

# Industry leader delivers lasting 360° social solutions

As an integral part of its commitment to building a stronger, more sustainable and productive South Africa, Afrox takes the long-term view to sustainable social responsibility, training, safety as well as industrial solutions. *African Fusion* finds out more...

Leading gases company Afrox incorporates a strong culture of social responsibility into its day-to-day business strategies through programmes supporting education, job creation and income generation. Its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives assist in practical ways while making a sustainable difference to society, positively impacting customers, stakeholders, surrounding communities and, importantly, the South African economy.

"We are committed to acting responsibly towards people and the environment, conserving natural resources and developing sustainable practices through socio-economic development and internal programmes," says Afrox CSR manager Nemenita Mohabir.

"CSR is an inherent part of how we do business. Economically and socially strong communities enhance success and Afrox's CSR initiatives are chosen to align with our long-term business objectives."

Afrox's CSR programmes comprise a host of projects ranging from fun days for under-privileged children to developing welding schools, donating gases and welding materials; talent and small business development schemes and internal programmes incorporating staff health and wellness, bursaries and tertiary assistance.

Mohabir cites a strategic CSR collaboration between Afrox and the Thuthukisa Institute, a community initiative approved by SARS as a Public Benefit Organisation. The Thuthukisa Institute runs a not-for-profit artisan and technical skills development centre where young black entrepreneurs can develop appropriate trade and production-centred vocational skills.

Says Thuthukisa Institute director Paulos Mahlangu: "In partnership with companies such as Afrox, we seek out young entrepreneurs from disadvantaged communities who are committed and display a keen interest in building viable businesses. Participants are mentored and encouraged to actively engage in entrepreneurial enterprises, while we transfer high quality and critically-needed skills, technologies, production and business know-how to the chosen candidates."

The Afrox-Thuthukisa collaboration project involves 10 unemployed apprentices – five women and five men – in a business incubation programme with direct environmental impact. "Initially, the programme focused on the refrigeration side of Afrox's business, with the candidates being trained in Thuthukisa's workshops on the maintenance and repair of refrigeration equipment. But then we became

aware of the mountain of empty single-use refrigerant cylinders at Afrox's Roodekop LPG and refrigerant warehouse," Mahlangu tells *African Fusion*. "The idea was born to upcycle this waste by using the skill and creativity of our apprentices to create high-value corporate gifts as an entrepreneurial income generator."

"This has social impact in terms of income and employment, along with environmental and sustainability impact," adds Afrox's CSR manager. "And to date, our 10 apprentices have manufactured over 2 000 braai stands out of these cylinders."

The end product, a portable outdoor cooker or braai stand, was distributed under the 'We Care' brand to all Afrox staff as an end-of-year company gift. This project exceeded the initiative's original goals in terms of sustainability and environmental impact, while still meeting all of the small business and technical skills development goals.

As well as the wealth of experience gleaned from producing so many identical high-quality gifts, Mohabir points out that the sponsored trainees received welding and cutting training directly from Afrox, along with refrigeration, electrical/electronic and manufacturing skills training from the Thuthukisa Institute, all of which relate to Afrox's business areas.

While on the programme, all students received a laptop with access to MS Office; and access to Thuthukisa tools, workshops and the business centre from where they were encouraged to run small businesses. Trade specific PPE, tools and consumables were also issued to each candidate and they all benefitted from a monthly stipend of R4 000.

"We have now depleted the stockpile of empty refrigerant cylinders at Roodekop and we are looking for other refrigerant suppliers who may have a similar waste stockpile problem. All our Afrox-sponsored apprentices are still with us completing various apprenticeship programmes," says Mahlangu.

Another successful Afrox CSR initiative is the development of training centres focused on welding as an in-demand route to a sustainable career. Launched in 2016, the POPUP Welding School in Soshanguve provides welding skills to persons who need them most.

Following this success, Afrox sponsored the LIV Welding Academy in KZN, a custom-built container welding school developed in partnership with Afrox and the LIV Village. Through these training centres, Afrox contributes to the development of entrepreneurial skills for the upliftment of South Africa's unemployed youth.



Of the 11 LIV welding apprentices that started training before the Covid Pandemic – **Bulelani Quishane; Mfundo Mthembu; Thobani Ngwane; Thulasizwe Mgobozi; Simphiwe Makhanya; Senzo Mthembu; Sakhile Nzuza; Nqobile Blose; Nombuso Vundla; Mdu Buthelezi; and Chris Phewa** – the eight in bold have now graduated as Red Seal artisans on the QCTO Welder Programme, while Chris Phewa is about to redo his Trade Test.

"Welding is the backbone of industry. It's a skill that builds economies, infrastructure and whole nations," says Johann Pieterse, Business Manager for Manufacturing Industries at Afrox. "Our commitment to sponsoring welding schools and centres is as real as it gets because Afrox is dedicated to encouraging our youth to take up this profession, and we hope to see many more young people graduate as welders in the years to come."

Most notably, Pieterse points out, eight of the welding apprentices from the Afrox sponsored LIV Academy are now among the first welders to graduate as QCTO artisan welders. "This is a tangible success story, for the welders who now have exciting careers ahead of them, for the new QCTO-Welder Programme and for the South African welding industry. We are very proud to have been associated with this success," says Pieterse.

Pieterse emphasises the importance of Afrox's responsibility to South Africa in terms of the safety of people working on industrial plant and the long-term sustainability of the industrial solutions Afrox delivers.

"We offer a comprehensive and customised safety auditing, training and implementation service, for example, for any company involved in using our gases or welding and cutting solutions. Not only do we strive to ensure people are safe at work, but we help companies to achieve site-based compliance with Health and Safety legislation," confirms Pieterse. "In addition, we invest in developing 360° solutions such as our safety at height solution for general overhaul work on power-plant boilers. Our Afrox-developed Multi-User Pressure Panel (MUPP) enables welders to work at height while using gas from cylinders 100 m below them on the ground."

This solution can also be coupled with Miller's ArcReach technology. It enables the welding power source to be on the ground, while the welding process controls are set via a suitcase wire feeder or a small remote control that communicates directly via robust welding cables. "This solution is a win-win for safety, efficiency and productivity," says Pieterse.

On the supply side of the business – and in collaboration with transformation and skills development specialist, LEAP – Afrox has designed a robust Enterprise and Supplier Development (ESD) strategy that encompasses comprehensive business development support for a group of relevant enterprises and suppliers. "The programme includes business management training, mentorship and support for purchasing assets, all with a view to reducing market concentration risks for Afrox ESD programme beneficiaries by exposing them to a wide range of other corporate and business opportunities," says Afrox Procurement Director, Makhula Magaoga.

Other CSR programmes focus on socio-economic and skills development. These include the support and upliftment of secondary and tertiary schools across the country, who receive training for their learners, upgrading of equipment and facilities and up-skilling of their technical teachers directly from Afrox.

The gases and welding equipment company also runs Young Talent Development consisting of in-service training, apprenticeships, internships and learnerships, while its SED programme continues to provide donations of LPG to Early Childhood Development feeding schemes, and gases and welding materials to various training centres.

"Afrox's skills development initiatives are largely focused on ensuring skills



The Thuthukisa Institute apprentices have manufactured over 2 000 braai stands out of empty single-use refrigerant cylinders from Afrox's Roodekop LPG and refrigerant warehouse.



Thuthukisa trainees received welding and cutting training directly from Afrox, along with refrigeration, electrical/electronic and manufacturing skills training from Thuthukisa Institute.

growth in the chemical industries division. Last year we invested over R13-million in this sector and placed 480 learners in different training schemes," says Mohabir. "A highlight of our annual calendar is Bumbani Day, a southern Africa-wide celebration that sees thousands of disadvantaged and under-privileged children entertained by our staff volunteers from all around the region. This is a staff-driven social event where we get the opportunity to become involved with the children, treating them to outings, fun games and gift bags."

Afrox also runs an Employee Wellness Programme to enhance productivity and performance in the workplace and instil a culture of wellness and caring, while empowering staff to take responsibility for their own wellbeing.

Afrox's CSR initiatives reflect the spirit of South Africa as a country and are grounded in consultation, empowerment and partnership, utilising innovative and effective means to build stronger, more self-sustaining communities. "Empowerment of Afrox people is a core value and at the heart of how we do business, with a culture based on the principles of safety, integrity, sustainability and respect," concludes Nemenita Mohabir.

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The ten Thuthukisa Institute Apprentices, from left: **Nancy Mokoena, Paballo Motaung, Ntokolo Rakolodi, Xolani Ndlovu, Thabang Mohlala, Karabelo Lekgothoane, Kgotsotso Mahlangu, Precias Phetla, Phontso Aphane and Thabang Rampone.**