

Is education still a worthwhile pathway to success?

By [Carole Podetti-Ngono](#)

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"The labour market absorption rate for tertiary qualified professionals was 75.6% in 2017 as opposed to just 43.3% for the country as a whole." This is according to the Centre for Risk Analysis's (CAR) April 2018 report entitled: *Education the single greatest obstacle to socio-economic advancement in South Africa*.



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Frans Cronje, editor-in-chief of the report says: "The education system represents the single greatest obstacle to socio-economic advancement in South Africa. It replicates patterns of unemployment, poverty, and inequality and denies the majority of young people the chance of a middle class life."

However, I implore you to look at some positives as outlined in this report as well as those at play in society. Education is still a worthwhile vehicle for success. In this report we learn that in the 21 years (between 1995 and 2016) more people are attending school, and attaining tertiary qualifications in ever more increasing numbers. University enrolment numbers are up by 100% since 1995.

Those with tertiary qualifications fare better even in a difficult employment climate proving that a qualification can be an economic bargaining tool. It precedes its possessor and opens doors that would otherwise be shut. Furthermore, with an education one can write their own future, their own career, allowing for better social mobility. It is the one tool that not only allows one to move through the social strata but also serves as a great equalizer in society.

Young people ought to look at these reports, as well as the recent work and labour force statistics by Statistics South Africa, as a challenge. Stats SA's recent figures show that the unemployment rate for graduates was 33.5% for those aged 15 to 24 and 10.2% among those aged 25 to 34 and 4.7% for those older than 34. This should encourage the youth still going through the education system.

But let's not lose sight of the challenges. It is pitiful that in 21 years of democracy, only 1 in 3 schools have a library, and 1 in 5 have a science lab, among a long list of issues in the education system.

However, while we wait for the "new dawn" to manifest, we can draw inspiration from stories of those who have overcome the odds and made a success of their lives despite these difficulties.

Success stories

One such young South African comes to mind. The story of Siyabulela Xuza is a great example of where a passion for education can take you.

Xuza, affectionately known as the darling of Nasa, is a 29-year-old from rural Mthatha in the Eastern Cape with an engineering degree from Harvard's School of Engineering and Applied Science. His love for science was sparked in 1994 when he was five-years-old watching a plane sprinkle election pamphlets above his village for the first democratic elections.

He matriculated in 2007 with distinction and a long list of unparalleled accolades in science. While at Harvard University, he made it a point to contribute to the world and his community through his education as part of the Harvard Forum for International Leadership where global issues such as HIV/Aids, and the need for efficient energy solutions were discussed.

Today Xuza has a planet named after him. Planet 23182 Siyaxuza, is a minor planet which circles the solar system in the main asteroid belt near Jupiter. The planet was named after him by the MIT Lincoln Laboratory in honour and recognition of Xuza's immense contribution to science. Here at Valued Citizens Initiative, we cultivate similar stories of success in our Bridging for Life programme. One such story is that of Albert Dove. Dove was 16 when we met him and already he knew that he would pursue higher learning in electrical engineering.

Soweto raised, Dove pursued his dreams in spite of what life put in his way and is now an electrical engineering PhD student and completed parts of his studies on scholarship. However, Dove does not negate to mention the Bridging for Life programme as one of the catalysts in his journey. Through this programme he says he acquired the "great secrets to success" which many spend their whole lives and money, hoping to find.

These are the stories young people should be hearing while navigating their way through school. Stories of hope, achievement, passion and perseverance. No matter the state of the country's employment rates, they should know that education is not just a piece of paper, but a weapon by which equality and economic freedom can be achieved.

For former state president Nelson Mandela, the value of a good education was as clear as day.

He once made this observation: "No country can really develop unless its citizens are educated." It is not just the task of government to educate the nation, and young people have to want to learn. However, as Madiba also noted: "It is not beyond our power to create a world in which all children have access to a good education. Those who do not believe this have small imaginations."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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