

# Involvement, not just investment

CONCENTRATING its efforts where it believes it can be most effective, AfriSam focuses its CSI resources on education and conservation and Tsholo Diale, Corporate Social Responsibility Manager, says, "Our sustainability credo builds on the present to create the future, and both education and conservation are core to the realisation of that goal."

This means long-term partnerships, not hit-and-run sponsorships and donations. "And it means truly understanding the real needs of communities, not imposing external solutions," he stresses.

True to its practice of ensuring excellence, the cement company entered into the National Business Initiative's Education Quality Improvement Partnerships project, which focuses on the *Whole School Development Programme*.

"Schools are not just bricks and mortar, they must become centres of hope for children, teachers, parents and the community." So the company conducts needs analyses and, with community leaders, draws up strategic business plans to address both shortcomings and growth before initiating the exhaustive process of building and fostering the vital elements of a good school.

These include: governance, management, problem solving, conflict management, financial management, safety and security, teacher development, academic support with vital maths, science and English subjects and overall learner performance. "We nurture schools to an entirely different level of education," Diale says.

In the process, the entire community is drawn in. Parental participation boosts both teacher and student morale and performance while uplifting community members. The school becomes a centre for skills and education training.

Team-building sessions and workshops improve community and teacher relationships. School governing bodies receive training in leadership. The previously insular, circumscribed life of these communities is radically impacted for the good. Initial beneficiaries are KwaZulu-Natal, the Northern Cape and Gauteng.

"Once these skills are in place, generally a three-year process, we start investing resources in facilities

and structures: libraries, sanitation, sports fields, laboratories – to which the community and nearby schools have access. The aim is to have at least one school in a cluster to provide artisan training. Both immediate communities and the wider economy will benefit."

Entrepreneurial development projects operate in the Western Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and even Namibia. Seven Learnership Programmes in different technical specialist areas provide hands-on training.

"We also facilitate funding where skills are in dire need, such as at the King Shaka International Airport, where we have liaised with ACSA and surrounding FET colleges to stimulate skills training. Agri-business projects which could lead to more developed commercial urban farming also fall under our funding spotlight.

"To complement these projects we implement early childhood development programmes in areas where we are a dominant player."

The third pillar of the community involvement platform is the environment. "Every subject in the curriculum is required to have an environmental element, and we are helping to ensure that this is realised."

In 1996, AfriSam adopted the Vissershoeck Primary School in the Western Cape to educate learners about environmental awareness and conservation. On a broader scale, the company partnered with the KZN Department of Agriculture and Environmental Affairs in 2007, hosting a three-day nature conservation workshop. Learners participated in a poster competition to show what they think the world will look like in 2015.

"Every year we invest a portion of our budget into NGO's with proven expertise in the environmental sector," Diale points out.

"And a unique and important aspect of our community involvement is recognition of our employees' own interests," he continues. "We acknowledge employees whose hearts are in deserving projects which do not fall directly within our corporate objectives. This is also vital in helping create space to act for those who wish to contribute to society."