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You could make a difference

Much has changed since Skillshare Africa was formed in 1990. There have been big developments both for us and the people of southern Africa. The region is emerging from a dramatic period of political change and, as we stride into a new millennium, there are now visions of a future scarcely dreamed of in our early years. This has been reflected in the way we work and our new Corporate Strategy, launched mid 1999, set out a commitment to assist the people of southern Africa fulfil their own ambitions. Working in partnership is still central to our approach but we are now complimenting the sharing of skills with the development of organisational and leadership effectiveness - taking our commitment to our partners that one stage further.

The determination of local communities to improve their situation remains, despite the barriers and disappointments they experience. In my regular visits to the region I have seen the contribution of Skillshare Africa development workers making a real difference. Working in partnership has led to local people building their own classrooms, trained paramedics working in their own localities, people turning life skills, such as weaving and chicken raising, into income earning activities.

The change that you could make as a development worker is immense. If you can meet the challenge, if you have a sense of humour, are adaptable and tenacious, if you have the right skills, then you should seriously consider applying to Skillshare Africa.

I hope this information booklet will give you some insight into the benefits that you and the people of southern Africa can derive from the sharing of skills in this way. It will tell you a little about the countries we work in, life as a development worker and the skills we are looking for. Please read this booklet carefully. Once you have read it, if you feel we are right for you, please apply.

You could make a difference.

Cliff Allum · Director

An investment for life

When I left Scotland on retirement to work in Lesotho, the reaction of many colleagues was 'I'd love to do what you're doing but ...'

There was always a 'but', some excuse for not changing their way of life. It's a pity because they are missing out on a great experience, a new lease of life in fact. To have the chance to put my skills and a lifetime of experience to use working with students who are so desperately eager to learn has been very rewarding.

Jack Devlin, Lesotho

Skillshare Africa works for sustainable development. One of the ways in which we do this is by sending development workers over to southern Africa to share their skills. In doing so, they promote self-reliance, helping the people and communities they work with break the cycle of dependence.

We have a 'needs driven' approach and recruit development workers in response to requests from our partner organisations, finding people for jobs, not jobs for people.

Across southern Africa, development workers are meeting an increasingly diverse range of needs. Therefore, the range of professional skills we're looking for in applicants is also incredibly varied, covering a wide range of occupations. Most places though are in education and vocational training, health care, engineering and planning, income generation, agriculture and environmental conservation. Sometimes our work is set in a wider context such as empowering women or working with people with disabilities.

Do you have what it takes to become a development worker? You may have the skills but are you prepared for what two years in southern Africa will mean to your life? This booklet should provide you with the answers.

Things do not always go according to plan. You have to accept a new culture, new climate and new working conditions. Often you will have to adjust the way you work to accommodate the resources available.

Compared to what you could earn at home, your salary will be modest. However, it will afford you a reasonable standard of living. And you can expect an experience that will be both professionally and personally fulfilling.

As Jack Devlin said, his time as a development worker has been highly rewarding, but even he cannot begin to imagine how his work in Lesotho has affected the lives of the local community.

Making a lasting impact

You will have the chance to make a valuable, lasting impact on people's lives, including your own, sharing skills works both ways. It will be a learning process for you as well as for the people and communities you work with and most development workers gain a lot from what they contribute.

Hundreds of people - people like you perhaps - have now worked as Skillshare Africa development workers. Many simply describe it as the most rewarding step they have ever taken.

The most important part of your role as a development worker is to ensure that when your placement comes to an end, the work that you have done will continue.

We do not offer short-term 'quick fix' solutions, we are working for sustainable development. Being an effective development worker is about sharing your expertise not just lending it.

You will build on existing local skills and knowledge, sharing your experience in a number of ways. You might be working closely with your colleagues as part of a team, or setting up systems and processes to help strengthen the organisation where you are employed. You may be teaching, training trainers or working together with a colleague to help them take over your role when you leave.

Whatever your function, living and working in southern Africa can be personally and professionally very challenging. You'll have to adjust to a new way of life, adapt to a different culture and customs, and face up to problems you've probably never encountered before. However, in doing so, you'll derive a real sense of personal growth and achievement. At work, there's often the chance to take on a high level of responsibility and to stretch your capabilities in new areas such as training and team leadership. Ultimately, you'll return home with broader professional skills and new ways of working that could be of benefit your long-term career.

"New job, new boss, new colleagues, different culture. Different ways of doing things. No close friends or family around. These are just a few of the objections people put up when I said I was going to work in Mozambique. To be honest I'd thought about them too.

"My diary for the first couple of weeks in Mozambique reads as if I'd been catapulted into oblivion. I felt unable to cope and completely useless. And the fact that the job I'd taken on was apparently non-existent didn't help!

"In spite of my training I was not prepared for the problems, especially when my presence was called into question. But eventually, through negotiation and compromise, my Director and I sorted things out. My role became varied in its demands and I had to be flexible and assertive. Ultimately there was great satisfaction.

"No experience in my life has been tougher than those first few months in Mozambique, but then no other experience has been more rewarding in the long term. The pluses outweighed the minuses. And all the minuses just seemed to be at the beginning. I would do it all again and wouldn't change anything."

David Alfert, Mozambique

“Frustrating, thrilling infuriating, exhilarating” Julie Turner, Lesotho

Living and Working as a Development Worker

The best people to say what it's really like living and working as a Skillshare Africa development worker are those who have gone before you. Hundreds of people have now served as development workers and every one has different experiences to tell of. To give an idea of the challenges that await you, here are some personal views on what to expect.

“My time in Africa has made me appreciate that my job as a librarian has many aspects - and that some of the most enjoyable have, in a way, been lost at home in the UK.

“For students in Lesotho, reading for pleasure is a wonderful, mind-opening experience and cherished for that reason.

“It was inspirational to work with students who had mostly only experienced difficult set English Literature texts as part of their studies, and to give them the chance to read at their own level and pace.

“To be honest, at first, I found myself questioning the relevance of libraries in terms of the priorities for the students' education - I admired the emphasis on practical life skills such as agriculture, home economics and technical craftwork.

“But seeing the enthusiasm the

students had for books made me realise that my role was important in supporting their ambitions for life.”

Fiona MacKenzie, Lesotho

“Trying to fit in with the local community and be accepted was, to me, as important and as great a challenge as was my job teaching maths.

“I lived in a similar house to the other villagers, used public transport like everyone else, and learnt as much as I could of the local Setswana language and customs.

“And my students would often teach me as much about their lives and about Botswana as I taught them about maths.”

Neil Carr, Botswana

“For me, the major thing I learnt working in Africa was patience. You cannot expect instant results and you can never take things for granted.

“Supplies are not on your doorstep, electricity may not be available, and water may have to come from a river some distance away. You learn to improvise, to make the most of what resources you have, to adapt to local conditions.”

Graham Duffill, Swaziland

“Every time I walk into the classroom, I remember why I enjoy teaching.

“In my first semester, I taught English in the Faculty of Engineering and had in total about 100 students, only four

of whom were women.

My initial apprehension at being in such a male-dominated environment was unfounded.

“I had never been in a class of such hardworking, charming students. Competition for places at the university is fierce and the workload for students is gruelling.

English is seen as essential but also as a class where they can relax a little.

“The education system seems very traditional - the teacher talks, the students listen. Despite this, after a little trial and error, my classes have responded well to different teaching methods which is very rewarding.

“All development workers talk of the need to rid yourself of any preconceived ideas. Before I came out, I questioned the need for development workers at tertiary education level.

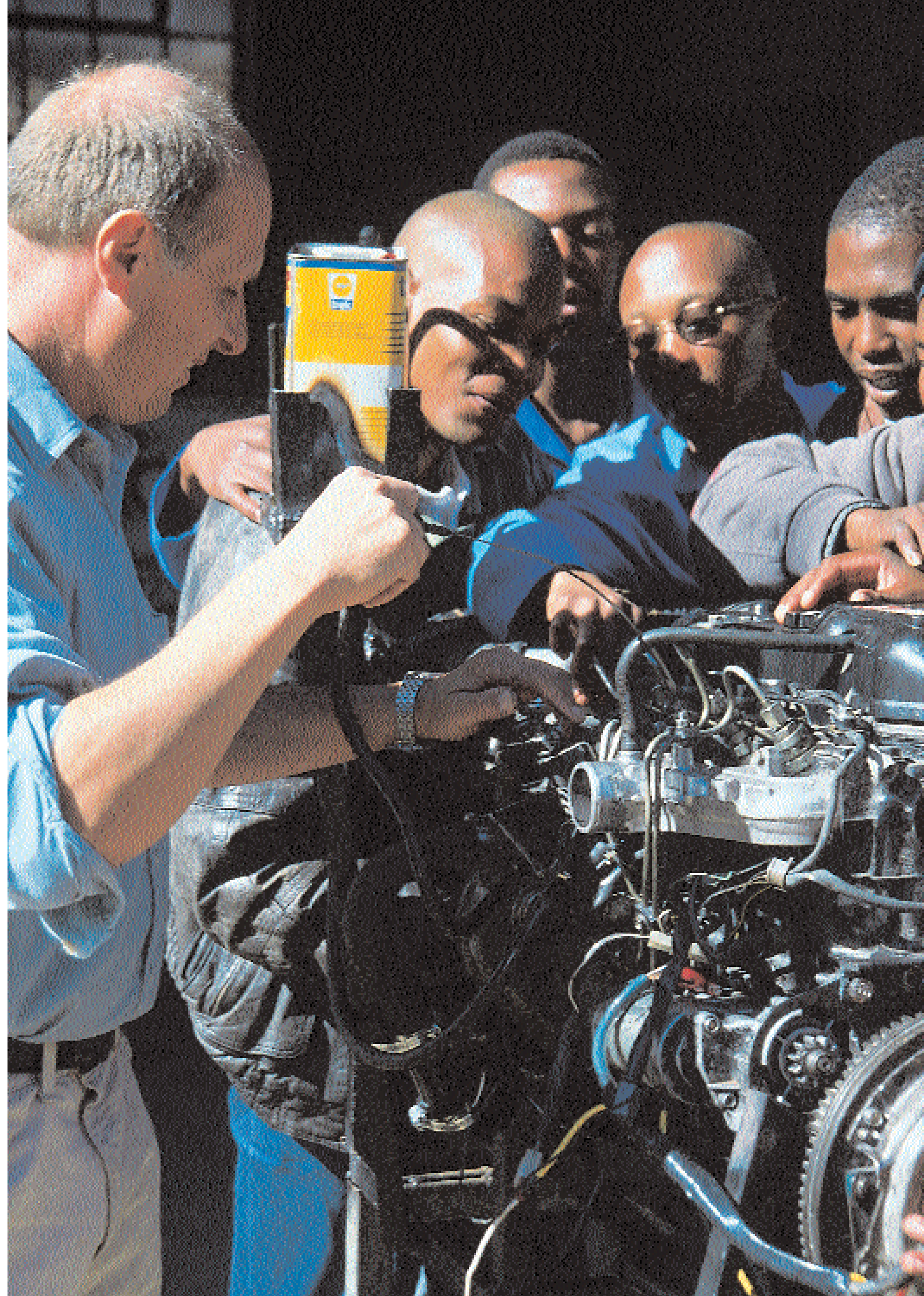
“Surely the only people who could have got as far as university were from a wealthy, well-educated elite.

How naive! In reality, I am constantly humbled and impressed by the effort many of the students have made to reach university.

“Some come from families of subsistence farmers, others have parents with no formal education and live in the most difficult circumstances in the poorer districts of Maputo.

“It is, as I said, a humbling experience.”

Bridget Sleap, Mozambique





Living and working in Africa can be personally and professionally very challenging. You'll have to adjust to a new way of life, and face up to problems you've probably never encountered before. However, in doing so, you'll derive a real sense of personal growth and achievement.

The countries where Skillshare Africa works

As a Skillshare Africa development worker, you may find yourself working in one of the following countries in southern Africa:

Botswana

Botswana is about the size of France and mostly desert - the Kalahari. Only along the border in the south east and in the Okavango Delta to the north, is there fertile land. It is in these areas that most of the 1.2 million population lives. National parks also cover 17 per cent of the country. Most of the country has a good road system.

An independent republic, Botswana is a stable multi-party democracy. The economy is largely dependent on the country's mineral wealth, especially diamonds. However, 80 per cent of the population work in agriculture, mainly cattle farming and the growing of subsistence crops. The capital Gaborone is a modern city with good amenities, and there is sound development in many rural areas. English is the official language while Setswana is the national language.

Lesotho

An independent kingdom, Lesotho is surrounded on all sides by South Africa. It is one of the smallest countries in Africa and also one of the highest, standing entirely at over 1,500 metres above sea level. Much of the land is mountainous and winters can be bitterly cold. Some villages in the east can be snowbound for weeks. Two thirds of a population of just over 2 million live in the rural areas.

Lesotho's most abundant natural resource is water, and five giant dams are being built with a view to exporting water on a major scale to South Africa. Most people are involved in subsistence agriculture. Suitable land for farming is limited. The mountainous terrain has also restricted development of the transport system, although major towns are linked to the capital, Maseru, by tarred roads. In the most remote mountain areas, travel is only possible on foot or by horse. The country has a strong sense of national identity, helped by a single national language Sesotho, although the language of business is English.

Mozambique

Three times the size of the UK, Mozambique borders the Indian Ocean to the east and has a coastline of almost 2,500 km. It is a fertile country and agriculture employs 90 per cent of the working population - at a subsistence level and in the farming of cash crops for export. While there are many different tribal groups in Mozambique, each with its own language, the most commonly spoken language is Portuguese. Some English is also spoken, mainly in the cities and large towns.

The country is slowly recovering from the devastation caused by years of civil war but progress is being made in the rebuilding of agriculture and industry, education and health care, as well as the country's transport and communications infrastructure. A major problem though is the shortage of skilled people at all levels.

Namibia

Lying between the Kalahari and the South Atlantic, Namibia is a large country, similar in size to Mozambique. With a population of less than two million, it is the least densely populated country in Africa. There are at least eleven major ethnic groups, with many indigenous languages that fall into two groups - Bantu and Khosian. Afrikaans is still widely spoken while the sole official language is now English.

Rich in natural resources, the country's economy is dominated by mining, cattle and sheep herding, tourism and fishing. Namibia is a relatively prosperous country although its wealth remains unevenly distributed. Facilities are poor or non-existent in rural areas, while most towns and cities have modern amenities. Also, economic growth is being hampered by large skills gaps in middle management, a legacy of white rule. Independent since 1990, Namibia is democratic, multi-party republic.

South Africa

About twice the size of Botswana with a population of 38.8 million, South Africa's geography is considerably varied, from the semi-desert arid plains stretching from the west coast, to the hilly and rich hinterland reaching towards the east coast. South Africa is a land of two stark contrasts, modern cities and high quality infrastructure are contrasted by poor, desperately underdeveloped rural settlements. Under the second democratically elected government, radical social and economic reforms are taking place through a programme of reconstruction and development. The programme addresses issues such as education and training for the disadvantaged.

South Africa has one of the world's larger economies and dominates the southern African region in business and commerce. Mining is the economy's foundation although manufacturing is the largest sector. Also strong is crop and livestock farming, the country is virtually self sufficient in food production. There are nine main languages, including Xhosa, Zulu and Sotho, while Afrikaans and English are also widely spoken.

Swaziland

Bordered to the north, south and west by South Africa and to the east by Mozambique, landlocked Swaziland is about the same size as Wales. It is also, like Lesotho, an independent kingdom and one of the best-watered regions of southern Africa. Four major rivers flow down from the mountainous western highveld. Essential infrastructure such as the road system and basic education and health care services are generally well developed. As a result, the most pressing development needs of our partner organisations are in other areas such as institutional strengthening and capacity building.

The country is governed by a constitutional monarchy and a parliament elected from the ruling families. The economy is dominated and closely linked to that of South Africa, with over 75 per cent of the working population employed in agriculture. Sugar and citrus fruits are the main cash crops. Traditional Swazi culture and customs are still strong and play an important part in daily life. The official languages are English and Siswati, and the population is just under a million.



Being a development worker could be the most rewarding experience of your life. However, you must be willing to adapt to a new culture, different working conditions and a different way of life

Some common questions answered

The nature of Skillshare Africa's work means that almost every placement is different. At times, the terms and conditions of your employment as a development worker may vary. However, some issues and concerns are the same for many applicants. So, although we can't tell you everything on this page, here are answers to some of the most common questions we are asked.

Are there age limits for development workers?

If you are over 21 and under 62 then you can apply.

Are placements always for two years?

No, not always. For some posts, shorter placements are considered if it is felt that development workers can still make an effective contribution. In many cases though, two years is necessary to give you the chance to become fully effective and make a lasting impact.

Do I have to apply for a specific post?

No. Rather than applying for one particular post, you can make a general application in your skill area.

What if I'm interested in several posts?

That's fine. Just indicate on your application form if you feel there is more than one post you are suitable for.

Will my qualifications and experience be appropriate?

The range of skills we're looking for is incredibly varied, covering a wide variety of occupations.

However, whatever your field of work, you need to have a combination of a relevant professional qualification and relevant work experience - normally at least two years.

Who will I be working for?

Your employer will be the organisation in southern Africa with whom you are placed, not Skillshare Africa. However, Skillshare Africa Country Office staff will be there to provide support throughout your placement.

My partner wants to come with me. Is that possible?

Skillshare Africa welcomes applications from couples where both have relevant skills. Also, some placements will accept accompanying partners. Where this is possible, Skillshare Africa will generally pay for flights and medical insurance for your partner. You must make it clear though, when applying, that you wish your partner to accompany you. It is also important that accompanying partners have fully thought through the implications of the move they are making and attend the pre-departure training week.

And my children?

In certain cases, Skillshare Africa is able to accept applicants with children. It must be stressed though that the decision to take children with you calls for careful consideration of many issues, such as living conditions and the education facilities available. As with partners, Skillshare Africa will generally provide flights and medical cover for accompanying children.

Who handles the pre-departure administration such as booking flights and arranging work permits?

We do. Of course, you will need to do some of the work yourself at times, but we will help you to get all the right documentation.

Will I receive training?

Development workers recruited from the UK will receive pre-departure training to gain a better idea of what to expect while living and working in Africa. Training will cover issues relevant to all, such as the practicalities of day-to-day life and your likely status in the community and at work. You will also learn how your role fits into the activities of Skillshare Africa as a whole. Orientation and training covering other issues is given on your arrival in southern Africa. You may also receive specialist training as needed.

Do I need to speak another language?

English is widely spoken across most of southern Africa. However, wherever you're placed, learning to speak the local language will help you integrate with your colleagues and the local community more easily. We therefore provide language training in country to get you started. In Mozambique, where Portuguese is the most widely spoken language, every development worker is given two months training in Portuguese at the start of their placement.

What and how will I be paid?

You will be paid either a local salary or an allowance. This will enable you to afford a reasonable standard of living in the country where you are working. For most development workers, the allowance is paid monthly in arrears and consists of two payments, one in your country of placement and another in your country of residence. It will be paid either by Skillshare Africa, by your employer in Africa, or by a combination of both. Our benefits package includes other grants and allowances. These may vary and are not universal.

What about National Insurance?

If you are eligible for inclusion in the state social security schemes of the UK or the Republic of Ireland, Skillshare Africa will pay contributions to that scheme for the length of your placement. For other nationals, we will pay you an equivalent sum.



Sharing skills is very much a two-way process and you should be prepared to discover as much as you convey.

Some common questions answered

Will I have to pay anything towards my accommodation?

Most development workers are provided with rent-free accommodation complete with basic furnishings. However, you will have to pay for utility bills out of your allowance. And if you are on a local salary contract, receiving more than the standard allowance, you may have to pay some or all of the rent

What's the accommodation like?

It can vary considerably from placement to placement, depending on whether you are based in an urban or rural location. You could be housed in a block of flats or find yourself traditional African housing. You might also have to share accommodation with another development worker, although you will always have your own room.

Will I get holidays?

Yes. We aim to ensure a minimum of 20 days leave per year in addition to the statutory holidays of the country you are working in. Many development workers use their holidays to fully explore the region. Bear in mind that Skillshare Africa covers the cost of flights at the start and finish of your placement only.

What if I fall ill?

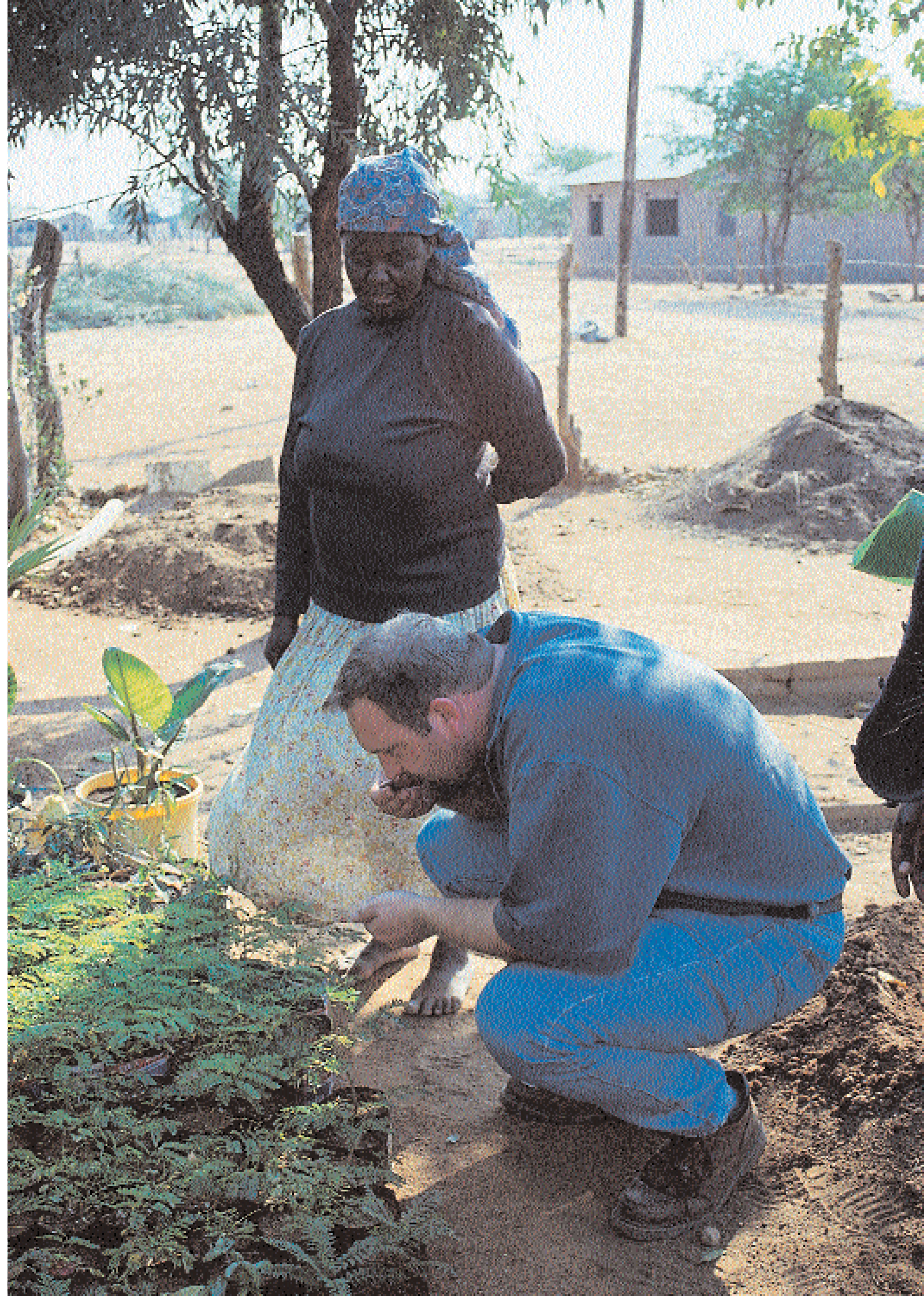
The vast majority of development workers enjoy good health during their time in southern Africa. However, medical facilities to treat most conditions are available in all the countries in which we operate. If necessary, you will be transferred to another country or even repatriated to receive treatment. Your medical costs will be paid by Skillshare Africa, as will any inoculations you may need.

What's the role of Skillshare Africa Country Office staff?

As well as being responsible for the development and promotion of Skillshare Africa in their own countries, Country Office staff provide advice and support when needed to development workers and their employers.

Will I receive support on my return once my placement is over?

In order to help you resettle, you will receive a Welcome Home Pack. You will be invited to a feedback session, which is an opportunity to reflect on your experience. You will automatically be made a member of *Friends of Skillshare Africa*, our supporters association. *Friends of Skillshare Africa* share experiences and have the chance to remain actively involved with Skillshare Africa.



Could you share your skills in southern Africa?

	Yes	No	
Are you the right age?			<p>If you have answered “yes” to all these questions then we’d like to hear from you.</p> <p>We ask these question because you (and we) need to be sure that this is really what you want to do.</p> <p>Working thousands of miles away from home is a major commitment for you, for us and for people in Africa. If it goes wrong it will cost more than just the £3,000 in recruiting and sending you.</p> <p>If you decide not to apply to be a development worker but would like to be involved with our work, perhaps you would like to join <i>Friends of Skillshare Africa</i>.</p> <p>Complete and return the flap at the back of this booklet and we’ll send you some information.</p>
Do you have the right qualifications and skills?			
Are you resourceful?			
Do you keep going when things are getting difficult?			
Do you know when to take a step back and take a fresh look?			
Can you adapt to a completely different culture and lifestyle?			
Can you work alone?			
Or in a team?			
Do you get on well with new people?			
Can you afford to do this, financially?			
Have you talked this through with your family and friends?			
Are you really sure this is what you want to do?			
			<p>The next step to sharing skills in southern Africa</p> <p>After carefully reading this booklet and having decided you want to continue with your application, here are the next steps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete and return one of the application forms that accompanies this booklet (the other is your own copy). Please do not send a CV as only fully completed application forms will be considered. If you are shortlisted you will be invited for selection • If you are successful at selection (the final decision is made by the local employer) you will be asked to attend briefings and undergo a medical. • Apply even if there is no specific post for you at the moment providing, of course, you have broadly relevant skills for the type of work we do. • If there is no suitable post for you at present you may be placed on our register. • The information contained in this booklet is necessarily general in nature. You will be given more detailed information later on in the process.