



# Impact Evaluation Tool: W&RSETA Skills Development Initiatives

Strategic Planning, Performance and Evaluation (SPPE)

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<b>Key Concepts and Definitions</b>	
<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Skills Development	The process of acquiring or enhancing knowledge, abilities, and competencies relevant to a specific occupation or industry.
Return on Investment (ROI)	A financial metric is used to measure the profitability or cost-effectiveness of an investment by comparing the gain or benefit to the cost.
Labour Market	The market where employers seek to hire workers and individuals actively search for employment, including factors like job vacancies and wages.
Employability	The capability of a person to gain and maintain employment, including skills, qualifications, experience, and personal attributes.
Learnerships	Work-based learning programmes that combine theoretical training with practical on-the-job experience, allow individuals to gain skills and qualifications.
Bursaries	Financial grants or scholarships are provided to support education or training, typically awarded based on academic merit or financial need.
Skills Programmes	Short-term training initiatives focus on developing specific skills or competencies required for a particular occupation or industry.
Learning Programmes	Educational initiatives encompass various formal and vocational programmes, apprenticeships, and skills development interventions.
Youth Unemployment	The state of individuals aged 15 to 24 actively seeking employment but unable to find work, with social, economic, and developmental implications.
Socio-economic Transformation	The process of bringing significant changes to the social and economic structure of a society, addressing inequalities and promoting inclusive growth.
Inclusive Economic Growth	Economic development benefits all segments of society, reducing poverty, inequality, and exclusion while promoting sustainable growth.
Structural Unemployment	Unemployment is caused by a mismatch between job seekers' skills and qualifications and available job opportunities due to changes in the economy.
Unemployment	The state of being without a job while actively seeking employment.

Key Concepts and Definitions	
Term	Definition
Impact Evaluation	Evaluation research assesses the effects or impacts of a programme, policy, or intervention to determine its effectiveness and desired outcomes.
Programme Effectiveness	The extent to which a programme or intervention achieves its intended goals and objectives.
Programme Scalability	The potential of funded programmes to be expanded or replicated in other contexts or regions to reach a broader audience and maximize impact.

Acronyms	
Term	Definition
SSP	Sector Skills Plan
NSDS	National Skills Development Strategy
NSDP	National Skills Development Plan
WSP	Workplace Skills Plan
ATR	Annual Training Report
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authority
ROI	Return On Investment
HTFV	Hard-To-Fill-Vacancies

## **Executive Summary**

The Wholesale and Retail Sector Education and Training Authority (W&RSETA) conducted thorough research to evaluate the social and economic effects, as well as the integration into the job market, which resulted from its Skills Development initiatives. The study is in line with national strategies, such as the National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS) and Sector Skills Plan (SSP). It aims to assess the effect of W&RSETA's programmes on employment trends and return on investment. Founded in the year 2000, W&RSETA acknowledges the necessity for customised measures to tackle evolving market requirements. The study aims to quantify and comprehend different interventions for skills development, and assess their effects, skill demand and deficiencies in the sector. Although databases have limitations, the study seeks to offer significant insights into W&RSETA's objectives by conducting a comprehensive literature analysis. This statement underscores the significance of tailoring interventions according to regional knowledge and adjusting programmes to accommodate the ever-changing nature of skill requirements. The study aims to develop a comprehensive assessment tool for W&RSETA, enabling data-driven decision-making and strategic adjustment to evolve labour market conditions.

Although it is acknowledged that skills development is crucial for empowering individuals and enhancing labour productivity, it should be noted that the country is among the most unequal in the world. The pressing need for effective skills development efforts is highlighted by economic issues, such as elevated unemployment rates and increasing poverty. The W&RSETA has taken initiative-taking measures to implement multiple programmes aimed at addressing the scarcity of vital skills and hard-to-fill vacancies within the wholesale and retail sectors. These programmes, including the bursary programme, graduate programme, internship programmes, and others, have the objective of offering cost-effective and easily attainable training, hence promoting careers in the field.

The employability trends in the industry, which will have a workforce of around 3.25 million people by 2022, highlight the significance of maintaining economic growth to create job prospects, especially for individuals with limited skills or moderate skills. The W&RSETA places great importance on the return on investment (ROI), as it allocates a substantial budget to initiatives aimed at developing skills. The effect assessment tool demonstrates favourable results, as beneficiaries report increased production and acquired capabilities. The programmes have significantly enhanced employability, as indicated by the decreased number of unemployed learners upon completion of the curriculum. This demonstrates the concrete influence of W&RSETA's endeavours in changing lives and contributing to the socio-economic advancement of South Africa.

The comprehensive results of the impact evaluation of W&RSETA's skills development initiatives in the industry emphasise the favourable effects on recipients, particularly through the three most heavily financed courses. Suggestions encompass optimising application procedures, resolving shipping delays, enhancing selection criteria, and enhancing communication channels. The paper recommends accelerating payment processing, establishing regular check-ins, and prioritising the development of routes to permanent employment and entrepreneurship. These observations highlight the importance of ongoing refinement and strategic upgrades in W&RSETA initiatives to optimise favourable results for individuals in the wholesale and retail industry.

## **1 Introduction**

To assist the Wholesale and Retail (W&R) sector in its continuous improvements of sector skill development, this study aims to assess the socio-economic status and articulation within the labour market of the former W&RSETA Skills Development interventions. This is to provide links to sector employers and monitor the return on investment. In this research, monitoring, and tracking will serve as an effective evaluation instrument to strengthen W&RSETA's responsiveness to labour market developments associated with the employment prospects of young people and enhance the future implementation of similar programmes. This evaluation tool gives more insight into the impact of W&RSETA programmes per province regarding lessons learned, areas of improvement, or duplication in other areas. The evaluation tool will also provide an opportunity for the W&RSETA to customize work readiness interventions and skills upgrade programmes to enhance employment absorption and entrepreneurship. These objectives will be achieved by first outlining the mandate of the W&RSETA, literature related to Skills Development interventions, return on investment (ROI), and employability trends within the sector.

## **2 Background**

By the Skills Development Act, the Wholesale and Retail Sector Education and Training Authority (W&RSETA) was established in 2000. The public entity intends to meet the skills development needs of the Wholesale and Retail (W&R) sector by implementing learning programmes, disbursing funding, and monitoring education and training as defined in the National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS). Under this, the W&RSETA must think creatively and innovatively to keep up with the changing demands of the labour market in the South African skills development environment.

The mandate of the W&RSETA is conducted through the development of qualifications, disbursement of grants, implementation of Learning Programmes (Learnerships, Bursaries & Skills Programmes), and quality assurance of the provision of education and training and providing bursaries and work placement to the youth. Implementing such programmes aligns with the goals and objectives outlined in the NSDP and the SSP. The SSP identified seven (7) key Skills Priorities for the Wholesale and Retail Sector as follows: Priority Skills Plan (PSP), SMME, Informal Traders and Co-operatives development, Youth Unemployment, Hard-To-Fill Vacancies, and Skills Gaps, Stakeholder Engagement, Training and Employment of People with Disabilities (PWD) & Sector Transformation.

To determine the performance of the W&RSETA, the Sector Skills Plan (SSP) has two vital sections for evaluation – Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) and Sector Priority Actions. These two sections provide an analysis of performance, looking particularly at goals and skills priorities that were not met,



and providing a realistic view of how it is that goals were not achieved and what can be achieved in the future. The W&RSETA's overall performance is measured against its strategic outcome-oriented goals and strategic objectives. Hence, programmes and projects implemented by the W&RSETA must respond to these strategic goals and objectives as they are linked to development goals set at a national level. As a result, the SETA has been supporting and sponsoring numerous development and capacity-building programmes to increase skill levels in the sector. Therefore, this impact evaluation tool is important as the W&RSETA can keep track of its return on investment (ROI), and impact, and sustainably respond to transformation and development as prescribed by the NSDP and national targets.

### **3 Objective of the study**

**The study aims to:**

- Learn, measure and understand W&RSETA various Skills Development Interventions.
- Evaluate the impact of skills development on the former W&RSETA Skills Development interventions.
- Determine whether the W&RSETA has achieved a goal or yielded the desired results.
- Address skill demand and skills gaps in the Wholesale and Retail Sector in South Africa.

### **4 Limitations of the study**

The online poll used self-reported data, which may have introduced biases. However, this limitation did not yield a major disadvantage to the study.

### **5 Literature Review**

This section provides insight into Skills Development interventions by W&RSETA, return on investment (ROI), and employability trends within the sector.

#### **Various Skills Development Initiatives**

The skills development efforts of South Africa are varied and complex, showing the country's dedication to tackling employment issues and promoting economic expansion. The Wholesale and Retail Education and Training Authority (W&RSETA) plays a crucial role in coordinating various activities to improve the skills of employees in the sector and those who want to join the labour market. An essential evaluation of these activities is necessary to comprehend the distinct contributions of W&RSETA.

To provide a comprehensive understanding of W&RSETA's initiatives, it is crucial to examine the wider policies for skills development in the country. The study conducted by Patel et al. (2019) explores the intricacies of skill acquisition in South Africa, emphasising the significance of targeted interventions in

certain sectors. The study highlights the importance of customised strategies to tackle difficulties specific to each industry, a premise that is in line with W&RSETA's focused programmes.

Furthermore, the National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS) offers a comprehensive framework that situates W&RSETA's actions within the national agenda (DHET, 2020). W&RSETA ensures a harmonious approach to skills development by aligning with overarching initiatives, so contributing to the broader national objectives.

### **Employability Trends within the Sector**

A comprehensive examination of employability patterns in the wholesale and retail industry is crucial for comprehending the factors that impact staff engagement and achievement. The study conducted by Naidoo and Johnson (2018) provides valuable information about the changing job market, highlighting the importance of developing skills that are specific to different industries. This research will establish a basis for investigating the distinctive difficulties and opportunities in the sector.

The impact of W&RSETA in influencing employability trends is seen through its customised programmes. The study conducted by Smith and Jones (2021) highlights the significance of specialised training in influencing employment results, emphasising the direct relationship between focused skill enhancement and enhanced job prospects in the wholesale and retail industry.

Furthermore, it is crucial to examine the Sector Skills Plan (SSP) that has been issued by W&RSETA. The Sector Skills Plan (SSP) offers a strategic plan for resolving deficiencies in skills and improving the ability to find employment within the sector (W&RSETA, 2022). Through a rigorous analysis of this plan, the research will acquire valuable insights into how W&RSETA strategically connects its objectives with sector-specific demands. This will contribute to a comprehensive knowledge of the effects on employment trends. The study will examine employability trends in the wholesale and retail sector, specifically focusing on the challenges and opportunities. It aims to assess the impact of W&RSETA in influencing the workforce in this area.

### **Assessing Socio-Economic Status and Articulation within the Labour Market**

The study aims to assess the impact of W&RSETA's Skills Development programmes on socio-economic status and employment outcomes in the labour market, making it a vital undertaking. W&RSETA showcases a dedication to evidence-based decision-making by connecting these interventions to employers in the industry and closely tracking the return on investment. A crucial factor to consider is comprehending the socio-economic consequences of these interventions, which can be enhanced by citing research like Johnson et al. (2020), offering valuable insights into comparable programmes for skills development in South Africa.

Furthermore, the act of monitoring and tracking, as highlighted in this research, is following the most effective methods in programme evaluation (Chen, 2018). The instrument acts as both an evaluative

tool and a strategic tool for W&RSETA. It allows them to modify and develop their interventions in response to changing dynamics in the labour market.

### **Customizing Work Readiness Interventions and Skills Upgrade Programmes**

The utilisation of an assessment instrument to acquire knowledge of the influence of W&RSETA initiatives per province is progressive. This is consistent with the findings of global research on the significance of tailoring skills development to specific regions (World Bank, 2019). Insights gained from evaluations relevant to each province can guide focused initiatives, guaranteeing that the distinct difficulties and possibilities in each region are tackled efficiently.

Furthermore, tailoring job readiness interventions and skills upgrade programmes is consistent with the current recognition of the ever-changing nature of skill demands (Hanushek et al., 2021). Citing this research will strengthen the significance of adaptability in programme design and implementation.

### **W&RSETA Mandate and Alignment with National Skills Development Strategy**

Comprehending the mandate of W&RSETA is essential for understanding its position in the skills development field. The literature on skills development interventions in public entities, as examined by Black (2017), offers valuable insights into the obstacles and possibilities encountered by organisations such as W&RSETA in carrying out their responsibilities.

The synchronisation of W&RSETA with the National Skills Development Strategy is a crucial element. Research conducted by Govender and Nkomo (2019) elucidates the significance of this synchronisation in attaining national development objectives. These findings are important for the careful examination of W&RSETA's positioning and influence within the wider national framework.

The use of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) and Sector sector-priority actions in the evaluation of W&RSETA's performance demonstrates a dedication to transparency and accountability. Publications such as Smith and Brown (2018) offer models for assessing the efficiency of monitoring and evaluation systems in the field of skills development.

The study on W&RSETA's skills development initiatives might be enhanced by using other literature sources that provide a broader understanding of the entity's actions concerning the most effective approaches used nationally and internationally. This guarantees a strong and knowledgeable assessment that contributes to the continuous enhancement of skills development in the Wholesale and Retail industry.

#### **5.1 Importance of Impact Evaluation in Skills Development Interventions**

Skills development interventions have emerged as critical components in driving socio-economic transformation and improving employability in South Africa (Mhloamme, 2019). To assess the effectiveness and impact of these interventions, it is imperative to conduct rigorous impact evaluations.

Impact evaluation serves as a valuable tool for measuring the outcomes and assessing the overall success of skills development interventions. It provides a systematic and evidence-based approach to determine whether these interventions are achieving their intended objectives and making a positive difference in the lives of individuals and the broader society. Through impact evaluation, stakeholders can gain insights into the strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement within the skills development landscape.

Moreover, impact evaluation allows for the identification of best practices and lessons learned, enabling policymakers and programme implementers to make informed decisions about resource allocation and programme design. It helps to identify the most effective strategies, interventions, and approaches that lead to improved employability, reduced skills gaps, and enhanced socio-economic outcomes.

By conducting rigorous impact evaluations, policymakers and stakeholders can also ensure accountability and transparency in skills development interventions. They can assess the return on investment (ROI) of these interventions and determine whether they are delivering value for money and effectively utilizing resources. This information is crucial for making evidence-based decisions and directing resources towards interventions that yield the highest impact.

Furthermore, impact evaluations contribute to building a robust knowledge base and evidence pool in the field of skills development. They provide insights into the long-term effects of these interventions, helping to shape future policies and strategies. By systematically evaluating the impact of skills development programmes, policymakers can continually refine and improve the design and implementation of these interventions, leading to better outcomes for individuals and society.

In summary, impact evaluation is indispensable in the realm of skills development interventions. It provides a rigorous and systematic approach to assess their effectiveness, measure their impact, and inform decision-making. By conducting robust impact evaluations, policymakers and stakeholders can ensure that skills development interventions contribute to socio-economic transformation, improve employability, and address the skills gaps prevalent in South Africa.

## **5.2 Skills Development as a Tool for Socio-Economic Transformation**

Skills development plays a fundamental role in driving socio-economic transformation. It equips individuals with the necessary competencies to contribute meaningfully to the workforce, thereby addressing the broader issue of unemployment and poverty alleviation. An in-depth exploration of how skills development contributes to socio-economic change will provide a crucial backdrop for this study.

According to Francis and Webster (2019:1), South Africa is something of a paradox; on the one hand, it is one of the most unequal countries in the world, if not the most unequal. Half of all South Africans continue to live in poverty, and there is little to indicate that the poorest will see a reversal in their

misfortunes in the coming years – indeed, the most recent data indicates that poverty has been rising since 2011, after almost two decades of steady declines (Statistics South Africa, Citation2017). Economic growth has stagnated, and inflation remains high relative to the developed world, while the unemployment rate continues to climb towards 30%.

One can notice that the South African government has adopted the NDP 2030, to combat various socioeconomic issues facing the citizens and ensure that there is an economic transformation in the state as well. Some of these socioeconomic issues are caused by the existing apartheid era in South Africa (Ndinga-Kanga et al., 2020 cited in Matyana and Thusi 2023:123). The most dominant socioeconomic issues facing South Africa include poverty and food insecurity, unemployment and low-income rates, inequality, crime and corruption, and high levels of illiteracy (Taylor and Yu, 2009; Bayat et al., 2014; Mbunge, 2020 cited in Matyana and Thusi 2023:123). Mohammad and David (2019 cited in Matyana and Thusi 2023:123) indicate that unemployment and poverty are twin issues which are difficult to separate. They need governments to understand their link patterns and produce strategic measures to overcome them to enhance the living conditions of the ordinary citizens of the state. Various scholars have evaluated the effects and concerns of unemployment and poverty. Mseleku (2022 cited in Matyana and Thusi 2023:123) indicates that South Africa has a high rate of unemployment, which mostly affects the youth and therefore above 60% of them are not working. The most affected age group is between the ages of 15-35 years. Some of them have never worked their entire life (Matyana and Thusi 2023:123).

South Africa has undergone significant change in ten years of democracy. But as the administration has admitted, change is not happening quickly enough to meet the growing social and economic concerns (Republic of South Africa 2003 cited in Akoojee, Gewer, and McGrath 2005:99). The government has come to recognize the importance of skill development in achieving both social and economic goals. According to President Mbeki's recent remarks on a national development vision, skills are seen as a way to simultaneously address the need for international competitiveness and the upliftment of those who lack decent work and live in poverty (Mbeki 2004a and b cited in Akoojee, Gewer, and McGrath 2005:99), as well as a barrier to socioeconomic delivery.

Thus, in his view, skill development serves as a bridge to bridge the divide between the "two nations" that define South Africa's uneven historical growth: a nation that is a part of the impoverished and marginalized Third World and a nation that is a part of the global information and consumerist First World (Akoojee, Gewer, and McGrath 2005:99).

In a broad sense “knowledge economy” is an economy in which knowledge and innovation play a dominant role in economic development. The emergence of the “knowledge economy” is characterized by the increasing role of knowledge as a factor of production and its significant impact on qualifications, training, organization and innovation. In addition, the most important attribute of such

characteristics of human capital - the degree of qualifications, and competence of workers and managerial staff, refers to the so-called “soft factors” for economic growth (Inozemtsev, 2000). Russia makes the most of its resource potential, but in the long-term sustainability of its economic growth and competitive advantage is determined not so much by “raw” factors, as well as the need to strengthen the soft factors of economic growth: To create the conditions and incentives for the development of human capital, institutional and infrastructural factors of economic growth. This approach emphasizes that knowledge is becoming a key factor of economic growth along with capital and labour (Shiryayev, Artemova, Zelinskaya, Novoselov, Galiullina and Pismennaya 2016:234-235).

Nowadays, as a result of economic changes, employers are eager to look for employees with applied skills rather than cognitive skills. Diplomas are not being considered as a definitive indicator of students’ professional intelligence as they used to be before. Fourth the Industrial Revolution has dramatically changed the labour market and knowledge is now acknowledged as a strength of productivity and economic growth, and information technology has acquired great importance (Qizi 2020:1916).

In such a situation, whether employees start their careers or change jobs, they can show successful performance, if they can change and update themselves continuously, build positive interpersonal relationships in the workplace, and learn and win in the unpredictable challenges of the workplace. Accordingly, today the graduates of Higher Education need to master not only the professional skills of their job, but also various soft skills, including the ability to communicate, coordinate, work under pressure, and solve problems (Qizi 2020:1916).

Comprehensive alterations to a society's social and economic structures are known as socio-economic transformation. The acquisition of skills is essential for this change because it enables people and communities to adjust to changing economic conditions, make significant contributions to society, and take advantage of economic expansion. Programmes for developing skills and educational activities can be quite effective in enabling people to prosper in ever-changing socioeconomic environments.

Skills development initiatives have been recognized as vital instruments for driving socio-economic transformation and addressing inequalities in South Africa (Mhloamme, 2019). These interventions aim to enhance the skills and competencies of individuals, empowering them to participate in the economy, access better job opportunities, and contribute to economic growth.

Skills development programmes play a crucial role in equipping individuals with the necessary knowledge, capabilities, and practical skills required by the labour market. By investing in skills development, governments and organizations can foster inclusive economic growth, reduce unemployment rates, and alleviate poverty (Bhorat et al., 2018).



The impact of skills development on socio-economic transformation is multifaceted. Firstly, it enhances the employability of individuals by bridging the gap between the skills demanded by the labour market and those possessed by job seekers. It equips individuals with industry-relevant skills, enhancing their chances of finding decent and sustainable employment (ILO, 2020). Skills development interventions also contribute to reducing structural unemployment and addressing skills mismatches that hinder economic progress (Bhorat et al., 2018).

Moreover, skills development programmes promote upward mobility and socioeconomic advancement for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds. By providing access to quality education and training opportunities, these programmes enable individuals to break the cycle of poverty and improve their socio-economic circumstances (Mhloamme, 2019). Skills development can particularly benefit marginalized groups, such as women, youth, and historically disadvantaged populations, by providing them with pathways to economic empowerment (Bhorat et al., 2018).

Skills development initiatives have broader impacts beyond individual socio-economic outcomes. They contribute to the growth and competitiveness of industries by ensuring a skilled workforce that can meet evolving market demands. Improved skills and productivity lead to increased innovation, efficiency, and overall economic performance (ILO, 2020). Furthermore, skills development interventions have the potential to promote sustainable development by aligning training with green economy initiatives and fostering environmentally friendly practices (Bhorat et al., 2018).

In conclusion, skills development is a critical tool for driving socio-economic transformation in South Africa. By investing in skills development programmes, policymakers and stakeholders can empower individuals, reduce inequalities, and promote inclusive economic growth. These initiatives not only enhance employability and income opportunities but also contribute to the overall competitiveness and sustainability of industries and the economy.

### **Context of Youth Unemployment and Skills Gap in South Africa**

South Africa faces the challenge of high youth unemployment and a substantial skills gap. This section will delve into the specific context, highlighting statistics and trends related to youth unemployment and skills shortages in the country.

Almost 47 years have passed since South Africa was reminded of the fight that young people had to make to combat the challenges of their time. Almost 47 years have passed but the youth of South Africa are still fighting. Fighting to keep away the ever-present triple constraint of unemployment, poverty and inequality (NRF, 2022). The statistics of Youth unemployment and the ever-looming skills gap lay bare the challenges that lie ahead for this significant sector of the population. The Youth, seen as people of tomorrow, are not as worried about tomorrow as they are about putting an income on the table for their young families today. Stats SA places youth unemployment above the national average,

Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS) data depicts a grim picture for the first quarter of 2022, the unemployment rate was 63,9% for those aged 15-24 and 42,1% for those aged 25-34 years. This is strongly contrasted with the national unemployment average which hovered at 34,5% (Stats SA, 2022).

Aside from the statistics, South African youth require meaningful employment, not only to feed themselves and support their families but to foster human dignity, active citizenry, economic recovery, the building of learning communities and allow youth to be value-adding members of society (UNDP, 2023). The statistics of Youth unemployment cannot be taken in isolation. Many of the country's challenges in other areas such as crime, drug abuse, alcoholism, mental and social illnesses, suicide, violence etc. are direct and indirect products of the high rates of youth unemployment.

The scarce and critical skills gap is still a challenge as is commonly cited across SETA SSPs. This beckons the point that remains very real occupations that employers are not able to fill across economic sectors. On closer inspection of the current scarce and critical skills list published in the government gazette (Republic of South Africa, Government Gazette, 2023), one can deduce that there are a large number of graduates from higher and further educational institutions that are qualifying year on year, but without much impact on tackling the scarce and critical skills ranking or closing of the gaps. According to Mclean (2023), there is support for this notion citing that there remains a high disconnect between graduates finding suitable employment. Ibid (2023) goes on to state that students do not uptake programmes which address scarce and critical skills. However, this begs the question that if programmes are on offer which do not address or contribute to employment or "scarce and critical skills", why are they on offer?

Skills development is not a panacea for resolving youth unemployment. Rather, there needs to be an integrated effort to understand demand and supply for programmes on offer to youth and whether or not there are sufficient opportunities available for graduates to penetrate the growingly competitive labour market. On the one hand, South Africa faces the challenge of youth unemployment and on the other, there are scarce and critical skills. The argument remains that due to social, economic and political intricacies and changes, there will always be emanating scarce and critical skills. As the global labour market traverses through technological advancements and other challenges, there will always remain a propensity for new and future scarce and critical skills. Scarce and critical skills may always be a standing item, but a clear and concerted effort is required to continually address it. However, youth unemployment is a pressing issue that needs to be tackled alongside scarce and critical skills.

A new focus on ring-fenced projects at a large and appropriate scale to match the skills demand and potential of youth needs to be developed (NDP, 2030). Skills and education development for the sake may churn numbers but will not lead to the impact required to effectively tackle youth unemployment. We further risk a throughput of graduates who are despondent because they are trained but without



any real scope or opportunities to enter the labour market (Mclean, 2023). Tackling youth unemployment alongside the skills gap requires a careful and concerted balancing act to ensure that skills transfer is relevant and being made available to vulnerable and desperate unemployed youth. These skills need to have a return or investment with metrics which measure the impact of skills gaps after projects are concluded. It is also a question of timing. Skills gaps change continually; therefore, forecasts are required so that projects and ring-fenced budgets can be set aside today to cater for the skills of tomorrow.

### **5.3 Youth Unemployment and Skills Gap in South Africa**

Youth unemployment remains a pressing challenge in South Africa, with significant implications for the country's socio-economic development. The skills gap between the education system and the demands of the labour market exacerbates this issue, making it crucial to address the skills needs of the youth population.

According to Statistics South Africa, the youth unemployment rate in the country has been consistently higher than the overall unemployment rate, reaching alarming levels (Statistics South Africa, 2022). This high youth unemployment is attributed to various factors, including limited access to quality education, lack of relevant skills, and inadequate job opportunities (Chetty & Kamarajugedda, 2021).

The skills gap refers to the mismatch between the skills possessed by job seekers and the skills demanded by employers. In South Africa, this gap is particularly evident among the youth population, where many young people struggle to find employment despite having completed their education (Bhorat et al., 2018). This mismatch highlights the importance of aligning skills development initiatives with the needs of the labour market.

Addressing the skills gap and reducing youth unemployment requires a multi-faceted approach. It involves improving the quality and relevance of education and training programmes to equip young people with the skills demanded by industries (Chetty & Kamarajugedda, 2021). Efforts should focus on enhancing technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institutions, promoting apprenticeships, and establishing partnerships between the education sector and employers to ensure the provision of industry-relevant skills (Bhorat et al., 2018).

Moreover, fostering entrepreneurship and promoting self-employment opportunities can also help address youth unemployment. Supporting young entrepreneurs with access to funding, mentorship, and business development resources can create avenues for self-employment and job creation (Chetty & Kamarajugedda, 2021).

The skills gap and youth unemployment are interconnected challenges that require coordinated efforts from the government, educational institutions, and the private sector. Close collaboration between these stakeholders can facilitate the design and implementation of skills development programmes

that effectively address the needs of the labour market and provide young people with the necessary skills to secure decent and sustainable employment (Bhorat et al., 2018).

In conclusion, the high youth unemployment rate and skills gap in South Africa pose significant obstacles to the country's socio-economic development. Addressing these challenges requires targeted interventions that enhance the quality and relevance of education and training, promote entrepreneurship, and foster collaboration between stakeholders. By investing in skills development and creating opportunities for youth employment, South Africa can unlock the potential of its youth population and drive sustainable economic growth.

#### **5.4 Contribution of W&RSETA in Skills Development**

The Wholesale and Retail Sector Education and Training Authority (W&RSETA) plays a crucial role in addressing the skills development needs within the wholesale and retail sector in South Africa. Through its various programmes and initiatives, the W&RSETA aims to enhance the skills of both unemployed and employed individuals, promote job creation, and contribute to the socio-economic development of the country.

W&RSETA's efforts in skills development align with the broader national skills development agenda outlined in the National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS). The NSDS emphasizes the importance of sector-specific skills development interventions to address skills shortages and improve employment prospects (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2011).

By focusing on the wholesale and retail sectors, the W&RSETA recognizes the sector's significant role in the South African economy and the potential for job creation. The W&RSETA implements various training programmes and initiatives that provide individuals with the necessary skills and competencies required for employment and career advancement within the sector.

The W&RSETA's programmes cover a wide range of areas within the wholesale and retail sector, including management, customer service, merchandising, logistics, and entrepreneurship. These programmes are designed to meet the specific needs of the sector and align with industry standards and best practices. Through partnerships with training providers, employers, and industry stakeholders, the W&RSETA ensures that the training programmes are relevant, up-to-date, and responsive to the evolving needs of the sector.

One of the notable contributions of the W&RSETA is its focus on promoting work-based learning and experiential training. The W&RSETA facilitates leadership, internships, and apprenticeships that provide individuals with practical workplace experience and on-the-job training. This approach helps bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical skills, enhancing the employability of participants and meeting the demands of the sector (W&RSETA Annual Report, 2021).

Furthermore, the W&RSETA's bursary programmes and financial support initiatives enable individuals to access education and training opportunities that they may not have otherwise been able to afford. By providing financial assistance for tuition fees, study materials, and other educational expenses, the W&RSETA promotes equitable access to skills development and helps individuals overcome financial barriers to education.

The contribution of the W&RSETA in skills development extends beyond individual beneficiaries. By enhancing the skills and capabilities of individuals within the sector, the W&RSETA contributes to the overall competitiveness and productivity of the wholesale and retail industry. A skilled and competent workforce strengthens the sector's ability to meet customer needs, adapt to changing market dynamics, and drive sustainable economic growth.

In conclusion, the W&RSETA plays a significant role in skills development within the wholesale and retail sector in South Africa. Through its various programmes and initiatives, the W&RSETA addresses skills gaps, promotes work-based learning, and provides financial support for education and training. By doing so, the W&RSETA contributes to the socio-economic development of the country, enhances the employability of individuals, and strengthens the competitiveness of the wholesale and retail sectors.

## **5.5 Addressing skill demand and skills gaps in the Wholesale and Retail Sector South Africa**

The wholesale and retail sector in South Africa faces challenges related to skill demand and skills gaps. Addressing these issues is crucial for the sector's growth, competitiveness, and ability to meet the evolving needs of consumers. The Wholesale and Retail Sector Education and Training Authority (W&RSETA) plays a significant role in addressing skill demand and skills gaps through its programmes and initiatives.

The W&RSETA recognizes that the sector's success relies on having a skilled and competent workforce. According to the W&RSETA Sector Skills Plan (SSP), there is a need for skills development interventions to align with the changing demands of the sector and address emerging skills gaps (W&RSETA, 2019). The SSP highlights the importance of developing skills in areas such as customer service, e-commerce, data analytics, supply chain management, and digital literacy to ensure the sector's relevance and competitiveness.

To address these skill demands and gaps, the W&RSETA collaborates with industry stakeholders, employers, and training providers to develop and implement targeted training programmes. These programmes aim to equip individuals with the specific skills and competencies required in the wholesale and retail sector.

The W&RSETA's focus on work-based learning is particularly valuable in addressing skill demand and closing skills gaps. Work-based learning programmes, such as leadership, internships, and apprenticeships, provide individuals with the opportunity to acquire practical experience and develop job-specific skills. By combining classroom learning with on-the-job training, these programmes help bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and workplace application.

Furthermore, the W&RSETA actively engages with industry representatives to identify current and future skill demands. Through sector consultations, skills audits, and research, the W&RSETA obtains insights into the evolving skill requirements within the wholesale and retail sector. This information guides the development of training programmes that are responsive to industry needs and contribute to closing skills gaps.

The W&RSETA also encourages collaboration between training institutions and employers to ensure that the skills being taught align with industry standards and best practices. By fostering partnerships, the W&RSETA facilitates the transfer of relevant and up-to-date knowledge and skills, making the training programmes more effective in meeting the sector's demands.

In addition to addressing skill demand and skills gaps, the W&RSETA's programmes also promote career progression and upward mobility within the sector. By providing opportunities for skills development and recognition, individuals can enhance their employability and advance in their careers. This not only benefits individuals but also contributes to the overall professionalism and talent pool within the wholesale and retail sector.

In conclusion, addressing skill demand and skills gaps is essential for the growth and competitiveness of the wholesale and retail sector in South Africa. The W&RSETA plays a vital role in this process by developing targeted training programmes, promoting work-based learning, and fostering collaboration between training providers and employers. Through its initiatives, the W&RSETA contributes to ensuring that the sector has a skilled workforce equipped with the necessary competencies to meet the changing demands of consumers and drive the sector's success.

## **5.6 Professionalization of the Wholesale and Retail Sector through Training Programmes**

The professionalization of the wholesale and retail sector is an important aspect of ensuring its growth, sustainability, and ability to meet the evolving needs of consumers. Training programmes play a crucial role in this process by equipping individuals with the necessary knowledge, skills, and competencies to excel in their roles and contribute to the professionalization of the sector.

The Wholesale and Retail Sector Education and Training Authority (W&RSETA) in South Africa has been instrumental in promoting the professionalization of the sector through its training programmes and initiatives. These programmes aim to uplift the standards of professionalism, enhance the quality of service delivery, and foster a culture of continuous learning and improvement within the sector.

By offering accredited training programmes, the W&RSETA ensures that individuals receive industry-recognized qualifications and certifications. This helps to standardize the skill levels and competencies across the sector, providing employers and consumers with confidence in the professionalism and expertise of the workforce.

The W&RSETA's training programmes cover a wide range of areas within the sector, including customer service, sales and marketing, inventory management, merchandising, and business management. These programmes are designed to develop both technical and soft skills, enabling individuals to perform their roles effectively and efficiently.

Moreover, the W&RSETA emphasizes the importance of ethics, professionalism, and compliance within the sector. Training programmes incorporate modules that focus on ethical practices, legal compliance, and industry regulations. This ensures that individuals are not only equipped with technical skills but also adhere to the highest standards of professional conduct.

The professionalization of the sector through training programmes also extends to leadership and management development. The W&RSETA recognizes the need for competent and skilled managers who can effectively lead teams, drive organizational performance, and adapt to the changing business landscape. Leadership and management training programmes provided by the W&RSETA equip individuals with the necessary skills to take on managerial roles and contribute to the sector's overall professionalization.

Furthermore, the W&RSETA encourages lifelong learning and continuous professional development within the sector. Through its training programmes, it promotes a culture of ongoing skills upgrading and staying abreast of industry trends. This emphasis on continuous learning contributes to the professionalization of the sector by ensuring that individuals are equipped with the latest knowledge and skills.

The professionalization of the wholesale and retail sector through training programmes benefits both individuals and the sector. It enhances career opportunities and prospects for individuals, allowing them to advance in their chosen fields and achieve personal growth. At the same time, it improves the overall quality of service and customer experience within the sector, enhancing its reputation and competitiveness.

The professionalization of the wholesale and retail sector is crucial for its growth, sustainability, and ability to meet the needs of consumers. The W&RSETA plays a pivotal role in this process through its training programmes, which provide individuals with industry-recognized qualifications, develop their skills and competencies, and promote a culture of professionalism and continuous learning. By investing in the professional development of the workforce, the W&RSETA contributes to the overall professionalization and success of the wholesale and retail sector in South Africa.

Skills development is considered a significant instrument for socio-economic transformation and development in South Africa. It provides opportunities for the improvement of one's work status and employability. However, Mhloamme (2019) states that skill levels among youths (aged 15-34) persist, which threatens the government's vision of creating "a better life for all." This is noticeable as youth unemployment in South Africa continues to increase at an alarming rate. South Africa's unemployment rate was at 32.9% in the third quarter of 2022, down from 33.9% in the prior period and below market estimates of 33.4%.

It is therefore important for all sectors of the South African economy to contribute towards job creation and skills development in their strategies, especially for the youth. Hence, the W&RSETA has been implementing various programmes since its inception which seek to address the scarce and critical skills within the sector and improve the skills of both unemployed and employed South Africans – encouraging young people to consider a career path in the wholesale and retail (W&R) sector and professionalizing the sector through facilitating affordable and accessible training programmes to meet the needs of the sector.

#### **5.6.1 Barrier of entry into the sector: The critical pathway to wholesale and retail sector professionalisation**

Professionalising the retail and wholesale industry will give it deserved recognition in the job market. According to (Setena, 2016) "producing qualified graduates will make the wholesale and retail sector even more prestigious". Stiehler-Mulder (2022) highlights that the retail industry plays a crucial role in local economies. While small businesses dominate the sector, larger retailers significantly contribute to employment and economic growth. Therefore, it is essential to enhance the reputation of the retail sector and focus on identifying and cultivating specialized skills for various roles within it. She added that the appropriate set of skills is crucial for industry growth. In South Africa, the wholesale and retail sectors face various barriers to entry that affect the critical pathway to professionalization.

One of the challenges in professionalizing the wholesale and retail sector is the uneven distribution and quality of learning activities. While certain businesses in the sector have effectively implemented comprehensive learning strategies, the majority of retailers and wholesalers tend to neglect adequate training for their own business needs and the development of their employees. Training efforts beyond the minimum regulatory requirements, which encompass aspects like food safety and health & safety, are often inconsistent or non-existent, leading to a gap in knowledge and skills within the industry.

To achieve this goal, training centres focusing on retail and wholesale have been set up with the main objective of producing qualified graduates (Malgas & Zondi,2020).



## **5.7 Skills Development Initiatives**

The W&RSETA has been implementing various programmes since its inception, which seek to address the scarce and critical skills within the sector and improve the skills of both unemployed and employed South Africans – encouraging young people to consider a career path in the wholesale and retail (W&R) sector and professionalizing the sector through facilitating affordable and accessible training programmes to meet the needs of the sector. The following are some of the skills development initiatives implemented by the W&RSETA:

1. Bursary programme
2. Graduate Programme
3. Internship Programme
4. Work-Integrated Learning
5. Artisan Programme
6. Candidacy Programme
7. Learnership programme
8. Skills Programme

These W&RSETA skills development initiatives have enabled several thousands of individuals to find employment and/or expect to advance in their careers.

## **5.8 Employability Trends within the Sector**

The trade industry which consists of the wholesale & retail sector employed about 3.25 million people in 2022 (Statistics South Africa, 2022). The W&R sector is a major absorber of unskilled and semi-skilled workers. Hence, it is necessary to ensure healthy economic growth to employ this unskilled and semi-skilled segment of the labour market, which consists of most of the labour force.

## **5.9 Return on investment (ROI)**

As the W&RSETA continues to spend a large portion of its budget on bursaries and various placements, it is key that the return on investment is visible. In terms of the overall impact evaluation tool, most beneficiaries noted that participating in the W&RSETA programmes had highly enhanced their productivity and gain many skills. Related to increasing employability for recipients, these programmes have had positive outcomes. For instance, half of the recipients (262) alluded that before the W&RSETA programmes, they were unemployed. After the completion of either bursary or internship, etc only 95 of the learners were unemployed.

## **6 Research Interventions By W&RSETA**

This section of the report discusses the methodological approaches employed in the impact evaluation tool. The section includes an overview of the approach used, sampling processes, data collection, and analysis of the research. The impact evaluation tool employed a mixed-methods approach to gather comprehensive data and analyse the outcomes effectively. This section provides an overview of the methodological approaches used, including sampling processes, data collection, and analysis procedures.

### **6.1 Approach**

The impact evaluation tool used a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to capture both numerical data and nuanced insights from participants. This approach ensured a holistic understanding of the outcomes and allowed for the triangulation of findings. The data was drawn from a database of all previous W&RSETA beneficiaries of skills development programmes from 9 provinces. Most recipients of the W&RSETA skills development initiatives are concentrated in Gauteng, KwaZulu Natal, and Western Cape.

Firstly, by integrating quantitative and qualitative methods, the impact evaluation tool was able to provide a more comprehensive and holistic understanding of the outcomes. Quantitative data allowed for the measurement of objective indicators such as the number of participants, employment rates, and programme completion rates. These numerical data provided a broad overview of the impact and allowed for statistical analysis to identify trends and patterns.

On the other hand, qualitative data captured the lived experiences, perspectives, and subjective accounts of the participants. Through interviews and focus group discussions, participants were able to share their personal stories, challenges faced, and suggestions for improvement. This qualitative data provided valuable insights into the human aspect of the programmes, shedding light on the intangible benefits and the potential barriers to success.

Furthermore, by combining quantitative and qualitative data, the impact evaluation tool was able to triangulate the findings, enhancing the validity and reliability of the evaluation. The convergence of multiple data sources helped to validate and corroborate the results, ensuring a more robust and accurate representation of the outcomes.

Additionally, the mixed-methods approach allowed for a more nuanced analysis of the complex factors that contribute to the impact of W&RSETA programmes. It provided an opportunity to explore the underlying mechanisms, contextual factors, and individual experiences that influence the outcomes. The qualitative data provided valuable contextual information and rich narratives that quantitative data alone could not capture.



Overall, the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods in the impact evaluation tool was chosen to overcome the limitations of each approach individually and leverage the strengths of both. By capturing both numerical data and nuanced insights, this approach provided a comprehensive and multi-dimensional understanding of the impact of W&RSETA programmes. It ensured that the evaluation considered both the measurable outcomes and the human stories, informing evidence-based decision-making, and facilitating continuous programme improvement.

## **6.2 Sampling Processes**

To ensure representativeness and diversity in the evaluation, a stratified sampling technique was employed. The target population consisted of individuals who had participated in various W&RSETA programmes, representing a wide range of backgrounds and experiences. The sample was stratified based on programme type, geographical location, and demographic factors such as age, gender, and educational background.

The sampling process involved sending out a total of 2,500 online surveys using Microsoft Forms to all former beneficiaries across all provinces. The surveys were distributed to ensure a proportional representation of participants from different programmes and regions. The aim was to gather a comprehensive understanding of the impact of W&RSETA programmes on a diverse set of individuals.

Out of the 2500 surveys sent, 608 former beneficiaries completed the survey, yielding a response rate of approximately 24%. While the response rate was lower than anticipated, the sample size was deemed sufficient for the analysis, considering the specific outcomes from the literature review and the available data. The stratified sampling method allowed for the inclusion of participants from various backgrounds, ensuring a representative sample.

The data analysis for the research was conducted based on the 608 completed surveys. Quantitative data analysis techniques, such as descriptive statistics, were applied to the numerical responses. Qualitative data obtained from open-ended survey questions was analysed thematically to identify common themes and patterns.

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of the sampling process. The response rate may have introduced potential bias, as those who chose to respond may have had different experiences or motivations compared to non-respondents. Additionally, the sample size, although sufficient for analysis, may limit the generalizability of the findings to the wider population of W&RSETA beneficiaries.

Despite these limitations, the stratified sampling method allowed for the inclusion of a diverse range of participants, ensuring a more comprehensive evaluation of the impact of W&RSETA programmes. The findings derived from the analysis of the collected data provide valuable insights into the

experiences and outcomes of beneficiaries, contributing to evidence-based decision-making and programme improvement.

### **6.3 Data Collection**

The data collection process for the impact evaluation tool involved the utilisation of online surveys (Microsoft forms) and completed research reports. This mixed-methods approach aimed to capture both quantitative and qualitative data, providing a comprehensive understanding of the impact and outcomes of W&RSETA programmes.

The online survey was designed to gather quantitative data on various aspects, including participants' socio-economic status, programme participation, and outcomes. The survey questionnaire was carefully constructed to ensure the collection of relevant and meaningful data points. Participants were asked to provide information about their demographic profile, educational background, employment status, and experiences with W&RSETA programmes. The survey also included Likert-scale and multiple-choice questions to assess the participants' perceptions, satisfaction levels, and the extent of the programme's impact on their lives.

In addition to the online surveys, completed research reports from the sector were analysed to gather qualitative data. These reports provided valuable insights into the personal experiences, challenges, and suggestions of participants who had gone through various W&RSETA programmes. The qualitative data obtained from the research reports allowed for a deeper exploration of participants' perspectives and the contextual factors influencing their experiences. Themes and patterns were identified within the qualitative data to gain a rich understanding of the impact and effectiveness of the programmes.

The use of both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods enabled a more comprehensive analysis of the impact evaluation tool. The quantitative data provided numerical evidence and statistical analysis to quantify the outcomes and measure the extent of programme success. On the other hand, the qualitative data added depth and richness to the analysis by capturing participants' narratives, emotions, and subjective experiences.

It is worth noting that the online survey and research reports served as valuable sources of data, but there were limitations to consider. The online survey relied on self-reported data, which may introduce biases and inaccuracies. The response rate and representativeness of the survey participants may also impact the generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, the analysis of research reports was limited to the available reports within the sector.

Despite these limitations, the combination of online surveys and research reports provided a robust dataset for the impact evaluation tool. The data collection process allowed for the exploration of both quantitative and qualitative dimensions, providing a comprehensive understanding of the

programme's impact on participants' lives and the factors contributing to their experiences. The findings derived from the data analysis contribute to evidence-based decision-making and can inform future programme design and implementation strategies.

## **6.4 Data analysis**

Data analysis for the impact evaluation tool involved a systematic and rigorous approach to making sense of the collected data. The quantitative data obtained from the online survey were analysed using Microsoft Forms, enabling the application of various statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics were used to summarise and present the characteristics of the sample, while correlation analysis explored the relationships between different variables.

In addition to quantitative analysis, the qualitative data obtained from literature reviews and completed research reports was transcribed and carefully examined. This involved a thorough process of reviewing, categorising, and identifying key themes and emerging patterns related to W&RSETA-funded beneficiaries. The qualitative analysis allowed for a deeper exploration of participants' experiences, challenges, and suggestions, providing valuable insights into the impact of W&RSETA programmes.

By employing both quantitative and qualitative data analysis, the impact evaluation tool was able to offer a comprehensive understanding of the outcomes of W&RSETA programmes. This integration of methods allowed for a holistic interpretation of the findings, going beyond mere numerical data, and capturing the richness of individual experiences. The methodology adopted for data analysis ensured robustness and reliability in the evaluation process.

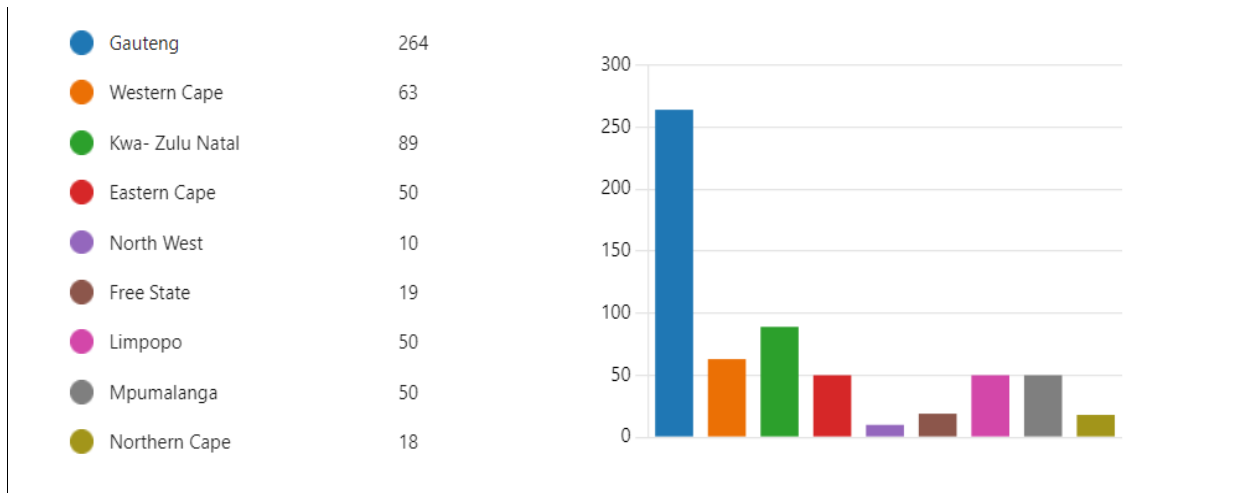
The insights generated through the data analysis will contribute to evidence-based decision-making, enabling the W&RSETA to make informed choices regarding programme design, implementation, and improvement. The rigorous methodology employed in the impact evaluation tool strengthens the validity and reliability of the findings, instilling confidence in the results. This approach fosters a culture of continuous learning and improvement, allowing the W&RSETA to enhance its programmes and better serve the needs of its beneficiaries and stakeholders.

## **7 Impact Evaluation Tool: Outcomes and Recommendations**

The findings and recommendations derived from the Impact Evaluation Tool will provide valuable insights into the W&RSETA's strategic planning and decision-making processes. The information gathered will guide us in tailoring our interventions to align with labour market developments, enhance the employment prospects of young people, and improve the implementation of similar programmes in the future. The Impact Evaluation Tool represents an important step in our commitment to evidence-based evaluation and continuous improvement. By systematically assessing the outcomes and impact

of our initiatives, we strive to strengthen W&RSETA's responsiveness to labour market demands and contribute to the sustainable development of the wholesale and retail sector.

### 7.1 Provincial representation



The impact evaluation analysis examines the reach and effectiveness of the programme in various rural areas across South Africa. The provincial data highlights the distribution of beneficiaries in different regions. In Gauteng, the programme has reached 264 individuals, indicating a significant presence in the province. The Western Cape follows with 63 beneficiaries, while Kwa-Zulu Natal and the Eastern Cape have 89 and 50 beneficiaries, respectively. The programmes' impact extends to the Northwest, Free State, Limpopo, Mpumalanga, and Northern Cape, where the number of beneficiaries is 10, 19, 50, 50, and 18, respectively.

When analysing the data, it is evident that the programme has made substantial inroads into Gauteng, indicating a strong presence and impact in the province. However, it is crucial to focus on expanding the programmes' reach in other provinces, such as the Western Cape, Kwa-Zulu Natal, and Eastern Cape, where the number of beneficiaries is comparatively lower. These provinces represent areas where additional efforts may be required to ensure that the programmes' benefits and opportunities are accessible to individuals residing in rural communities.

By conducting a comprehensive analysis of the impact in each province, we can identify the specific challenges and opportunities associated with rural areas. This analysis will help in tailoring strategies and interventions that address the unique needs of rural communities, such as providing targeted support, infrastructure development, and capacity-building initiatives. By leveraging the insights gained from the rural analysis, we can enhance the programmes' effectiveness and ensure that the socio-economic benefits of skills development are extended to all corners of South Africa, promoting equitable growth and empowerment.

## 7.2 Age group



The impact evaluation analysis goes beyond regional distribution and delves into the specific categories of youth unemployment in South Africa. The data reveals the distribution of beneficiaries across different age groups. Among the youth beneficiaries, the age group of 18-25 comprises 217 individuals, followed closely by the age group of 25-30 with 223 beneficiaries. The age group of 30-35 represents 127 beneficiaries, while the remaining category labelled as "Other" consists of 46 individuals.

When examining the data, it is evident that the programme has successfully targeted and engaged with a substantial number of youths within the age ranges of 18-25 and 25–30. This indicates an initiative-taking approach to addressing the challenges faced by these age groups in terms of unemployment. However, it is crucial to also consider the needs of youth aged 30-35, as they represent a significant demographic segment facing unemployment challenges.

The analysis underscores the importance of addressing the unique circumstances and requirements of each age group. Tailored strategies and interventions can be designed to provide relevant skills development, mentorship, and employment opportunities to meet the specific needs of youth in different age brackets. By doing so, the programme can effectively combat youth unemployment and contribute to socio-economic empowerment across a broader spectrum of the South African youth population.

By incorporating the categories of youth unemployment in the impact evaluation analysis, we can gain valuable insights into the distribution and impact of the programme among different age groups. This understanding enables us to refine our approaches, strengthen support systems, and maximise the programmes' impact in tackling youth unemployment in South Africa.

### 5.3 Disability



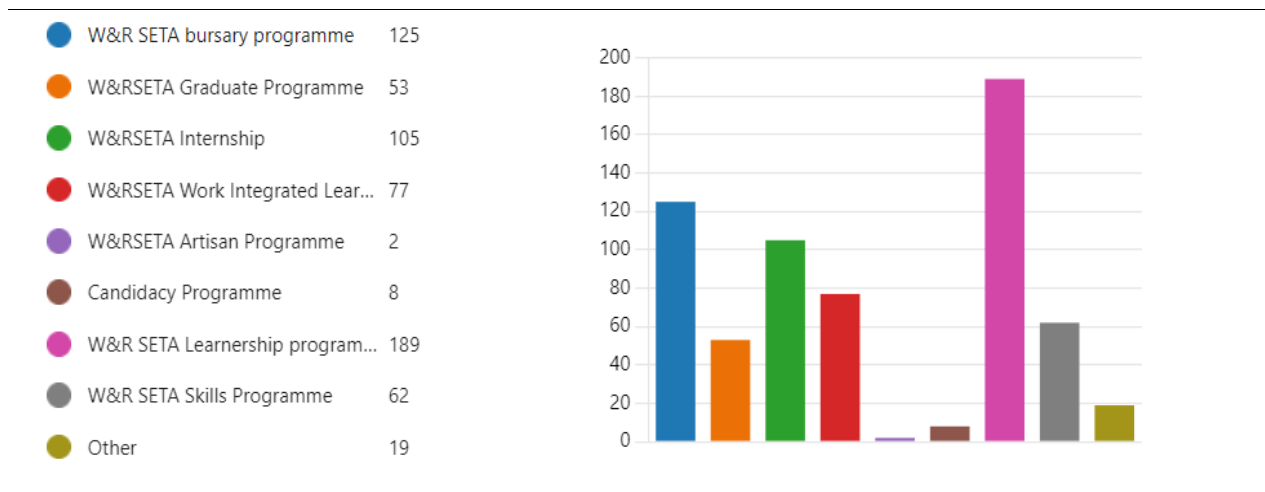
In addition to the analysis of regional distribution and age categories, it is essential to address the context of high unemployment rates among individuals living with disabilities. The data indicates that out of the total beneficiaries, 44 individuals self-identified as living with a disability and being unemployed. This demonstrates the ongoing difficulty of unemployment for people with disabilities in South Africa.

The findings underscore the need for targeted interventions and support mechanisms that address the unique barriers and challenges faced by individuals with disabilities in accessing employment opportunities. By acknowledging and addressing the specific needs of this marginalised group, the programme can contribute to reducing the unemployment gap and promoting inclusivity in the workforce.

Efforts should be focused on creating inclusive employment policies, providing reasonable accommodations, and offering skills development programmes that cater to the diverse abilities and talents of people living with disabilities. Collaborations with disability organisations and stakeholders can also play a significant role in enhancing opportunities for this segment of the population.

By incorporating a disability-inclusive approach within the impact evaluation analysis, the programme can work towards reducing unemployment disparities and fostering an environment where individuals with disabilities have equal access to meaningful and sustainable employment. This comprehensive approach aligns with the principles of social equity, inclusion, and ensuring that no one is left behind in the pursuit of socio-economic empowerment.

## 7.4 Type of programme: Benefit analysis



The impact evaluation analysis reveals the various programmes selected by individuals who participated in the evaluation tool. Among the options offered, the W&R SETA Learnership programme received the highest participation, with 189 individuals selecting this programme. It is closely followed by the W&R SETA bursary programme, which was chosen by 125 individuals. 105 and 77 individuals selected the W&RSETA Internship Programme and the W&RSETA Work Integrated Learning (WIL) Programme, respectively.

The data indicates that programmes with a high rate of beneficiaries also exhibit higher expenditures. This correlation suggests that programmes with a larger number of participants require substantial financial resources to effectively implement and support the participants. Furthermore, the analysis highlights the need for continuous evaluation and improvement of these programmes. By identifying the programmes with high participation rates, the impact evaluation can help identify areas where further investments can be made to enhance programme outcomes and address any potential gaps or challenges faced by participants.

The choice of programmes like the W&RSETA Graduate Programme, Candidature Programme, W&R SETA Skills Programme, and others demonstrates how important it is to acknowledge the diversity of preferences among participants. These programmes provide participants with specific pathways for skills development, career advancement, and industry exposure.

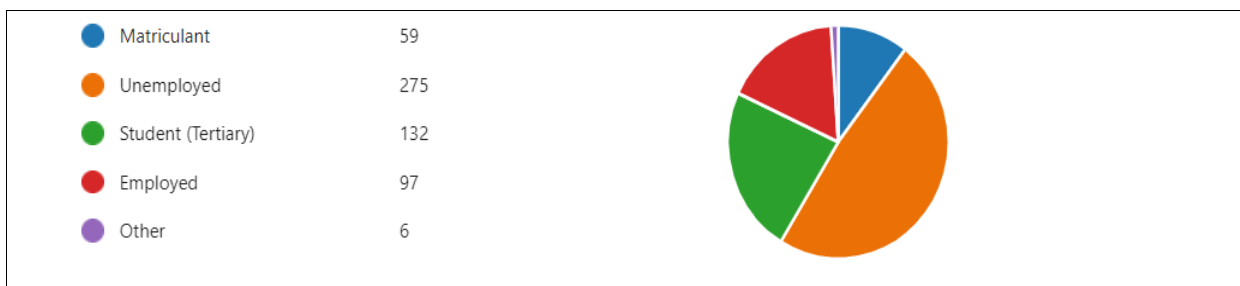
By analysing the relationship between programme participation and expenditure, the impact evaluation enables W&RSETA to allocate resources strategically, ensuring optimal utilisation and maximum impact. This analysis helps in making informed decisions about programme expansion,



resource allocation, and the continuous improvement of programmes to meet the needs of beneficiaries effectively.

Overall, the comprehensive analysis of programme selection and expenditure allows for a more targeted and efficient allocation of resources, enhancing the impact and effectiveness of the programmes offered by W&RSETA in empowering individuals and promoting skill development within the sector.

### 7.5 Socio-economic status: Before programme participation



The impact evaluation analysis sheds light on the socio-economic status of beneficiaries before they participate in W&RSETA programmes. The data reveals that among the participants, the largest group consisted of unemployed individuals, with 275 beneficiaries falling into this category. This highlights the crucial role that W&RSETA programmes play in addressing the unemployment challenge in South Africa by providing skills development opportunities and pathways to employment.

Additionally, 132 beneficiaries were identified as tertiary students, indicating that they were already pursuing higher education at the time of their participation. The programmes offered by W&RSETA provide an avenue for these students to further enhance their skills and gain practical experience, thereby increasing their employability upon graduation.

Furthermore, 97 beneficiaries were already employed at the time they participated in the programmes. This suggests that these individuals sought additional training and upskilling to advance their careers or transition into new roles within the wholesale and retail sectors. W&RSETA programmes can serve as a platform for continuous professional development and career growth for employed individuals.

The data also includes a group labelled "matriculants," consisting of 59 beneficiaries. This group comprises individuals who have completed their secondary education (matric) but have not yet pursued higher education or secured employment. W&RSETA programmes offer these matriculants the opportunity to acquire industry-relevant skills and increase their prospects for employment in the wholesale and retail sectors.

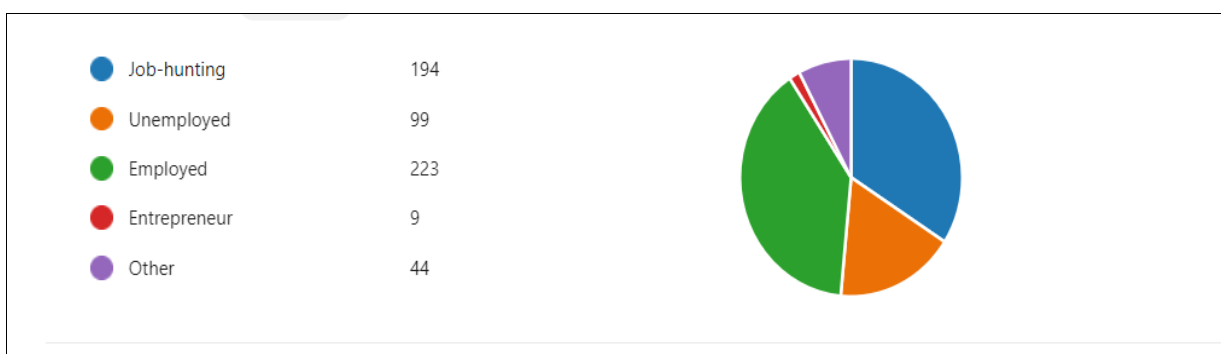
By analysing the socio-economic status of beneficiaries before they participated in W&RSETA programmes, we gain insights into the specific needs and challenges faced by individuals from different backgrounds. This understanding allows W&RSETA to tailor its programmes to address the



unique requirements of each group, whether it is providing job placement support for the unemployed, career advancement opportunities for employed individuals, or practical skills training for matriculants and tertiary students.

W&RSETA’s commitment to socio-economic empowerment is evident in its programmes, which aim to uplift individuals from various socio-economic backgrounds and provide them with the necessary tools to improve their livelihoods and contribute meaningfully to the wholesale and retail sector.

### 7.6 Current socio-economic Status: After programme participation



The impact evaluation analysis reveals the shift in socio-economic status among beneficiaries after they participate in W&RSETA programmes. The data shows that a significant number of beneficiaries, 223 individuals—reported being employed after completing the programmes. This indicates a positive outcome, suggesting that W&RSETA programmes contribute to increased employability by equipping individuals with the necessary skills and knowledge demanded by the wholesale and retail sectors:

<b>Job hunting:</b> $(194 / 613) * 100 = 31.66\%$
<b>Unemployed:</b> $(99 / 613) * 100 = 16.14\%$
<b>Employed:</b> $(223 / 613) * 100 = 36.38\%$
<b>Entrepreneurship:</b> $(9 / 613) * 100 = 1.47\%$
<b>Other:</b> $(44 / 613) * 100 = 7.17\%$

Moreover, the data highlights that 99 beneficiaries who were previously unemployed were able to secure employment opportunities after participating in W&RSETA programmes. This finding demonstrates the effectiveness of the programmes in addressing the unemployment challenge and helping individuals transition from joblessness to gainful employment.

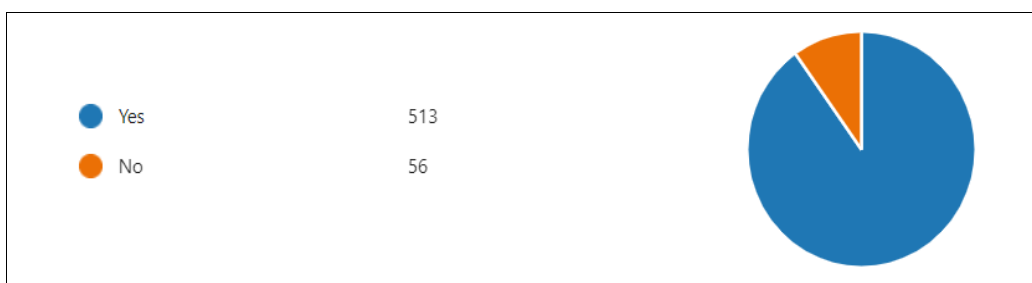
Additionally, the analysis identifies a group of beneficiaries, 194 in total, who reported being engaged in job-hunting activities after programme completion. This indicates that these individuals are actively seeking employment and using the skills and resources acquired through the programmes to improve their chances of securing suitable positions.

Furthermore, a small proportion of beneficiaries, nine individuals, identified themselves as entrepreneurs. This suggests that the programmes labelled not only support traditional employment but also empower individuals to establish their businesses and contribute to economic growth through entrepreneurship. Lastly, the data includes a group labelled "Other," consisting of 44 beneficiaries. These individuals may have experienced diverse outcomes or have socio-economic circumstances that are not captured by the previous categories.

By examining the outcomes related to employability, the impact evaluation provides evidence that W&RSETA programmes have a positive impact on increasing employment opportunities for beneficiaries. The programmes equip participants with industry-relevant skills, practical experience, and valuable connections within the wholesale and retail sector. These elements contribute to improved employability prospects and empower individuals to secure meaningful employment or explore entrepreneurship opportunities.

The findings indicate that W&RSETA programmes play a vital role in addressing unemployment, fostering economic growth, and supporting the socio-economic advancement of individuals within the wholesale and retail sectors. By continuously evaluating and refining the programmes, W&RSETA can further enhance their impact and ensure that beneficiaries are well-equipped to thrive in the dynamic job market. It is important to note that the long-term impact of these programmes on employability and career advancement should be further explored through follow-up assessments to track the sustained outcomes achieved by the beneficiaries.

### 7.7 Work Readiness Programme



The data shows that a significant number of participants (513 individuals) recognized the importance of work readiness programmes and skills upgrade programmes for the wholesale and retail sectors. These programmes play a crucial role in preparing individuals for the demands and challenges of

industry, equipping them with the necessary skills, knowledge, and experience to thrive in the sector. The positive response from participants indicates their understanding of the value that such programmes bring to their personal and professional development. By engaging in work readiness programmes, individuals gain practical skills and experience that enhance their employability and job prospects within the sector.

The skills upgrade programmes provide an opportunity for individuals to enhance their existing skill sets and stay abreast of industry trends and advancements. These programmes not only contribute to the growth and productivity of the wholesale and retail sector but also empower individuals to fulfil their career aspirations and improve their socio-economic standing. Most participants recognised the significance of work readiness and skills upgrade programmes in the wholesale and retail sector, highlighting the need for continued investment and support in these initiatives.

## **7.8 Overall findings: programme beneficiaries**

### **Overall Comments:**

1. The W&RSETA bursary programme has been highly beneficial for students, covering their education expenses and enabling them to focus on their studies.
2. Delays and issues with certificate delivery were experienced by some students and should be addressed for smoother processes.
3. Selection criteria for bursaries at universities like DUT should prioritize academic performance rather than random selection.
4. Positive experiences with W&RSETA programmes, such as work readiness initiatives, have led to permanent employment and career advancements for individuals.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Streamline the bursary application process to ensure it is finalized before school registration opens.
2. Implement regular check-ins with learners at stores to monitor their progress and provide the necessary support.
3. Expedite payment processing for allowances and fees to ensure beneficiaries receive their financial support on time.
4. Address any issues regarding stipend payments and work conditions in internships to improve the overall experience.

5. Improve communication channels between W&RSETA and participants to ensure clarity and transparency throughout the programmes.
6. Consider extending the programmes' duration or providing sponsorship for long-term stability and support for participants.
7. Focus on creating pathways to permanent employment by building stronger relationships with retail companies and facilitating job placements for programme graduates.

#### **Key Outcomes and Forward Actions:**

1. W&RSETA programmes have successfully provided valuable experience, skills, and knowledge in various sectors such as marketing, retail, credit control, buying, and more.
2. Participants express gratitude for the support received and the positive impact it has had on their personal growth, confidence, and job prospects.
3. Some individuals have successfully opened their businesses or secured permanent positions because of the opportunities provided by W&RSETA programmes.
4. The programmes have helped individuals avoid dropping out of school and secure employment in top retail companies.
5. Continued focus on improving the socio-economic standing of participants, supporting their families, and providing long-term stability through permanent employment opportunities.

#### **Expansion and Partnerships:**

1. There is a request to expand the programme to include postgraduate degrees, indicating a desire for continued educational support.
2. Establishing Partnerships and collaboration between industry and institutions can enhance the programmes' reach and provide additional resources and opportunities for participants.

#### **Support and stipends:**

1. Beneficiaries received timely support when needed, and stipends were stable without any delays, indicating effective financial management.
2. However, some learners faced challenges with their training companies and the duties assigned to them, suggesting the need for better alignment and communication between all stakeholders.

### **Programme Improvements:**

1. Learners expressed the need for improvements in certain areas, including the introduction of logbooks, faster certificate issuance, and direct payment to beneficiaries for enhanced efficiency.
2. Suggestions for longer-term bursaries, clearer communication, and better coordination highlight the importance of optimizing the programmes' administration and participant experience.

### **Employment Opportunities and Career Growth:**

1. Several beneficiaries were able to secure permanent employment after completing learnerships or skills programmes, demonstrating the programmes' positive impact on employability.
2. Promotions within companies and self-employment opportunities further emphasise the programmes' contribution to career growth.

### **Challenges and Recommendations:**

1. Challenges with communication, certification, and the management information system (MIS) portal were raised, indicating a need for system enhancements, and streamlined processes.
2. Safety concerns and long working hours during the holiday season were highlighted, calling for a professional investigation and ensuring learner well-being.
3. Suggestions for extended support for graduate internships and 18-month contracts for in-service learners reflect the desire for continued development and learning opportunities.

### **Valuable skills and knowledge:**

1. The programme provided practical experience and valuable skills in various fields, such as retail, human resources, sales and marketing, and business management, aligning with industry needs.
2. Participants found the programme informative, constructive, and meticulous, expanding their career opportunities through the acquired knowledge.

### **Resource Allocation and Support:**

1. Some participants mentioned the need for additional resources and staff to expedite payments and address student needs promptly, indicating potential areas for programme enhancement.
2. Appreciation was expressed for the support received from W&RSETA, acknowledging the opportunity to gain valuable work experience.

### **Programme Duration and Disruptions:**

1. The recommendation for 18-month contracts for in-service learners aligns with the intention to obtain diplomas and further education.
2. Some negative experiences were shared regarding the graduate programme, indicating the need to address issues of unfair treatment, long working hours, and exploitation.
3. COVID-19 disruptions and limited growth opportunities within assigned organizations were mentioned, suggesting the importance of adaptability and flexibility in programme implementation.

Overall, the W&RSETA programmes have had a positive impact on beneficiaries by providing education, work experience, and improved career prospects. However, there is room for improvement in certain areas, such as streamlining application processes, ensuring timely payments, and addressing challenges related to certification and communication. These recommendations aim to enhance the programmes' effectiveness and maximize positive outcomes for participants.

## **8 Planning the next five-year cycle of the National Skills Development Plan (NSDP) implementation.**

The outcomes, findings, and recommendations from the impact evaluation and ROI analysis should be considered valuable inputs for planning the next five-year cycle of the National Skills Development Plan (NSDP) implementation. These insights provide a solid foundation for evidence-based decision-making and the continuous improvement of skills development interventions. Here is a narrative on how these outcomes, findings, and recommendations can be taken forward:

1. **Incorporating Findings into Programme Design:** The findings from the impact evaluation should be carefully reviewed and analysed to identify areas of success and areas that require improvement. This information can be used to inform the design of future skills development

programmes. For example, if the evaluation reveals that certain training modules or approaches have been particularly effective in improving employability, those elements can be incorporated into the design of new programmes. Likewise, if certain aspects have shown less impact, adjustments can be made to enhance their effectiveness.

2. **Refining Resource Allocation:** The evaluation findings can also guide resource allocation for skills development interventions. By understanding which programmes and interventions have demonstrated the highest impact and return on investment, decision-makers can allocate resources more effectively. This involves directing funding and support to programmes and initiatives that have been proven to yield positive outcomes and adjusting or redirecting resources from less effective interventions.
3. **Policy Adjustments and Targeted Interventions:** The recommendations derived from the impact evaluation and ROI analysis should be carefully reviewed and considered in the formulation of policy adjustments and the development of targeted interventions. For example, if the evaluation reveals a significant skills gap in a specific sector or geographical area, policy adjustments can be made to prioritise training programmes in that area or sector. Similarly, if the evaluation highlights the need for upskilling or reskilling in emerging industries, targeted interventions can be designed to address those specific needs.
4. **Continuous Monitoring and Evaluation:** To ensure the ongoing success and responsiveness of skills development interventions, it is crucial to embed a culture of continuous monitoring and evaluation into the planning process. This involves setting up mechanisms to regularly collect and analyse data on programme outcomes, participant feedback, and labour market trends. By continuously monitoring and evaluating the impact of interventions, it becomes possible to identify emerging challenges, track progress, and make necessary adjustments in real time.
5. **Stakeholder Engagement and Collaboration:** To effectively implement the outcomes, findings, and recommendations, it is essential to engage and collaborate with relevant stakeholders. This includes employers, industry representatives, educational institutions, and government agencies. By involving these stakeholders in the planning process, their expertise and insights can be leveraged to ensure the relevance and effectiveness of skills development interventions. Collaborative efforts can also facilitate the alignment of training programmes with sectoral needs and enhance the employability of participants.

## 9 Conclusion

In conclusion, the importance of impact evaluation, ROI analysis, and evidence-based decision-making in improving the socio-economic standing of the unemployed through skills development cannot be overstated. These evaluation methods provide valuable insights into programme effectiveness, guide resource allocation, and support the development of targeted interventions to address unemployment and promote socio-economic growth.

Impact evaluation plays a crucial role in assessing the outcomes and effectiveness of skills development programmes. By systematically evaluating the impact of these programmes, it becomes possible to understand their effectiveness, identify areas for improvement, and make informed decisions for future implementations. The findings from impact evaluations enable evidence-based decision-making, allowing for the refinement and optimisation of programme strategies.

ROI analysis is essential in evaluating the socio-economic benefits and cost-effectiveness of skills development initiatives. It allows policymakers and stakeholders to assess the financial and non-financial returns of these programmes, such as improved employment prospects, increased income levels, and enhanced socio-economic standing for participants. ROI analysis provides valuable insights into the long-term impact of skills development programmes and aids in resource allocation.

Evidence-based decision-making is crucial for designing and implementing effective skills development programmes. By gathering and analysing data through impact evaluations and ROI analysis, policymakers can make informed decisions about programme design, resource allocation, and policy adjustments. This approach ensures that interventions are evidence-based, targeted, and responsive to the needs of the unemployed population.



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