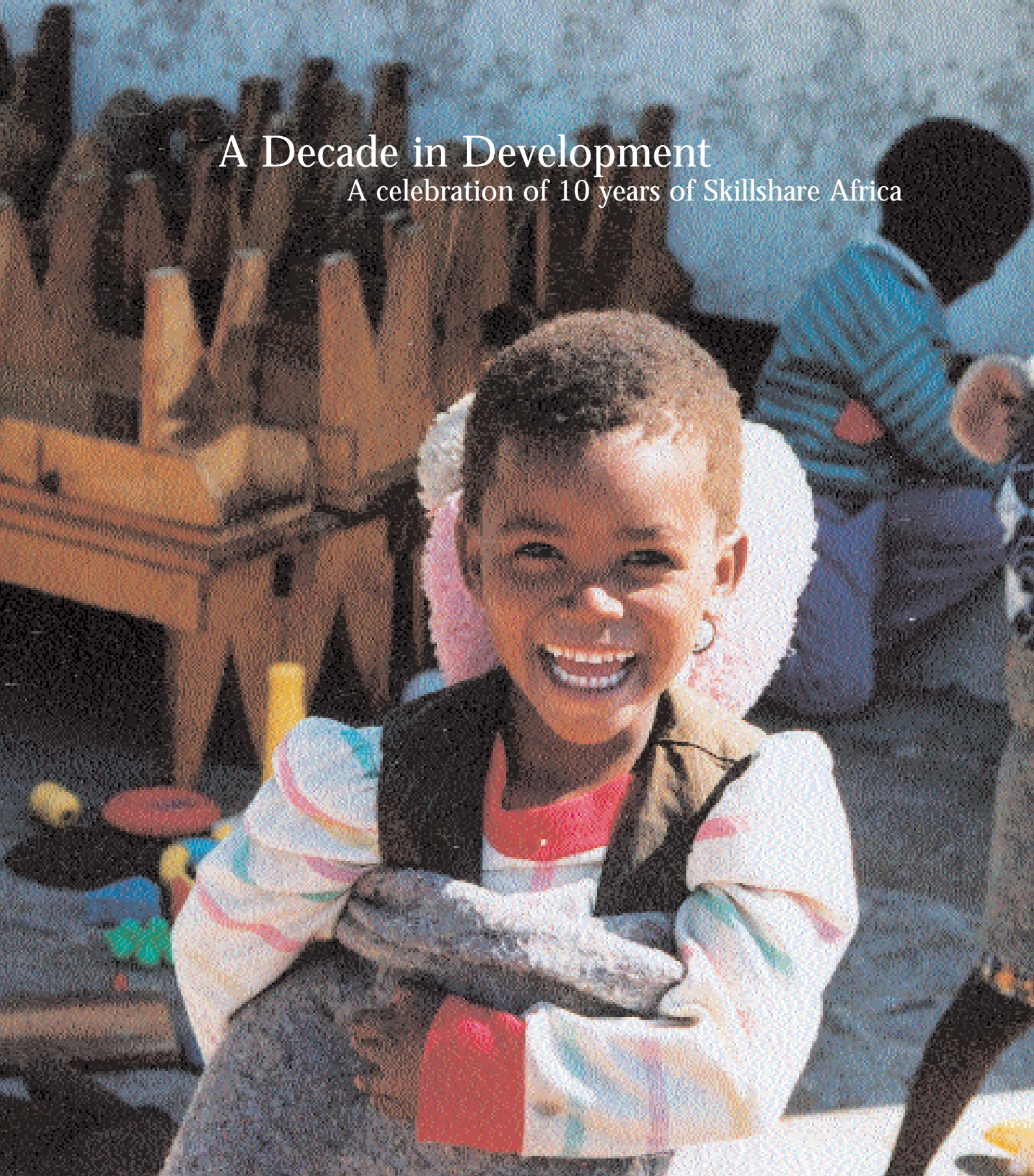


A Decade in Development

A celebration of 10 years of Skillshare Africa



Contents

Foreword by George Foulkes	4
Introduction from the Chair	5
Guiding the Vision	6
Southern Africa – Cause to Celebrate?	10
Learning and Litter Bins	14
The Development Diplomat	18
An Organisation in a Changing Environment	22
The Difficult Art of Learning to Listen	24
Five years as Friends	26

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Foreword by George Foulkes MP



An active and diverse civil society is crucial to achieve poverty elimination. Skillshare Africa, through their dedicated work in southern Africa, placing development workers in sectors where there is vital need for skills development, has played an important and necessary role over the last decade.

Broadening their range of activities, and working with the explicit value of the rights of poor communities to determine their own needs, Skillshare Africa have built up necessary links with local partners to enable the achievement of sustainable development in poor communities.

Congratulations on your 10th anniversary and I wish you every success for the next decade and beyond.

George Foulkes, MP

*Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
for International Development*

Introduction from the Chair

My association with Skillshare Africa goes back to 1978 when I was the Field Officer for IVS in Lesotho for four years before spending a further 18 months working in the UK office.

I was working overseas for other organisations when Skillshare Africa came into being in 1990 and was invited to be on the Board of Trustees not because of my links with IVS but through my role at Oxfam where I was working at the time.

However, I was very interested in finding out how the organisation had changed in its transition from IVS to Skillshare Africa and jumped at the chance to be involved. That was back in 1992, I became Chair a year later and eight years on, Skillshare Africa has changed dramatically as an organisation. The process of developing the first Corporate Strategy in the early nineties focused the organisation on what it believed in, what it did well and where it wanted to go. The second Corporate Strategy has built on that foundation.

The steady introduction of good management practices and policies, quality systems, and encouragement

for staff to take responsibility for their areas of work, has transformed the organisation in recent years.

One of the most exciting changes of the last ten years, in my opinion, has been the development of local Programme Advisory Committees (PACs). Their increasing responsibility for the programme work in their countries is designed to transfer areas of governance from the UK-based Board of Trustees to southern Africa.

Progress has been slow, but we are definitely moving in the right direction. This 'localisation' is something that Skillshare Africa has always believed in and been proud of. We had a rather vague definition of what localisation meant in the early days, but this has grown into a very clear needs-driven focus with local people managing their own development processes. I have been privileged to travel to southern Africa representing the

Board of Trustees at various meetings. The first PAC conference in Lesotho was a significant landmark, as was the launch of our partnership with Link Africa in South Africa and the meeting between the Country Directors and Board of Trustee members to develop the current Corporate Strategy.

These meetings, and those in Leicester between staff and the Board, have always proved to be very valuable occasions and demonstrate the unity of purpose that Skillshare Africa now has.

This 10th Anniversary publication takes us back through time to highlight the kind of people - from Programme Partners, to development workers, to the staff - and events that have attributed to that unification. I hope that you enjoy reading is as much as we have enjoyed experiencing it.

Sarah Westcott
Chair of the Board of Trustees



Sarah (standing) and members of the Board of Trustees, Management Team and Programme Advisory Committee at a meeting to develop the new Corporate Strategy

Guiding the Vision

The history of Skillshare Africa through the eyes of its Directors

Skillshare Africa has had two Directors in the last ten years, Kathy Oliveira, who guided the organisation from conception through its infancy, and Cliff Allum, who has built on those foundations to take the organisation into what we know today. Their inputs, and the efforts of those working around them, have had a massive impact on the shape of the organisation. Rebecca Watson spoke to both Kathy and Cliff about the history of Skillshare Africa over the last ten years and the personal memories they have collected.

The roots of Skillshare Africa go back to 1917, when Pierre Ceresole set up an international group of people, Service Civil International (SCI), to work together in the cause of peace. The British section of this was called International Voluntary Service (IVS). The principal activity of SCI was, and still is, to run international work camps, where volunteers share skills, experience and understanding across frontiers.

In 1958, IVS made a longer term volunteer arrangement and sent a volunteer to work with a community in Ghana. During the 1960s, the long-term overseas volunteer programme became established and received funding from the British Government. Volunteer placements were determined by the British-based members and managed by expatriate staff.

Kathy Oliveira joined IVS in 1977 as a programme officer for Botswana, Swaziland and Lesotho. Her role included recruiting development workers, organising their training and liaising with the southern Africa Projects Officer who split her time between the three countries.

By 1985, this model of work was becoming untenable.

There was pressure from the overseas volunteers for a more local approach to development.

The focus of the programme had also narrowed, and was based on four countries: Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique and Swaziland.

"The long-term programme did not fit into the same criteria as the rest of IVS," explains Kathy.

"We were not pulling in the same direction and those of us involved in the overseas section started to realise that it might be better to separate."



Kathy Oliveira (centre) in her days as Director with Lesotho Country Director, Matisetso Libetso (Left) and the late Archbishop Trevor Huddleston

The Management Committee of IVS recognised the need for change, and resolved to separate the long-term volunteer programme from its other activities. IVS also took the imaginative and innovative step of establishing a framework for this programme that would turn it from a programme of sending volunteers, to a development organisation which responded to locally identified needs.

The keystone of the new organisation was to be localisation, which was eventually defined as the appointment of local staff to determine and manage the programme. The first local staff were appointed in 1986.

Kathy became Overseas Programme Director of IVS in 1986 and sees maintaining that commitment to localisation as a great achievement.

"All that took place in the lead up to 1990 when Skillshare Africa was launched shaped the way we looked as an organisation. We didn't start with a clean slate and say 'right, we're going to do this'. A lot of the foundations were laid while we were still part of IVS where we were somewhat autonomous anyway.

"It was felt very strongly – particularly by those overseeing the programme in southern Africa – that there was strength in employing local people to run the programmes in the countries.

"I think we were one of the first organisations to really push for localisation. Many similar charities were thinking along the same lines but were slow in getting from ideological to practical.

"Those that introduced localisation were rather tokenistic in their approach, they didn't really believe as we did that it was the best way forward."

Skillshare Africa became an independent charity on January 1 1990. Kathy remembers some uncertain times when those guiding the organisation had wondered whether they had made the right decision.

"We had a long-term vision and we were determined to make it work. We knew that our policy on localisation was right and that there was no way we would go back to ex-patriot leadership.

"We were driven by a vision that was wonderful and one we were sure would succeed ... but there was always that dread at the back of our minds.

"This was a period of change and change always brings with it uncertainty.

We were moving power from the UK to southern Africa and while everyone agreed in principle, sometimes in practice there was tension.

Many people, here and in Africa were unsure about their futures.

"While it was a difficult situation at the time I know that localisation was definitely the right thing to do and it is something I am very proud of.

And I am delighted that Skillshare Africa has now moved the work of the Programme Development Unit to southern Africa so that the programme can be supported from the Region. That was an aim of mine."



One of the first Management Team Meetings, l to r: Luis Silva - current Head of Programme and Policy, Musa Simelane - then Swaziland Country Director, now Regional Programme Officer, David Harries - current Head of Skills Development, Jake Bharier - current Head of Support Services, Fauzia Osman - Mozambique Country Programme Officer, Cliff Allum, Matisetso Libetso - Lesotho Country Director and Tiny Healy - Botswana Country Director

Kathy left the organisation in 1993 and Dr Cliff Allum took over the reigns. Cliff had spent the previous seven years working for a community and training organisation in Birmingham, located in an area with large concentrations of ethnic minority groups, particularly communities from the Asian sub-continent and people of African-Caribbean descent. There was also a community with strong Irish roots.

"It was a fairly run-down area in some respects and had seen a lot of changes over a short period of time," remembers Cliff.

"The training and Community Resource Centre had been established by the West Midlands Enterprise Board to provide high quality training to people in the West Midlands experiencing disadvantage in the labour market. In reality, most of our work was with the communities of the inner city areas of Birmingham, which provided some interesting parallels with the work of Skillshare Africa.

"It was whilst working in Birmingham that I took on the role of Director/Chief Executive for the first time. It wasn't the easiest job in the world and I made a lot of mistakes. Having gone through that experience I have learnt a lot. I may have made mistakes at Skillshare Africa but certainly not the same ones as I made back then!"

Mistakes aside, it is easy to see from Cliff's work in Birmingham how Skillshare Africa came to be the organisation we know today.

"I became very interested in management, leadership and personal development whilst with the Training and Community Resource Centre and spent a lot of time exploring that.

"I developed my own skills and focused on areas around race and gender and how we address those issues within organisations.

"With the diversity that exists within an organisation like Skillshare Africa, I found it very useful to have experienced and worked on a number of those issues before in both my own development and my approach to leadership and management.

"The other thing, of course, was quite simply the work we were doing with our beneficiaries: developing the skills within a community and not just training individuals. We had an agenda that was not simply about trying to build a training institution but was about working with communities to determine their needs."

While Kathy had left the organisation in 1993 a little concerned about its stability, Cliff sees the work in place then as an important building block for the subsequent success of Skillshare Africa.

"While I agree with Kathy that the organisation was unstable, it is important not to underestimate what she had achieved."

"She had brought in key personnel both in the UK and southern Africa. Many of our management team were with Skillshare Africa when I arrived, although some are now in different roles."

"I inherited a good programme. The work in southern Africa might have been going through transition in some places but it was appreciated and respected. And there was a very strong commitment to localisation."

But Cliff faced some interesting challenges in his early days as Director, as he goes on to explain:

"The organisation shared some common values but the people involved lacked a shared understanding of what it was trying to do. My main priority in the early days was to work with the organisation to develop a common vision and get that shared and understood throughout."

"Also, it was important to establish momentum around positive change and getting people in the organisation to recognise that they could make a significant contribution to the lives of our beneficiaries. I tried to instil pride in how we address issues of development and confidence in what we do."

In 1994, working with explicit values of the rights of people to determine their own needs participatively, Skillshare Africa set out its first Corporate Strategy, a five-year plan for developing the work.

The main strategic activities during this time were concerned with improvement of Skillshare Africa's ability to support high quality development work. At the same time, the end of apartheid in South Africa meant that opportunities arose for the development of new areas of work, notably in Namibia and in South Africa itself.

With the task of stabilising the organisation achieved, staff team structures introduced, a management development programme underway, and quality systems being developed, attention focused more closely at the issue of development and what Skillshare Africa as a development charity were trying to achieve.

"If we looked at every individual placement at that time, most were good initiatives. But how much impact were they or Skillshare Africa having?"

"As a development charity we had to ask 'Does the programme deliver for the benefit of the country as a whole?'"

"It grew increasingly obvious that there needed to be coherence in the programme. Our work on that led to the second Corporate Strategy 1999-2004 and the development of the country plans which set out the programme in line with the individual development needs of each country."

"We now endeavour to provide holistic ways of working with Partner Organisations, concentrating on building long-term partnerships offering a range of inputs from development workers, to project funding, to leadership development."

"And, of course, we cannot do all this without the support systems we have built. We've spent a lot of time improving the communications systems and financial management systems. Sometimes we have even found ourselves on the cutting edge of technology when we had believed ourselves to be mainstream. We were running the trials!"

Cliff has a lot of memories and highlights of his time at Skillshare Africa, the people and his visits to the countries.

"I remember my first visit to southern Africa in 1993. In Mozambique I stayed in a hotel with bullet holes in the walls and saw indescribable urban poverty. The natural environment was on a different scale, I recall vividly an electric storm in Swaziland, watching as it spread around the valley. And meeting my first development worker and beginning a rapid learning curve on water supply."

But the two things that really stick in my mind about Skillshare Africa on my early visits were sitting up late at night with colleagues, sharing our visions for the organisation. And the first Management Team Meeting where we all realised that actually, we could work together and this vision we had was going to succeed."

Kathy still works in development but a little closer to home. She is working for the UK Government's New Deal initiative working to regenerate a run-down area of Leicester.

It very much mirrors Skillshare Africa's approach of working with local communities to determine their own needs. Kathy was instrumental in the development of a Community Trust to help involve the local people in decision making, an idea she got from working with the Brigades in Botswana.



Cliff with Clare Short, Secretary of State for International Development.

When I was being interviewed for the job I was asked how I felt about the importance of working with communities," explains Kathy.

"I told them the story of the people who developed a machine for a farming community in East Africa to grind corn. It used the power of a bicycle. However, in this community, the women were not allowed to ride bicycles and the men didn't grind corn."

"The machine was useless and so was the development. You have to speak with the communities otherwise how are you going to know what their needs are?"

Cliff thinks Skillshare Africa still has yet to realise its full potential and, even after seven years as Director, is still excited by the current Corporate Strategy and beyond. Does he see Skillshare Africa lasting another ten years?

"If we retain a vision that is still relevant to our beneficiaries then we will still be here in another ten years. Lose sight of that and there is no reason to continue"

Southern Africa: Cause to Celebrate?

Southern Africa has been through some dramatic changes over the past ten years. Recently appointed Regional Director, *Imelda Diouf* talks to Skillshare Africa staff about their memories of the last decade and provides a very personal reflection on the changing face of the countries in which we work.



Nelson Mandela is freed and then elected president

Ten years ago? It's hard to go down memory lane and remember events with clarity. The mind starts to play games; the good times are forgotten merely because they were happy and the bad times are pushed back to the recesses of the mind because pain is always safer in a dark place. I try so hard to recall the events of the 1990s – yet it is only with the help of newspaper archives, the Internet and intense discussion with friends that memory is brought into focus.

1990 was a time of celebration in southern Africa's newest democracy. The war of liberation had finally been won; SWAPO triumphed in the first democratic elections and Namibia emerged.

Across the border Nelson Mandela was entering his 25th year of imprisonment courtesy of the

Apartheid regime. South Africa was becoming more isolated as both internal and external pressures mounted.

Mozambique was still at war. The Structural Adjustment Programme of the World Bank lending money to poor countries placed more assets in the hands of government and did not allow the private sector to flourish. This created a decrease in the provision of health and education causing greater poverty among people.

The Mountain Kingdom of Lesotho was experiencing military rule. King Moshoeshe II had literally been packed into a car by military personnel, driven to Bloemfontein and exiled to England.

The nation was both shocked and angry.

By contrast there was an atmosphere of calmness in the Royal Kingdom of Swaziland. With its history of 600 unbroken years of monarchy, King Mswati III had established himself and was three years into his rule.

Botswana maintained its sense of democracy, unity and tolerance evident among the Batswana people. Few natural resources meant that development was a slow process, yet economic growth and stability showed the reason for Botswana being labelled as 'The Star of Africa'.

As the decade wore on the highs and lows have resulted in a range of emotions among southern African watchers - intense joy and pride, fear, frustration, utter disbelief, satisfaction, achievement, hope and despair.



Thinking over the past decade Gcinikile Dlamini, Skillshare Africa Country Co-ordinator sees Swaziland as a place where the education system has changed.

"The gender balance is now most satisfactory," says Gcinikile, who has been with Skillshare Africa since 1996.

"Though less girls enter the fields of science and mathematics, there is almost equal balance of girls and boys on the school benches.

"This general improvement in education has been felt at many levels, there is a decrease in the number of women who die during childbirth, as well as a decrease in infant mortality."

Yet a shadow is cast over the nation as King Mswati III and other Swazi citizens question the monarchy and

the principles of democratisation. Should the kingdom become a constitutional monarchy? Even His Majesty is asking whether he should have executive and legislative authority. With these questions unanswered a growing tension exists.

The floods earlier this year in Mozambique caused pain and suffering to many thousands of people. Who can forget the startling visuals of people running in desperation from the flooding coastal areas and the newborn baby being rescued from the tree? The surviving mother and baby became a symbol of hope and life, a reflection of the peace agreement brokered between the government and Renamo a few years earlier.



Albano Veiga Jr, Country Director Mozambique

Goods and agricultural production have started to recover and Mozambique is experiencing a high rate of economic growth. The streets of Maputo vibrate with life and activity. Building construction is in evidence all around the city. Yet there remains a high dependency on international aid rather than external investment. Albano Veiga, Skillshare Africa Country Director, who has been in the Maputo office for nine years, said

"Though my country has experienced political, economic and social hardship, the will to survive and thrive is evident in even the remotest corners of Mozambique."



Children in front of the wall of Independence in Namibia

In South Africa the high level of crime and disrespect for human life casts shadows on the rainbow

nation. Johannesburg is often touted as the murder capital of the world and hardly a day goes by where passengers of taxis are not involved in gruesome vehicle accidents.

Yet this very nation helped the world realise that transformation is possible.

The queues that stretched for kilometres during the first general election of 1994 showed a willingness and determination to reconcile and rebuild.

The battle between those who have and those who daily sink beneath the poverty line is increasing. Yet this is also a nation that helped focus international attention on wildlife. Tens of thousands of birds had to be hand cleaned in May 1998 because of an oil slick and moved 500km away on the southern coast, before being allowed to swim back. The journey of Peter the Penguin was chartered all the way back to Robben Island.

The last 10 years have seen a number of people become displaced from their homes, either because of conflict or natural disaster.

The Basotho people experienced the mother of all parties when King Letsie III married amid glamour, pomp and ceremony earlier this year. The outpourings of joy and happiness were not stage managed, but sprung straight from the hearts of a nation who love their king and country.

Many SADC heads of government and other international celebrities who joined in with the three-day celebrations also honoured this celebration of national unity.



Matisetso Libetso,
Country Director Lesotho

"I am proud of my country, I am totally patriotic, I love the Basotho culture, language and people,"

says Matisetso Libetso who originally joined the organisation when it was part of IVS.

"Though we are so closely aligned to South Africa I see my country as a place that can develop according to its own principles," she says.

But the people of the Mountain Kingdom struggle to find a democracy that will embrace both traditional and democratic systems. The on-going political conflict experienced is an indication that multiparty elections and a new dispensation are not far from the thoughts of the people.

In Botswana the issue of citizenship for children of mixed parentage got international media coverage.

Tiny Healy, Skillshare Africa Country Director also with the organisation at its conception, remembers the court battle fought at the highest level of the judiciary. The right of citizenship for children

of Batswana women and foreign fathers was eventually won, but not without a high court battle. In the same decade the government changed the voting age from 21 to 18 years.

For young adults in Botswana this was a victory and meant that youth were

no longer marginalised from the political process. Since independence one party had always won the elections but this has made for new and fresh ideas to enter the political arena.

Yet the nineties have also brought disaster to the country and continued problems of lack of rain have caused mass famine and desertification. The wide outbreak of cattle lung disease in 1996 caused massive strife as hundreds of thousand of cattle had to be killed.

In Namibia tourism is on the increase. The desert country receives a growing number of visitors from not only southern Africa, but from Europe and the Americas.

Suzette Botes, Skillshare Africa Administrative Officer says:

"Namibia is a secure and safe place to live, there are no ethnic wars or military coups. It is a stable country on the continent of Africa."

"Since independence regular elections have been held – this is a sign of a functioning democracy."

There are many new laws being drafted. The Property Act, Domestic Violence Bill, the Children's and Maintenance Act, are all a sign of a growing democracy. There is also now a Minister of Women's Affairs.

Yet the growing conflict in the north and the mass movement of Angolan refugees into the Caprivi Strip threatens the stability of a peaceful land. The fact that the government's decentralisation programme is facing ongoing difficulties is also a sign that peace is such a fragile state.

I am not a romantic and have little time for what I often describe as the mythical notions of 'Ubuntu' (humanity).

Yet some of my warmest experiences of humanity have come from southern Africa.



Tiny Healy, Country
Director Botswana

Though we have had many years living under severe conditions of racism, injustice and violence, I and so many people like me, have still risen above the limitations of our circumstances.

In South Africa we often talk about the rainbow nation. An expression coined by Desmond Tutu post the Purple Rain march. I love this memory because it is possibly my most fun memory of the struggle against the Apartheid regime.

At the start of the nineties when 'civil disobedience' was at its height I, with thousands of other people, attempted to march from many different points of Cape Town city centre.

The police used a new strategy that day – they sprayed the marchers with water canons filled with potassium permanganate. After we were sprayed purple the police could easily pick up the 'trouble-makers' and cart us off to jail. Yet it was a day of fun, the singing and cheering that went on for the next 24 hours was a sign of a nation that knew a new democracy was rising. Sure enough Nelson Mandela was released less than two years later.

Africa is a hard and harsh continent. There is greater freedom now than ten years ago, yet the history of colonialism, war and internal



South Africa's first free elections in 1994 were met with great celebration

conflicts, dictatorships, slavery, debt, depletion of natural resources, ethnic divisions and economic bondage continues to haunt the everyday lives of people.

The high rate of unemployment and massive retrenchment of mineworkers, the high rate of crime, the increase in domestic violence, political and economic corruption, the rapid spread of HIV and AIDS, the ongoing disabling effect of diseases like malaria and tuberculosis, the high level of illiteracy, pollution, environmental degradation, desertification and increased levels of poverty, makes me sometimes think: 'Why bother?'

Well, I bother because Africa is part of a world, one that cannot survive if one part is infected and dying. Either I can operate from the level of high politics and economics and say: 'this is all pretty useless, let me just live in the best way I can as an individual', or I can open up my mind, try to see the bigger picture and then become part of the solutions.

For me, the best way that I can live is to remember that I am part of a whole world. My best way of living is to ensure that I live well with everyone. It's simple, but for me it works. My work with Skillshare Africa gives me the opportunity to work with other southern Africans for the good and the future of people in our region.

Each day brings many challenges and frustrations, but each day also brings new hope and accomplishments. Daily I see practical implementation of actions and sustainable futures. I am happy to be part of this emerging rainbow nation in southern Africa. I am proud to be an African.

Home Economics is one of the subjects taught at Assumption High School



Current development worker John Earl and his counterparts. John has extended his contract at Assumption High School to implement the new metalwork course

Learning and Litter Bins

One person who has been able to see the benefits of the work of Skillshare Africa unfold before her eyes is Mrs Molly Letela, Principal of Assumption High School.

Mrs Letela has been with the school since 1980 and remembers very clearly Skillshare Africa's first input in 1991. Assumption is one of a number of partner organisations with whom we have established a long-standing and ever developing relationship. *Rebecca Watson* spoke to Mrs Letela as she shared her memories of the past decade.

Principal, Mrs Molly Letela is very clear about where the biggest impact Assumption High School's partnership with Skillshare Africa has been ... on the students.

Speaking from her office in the town of Teyateyaneng, Lesotho, she remembers with amusement and frustration the way current development worker, John Earl, cancelled his June break because of the demands of students.

"Even in the holidays John has no rest," she says.

"There is always a student asking 'could you help me with this' or 'do you know how I can do this'. Such is their appetite to learn!"

"That has been the biggest impact for me on the school, the way the pupils now not only have more opportunity to learn, but that they really find the lessons challenging and interesting.

"Some even want to miss other traditional lessons to spend more time doing the vocational subjects that most development workers have taught.

"Lesotho has so much unemployment, it is a big problem for the country. In the past, students were leaving the school unemployable.

Skillshare Africa has enabled us to widen our curriculum so that if students don't go on to further their education at technical schools, they at least have enough recognised skills to become apprentices."

The ages of students at Assumption High School are from 11 up to late teens or early twenties, depending on what age the student joined the school from primary education. 10 years ago there were 350 pupils. There are now 560 eager minds studying the core subjects of English, Sesotho, Maths and Science as well as additional subjects of religious knowledge and agriculture.

They can then choose between Home Economics, Bookkeeping or Woodwork, Metalwork and Technical Drawing. When they reach O-level standard these are fine-tuned into Accounting, Fashion and Fabrics, Woodwork or Metalwork.

The Metal Work course is the first of its kind in Lesotho with the school and Skillshare Africa joining forces to buy the necessary equipment to run the new subject.

It is less than a year old but there are already half as many metalwork students as there are woodwork.

Soon, there will also be a computer studies teacher adding another subject to the school curriculum.

Over the years, five development workers have passed through the gates of Assumption High School, two in woodwork and technical drawing - John Earl and before him, Ralph Minney - Rosemary Austin, who spent three years as a Home Economics teacher, Permaculture Advisor, Joanne Tippett and Fiona MacKenzie, a librarian.



The Assumption Library as books start to arrive thanks to the efforts of development worker Fiona MacKenzie

Fiona is a perfect example of the way in which Skillshare Africa attempts to impact on a country and the region as a whole as Mrs Letela explains:

"Before Ms MacKenzie came to us our library was very small and out-of-date.

The books were mainly big textbooks with little to excite or interest the children.

"Fiona came to Assumption and revolutionised the reading resources and we now have a fantastic array of literature and reference material.

"But she did more than just assist us. She co-ordinated with libraries across the district and country giving them channels through which to get books themselves."

Now, the counterparts who learned with development workers are doing their jobs, and are teaching counterparts of their own.

Skillshare Africa's relationship has had a real impact on the success of the school. The examination pass rate has risen from 30 per cent to 90 per cent in nine years and in 1998 they attained the highest grades in the country for their woodwork examinations.

But it has also developed other areas of school life.

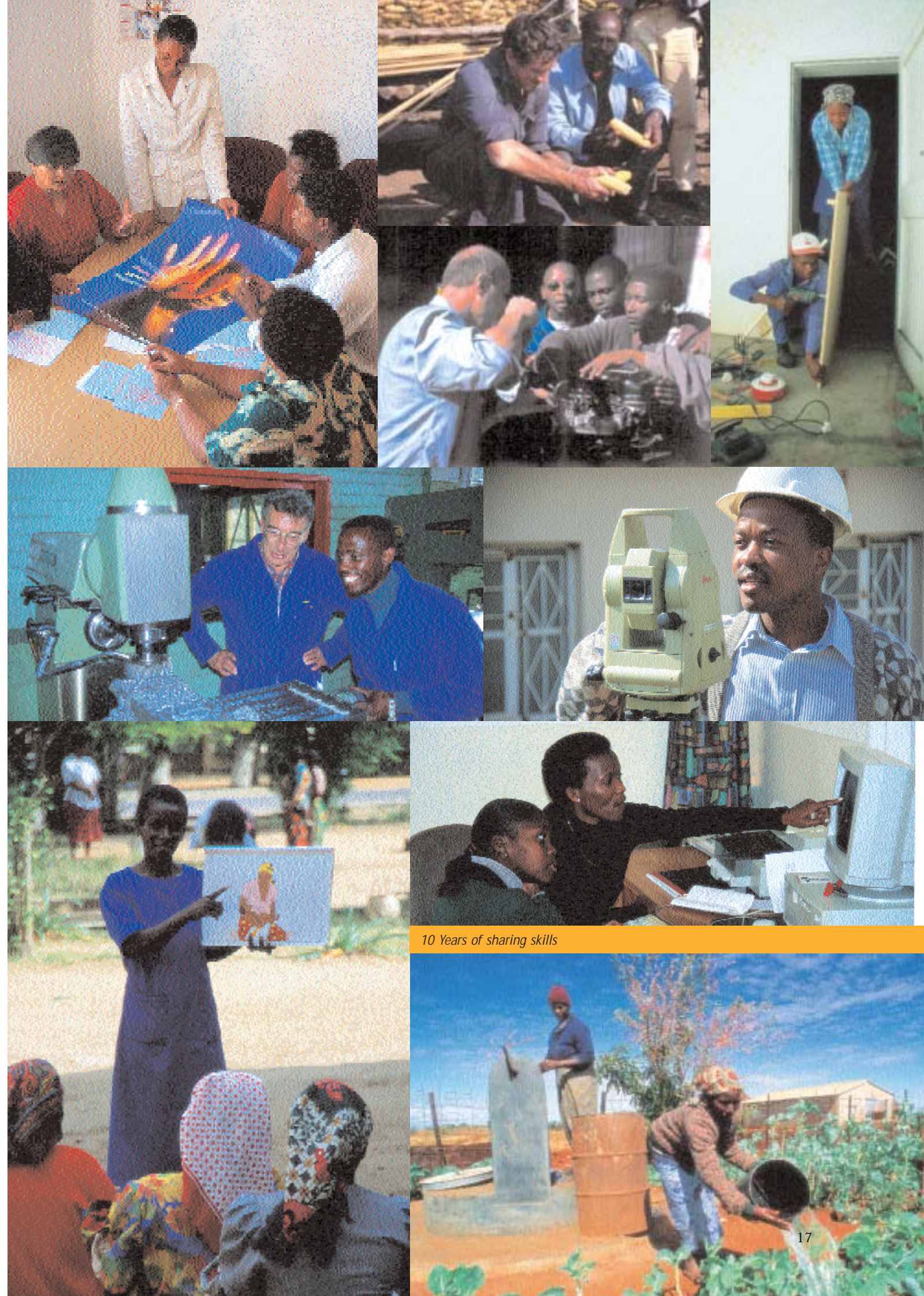
"Our bins, for example, were designed by Mr Minney and are the flip-up kind. It is quite unusual and something people often comment on when they visit the school."

"Development workers don't just teach practical subjects to the students, they can also have an impact in a non-academic way," says Mrs Letela.

This may seem like a trivial point but it serves to demonstrate the relationship Skillshare Africa endeavours to develop with all their programme partners. Working for sustainable development is about creating a lasting impression.

Whether it is on people, organisations or the environment, we work with partner organisations to meet their needs in a sustainable way.

Who knows what the students of Assumption High School, and the other technical and vocational education establishments we work with in Lesotho, will have achieved in another 10 years. But if the improvements of the past decade are any measure there is a lot more positive change ahead.



10 Years of sharing skills

The Development Diplomat

Every development worker has a different history with different life skills and personal philosophies that inspire them to work in development. Many development workers extend their contracts to continue the development they have helped to put into place, or continue different projects in different countries. One of our long-serving development workers is David Pinder, who has worked with Skillshare Africa since 1995. He has worked in two different vocational education posts in Lesotho, for the Thaba-Tseka Technical Institute and more recently at the Technical Institute of Leioaleng where he is working as a Carpentry Joinery Adviser. *Rebecca Watson* spoke to David in Lesotho about his life before Skillshare Africa and what prompted him to return to work for sustainable development in southern Africa.



David started his career in development teaching young boys in Sierra Leone how to do basic carpentry

When I first met David briefly on a visit to Lesotho in 1999 he seemed to be a very pleasant likeable man. He had a good relationship with his students and it was obvious he was committed and enthusiastic about his work at Leloaleng.

However, it was not until I spoke to him on the phone over six months later that I got to the heart of the passion that was driving him in what has turned out to be his life's work.

David is part of the Ethiopian Africa Black International Congress Church of Salvation (EABICCS) and is what he refers to as a 'Rasta Diplomat'.

I know very little about the EABICCS or the philosophy of Rastafarianism, but David's beliefs have taken him across the African continent working with local communities transferring his carpentry skills, as he explains:



Students at Leloaleng Trade School learn Skills such as carpentry and joinery.

"I went to Sierra Leone in 1991, before then I had been working and teaching carpentry and joinery in a number of places across England and Europe and worked in Israel for two years teaching simple carpentry techniques to 8-14 year olds.

"The work in Sierra Leone was very similar, myself and a Ghanaian Brother, Isaac trained young boys how to make furniture and helped to develop the vocational aspects of the Kabala Secondary School curriculum.

"We also co-ordinated similar activities at the Community Vocational Centre, working with men rather than boys, in conjunction with development practitioners.

"I had always wanted to go to Africa, ever since the age of 13 or 14 when I realised that all these negative images I had been absorbing up until then were not entirely true and that there was life and beauty oozing from this continent.

"We came from the West Indies to Britain to get a decent UK education and the roots of the West Indies lie in Africa so my mother says I have completed the circle!

"By 1992 things were getting difficult in Sierra Leone with the fighting. Liberian Rebels were living in the forest and when they emerge they looked very much like member of The Twelve Tribes of Israel – a group of Rastafarian members who were living in Sierra Leone.

"It became very dangerous to be Rastafarian at that time and we tried to keep a low profile for our safety. When my Ghanaian friend Isaac was killed, I decided I should perhaps move on."

David got a job working for VSO in Kenya at the Meru Tool Training Programme. He worked with Artisans teaching them how to make tools to refine their work. David also helped with the development of self-teach booklets so that Artisans did not have to miss much-needed work for training. He also facilitated the development of tool training networks across Africa in places such as Uganda and Tanzania.

It was while in Kenya that David stumbled upon Skillshare Africa in rather bizarre circumstances.

"I was talking with a friend, Alsa Buckley, about my philosophy, the way I saw my life and my work in development. She then proceeded to make fun of me and said that I had stolen my thinking from a Skillshare Africa brochure.



David's students preparing their course work for their end of season exams

"I'd never heard of Skillshare Africa so she lent me the brochure. Now, I'm not a big reader or development literature but I read it through twice. "I don't want to sound like I've just swallowed the Skillshare Africa PR manual but I feel that they have the right approach to development.

"It's about getting involved with human sustainable development, transferring real skills and allowing people to shape their own lives.

"I have always believed that human development has to be about helping people to live long, healthy lives, to acquire knowledge and have access to resources to enable them to give themselves a better life.

"I only like to be associated with things I feel comfortable being associated with and I really wanted to work with Skillshare Africa.

"They have an ethical outlook on development and work in a way that I think all development agencies should operate. There are so many big development projects that mean nothing to the community because the people who have installed those projects have not worked with the people.

"I remember a story about an organisation that built a fish factory by Lake Turkana in Kenya. They felt that this would be good for the Turkana people, providing them with food and work.

"But what they didn't realise that was for the Turkana people, traditionally pastoralists, a fisherman was the lowest form of person.

If you were illegitimate, un-schooled or anything else looked upon with sour eyes, you fished for a living.

"So, of course, none of the Turkana people wanted to be involved with this project and the factory they built is collecting dust by the side of the lake."

David has very strong views on development and particularly the North's relationship with the South. From growing up in Brixton to teaching throughout the UK, the negative perception within which Africa is held disappoints him.

"People seem to think that when you get past the Mediterranean Sea you enter a time warp. They need to realise that developing countries are not moving at a slower pace, they are moving at a different rate. They have different value systems and think about things in different ways to the industrialised nations.

"That doesn't make them slow or behind, they just have different needs."

The needs of the Lesotho people is something David has had to think about a lot in his time with Skillshare Africa. His first placement was in Thaba-Tseka where, under the leadership of a dynamic Director and alongside another long-serving development worker, Alan Moore, they turned the Technical Institute into a one of the most respected in Lesotho.

Having finished that placement early in 1998, David was keen to reach the goals he had set in 1995 and rejoined Skillshare Africa Lesotho at the Technical Institute of Leioaleng.

This was where I met him in 1999. He was busily erecting a stage upon which to perform the graduation ceremony. He and a number of his students were hard at work endeavouring to get it finished before the end of term, which was why our meeting back then was brief.

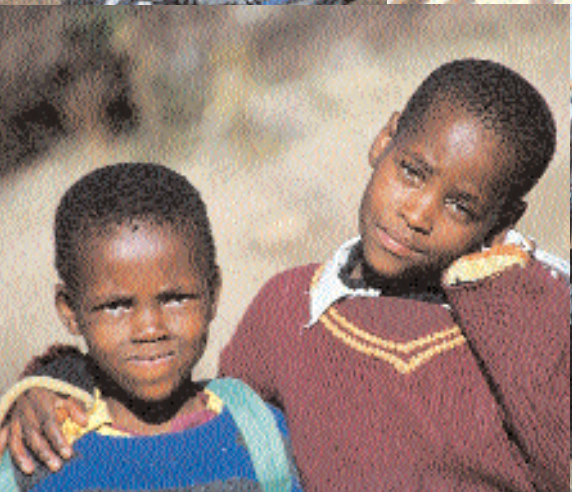
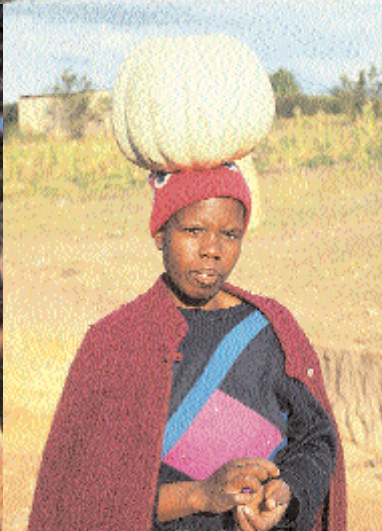
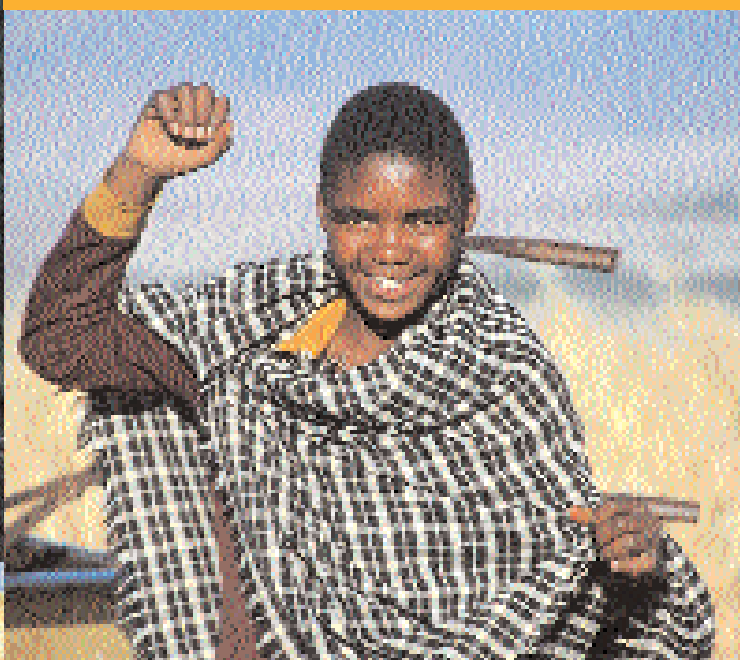
The wooden structure in the grounds of the school has become something of a symbol of partnership for David and the way in which the school has come together in recent times.

"All five departments had an input on that stage. It could have just been a carpentry department project but it hasn't turned out that way. The building department were involved, the electricians – everyone. It is a tribute to the integrated activities of our school."

Not all development workers relate as closely to Skillshare Africa as David does but he is not alone with his views on development. Part of what attracts people to Skillshare Africa is our commitment to working in partnership in accordance with the needs of the communities. It is this which gives the people of southern Africa confidence in our work and development workers the knowledge that they are working for sustainable development.



10 Years of working in partnership with the people and communities of southern Africa



An Organisation in a Changing Environment

Skillshare Africa is more than a volunteer-sending organisation, it is a development charity. Even in the past, when the organisation was still part of IVS, there was a philosophy of building world understanding. Here *Jake Bharier*, who has been with Skillshare Africa since October 1991 takes us through the change in the international development environment and how Skillshare Africa has evolved in its own thinking over that time.

If you look at the roots of an organisation such as Skillshare Africa you can see where their philosophy originates.

IVS was part of the world peace movement, bringing people together in the cause for peace following the First World War. It has always had purposes deeper than merely volunteer-sending. The overall aim of IVS was to build greater cultural understanding, and one way of doing this was through national and international workcamps.

In the mid-1960s the development environment was still dealing with the consequences of the end of the Empire. Governments were preoccupied with the Cold War and with preserving trade markets.

In this environment, voluntary organisations (some of which, like IVS, had existed for many years) found various roles, often described as supporting independence, encouraging independent movements and tackling the guilt of colonialism.

The break from IVS in 1990 was due to a change in vision for the long-term overseas programme. It had become apparent that the old model of bridging the gap in international understanding was no longer entirely appropriate for the work in southern Africa. Sustainable development was now the key aim.

Skillshare Africa's commitment to localisation, which began when they were still part of IVS demonstrated a deep-rooted commitment to working for lasting change. The employment of local staff and the use of Programme Advisory Committees (made up of government and programme partner personnel) to provide support for the strategic issues of the programme, was deemed crucial to maintain an effective programme.

Because we see ourselves as a development charity foremost, project work comes naturally into the equation. This wasn't always so. There was a time when people argued about why we were involved in project funding, particularly on projects where there was no need for a development worker.

Project work had grown without clear thinking initially. Skillshare Africa did as the international development environment did: set up projects to do in developing countries, rather helping developing countries to do projects. It started because the opportunity for funds became available.

With the advent of our first Corporate Strategy in 1994, projects found their place in the organisation's vision and values. We began to concentrate on the outcomes and the process, not the inputs. The inputs - be they human or financial resources - were tailored to the needs of our programme partners.

It was recognised that if we were truly to work for sustainable development and help organisations to develop and grow, we may be required to provide financial support. Sometimes a development worker would be needed to share and develop skills, sometimes all the necessary skills were in place and all that was needed was funding.



Swaziland Action Group Against Abuse are one organisation benefiting from project funding

In the current political climate, with DFID independent of, and equal to, the Foreign Office, Trade and the Ministry of Defence, there are no longer such close ties to these departments and their workings. Skillshare Africa's approach to development is coming into its element. It is encouraging to find that we are able to lead discussions on issues such as funding.

So has Skillshare Africa adapted with the changing view on international development or has the environment been influenced by the work of Skillshare Africa? In truth, both are contributing factors to the organisation we know today.

The overall development environment has changed quite considerably during this period. We can't ignore what's happening in the wider world but we have never lost our own focus.

Now, the development community is being forced to become more strategic, funders are moving away from funding NGOs in the North in favour of giving direct funding to the South. The focus of the world around us is changing but Skillshare Africa is still in charge of its own destiny.

I can't say what the future will bring. We may work more closely with government departments on development issues rather than individual community groups. We may find more of our work turning to advocacy.

It was interesting to see how Civil Society came together to back the Jubilee 2000 campaign and had such a great impact. It would be nice to build upon the feeling that people are being heard.

The Difficult Art of Learning to Listen

Sharing Skills is a two-way process and development workers often get as much out of their relationship with southern Africa as they put in. *Rebecca Watson* speaks to one development worker who has maintained his commitment to development and the continent he grew to love.

Africa has a way of stealing your heart. The beauty of the people and the landscape, whether you are working or just visiting the continent stays with you forever.

The experience you gain working in development is also one which no other job can emulate. Being a development worker - a new country, new climate, new customs and new ways of working, can affect your whole outlook on life.

It is no surprise therefore, that many Skillshare Africa development workers continue to work in development and southern Africa when their time with Skillshare Africa is over. A recent study involving 26 development workers in placement between 1978 and 1998 revealed that 62 per cent would definitely work overseas again and many already were.

One such person is Gareth Richards, currently living and working in Johannesburg as South Africa Programme Director for Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO).

Gareth joined Skillshare Africa in 1992, working for the Swaziland Association for Crime Prevention and the Rehabilitation of Offenders (SACRO).



Gareth Richards prior to his trip to Swaziland

The lessons he learned in his 12-months with Skillshare Africa and SACRO have been invaluable in his work developing and managing the VSO programme in South Africa.

"There is no substitute for the direct experience of working in the region," explains Gareth.

"In my job you need to know the grass roots. You need the experience of rolling your sleeves up and working alongside your colleagues.

"It helps to give you a better understanding of the needs of all parties - from the beneficiaries, to the programme partners, to the volunteers."

Like Skillshare Africa, VSO see sharing and developing skills as an important part of working for sustainable development.

They currently have 600 volunteers working in six southern African regions, 40 of whom work in South Africa with Gareth.

While Gareth cannot, and would not, admit to knowing everything, he has learned lessons from his time with SACRO that he can now use to advise VSO's own volunteers

"My Director at SACRO was a brilliant man. A very genial character, helpful and direct.

"After about six months in the placement we had an informal meeting and I asked him how he thought my work was going.

"He said: 'If you were African, you would have listened a lot more and said a lot less'. I was very embarrassed but it was a good lesson to learn.

"It made me think about my methods. I was bringing in northern ways of working because that is what I thought I should be doing.

"My director was right, how could I introduce systems and ways of working before I was really aware how SACRO and Swaziland worked?"

"My advice to new development workers and volunteers is this: Take what is already there, what already works and develop it. Look at traditions, at similar organisations in different parts of the country and always test your thoughts with those around you before putting them into practice."

Before joining Skillshare Africa, Gareth spent most of his working life in the probation service, working on rehabilitation programmes and with young offenders. He also spent some time working with young adults with learning difficulties for MENCAP.

Immediately before joining Skillshare Africa he was employed by The Prince's Trust as national co-ordinator of young offender initiatives.

After finishing his placement, he travelled for a while then got a job with Save the Children Fund in the UK.

"I had been bitten by the bug. I knew that I wanted to work in development after working for Skillshare Africa for 12 months. I also knew that I wanted to work in Africa."

"It was really difficult to get a job overseas immediately though."

"My work as a development worker had stood me in good stead but I needed middle-management experience."

"I began working for VSO in 1997. The headquarters are officially in Putney in London but it is the offices in the countries that shape the programme in line with the needs of local communities. This adds strength to the work."

"There's lots of paperwork and administration but no two days are ever the same and there is lots of people contact, which I love."

Gareth isn't an exception to the rule. There are many former volunteers and development workers still working in development.

Some find it very difficult to resettle in their home countries after working in Africa and can't wait to get back. Some make being a development worker a life-long career working for a number of different organisations in lots of countries.

Alternatively, they find posts working for charities. Many of the current Skillshare Africa staff in the UK office have worked as development workers or volunteers.

"Skillshare Africa and VSO are similar in that they feel that learning should be a two-way process," says Gareth.

"This is not always an easy philosophy to grasp. I know that when I was working for SACRO, many people perceived me to be the 'overseas expert'."

And in a way I guess I moulded myself into that role. My Director's comment about my manner in my first six months confirms that.

"But while there may be many ways in which the development workers' knowledge and skills are more advanced than the local communities, to see yourself as an expert can be very ignorant."

"There is so much you can learn from southern Africa. Certainly their 'alternative to custody' ideas were far in advance of anything I had experienced in my many years in the UK justice system."

"But I learnt more than that. I learnt a lot about me and a lot about what I wanted to do with my life."

"Whatever country you come from, whatever job you do, the lessons you learn as a development worker are those which stay with you forever."

"Sure, I picked up experience that is invaluable in my current role at VSO. But I absorbed a lot more than that."



Five Years as Friends

Friends of Skillshare Africa (FOS) was officially launched on the day the Skillshare Africa celebrated their fifth anniversary. Five years on, Friends has gone from strength to strength with more than 200 members.

Rebecca Watson spoke to two members to find out what being part of FOS means to them.

Friends of Skillshare Africa was formed to enable people to support and become involved with international development.

Naz Bharwaney is one such person and a member of the highly active London FOS group which was formed in 1998.

"Our key role, as far as I am concerned, is communicating the work of Skillshare Africa in an easily accessible way," he said.

"A lot of people are interested in development but are not sure how they can get involved. They may not want to become a development worker but still want to support positive change in southern Africa.

"Through Friends of Skillshare Africa we are able to show the public that there are many ways of supporting sustainable development.

"We can also highlight the issues southern African communities face to an interested audience giving them a true picture of what the local communities are trying to achieve."

London FOS have been involved in a number of awareness raising projects from exhibiting on behalf of Skillshare Africa at local events to arranging development education evenings.

One of the London group's most significant events so far was a development education evening they arranged in 1999. Speakers from Skillshare Africa and Action for South Africa (ACTSA) talked on the theme of debt and development to around 40 attendees who were then given an opportunity to ask questions and debate the issues raised on the night.

Returned development workers often maintain their links with Skillshare Africa through FOS.

One such development worker is Sue Bicknell, who returned to the UK in January after spending 18 months in Botswana at the Khama Rhino Sanctuary Trust.

"Former development workers have a wealth of knowledge on the situation in the countries where Skillshare Africa works and FOS is a good medium through which to share this learning.

"On my return, as a member of FOS, I gave a public talk on the work of the Khama Rhino Sanctuary and was pleased to find people in the UK interested in hearing about my experience.

"Khama was set up to protect and increase the breeding population of the white rhino in Botswana. When I started my placement there were only five white rhinos in a country with an area about the size of France.

"When I left there were seven, the trust itself was virtually self-sustainable and carefully managed eco-tourism was helping to bring in not only funds for the trust but trade to the surrounding businesses such as caterers, builders and fencers.

"In June 2000 I attended the DFID Policy Forum in Birmingham, an event run by the UK government's Department for International Development giving those interested in development an opportunity to share their thoughts and ideas.

"As someone who had worked in development I was able to share my experiences and contribute to the discussions."

Other activities supported by Friends from all over the country include fundraising, helping with corporate events, giving talks on international development and supporting the UK office staff running appeals and organising activities.

In September 1999, Friends of Skillshare Africa held their first development education weekend in Derby, UK. Supporters from all over the country made the trip to the Midlands to learn about the impact AIDS and HIV is having on development in southern Africa. Ways of disseminating this learning were also explored as FOS members completed workshops on running events, contacting the media and

giving presentations and talks, empowering them to promote international development and Skillshare Africa's role in the sector.

Over the past five years FOS have run several appeals to support specific areas of Skillshare Africa's work in development.

First came the Mobile Technical Training Institute appeal which successfully raised over £3,500 to help people living in rural Swaziland learn the practical skills needed to build rainwater catchment tanks at their homesteads.

In 2000 the Mozambique appeal raised over £14,000 to support the development needs of the country after severe flooding made thousands homeless and destroyed infrastructure. Other appeals over the years have dealt with the issues of rural poverty, children's health and HIV and AIDS.

Friends also join forces to add weight to other campaigns supported by Skillshare Africa.

In May 1998, Friends joined a 70,000 human chain at the People's Summit in Birmingham. It was a mass public plea to world leaders at the G8 summit to cancel the unpayable debts of the world's poorest countries.

Each FOS member chooses their own level of commitment and involvement. Whether it is donating time, knowledge or financial support, each member has an important contribution to make to the international development environment and, more specifically, the work of Skillshare Africa.

Messages from two Patron of Friends of Skillshare Africa Richard E Grant & Sir Trevor McDonald OBE

"I have been supporting the work of Skillshare Africa through Friends for five years and am delighted to see how the organisation has grown in that time.

We have seen great change in the region over the past ten years, both politically and socially. Skillshare Africa too has evolved but their basic philosophy remains - that working in partnership with people, in accordance with their own needs, is the best way to change lives for the better.



It is this philosophy that keeps me supporting their work. We all hope that one day there won't be a need for development organisations such as Skillshare Africa and it would be nice today to be able to say that poverty, lack of good education, health care, sanitation et cetera, are no longer an issue.

Until that day, I hope Skillshare Africa will continue, as they have done for the last decade, to help the people of southern Africa achieve great things."

"I know how people can be trapped by poverty and that given the right opportunities most people will work hard to free themselves from that poverty.

The chance to learn a practical skill can make all the difference and that is why I decided to support the work of Skillshare Africa by becoming a Friend. Congratulations Skillshare Africa on 10 years in international development, long may your good work continue."



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