

Takalani Sesame is back with four new seasons

Groundbreaking educational South African children's programme, Takalani Sesame, is set to return to our television screens and radios with four new seasons, plus an outreach campaign for the Eastern Cape. "Takalani" means "be happy" in TshiVenda, conveying the spirit of happiness and innocence. The programme received initial support and funding from the United States Agency for International Development, in support of the South African Department of Education.



After 12 years of delighting and engaging children with the help of favourite friends like Kami, Zikwe, Zuzu, and Neno, Takalani Sesame will continue to reinforce children's education and emphasise a positive atmosphere while supporting South Africa's mother-tongue-based education policy. With television and radio broadcast in nearly all of South Africa's official languages, the project is a partnership between Sesame Workshop; South Africa's Department of Basic Education (DBE); Sanlam; SABC; and production partner Kwasukasukela (KWK).

Sesame Workshop is the non-profit educational organisation that revolutionised children's television programming with the landmark Sesame Street. The workshop produces local Sesame Street programmes, seen in over 150 countries, and other acclaimed shows, including The Electric Company, to help bridge the literacy gap. Beyond television, the workshop produces content for multiple media platforms on a wide range of issues including literacy, health and resilience. Initiatives meet specific needs to help young children and families develop critical skills, acquire healthy habits and build emotional strength to prepare them for lifelong learning.

A brand new format

Season six of Takalani Sesame will debut on SABC on 2 September 2013. The new seasons introduce a brand new format that will see the Takalani Sesame Muppet friends featured in segments that highlight their own unique personalities: Zikwe loves to travel, Neno has extraordinary language skills, and Kami's interest in science will encourage creativity and experimentation. Kami, an HIV-positive five-year-old golden furry monster who loves science and reading, returns and helps illuminate age-appropriate messages designed to de-stigmatise perceptions surrounding people living with illness. This new format incorporates longer street story narratives that are connected by "Word on the Street" segments designed to introduce children to a variety of words integrated throughout the episode.

Takalani Sesame follows the successfully long-running holistic approach to children's early learning and development by covering educational domains of literacy and languages, mathematics and life-skills. Studies indicate that children exposed to Takalani Sesame showed greater learning across all three of the programmes' curricular areas (literacy, numeracy and life skills) than children who were not exposed.

Additionally, a new outreach initiative focusing on the Eastern Cape, an area in great need for early childhood educational resources, will allow Kami and all her Takalani Sesame friends to reach even more children in South Africa, meeting the specific critical needs of the children and families in this region. Funded by the Mai Family Foundation, this initiative will further extend the reach and proven success of Takalani Sesame's unique educational resources. To date, throughout South Africa Takalani Sesame's outreach teams have trained over 41,500 caregivers and 100 teachers and have carried out numerous community events designed to engage children with educationally rich experiences.

Integrating educational priorities

Fresh off of a four-day workshop held in Johannesburg, the Takalani Sesame team is now working to crystalise production plans to integrate the DBE's educational priorities which include language diversity, social inclusion of children with disabilities, critical thinking and problem solving into the series. The workshop participants included Marie Louise Samuels, acting director of DBE, representatives from the SABC, and Sesame Workshop.

"For 12 years, Kami, Zikwe, Neno and all the friends of Takalani Sesame have been educating and engaging children in South Africa, and we are thrilled to bring families more of what they love with these new seasons," says H. Melvin Ming, CEO and president, Sesame Workshop. "Sesame Workshop is proud to work with the Department of Basic Education, Sanlam, SABC and the Mai Family Foundation to create and distribute content that not only introduces children to letters and numbers, but will prepare them with fundamental skills to put them on a trajectory for a lifetime of learning."

"We are excited to extend our 12-year relationship with Sesame Workshop for another five years," says Dr Johan van Zyl, chief executive of Sanlam. "We believe by investing in education, we actively contribute to the socio-economic development of South African children. In extending our existing partnership with this initiative, we are acknowledging the powerful contribution it has made to literacy, numeracy and life skills education in South Africa. We continue to invest in early childhood education as this seeks to address one of the aims of the National Development Plan. By ensuring an educated nation equipped with the required quality education and skills development, we can ultimately contribute economically to the realisation of a better South Africa."

"SABC Children is delighted to continue the groundbreaking Takalani Sesame partnership," says Pontsho Makhetha, GM of television content, SABC. "South Africa's children will once again enjoy programming that is fun, entertaining and educational. They will play and learn with their favourite buddies: Neno, Moshe, Kamo, Zikwe, Zuzu and all their friends from the BEST street in South Africa!"

For more information, go to www.sesameworkshop.org.

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