usually has graduated from a formal course of study i.e. university, technikon or who holds a matric.

This involves bringing a young person into an organisation on a fixed term contract for a year and exposing them to work activities and environment. This opportunity enables the young person to gain useful work experience which will assist him to secure a job going forward.

The benefits of a good internship programme

- Young people gain technical skills that will make them marketable
- The interns gain work life skills and insight into the behaviours and attitudes that will make them successful in the workplace
- The organisation has the opportunity to develop young people who may become future employees of the company
- The Mentors/Coaches develop skills and insights that will help them develop and refine their management competencies
- The Mentors/Coaches grow from the experience and experiences a sense of contribution to the development of future human potential
- Although there is no commitment from the organisation to employ the intern at the end of the period, the organisation will be able to identify those interns who have demonstrated the ability to add value to the organisation going forward

In this series of articles, we will discuss the various ingredients of a good internship intervention.

More details about internships can be found on the Siyakhula Trust ETD Institute website – www.siyakhula-institute.co.za.