



*Generating Better Livelihoods
and
Basic Package of Support for
NEET Youth Programmes*

A Joint Policy Brief Series

POLICY BRIEF 1

FROM MARGINS TO MAINSTREAM:

In-Person Support as a Policy Lever for Livelihood Outcomes



social development

Department:
Social Development
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA





RETHINKING SOCIAL PROTECTION & LABOUR MARKET POLICY IN AN UNEMPLOYMENT CRISIS

South Africa faces a deep, structural unemployment crisis that persists despite decades of investment in Active Labour Market Programmes (ALMPs) aimed at stimulating demand and addressing supply-side challengesⁱ. Alongside these efforts, the country is rightly celebrated for its extensive social assistance system: **25.4 million people receive grants, most relying on them as their primary source of income.**ⁱⁱ

Yet, until very recently, these two prongs of policy, ALMPs and social assistance, have operated in separate silos, with little effort to connect grant recipients to programmes that could help them build sustainable livelihoods. For those furthest from the labour market, this disconnect is compounded by the fact that both systems are **fragmented, complex, and difficult to navigate without direct, in-person support.**

Unemployment is not only about insufficient job creation or skills gaps. Poverty and exclusion create layered barriers; for example, food insecurity, poor education access, high transport costs, distance from opportunity, and the mental health toll of chronic stress, that keep millions locked out of workⁱⁱⁱ. Social protection policy, including social assistance and welfare services, should mitigate these barriers, while ALMPs should enable market connection. But without integration, and without **hands-on guidance to help individuals access and combine these supports**, the most vulnerable remain excluded.

International evidence shows that **multi-faceted and integrated programmes**, combining social protection with labour market measures, are most effective in addressing these barriers^{iv}. **In-person support is a critical enabler:** it ensures that recipients can navigate complex systems, access opportunities, and sustain livelihoods. In South Africa, emerging initiatives and pilot programmes are beginning to demonstrate how integrated approaches, anchored in in-person support, can connect vulnerable groups to economic opportunities and sustained livelihoods. These lessons highlight the urgent need for policy innovation that bridges the divide between social protection and labour market interventions, while embedding **face-to-face support as a cornerstone of effective delivery.**

INTERNATIONAL BEST PRACTICE

Governments across the world increasingly recognise that **cash transfers alone are insufficient** to move people into sustainable livelihoods. Evidence also shows that singular ALMPs, such as job matching or skills training, are less effective than **multi-component approaches** that tackle the root causes of exclusion ^v.

As a result, international best practice is shifting toward **integrated social protection systems** that combine income support with complementary services such as training, employment facilitation, coaching, and psychosocial support. For example:

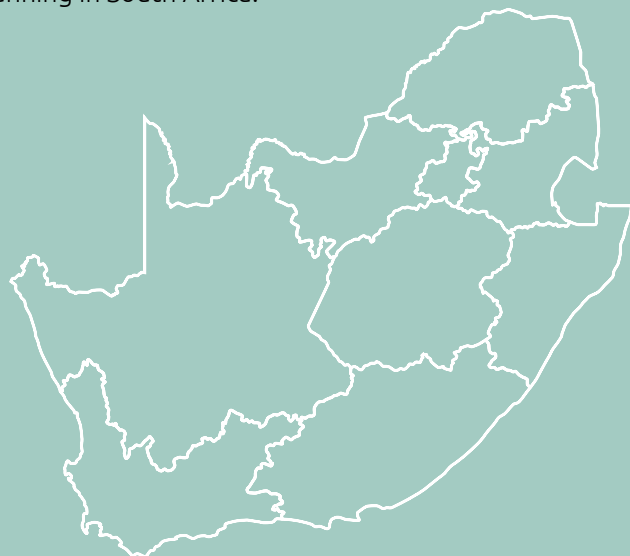


- **BRAC's Targeting the Ultra Poor programme (Bangladesh):**
Combines cash support with coaching, asset transfers, and livelihood training over two years, leading to sustained gains in income, food security, and inclusion. On an annual basis, there are around seventy thousand participants in the programme.
- **India's government led graduation programme in the State of Bihar:**
Implements poverty alleviation strategy for the ultra-poor and a financial incentive scheme for female college graduates. With the strong support of coaches, institutional architecture and governance, it has supported more than two hundred thousand households since the inception in 2018, establishing self-help group (SHGs), Village Organizations (VOs) and Cluster Level Federations.
- **Chile's Familias and Colombia's Youth in Action:**
Pair income support with psychosocial services, skills development, and labour market integration.
- **The European Union's Youth Guarantee:**
Ensures young people access employment, training, or education within a set timeframe, reflecting a broader move toward coordinated support systems.

KEY LESSON:

Linking vulnerable individuals to opportunity requires more than access to information or services: it demands **structured, human-centered support** that addresses both social and economic barriers.

Given the strong global evidence about the significance of integrated social protection and active labour market systems, this brief focuses on two innovative pilot programmes running in South Africa.



INNOVATIVE PILOT PROGRAMMES

The **Generating Better Livelihoods (GBL)** and **Basic Package of Support (BPS)** programmes are both innovative pilots that break with siloed policy traditions by offering integrated, in-person support to vulnerable groups, grant recipients and youth not in employment, education or training (NEET), helping them overcome barriers by supporting them to navigate complex, fragmented systems so that they can connect to sustainable livelihood opportunities.

Both programmes recognise that in-person support is vital, first to help people navigate complex social protection and labour market systems, and second, to rebuild wellbeing, confidence, and agency among those long excluded from opportunity.

The **Generating Better Livelihoods (GBL) Programme** focuses on grant recipients, inviting them into a relationship of support to overcome barriers, build financial inclusion, and connect to livelihood pathways. It is a pilot that is embedded within the government system led by DSD.

Based on the BRAC Graduation Approach, it consists of four graduation pillars, with a coaching function serving as the “glue” and the foundation that holds everything together.

Graduation pillars:

- **Social protection** by ensuring that participants have an income safety net in the form of grants for basic needs.
- **Livelihood promotion** by guiding participants to identify new income generating activities and strategies.
- **Social empowerment** through coaching and mentorship facilitates inclusion and behavioral change.
- **Financial inclusion** through training on income management and savings

Plans for scale up:

The team is building an integrated government system from the bottom up with the three pilot provinces that will organically scale the programme within and expand to other provinces. The **Minister of Social Development and MECs of Social Development both in KZN and FS have committed to providing political leadership and championing** the programme at national and provincial level. More than sixty community development practitioners (CDP) have been trained in KZN to roll out the programme. GBL introduces a **digital platform** that provides both **management information** and coaching capabilities to enable scaling up the model.

GBL reframes grants as a springboard for economic empowerment, embedding **hands-on support** to help recipients transition into entrepreneurship, skills development, and employment.



The **Basic Package of Support (BPS) for NEET Youth** engages young people aged 18 – 34 years who are NEET, many of whom are chronically disconnected and discouraged, in a coaching relationship aimed at supporting them to overcome barriers and reconnect to more stable learning and earning trajectories.

Based on the EU Youth Guarantee and other best-practice models for supporting NEET youth the BPS:

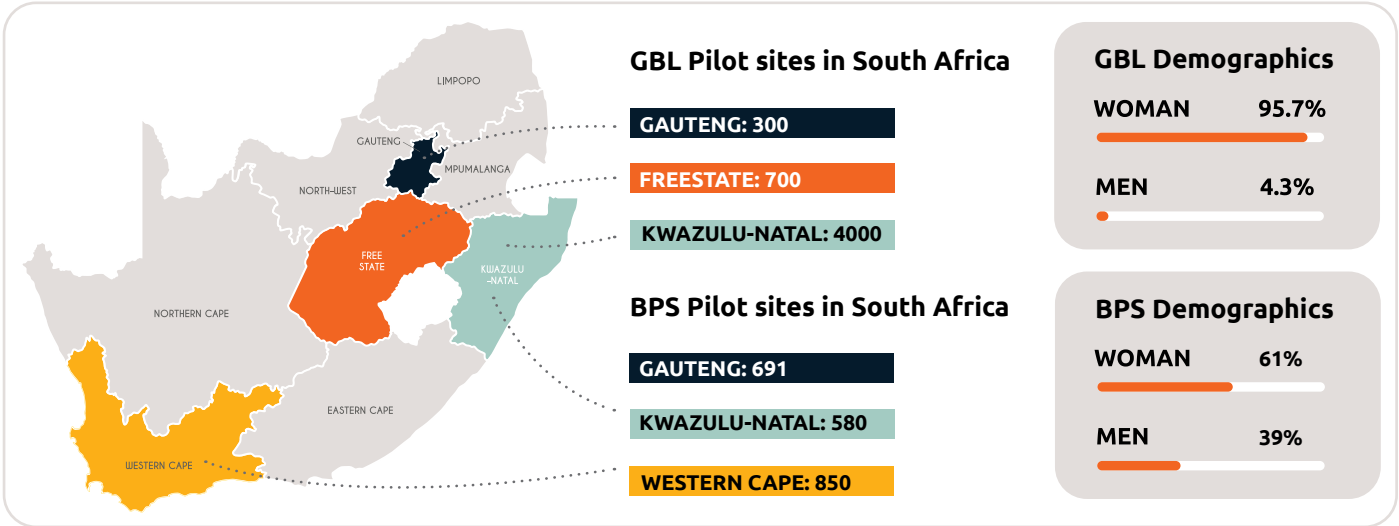
- **Proactively** reaches out to young people who are disconnected from opportunity
- **Engages** them in a coaching relationship aimed at identifying their long-term goals and immediate next steps.
- **Refers** them to services to overcome barriers on their path,
- **Connects** them to appropriate education, employment and/or self-employment opportunities to take steps towards their long-term goals, and
- **Ensures** they are able to come back to coaches to plan for transitions into the next opportunity.

Plans for scale up:

The programme forms part of the Presidential Youth Employment Intervention and will be institutionalised in youth-facing services including NYDA centres, DEL offices and other national, provincial and local youth spaces. The **Case Management System** has been designed as the digital platform that both supports coaching and referral practice and provides monitoring information to support quality assurance for scale up operations.

BPS is a programme that shifts from leaving young people to navigate fragmented and exclusionary interventions on their own, to **in-person guidance** and improved service delivery through a joined-up, relational model of support aimed at reducing churn in the youth labour market and ensuring that young people are on a stable livelihood trajectory.





SUCCESSSES TO DATE

GENERATING BETTER LIVELIHOODS:

Profiled participants have been linked to various opportunities.



185 participants accessed employment and learnership opportunities, spanning short- and medium-term placements.



1,333 participants strengthened resilience through soft skills programmes on personal mastery, GBV and substance abuse awareness, parenting, and financial literacy.



462 participants gained technical skills in early childhood development, agriculture, sewing, built environment, hospitality, and hair & beauty.



541 participants advanced through business development initiatives, from idea generation and start-up training to pricing, costing, and mentorship.



The programme drove notable psychosocial shifts: participants reported greater confidence, stronger self-belief, and a renewed sense of agency—changes closely linked to the coaching and supportive engagement model.

BASIC PACKAGE OF SUPPORT:



Within just four weeks and four coaching sessions, **40%** of participants have moved into learning or earning opportunities. Many of these had been long-term unemployed when entering the programme.



Many of these are young people who take up self-employment and receive ongoing support to keep building their business.



Levels of anxiety dropped significantly. **37%** of respondents had signs of anxiety when entering the programme.

This reduced to just **21%** of respondents after three coaching sessions. Similar drops in distress are noted.



Participants report a stronger awareness of, and willingness to access, support services in their communities^{vi}.



These positive outcomes obscure the incredibly hard work that occurs to ensure that people are on a stable livelihood trajectory. Participants of both programmes arrive with deep-seated challenges that constrain their ability to take up economic opportunities. Most report that the in-person coaching and support they receive is critical to their ability to take up and sustain learning, earning and livelihood pathways. Below are two success cases from the respective programmes:

NOMTHANDAZO'S STORY (GBL)

She spoke about trauma, emotional distress, and a loss of direction. Through the programme, she was referred to counselling and social support, which became a turning point for her. She describes this period as the time when she began to rebuild her confidence and start thinking differently about her future.

“ *I am who I am today because of the programme. I am this confident because of the programme.* ”
- A TOTALLY NEW PERSON ”

What is striking about Nomthandazo's story is that the first change was not economical, it was personal. Through coaching, counselling, and life skills training, she began to see herself differently. She says, **“I am who I am today because of the programme. I am this confident because of the programme.”** She describes herself as **“a totally new person”** who is calmer, more focused, and more confident.

Only after this personal shift did the economic activities begin to grow. Today, Nomthandazo runs a daycare centre, sells products such as eggs and spices, and offers services for company registrations and compliance with SARS and CIPC processes. She keeps financial records, manages cash flow, saves money, and is planning to expand her business and open a boarding facility for vulnerable children.

Nomthandazo's story shows that the starting point for improving livelihoods is not just skills or funding, but the person. Once confidence, emotional wellbeing, and a sense of direction are built, people are better able to use training, access opportunities, and build sustainable livelihoods. Her story demonstrates the importance of combining psychosocial support, coaching, and skills development in livelihood programmes.

The Support she received



Counselling



Social Support



Coaching



Life skill Training



Confidence & Direction



Livelihood growth





NOSIPHO'S STORY (BPS)

When Nosipho joined the BPS, she was in a difficult situation. She had completed some university training in Human Resources but was unable to finish due to financial constraints. For two years, she tried to find work, spending what little money she had on printing CVs and travelling to submit applications, often without any response. Over time, she became despondent.

At the same time, she was in a relationship that had become strained, but she felt unable to leave due to financial dependence and lack of alternative housing. Her family did not support the relationship, and she had become increasingly isolated from them. She describes this period as one marked by anxiety, low mood, and uncertainty about where to turn for support.



She heard about the BPS through a peer mobiliser in her community and decided to join. There, she met her coach, who she says made her feel, for the first time, that someone genuinely understood and cared about her situation. This marked a turning point. With her coach, she developed a plan that addressed both her personal and economic challenges. ”

She was referred for counselling through a City of Johannesburg social worker, while also applying for a learnership in an administrative role. The learnership allowed her to apply her Human Resources training in practice. As it came to an end, she worked with her coach to update her CV and approach her host organisation about employment opportunities. She was offered a position, but the cost of transport became a barrier.

With encouragement from her coach, Nosipho began to rebuild her relationship with her family. A sibling supported her with transport costs during her first months of employment. At the same time, she developed a savings plan with her coach, enabling her to move out of her previous living situation and closer to her workplace.

Nosipho's story highlights the multiple, interconnected barriers that young people face in accessing and sustaining opportunities. It also demonstrates the importance of sustained, in-person support in helping individuals navigate these constraints, coordinate available services, and translate opportunities into stable livelihood outcomes.

The Support she received



Coaching



Personal plan



Counselling support



Learnership opportunity



CV support and savings plan



Housing advice

These are just two stories amongst thousands that demonstrate the complexity of overcoming social and economic exclusion, and how in-person support is critical in supporting stable livelihood trajectories.



TRUST IS FOUNDATIONAL:

Participants have been let down repeatedly—ignored CVs, rejected applications, failed programmes, even job scams. Building genuine trust is essential to keep them engaged and believing this time will be different.



SEE THE WHOLE PERSON:

Coaches and linkage facilitators profile participants beyond “job seeker” status, recognising life realities that shape their ability to take up and sustain opportunities. This ensures referrals are tailored and relevant.



REBUILD CONFIDENCE AND SELF-BELIEF:

Years of exclusion and stigma erode self-esteem. Programmes must actively restore participants’ sense of worth and reorient them toward opportunity.



ADDRESS MENTAL HEALTH BARRIERS:

Anxiety, depression, and substance use are common consequences of exclusion. Having someone who listens, cares, and connects participants to support is critical for sustained engagement.



PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS MATTER:

Evidence shows that well-being, self-efficacy, and confidence are central to successful economic empowerment ^{vii}.



BUILD NAVIGATIONAL CAPACITY:

Services exist but are often fragmented and confusing. Helping participants understand eligibility and access pathways strengthens their ability to use available resources.



CURATE SUITABLE OPPORTUNITIES:

Coaches must stay up to date on what’s available across sectors to guide participants toward opportunities aligned with their goals.



IN-PERSON SUPPORT REMAINS INDISPENSABLE:

While digital programmes are often promoted as cost-effective, our evidence shows that even where digital platforms are rolled out, face-to-face support is the critical ingredient. It is the human connection that builds trust, sustains engagement, and ensures participants can translate opportunities into real outcomes.



PROVIDE ONGOING SUPPORT:

Placement is only the beginning. With many opportunities being short-term, facilitators and coaches must help participants plan next steps and problem-solve challenges along the way.



CHOOSING THEIR OWN PATH:

Participants need to choose their own paths and not have opportunities dictated to them. Opportunities that do not align to individuals ambitions, preferences etc. result in high dropout rates.



COORDINATED SUPPORT:

Participants need coordinated support at a local level sequenced to support the participant. This local coordination, properly timed, is critical for positive outcomes.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- **HUMAN-CENTRED SUPPORT IS CRITICAL TO ENSURING THE MOST VULNERABLE CAN FIND PATHWAYS INTO ECONOMIC INCLUSION:**

South Africa's growing investment in digital platforms and referral systems is important, but it cannot replace the value of on-the-ground, in-person facilitation and coaching. For vulnerable and excluded population groups, access to information alone is insufficient without support to navigate opportunities and sustain engagement. This kind of support is caring and holistic.

- **SHIFT FROM ACCESS-BASED TO PATHWAY-BASED APPROACHES:**

Policy design should move beyond enabling access to work or training opportunities toward supporting sustained livelihood pathways. This requires coordinated interventions that accompany individuals over time, rather than one-off referrals.

- **STRENGTHEN COORDINATION ACROSS SERVICES:**

Livelihood outcomes depend on the alignment of services across sectors, including psychosocial support, social development, employment, education, and financial inclusion. In contexts where many beneficiaries experience trauma and prolonged exclusion, mental well-being and psychosocial support are critical enablers of participation in livelihood pathways. In-person support can stand in for the lack of coordination of services, but ultimately better coordination is needed to reduce fragmentation and ensure that individuals can receive the support they need to be on track for economic inclusion.

- **PRIORITISE INTENSIVE SUPPORT FOR HIGH-VULNERABILITY GROUPS:**

Such intensive programmes are not necessary for all work seekers – many will benefit from digital only or low-touch public employment support. But more intensive support is critical for people facing multiple barriers and higher levels of vulnerability. Young women receiving social grants and NEET youth face multi-dimensional barriers that require tailored, intensive support. Policy responses should explicitly recognise these constraints and design interventions accordingly.

- **INVEST IN FACILITATION AND CASE-MANAGEMENT CAPACITY:**

The early design of both BPS and GBL highlights the importance of linkage facilitators and coaches. These practitioners have a unique skillset that is crucial for supporting vulnerable groups of people. Social service professionals and paraprofessionals are an under-appreciated resource in a country facing such high levels of economic exclusion. Both programmes demonstrate that leveraging this resource and building this capability within the system is crucial if we are to roll out such comprehensive support programmes more widely.

- **ALIGN SOCIAL PROTECTION AND SOCIAL SERVICES WITH ECONOMIC INCLUSION GOALS:**

Social assistance and social service provision has traditionally been seen as the domain of welfare, while Active Labour Market Programmes sit within economic and labour policy. The experiences across both programmes show how fundamental both are to creating sustainable livelihood pathways. This insight points to the need for clearer integration between grant systems, social services, and interventions to promote economic inclusion.

CONCLUSION

The path to economic inclusion is rarely straightforward. Poverty, exclusion, and fragmented services create significant barriers. If we are to think differently about how to address poverty and unemployment, we must acknowledge the complexity of this situation and design policies and programmes that address the complexity.

Programmes must invest in in-person, longer-term support, coordinated services, and tailored interventions for the most vulnerable. The BPs and GBL pilots offer a strategic opportunity to learn from, refine and scale these integrated, human-centered approaches.

This is policy brief 1 in a series of policy briefs. The next policy brief will focus on the importance of and limits to digital systems that integrate social protection and active labour market programmes.

Basic Package of Support for NEET Youth (BPS) and Generating Better Livelihoods (GBL) (2026).

FROM MARGINS TO MAINSTREAM: IN-PERSON SUPPORT AS A POLICY LEVER FOR LIVELIHOOD OUTCOMES.

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POLICY BRIEF 1

This is policy brief 1 in a series of policy briefs.

The next policy brief will focus on the importance of and limits to digital systems that integrate social protection and active labour market programmes.



KEY FOCUS AREAS



STRENGTHENING IN-PERSON SUPPORT FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT



TRANSLATING EVIDENCE AND EXPERIENCE INTO ACTION



SUPPORTING POLICY THAT DRIVES INCLUSIVE OUTCOMES



ADVANCING SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOOD OPPORTUNITIES



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