SchoolNet and DRDAR's work together to assist in the Clean-up of Bethania Secondary School

The province of the Eastern Cape is plagued by historical backlogs in the provision of universal access of basic services. Provision of ICT is a critical issue identified in the NDP and PDP. There is a greater demand now more than ever before to close the rural- urban digital divide in Eastern Cape. The Department of Rural and Agrarian Development (DRDAR) plans to kick-start a project that will help coordinate and attract investors to Rural ICT programmes in the Province. The plan is to expand ICT projects and the footprint in rural spaces. Rural development is a cross-cutting mandate and ICT access ought to champion and advance it. The DRDAR's approach is to organize and facilitate the broadband and Wi-Fi connectivity to rural schools, Agri-parks, SMMEs, and promote ICT training in rural areas.

The MEC of the DRDAR, the Hon. Mlibo Qoboshiyane in his 2014/15 policy speech, pronounced that the department, in partnership with the Department of Education and other stakeholders, would support at least 100 rural schools with broadband connection. Seven schools were selected to participate in this initial phase with the first school Bethania Secondary being used as a case study for the proof of concept. A baseline study was undertaken to provide a clear picture of the situation on the ground in terms of available infrastructure (computers, electricity), staff, learners and their matric pass rate. This report thus presents the findings of that study as well as the first of SchoolNet's activities to help clean up the school.

Bethania Secondary School, Mt Fletcher, Eastern Cape

Nestled in the Sathube Location, Bethani Admin Area, Mt Fletcher, Bethania is far from the beaten track and 35km on top of a mountain. The school has a total of 10 staff and a total of 407 learners between Grades 8 and 12 are also registered at the school as detailed in Table 1
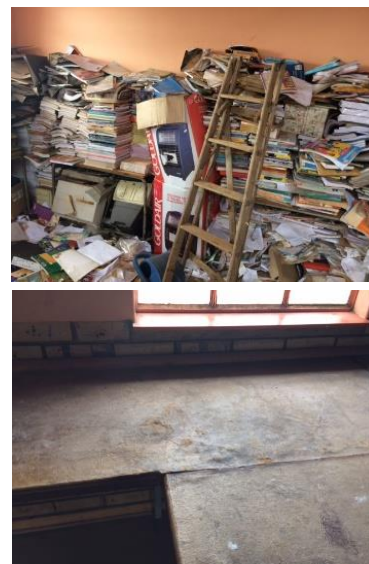
Item	Males	Females	Total
Number of Staff	4	6	10
Number of Learners	211	196	407
TOTAL	215	202	417

The school has a fence around its premises, a gate that barely locks, some burglar bars in the admin block, and despite the lack of security has never experienced a break-in. The school is built with bricks although there is no running water nor electricity at the school. Twenty desktop computers were donated to the school in 2013, however the solar panels that were installed were never operational and as a result the computers literally gathered dust. In the previous academic year, the school's matric pass rate was 8.2% with subjects such as Mathematics and Physical Science receiving pass rates of 23.8% and 9.38%, respectively.

School Visit

SchoolNet attended a meeting with the DRDAR and other partners in Bhisho on the 8th December 2016 and thereafter agreed to visit Bethania Secondary school with officials from the Eastern Cape Department of Education. The school visit foregrounded a range of challenges in the school:

- Blown off roof in the admin block
- Stacks of unused LTSM stored in the principal's office
- Poorly kept CPUs in the secretary's office
- An untidy storeroom which was used a dumping room for all sorts including grass cutters
- A leaking room earmarked to house the sponsored equipment
- Of the 6 classrooms, only 3 had desks and chairs. The remaining three classrooms had one or two desks and chairs that could be used by learners
- There is no running water which renders all toilets unusable
- There is no electricity, however several generators are present at the school

The work begins….

In the true spirit of partnership, all partners agreed to work together to help the school. SchoolNet SA committed to assist the school by helping with basic renovations before installing ICT infrastructure and completing teacher professional development interventions. The school with its governing body committed to fix the roof in the admin block as well as the leaks in the designated ICT classroom. The DRDAR promised to mobilise the municipality for the supply of electricity and the Department of Education agreed to re-distribute desks and chairs from schools that had been recently closed down.

In February 2017, SchoolNet's Mr Themba Mabaso and Ms. Mathapelo Sehume travelled to the Eastern Cape and worked with learners and teachers to address the challenges that could be solved as well as assess the progress identified in December 2016.

The assessment of progress revealed a few key focus areas for the SchoolNet team:

- Clearing out the storeroom and especially tidying up the unused books
- Sanding down desks to be used in storeroom
- Breaking and fixing broken windows in the designated ICT classroom
- Cleaning the designated classroom
- Assessing the classroom desks and chairs that could be fixed and reused.

Figure 1: December 2016 School Visit

The identified activities were completed with learner, teacher and parent assistance and we are proud to confirm that the following activities have been completed:

- Walls were cleaned and prepped in the designated classroom
- All walls in the designated classroom have been painted
- Desk/table frames have been sanded down and spray painted
- Spraying classroom table frames
- Windows have been replaced

Figure 2: February 2017 School Clean up

The work at Bethania Secondary School is a humbling experience as school on top of the mountain had clearly slipped off the radar. With minimal assistance the school is now working toward instilling pride and ownership from its learner and parent body. Stay tuned for more progress as we extend our support throughout 2017.

Omashani Naidoo & Mathapelo Sehume
SchoolNet SA

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