

# EMPLOYEE TRAINING IN SOUTH AFRICAN PRIVATE ENTERPRISES: Findings from the National Skills Survey of 2003

A central focus of the National Skills Development Strategy is to address huge disparities in educational, skill and wage levels in the working population. **ANDREW PATERSON** analyses the current state of training in relation to enterprise size.

**D**uring the apartheid era, South African enterprises were often criticised for their poor track records in workforce training. The post-apartheid 1994 democratic government then developed the National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS) and supportive legislation to provide a new institutional and financial structure to facilitate training – particularly in terms of planning, providing incentives and co-ordination.

The NSDS 2001-2005 was designed to support skills development in the South African workforce, and to utilise the workplace as an active learning environment.

In order to assess the impact of the NSDS and its underlying legislation on training in South African workplaces, the Department of Labour commissioned a national survey by the HSRC into the current state of skills development in private enterprises in South Africa – the National Skills Survey of 2003.

This survey addresses both skills needs and training participation in the workplace.

A central focus of the NSDS is to address huge disparities in educational, skill and wage levels in the working population. This article deals specifically with participation in training in relation to enterprise size (small, medium and large), and the trainees' race and occupation.

A benchmark measure of enterprise investment in training is the "training rate". This may be defined as the proportion of employees who receive any training – structured or unstructured – in a given period (the 2002/03 financial year in the case of the NSDS 2003). It is calculated as a percentage by dividing the number of people trained by the total number of employees. Only data on training within the permanent employee group will be discussed.

The national training rate was calculated at 25%, which means that across all enterprises in South Africa one in every four permanent

employees received training in the 2003/04 financial year.

It is difficult to compare South Africa's training rate meaningfully with that of other countries, because methodological, contextual and cultural factors come into play in measuring it, and make comparisons tentative. Nevertheless, placing the South African training rate within the very wide range of statistics found on training in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) suggests that it is roughly comparable to those achieved in some southern European economies. It appears that South Africa's performance in matters of skill is not as poor as is sometimes assumed.

But it is just as important to ask how well the South African training rate addresses the skills needs created by the poor general education of many people in the workforce.

Training participation rates varied according to enterprise size. Following international trends, small enterprises provided fewer training opportunities (22%) than medium-sized and large enterprises. Interestingly, the medium category provided a marginally higher proportion of training than the large category (Table 1).

In aggregate terms, the training ratio for Africans was higher than that of other race groups (Table 1), which suggests that some positive progress was made in redressing the skills gap for disadvantaged groups. In contrast, Indians had a markedly lower aggregate training rate – at least five per cent lower than the other race groups.

There was a clear pattern of racial differences in training access between small, medium and large enterprises. The training rates of Africans rose steadily from small to large enterprises, which suggests that large enterprises were more able to monitor and respond to racial equity needs in their labour force. Given the

large number of small enterprises in the country, and the centrality of small enterprises in generating employment, it is worrying that the training rate for Africans in such enterprises was below that of coloureds and whites.

There were also large variations in training access between occupational group categories (Table 2). Service and sales workers participated most, with one in every three receiving training. This implies that service quality has become increasingly important in the South African workplace.

The fragmented modes of training provision in South Africa have complex origins. The



**TABLE 1: Training ratio by race and enterprise size in 2002/03 (%)**

	Small 11-49	Medium 50-149	Large 150+	Group total
African	19	25	32	28
Coloured	27	24	21	23
Indian	17	23	16	18
White	25	33	19	23
Total	22	27	26	25

**TABLE 2: Training ratio by race and occupational category in 2002/03 (%)**

Occupational group	African	Coloured	Indian	White	Group total
Managers	34	16	18	23	24
Professionals	16	10	16	19	18
Technicians	16	13	22	23	20
Admin/sec	27	21	17	21	22
Service/sales	33	35	22	35	33
Agriculture	19	19	–	26	19
Craft/skilled trade	21	27	19	25	23
Operators	27	35	19	23	29
Elementary	30	13	05	10	27
Total	28	23	18	23	25

relatively high training ratios for the occupational categories of craft and skilled trade, and operators, may be partially explained by employers needing to recruit and sustain a stable and skilled workforce through on-the-job vocational training.

The relatively high training rate among elementary workers suggests that adult basic education and equity-based programmes were being widely implemented.

By comparison, the low rates of training among professionals can be attributed to the likelihood that professional employees had already acquired the necessary qualifications.

Training ratios by race and occupation (Table 2) show that African managers, administrative and secretarial workers and elementary workers received markedly more training opportunities than other race groups in the same occupational categories. These data suggest that equity programmes were taking

### **A cause for concern is the low level of training opportunities for African and coloured technicians**

effect across these categories, which could lead to improved skills levels among high-level managers, as well as development opportunities for elementary workers at the other end of the scale.

A cause for concern is the low level of training opportunities for African and coloured technicians. This could result from the disadvantages experienced by black learners at school in the gateway subjects of science and mathematics.

Though the analysis of training participation by race is important, it cannot adequately provide the full picture of the distribution of training opportunities in the workforce. Other factors also influence the participation of enterprises – and employees – in training. Some of these are the enterprise's location (whether urban or rural), the economic sector into which it falls, the Sector Education and Training Authority responsible for facilitating training in that sector, and the gender and disability status of the employee. •

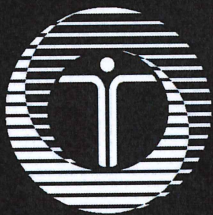
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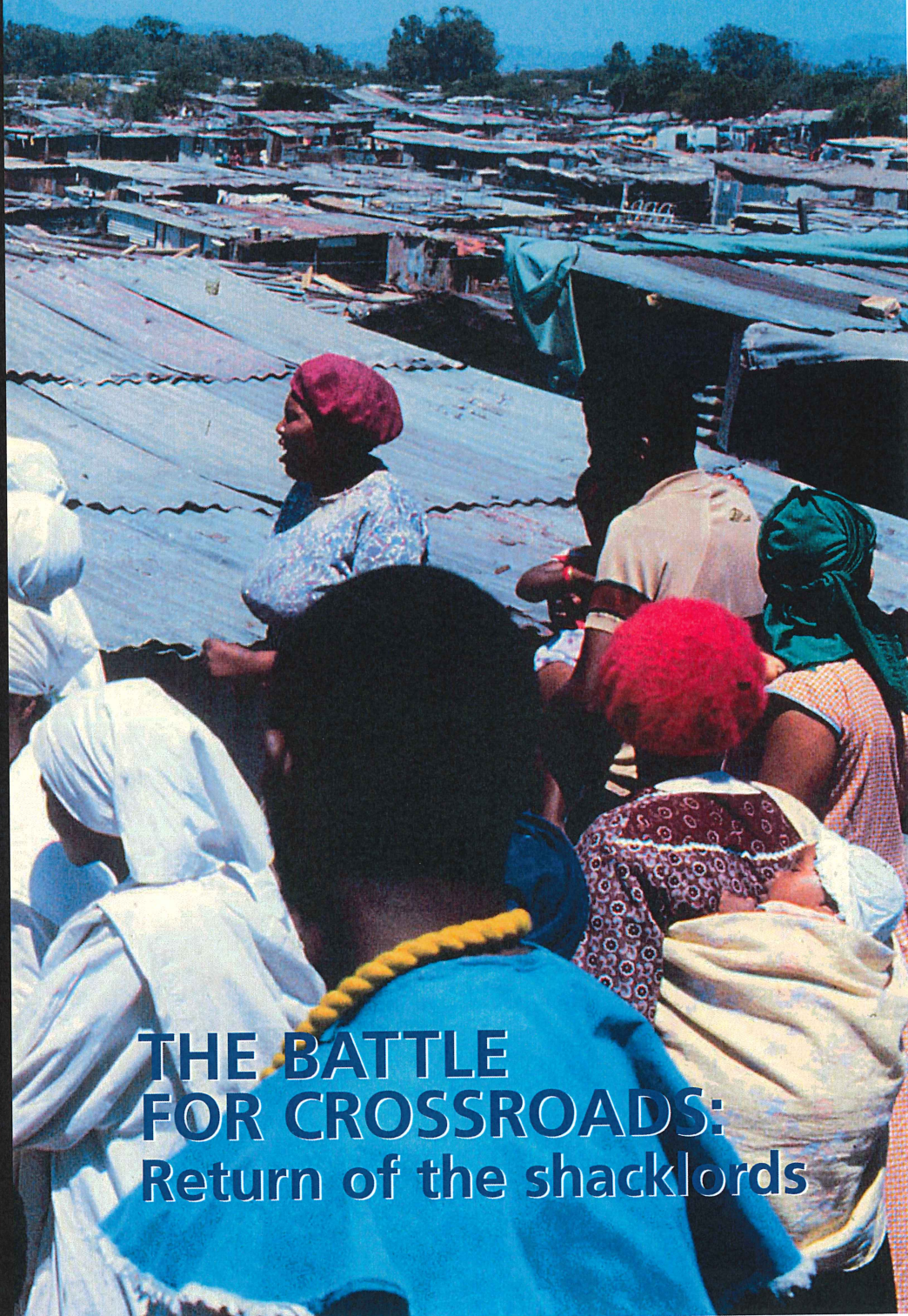
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