

**55. Excerpt from Community-Based Research Project:
“The South African Education and Environment Project—Summary”**

The South African Education and Environment
Project at Sinethemba Senior Secondary School:
A Program Evaluation and Needs Analysis

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(Please Note: The contents and page numbers above correspond to the original project. What follows is the summary only.)

Summary

The South African Education and Environment Project (SAEP) is a nongovernmental organization that has conducted after-school enrichment and academic support programs at Sinethemba Senior Secondary School in Philippi township, Cape Town, South Africa since 1999. This paper reports on a series of interviews conducted for an evaluation of SAEP's programs and an analysis of the high school's perceived needs. Interviews were conducted in June and July of 2004 with current Sinethemba students, former Sinethemba students, school teachers, non-teaching staff, administrators, and current and former SAEP interns, volunteers, staff, and management. Interview participants, whose identities have been kept confidential, discussed their experiences at Sinethemba and with SAEP and their perspectives regarding those experiences. This report is built on a foundation of previous research relating both to SAEP's work at Sinethemba and township secondary education in general, and its findings are derived from the qualitative data gathered from interview subjects.

Interviews revealed that the student experience at Sinethemba is deleteriously affected by the social pressures of Philippi life, systemic forces straining school resources, and poor formal and informal support structures. The result is a student experience often characterized by deficiencies in student motivation, self-confidence, and academic support. The students' greatest needs are for relationships and activities that can increase motivation and self-confidence and for academic support to remedy, to the degree possible, deficiencies in classroom tuition.

The teacher experience at Sinethemba is similarly challenging. Interviews indicated that difficult working conditions, systemic factors affecting the school institutionally, and cultural and social

forces that also impact students; teachers work in an environment where they are “overworked, underpaid, and underappreciated.” Current issues at the school have combined with the aforementioned factors to have a demoralizing effect on morale for staff members, who are in need of support for their work.

Interview subjects described SAEP programs as having a very positive impact on their participants and, in turn, Sinethemba and its surrounding community. The programs have had a positive effect on two of the factors cited as urgent student needs – motivation and self-confidence – as well as improving learners’ English language skills and exposing program participants to cultural and educational opportunities outside of their immediate surroundings. The programs also had a residual effect on cultural issues that negatively impact learning at the school.

SAEP, however, faces significant challenges in implementing its programs as a result of a general shortage of human, physical, and financial resources. The organization has no paid staff and relies on nominally supported “Gap Year” interns and unpaid volunteers, largely from the United States, to implement its programs at Sinethemba and other schools. The organization also suffers from a lack of physical space to conduct its work at the school.

SAEP’s cumulative effect at Sinethemba has been to increase students’ sense of investment in their school and surrounding community in Philippi by promoting accountability, responsibility, and pride in the school. The result is a “culture of community” where students engage their peers and community. That result forms the basis of recommendations for SAEP in designing a model

for high school interventions moving forward.

This report recommends that SAEP work to nurture a “three-legged pot” at Sinethemba of students, parents, and staff organized around a common community vision. That vision relies on participation from all parties, which is informed by four factors: flow of information, devolution of responsibility, consultation, and negotiation.

This report’s recommendations revolve largely around SAEP facilitating platforms for communication and information exchange for all parties at the school.