



ACAT's Impact on Children and Youth
January to June 2026

The human reality behind the numbers

When we look at KwaZulu-Natal today, we are witnessing a quiet crisis. KZN's expanded unemployment rate sits at a staggering 47.9%, but behind this statistic is a devastating reality: it is our young people who carry the heaviest weight of this economic collapse.

In the deep rural and peri-urban areas where ACAT works every day, youth unemployment isn't just a number—it balloons past 65% to 70%.

For us at ACAT, these aren't just figures for a spreadsheet. They represent young men and women full of untapped potential who are being locked out of the economy before they even get a chance to start.

This introduction frames the harsh terrain our youth navigate daily and shows exactly why our Integrated Livelihoods Programme (ILP) isn't just optional—it is a vital lifeline.

By walking alongside these young people and their families, we are helping them shift from discouraged onlookers into resilient agripreneurs and confident leaders.



The latest data from Statistics South Africa paints a clear picture of the structural walls our youth run into every day:

- **The Trap of Inactivity:** A heartbreaking 80% of young people aged 15–24 are economically inactive. They are stuck in limbo—not employed, not in school, and completely cut off from skills training.
- **Survival on the Margins:** 71% of these disconnected youth live in households surviving on less than R1,183 per person a month. There is zero room for error; every cent goes to basic survival.
- **The Unseen Burden on Young Women:** 57% of these income-poor, vulnerable youth are young women. They are often bound to the home, carrying the heavy, unpaid responsibility of caring for children and elderly relatives, which severely limits their freedom to look for work.
- **Homes Without Wages:** More than **one-third of rural youth grow up in households where no adult has a formal job**. Without working role models or professional networks, breaking into the job market is very difficult - like climbing a wall without footholds.



This year 100 youth qualified for job experience and training at the ACAT centre through the works programme initiated by Seriti Institute

Two Different Worlds: Rural Isolation vs. Urban Hubs

At ACAT, we focus our energies and resources on rural and peri-urban communities because we know that “rural” means facing a completely different set of rules compared to the cities.

What Our Youth Face	Rural & Peri-Urban KZN Youth	Urban KZN Youth
Real Unemployment (Expanded)	Over 65% – 70% (A massive wave of youth who have given up looking).	~48% – 52% (Severe, but kept alive by city networks).
Local Job Opportunities	Critically Low (<20%) (Local economies simply cannot absorb them).	~35% – 42% (Driven by retail, transport, and city services).
Keeping the Lights On	Child support and old-age grants, supplemented by family favors.	Informal trading, piece-work, or casual city labor.
The Biggest Roadblock	Distances, massive transport costs, and a total lack of local industries.	Intense competition for entry-level jobs and high costs of living.

In deep rural spaces the formal job market is practically non-existent. Youth here face a form of poverty that robs them of options:

- **The Schooling Gap:** Sadly, 72% of poor youth in these areas do not have a matric certificate. Without it, they are instantly locked out of modern, digital, or corporate entry-level jobs.
- **The “Transport Tax”:** For a young person in a rural area just traveling to a nearby town to print a CV or sit for an interview can cost up to 40% of their family’s entire monthly grant income. When looking for work costs more than food, active job hunting becomes an impossible luxury.

Why the ACAT Method Works: Sowing Seeds of Agency

When the formal market fails 4 out of 5 rural youth, they can’t wait for factories to open. They need to look at the land beneath their feet... Localized research proves that smallholder agriculture is the fastest, most sustainable way to break the cycle of rural poverty. ACAT’s Integrated Livelihoods Programme (ILP) works because it targets the hands, head and heart:

- **Tools matched with Mindset:** Giving a young person seeds isn’t enough. Real transformation happens when physical assets (arable land, clean water, quality inputs) meet a change in mindset—restoring dignity, self-belief, and purpose.
- **Our Grassroots Solution:** By combining Self-Help Sustainable Agriculture with micro-enterprise coaching and Savings and Loan Groups (SLGs), we are equipping KZN’s youth to grow their own food security, pocket their own profit, and rewrite their futures right where they live.
- **Annual YBLS Courses:** Each year we hold Youth Basic Life Skills courses in the areas we operate to give school going children the opportunity to broaden their minds by learning about
 - ♥ choices they can make regarding school subjects and career guidance
 - ♥ reproductive health
 - ♥ how to set up and keep records in a business
 - ♥ how to create a deep trench to produce a vegetable garden
 - ♥ spiritual options and the impact of this on their lives.



The photos in this report have been taken by our ACAT team and are an attempt to illustrate the dynamic that happens during the Youth Basic Life Skills Course. Just as geographical areas differ, so do the “styles” of the courses. But all courses teach the same content.

Practical demonstrations are held to take the participants through

- the various steps of establishing a vegetable garden
- keeping records of income and expenditure
- career guidance in the form of a test to guide them to suitable career options.

In terms of other basic skills, the course – run by their Area Implementing Committees (AIC) – deals with

- mindset
- identity
- spiritual beliefs and barriers
- nutrition and healthy living
- reproductive health

Catering is done by the AIC and they provide meals for children, many of whom rely on school feeding schemes for food, and since the courses are run in the holidays, they often will not have eaten breakfast. So food is very important.

And of course, plenty of fun!





Basic Life Skills participants from Watersmeet zone reported an interest in regular bible study after the spiritual development provided throughout the training. Some participants were simply grateful to finally own their own bibles, which they never had before.



YBLS lessons at Umzumbe



Excitement at Umzumbe to find out what career suits them best





These two photos were taken at the Umzumbe YBLS.

At each YBLS course a sealed ballot box is available for participants to post a written comment or complaint, and to hand in their confidential questionnaires. These boxes are then handed in to the office where they are read and captured (by one appointed admin staff member) and given to the Director for his oversight and action (if necessary).



The photos (*above*) show the children and the Community Training Team (*directly above*) who conducted the training at Mophela

YBLS at Izingolweni





YBLS at Taylors Halt



YBLS at Okhahlamba

YBLS with Walk In The Light, Drakensberg



YBLS in Nqutu



How YBLS has helped past participants



Abenathi Zuma from Okhahalmaba attended the Youth Basic Life Skills Training last year. She says:

“I especially enjoyed learning about God and developing business skills. I dream of becoming a businesswoman. Since the training, I started selling sweets at school and I am making a profit. I hope to encourage my friends to start a savings group with me.”

Abenathi's parents are delighted with the positive impact the training has had on her life.



Banenhlanhla Dlamini joined the programme in 2022. Before that she had done the YBLS as a teenager.

Although she now has a full-time job, she continues to apply the skills she gained through the Basic Life Skills programme. She runs a small business buying and selling fresh vegetables and fruit, creating an additional source of income.

Her business also benefits the wider community, as she purchases produce from other participants in the programme, helping to strengthen local livelihoods. Being part of the ACAT family has empowered Banenhlanhla to recognize business opportunities and develop an entrepreneurial mindset that continues to make a positive impact on her life and those around her.

