



Global employee volunteering trend arrives in South Africa with Transnet in the lead

Wednesday 9th November 2011

Today was an eventful day for Paradise Bend Primary School in Diepsloot as Transnet employees traded in their laptops and spanners for spades and paint brushes for the launch of the Transnet Employee Volunteerism Programme (EVP).

Attended by Transnet CEO Brian Molefe, the launch signifies a three year commitment by Transnet to three underdeveloped locations across South Africa. Employee volunteerism and its mutual gains for both volunteers and beneficiaries will now become a major component of the parastatal's CSI spend. The Transnet EVP is a pioneering programme that will see intensive volunteering efforts ploughed into selected villages over periods of three years.

Susie Mabie, Senior Manager at the Transnet Foundation, explains: "Taking as inspiration the African proverb, 'It takes a village to raise a child', we've posed questions such as, 'But what does it take to raise a village?' and 'Who lends the village a helping hand?'"

While the developmental needs of most underprivileged communities are extremely broad, spanning education, health, infrastructure and far more, the Transnet Foundation believes that the vast wealth of skills found within the ranks of its employees offers a match for all requirements. "With engineers to trades people as staff, we believe that we can create many and diverse volunteering opportunities for our employees," states Mabie.

'Villages' in this employee volunteer programme (EVP) are defined as demarcated municipal zones. Initially, three villages will be selected, one in each of three cities where a Transnet Operating Division exists, namely Durban, Port Elizabeth and Johannesburg. Cape Town will be incorporated into the programme in 2012.

Transnet Foundation has undertaken comprehensive environmental analyses of the selected villages, focusing on demographics, poverty and employment levels, community institutions and structures and unique characteristics. Such studies formed the baseline against which the EVP was planned, implemented and measured.

Transnet's involvement in each village will be limited to three years, in which time all interventions must have reached sustainable levels so that the various projects are able to fend for themselves. A new project cycle in a new set of villages will then be implemented.

Volunteers will be able to undertake their community duties during working hours on Wednesday to Fridays for three hours at a time. They will be encouraged to devote 24 hours a year to volunteering, amounting to three working days. Transnet believes the result will be a substantial investment in CSI both in terms of rand and time.

Types of volunteer activities envisaged include waste management and solar power projects, adult education, second-hand stores, assisting with business plans, sports coaching, computer literacy, food gardens and general upliftment 'blitzes'.

Mabie speaks of the exciting possibilities in Small, Medium and Micro Enterprise (SMME) Development such as the establishment of Village Chambers of Commerce. "Our approach is informed by research and global trends," she points out, "and to this end partnerships with the University of Cape Town's Centre for Innovation and Entrepreneurship are being researched."

Transnet is also considering monthly Help Desk sessions, where village representatives will be able to consult with a panel experts in varied fields – lawyers, engineers and IT professionals for example, drawn from Transnet staff. "In this way, we feel that we as South Africa's freight carrier, are not just focussing on our own core business, but on the communities within which we operate," states Cynthia Mgjima, Transnet Foundation Head.

It is envisaged that volunteers offering professional skills may pass on soft skills as well. "A finance manager may develop a financial management system for a village enterprise," explains Mabie, "but she may also set up a knitting group for women who want to supplement their income."

The Foundation is of the opinion that the visible and constant presence of Transnet employees in selected villages will see them regarded almost as members of the communities, adding to sustainable change and growth. Taking place in a controlled environment, impact and returns will be measurable.

Mgjima comments, "If more companies such as Transnet could make a better life for all as one man like Mandela could, the response and the numbers of people that would be touched would go far beyond our imaginations."

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About the Transnet Foundation

The Transnet Foundation is the corporate social investment (CSI) unit of Transnet SOC Limited. Spending over R150 million on its CSI portfolio each year, the Transnet Foundation's responsibility is to implement socio-economic development projects on behalf of Transnet. The unit's focus areas are health, education, sports and containerised assistance and are aimed at contribute to a healthier, well-educated and skilled population that can contribute to South Africa's economic success. The Transnet Foundation also manages the pioneering Employee Volunteer Programme in three villages across South Africa in order to encourage skills transfer and employee participation in social development issues.