

LEVELING THE RURAL PLAYING FIELDS

Winner **Sports Development category: Transnet Foundation**



From grassroots to glory...

The Rural and Farm Schools Sport Tournaments showcases the wealth of sporting talent locked away in South African villages and farms, exposing such talent to the broader sporting fraternity and affording the learners a chance to celebrate their sporting talent.

Each year participation includes:

- 22000 learners from 80 schools in all 9 provinces at interhouse competitions
- 4400 learners at the 4 regional tournaments
- 1000 learners at the national tournament
- 80 Local Organising Committee members - trained in event management
- 80 team managers - trained in team management activities
- 220 accredited coaches (soccer, track and field, netball)
- 160 accredited referees and umpires (soccer, netball)

Our game plan is to level the playing fields for Rural and Farm School learners, unlocking hidden talents and showcasing tomorrow's sporting legends.

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Transnet makes use of sport as a key instrument to help extricate South Africa's disadvantaged children from the yoke of poverty.

Based on its own historical data, the foundation recognises the constructive role that sport plays in the lives of young people. Furthermore, the foundation believes that focusing the youth on sport has a positive impact on family and community stability. Every year, through its four focus areas, the Transnet Foundation's sport portfolio exposes more than 26 000 children in the country's rural communities to myriad opportunities that various sporting codes present.

"The foundation's commitment to sports development is geared at instilling a strong sense of national pride among today's youth – inspiring them to be tomorrow's sporting stars," says Michael Moloto, senior sports manager at Transnet Foundation. "Our primary mission is to unearth South Africa's undiscovered sporting talent and to nurture it to the highest possible level.

“In so doing the foundation aims to make a social change in the lives of our future sporting stars as well as their communities.”

Moloto says rural areas are in dire need of a boost in sport development programmes as they have been neglected. Through its sports portfolio the foundation aims to address this by strengthening its commitment to offering programmes that develop sport among rural youth aged between 13 and 19.

“Aligned with government’s Integrated Rural Development Plan and the Development of Human Capital Strategy, the Transnet Foundation sports portfolio aims to implement the most innovative way of using sport as an agent to intervene against social problems at school level.

“Through these programmes the foundation not only nurtures the growth of previously disadvantaged youth, but also provides a valuable community-building activity.”

The Transnet Rural and Farm School Sport Programme, which was initiated by Moloto in 2002, was started for the purpose of making rural and farm schools an effective and conducive environment for learning, using sport as a catalyst for positive change in the lifestyles of learners.

The programme targets schools in rural areas where academic results are poor and morale is low. It includes netball, soccer and athletics sporting codes, identifying and developing talent within the rural-presidential poverty alleviation nodes of Limpopo, KwaZulu-Natal, the Free State and the North West Province.

Although the project kicked off with 10 schools, 20 schools are active today in each region and there are plans to grow participation. Since its inception, R15-million has been invested in the programme with R4-million being invested in the last financial period (2007 to 2008).

Moloto says that one of the objectives achieved by the programme has been a change in attitude among the participating young people because constructive values such as discipline and self-confidence have been inculcated.

He says the programme will have a lasting effect on thousands of learners as well as their coaches, parents and the community as it incorporates many people who want to make a difference.

The project not only provides sports equipment and kit for the participating schools, but also makes allowance for the training of coaches and officials for the

different disciplines, as well as organising committee members who are trained in event management for regional and national tournaments.

Moloto says once officials have finished their training they are accredited by the respective sports governing body. This empowers them to practice their newfound skills in a broader environment than the programme, which the Transnet Foundation encourages.

“The programme starts by training sport officials and equipping them to bring out the best performance of the young athletes. Because of the sophisticated training techniques employed by the coaches, a high standard of competition prevails among teams and athletes.

“The winning teams and athletes of regional competitions receive medals and trophies and have the opportunity to compete at national level.”

The project places an emphasis on developing the skills of learners who show talent in a sport by holding special camps during which they receive in-depth coaching.

“We try to accelerate their development with the goal of participating at higher levels. In terms of soccer, the project collaborates with the Transnet School of Excellence which sends scouts to attend our tournaments to identify talent.

“We are sure that, with the correct encouragement, support and development, many of these young learners will access bursaries to further their education and be able to earn a living through sport,” says Moloto.

During the 2007-2008 financial year 22 000 learners from 75 schools took part at inter-school competitions; 4 400 learners took part at the four regional tournaments; 1 000 learners participated at the national tournament; 80 local organising committee members were trained in event management; and 80 team managers were trained in team management activities.