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READ AND WRITE

# Hands-on

Learning from our implementing partners

## Sumbandila Outliers Programme

**A culture of under-achievement:** A culture of under-ambition and under-achievement is a well-documented problem in South African schools. The 2009 Grade 12 results show that Limpopo has the highest number of dysfunctional schools in the country, with 186 schools achieving a pass rate of less than 20%. The rural areas from which Sumbandila draws its students are characterised by deeply entrenched social problems and poverty, degraded physical environments and poorly performing schools - all of which limit opportunity and achievement. Moreover, the migration to the cities of successful individuals who could act as role models exacerbates the lack of meaning and ambition in the lives of rural children.

**Sumbandila Outliers Programme:** Based at Ridgeway College, in the town of Makhado (formerly Louis Trichardt), Sumbandila Scholarship Trust has developed several programmes, including its unique 'Outliers' enrichment programme, to assist exceptional children from rural and disadvantaged communities in Limpopo to develop their potential. At the heart of Sumbandila's mission is to build the ability and willingness to succeed. Sumbandila also inculcates a sense that individuals can and must make a difference as social entrepreneurs. Sumbandila students speak about 'the new struggle', their struggle to improve their own lives. There are currently 67 children on the programme: 27 in Grade Eight, 21 in Grade Nine and 19 in Grade Ten. Most of them attend schools in the former 'homelands' of Venda and Gazankulu.

**Identifying potential:** A rigorous testing process is used to select programme participants. Between 500 and 600 children in their final year of primary school are tested across the Vhembe District each year. Testing is carried out in consultation with the Department of Education and school principals. Principals identify their top five students based on the financial need, age, academic ability and potential. These students complete a series of tests to assess language and arithmetical ability. Top candidates are invited for interviews and further testing, including a creativity test and two tests designed by the South African Institute for Entrepreneurship 5 (SAIE), one a 'culturally fair' IQ test and the other designed to measure entrepreneurial potential. Top performers are invited to join the programme.

**Investing in potential:** Participants take part in an integrated programme that addresses critical challenges learners face: academic excellence, psychosocial wellbeing and life skills. The programme is called the Sumbandila Outliers Programme. Learners attend week long Holiday Schools during school holidays and bi-monthly Saturday Schools during term time. The programme uses the facilities of Ridgeway College with whom Sumbandila has a partnership. The goal is to provide bright, determined children with intensive educational support and mentoring in core areas and thereby assist them towards success in tertiary education and later life.

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Sumbandila's vision is the transformation of underprivileged children with exceptional potential into entrepreneurs and leaders who make significant contributions to society and their own communities



**Measuring success:** Success is measured through continuous academic assessment during Saturday Schools and by monitoring the children’s academic results from their own schools. Their development through life-skills lessons, entrepreneurial workshops and field trips is more difficult to quantify but some attempt is made through observation and conversation with the children. Another measure is participation in community development programmes, youth organisations and civil society. In the longer-term success will also be reflected in university level entrance exam results and contributions to their communities.

### Results to date

The Sumbandila Scholarship Trust’s Outlier Programme has been in existence for only three years and, while the effect on the students’ personal and academic development has been remarkable, the true impact of the intervention lies in the future as they enter tertiary education, careers or start their own businesses. Over the three years only one of the children in the programme has had to be excluded for non-attendance, and absenteeism is rare. Sumbandila is one of the very few educational initiatives focused on children from rural areas in Limpopo and works to keep students motivated to remain in and succeed in school.

**Academic impact:** Academic performance is measured through internal testing and school results. The change in performance after participation in the programme has been significant. Sumbandila believes that their

methodology- involving the children, focusing on core concepts and integrating themes and projects across the subjects plays a key role in this success. The programme is fortunate to have the services and support of experienced Maths, English, Information Technology and Science teaching professionals whose adaptability has been critical to success.

**Mathematics:** Maths proficiency of those joining the programme in Grade 8 is generally very poor, so Sumbandila goes back to basics, focusing on addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. After the first year, learners have developed a better understanding of basic mathematics concepts. Very often, learners ask for explanations of work being covered at their schools. They have a real interest in learning, and enjoy the classes but the lack of frequent contact is a real drawback. Giving them workbooks (based on a pattern of sequential learning) seems to have had a significant effect.

Reports suggest that even teachers in participants’ schools are using Sumbandila Saturday School texts and material for their own Mathematics teaching. Informal student study groups are also springing up, led by Saturday School participants. While some Maths scores remain low, internal testing shows considerable progress among the majority and the achievement of excellence by some. This is reflected in many school reports, although it appears that, in many cases, assessment at these schools can be fairly arbitrary.

**English:** English classes are conducted at Second Language level and concentrate mainly on

Table 1: Sumbandila’s internal tests results for Grades 9 – 11 in Maths, English and IT in 2009 and 2010

		Maths		English		IT	
		Year	Score	Year	Score	Year	Score
2008 Grade 8 intake Currently in Grade 11	Gr9	2009	44%	2009	64%	2009	60%
	Gr10	2010	56%	2010	82%	2010	67%
		% increase	12%	% increase	18%	% increase	7%
2009 Grade 8 intake currently in Grade 10	Gr8	2009	65%	2009	61%	2009	69%
	Gr9	2010	74%	2010	80%	2010	73%
		% increase	9%	% increase	19%	% increase	4%



comprehension skills, vocabulary development and remediation of common errors in grammar, syntax and idiom. They are taught by an experienced, qualified remedial teacher. Progress in basic comprehension and communication skills has been consistent. However, language teaching is generally reliant on frequent reinforcement. Sumbandila is in the process of devising additional ways of ensuring that the skills acquired are regularly practised between Saturday schools.

Apart from the English classes, participants become accustomed to using English as a medium of conversation and communication at Saturday schools and holiday schools. Internet research, the widespread use of the Library, discussions on life-skill issues and the entrepreneurial games all contribute to extending vocabulary and increasing competence and confidence in the use of English.

**Information Technology:** Only two of the 69 participants had ever used a computer before joining the programme and only one has access to a computer at home. All participants now have their own e-mail addresses and are able to communicate with people around the world. They have also learned to use the Internet for research for school projects and common assessment tasks.

Computers are used to carry out online tests in both English and Mathematics, working on comprehension and language skills, as well as working specifically with geometry and

measurement. Using tools like protractors and compasses online is easier and more cost effective than the purchase of maths sets. Most learners do not have calculators nor do they have maths sets, so their schools tend not to focus on this area.

All learners have also learnt how to use MS Word templates, scanners and open-source image editing software. Classes have also concentrated on PowerPoint and for both the Grade 9 and 10's, the programme concentrates on developing word skills, through creating a family tree, greeting cards and working between applications. They were introduced to Excel in order to create graphs for Statistical Projects at school.

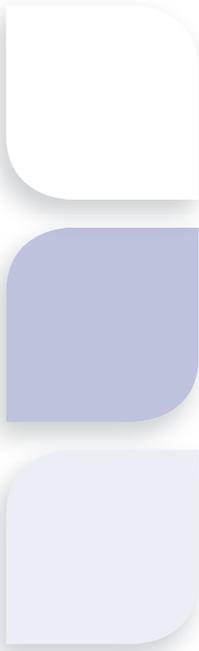
## Implications for broader policy and practice

The need for enrichment programmes: In the post-apartheid South African era, government investment in the public education system has increased significantly and currently stands at 22% of the total annual budget of the country. This has tended to create the impression particularly among local and international funders that financial investment in education is disproportionately excessive compared to the returns. There is a general reluctance to support enrichment programmes, which are seen as a luxury given that education is receiving significant funding and schools should deal with learner under-achievement.

### Individual opportunities

*Sumbandila is constantly looking for further opportunities for programme participants:*

- Nthabiseng Ndzeru, at Lemana High, has been selected to attend the University of the Witwaterstrand Holiday schools every July and December until the end of Grade 12.
- Nkhensani Maluleke at Nwaridi Secondary was promoted to Grade 10 after only 3 months in grade 9.
- Azwihangwisi Davhana at Tshivase Secondary was awarded the Vhembe District Certificate for Maths Achievement.
- Murendi Rampai won a Silver Award at the National Maths Olympiad.
- Eight of the Sumbandila Outliers have been short listed for Old Mutual Learners Scholarship Programme on entering Grade 10.



Yet, South Africa is still a long way from transforming our schools to reach those levels of productivity. In the meantime, children keep falling by the wayside without the help of enrichment programmes, seen as redundant. Until we have substantially improved the performance of all schools across the system, there will continue to be a need for support.

**Building on potential through merit-based programmes:** There is a general aversion to meritorious programmes in education. They are often seen as unfair and seen as benefiting learners who would have succeeded anyway. The improvement in performance by learners participating in the Sumbandila programme shows clearly the difference it makes to put these learners from disadvantaged background in high performing educational and social environment. This is shown by significant academic improvement in test results while participating in the programme.

The chances are that, despite their bright minds, some of these learners would not have been performing academically without the added investment of the Sumbandila Outliers Programme. The programme currently reaches 67 learners and has shown significant improvement for these learners and their families. Focussing on the children who show the greatest potential increases the chances that investments in children programme will produce the greatest possible results for individuals, and through them, and the programme's natural knock-on effect, for other children in their communities, now and in the future.

**This learning brief tells of the hands-on experience of:**



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