PARTNERS FOR POSSIBILITY

2018 Impact and Trends Report

Insights and learnings from programme evaluation
2018 Impact and Trends report

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1 Introduction

The Partners for Possibility (PfP) programme seeks to address the current crisis in education through a unique approach of leadership development and support for school principals, working in collaboration with other role-players in the education space. Symphonia for South Africa invites members of the business community to partner with a principal over a 12-month period. During this time both partners are exposed to a dynamic leadership development programme while being supported through the experience of applying new skills and knowledge in their individual schools, and equipped to nurture networks of support around their schools.

Since 2010 and up to 31 August 2018, Symphonia for SA has won multiple awards and accreditations for its innovative response to the country’s educational challenge, most notably the prestigious international WISE award (see list of awards in Appendix). Over the same period, Symphonia for SA launched a total of 842 partnerships between school principals and business partners. The number of schools, learners and communities impacted is depicted in the graphic below.

A simplified PfP Theory of Change

As the diagram on page 3 shows, the PfP programme is based on the assumption that the programme takes 3-5 years to reach its full impact in the schools where it has been launched. Over the course of a year the foundational building blocks of principals’ skills, supportive relationships, and change projects at the school (“I”, “We” and “The Work”) are put into place and gradually effect changes in the school’s culture and ecosystem, leading over time to shifts among its various stakeholders - teachers, governing body, parents, district etc. - and ultimately among the learners.
Simplified Theory of Change:

**Learners – improved academic performance**
- Perform better in standardised tests (primary schools)
- Improved NSC results (pass rate and quality of passes)

**Learners – equipped for adult life**
- Perseverance (reduced school dropouts)
- Critical thinking, problem solving and digital literacy skills
- Social & emotional skills

**Learners – feelings and attitudes**
- Learners feel valued & encouraged by teachers, parents & community
- Learners are able to see a future for themselves
- Learners develop non-academic skills

**Teachers – motivated and resilient**
- Less absent, less turnover
- More connected to learners
- + engaged in professional development

**Parents & Community – engaged & aligned**
- Attended school meetings
- Value their children’s schooling and see to learners’ attendance
- Volunteer to help / donations

**District – supportive**
- Supports rather than instructs

**Symphonia for SA partners and others**
- Ad hoc and durable partnerships with other organisations

**Healthy school ecosystem**
- School culture: positive energy, team spirit
- SGB – engaged and equipped
- Collective vision + active leadership

**School Principal – confident and competent leader**
- From “reacting” to “planning”
- Delegates & engages staff in decision making
- Has courageous conversations
- Promotes teachers’ unique potential
- Recognises and celebrates achievements
- Proactively collaborates with school stakeholders

**the “I” Principal’s Skills & Attitudes**
- Strong listening skills
- Focus on relationships
- Mobilising stakeholders
- Agency, confidence, sense of possibility

**the “We” Relationships and Social Capital**
- Relationship with Partner
- Community of Practice
- Access to Symphonia network
- Listening ear + networks & information
- Support network, innovation
- Opportunities

**the “Work” Change projects at the school**
- Determined by the school’s specific context and needs
- and the partners’ skills and networks

**PfP Facilitated 12-month programme**
- 3 Workshops (5 days)
- 3 Community of Practice sessions
- Leadership Coaching & Tillad sessions
- One-on-one sessions with PFP Farmer
- "Assignments" / documentation
Objective of this report

The objective of this report is to provide an overview of the evidence for the impact of PfP during 2018 along four dimensions:

- The growing number and diversity of schools, nationally, which have been exposed to the PfP programme
- The short-term successes of the partnerships launched in 2016-2017, which reached the end of the 12-month programme during the financial year 2017-2018
- The longer-term impact of PfP partnerships on school performance, with a focus on primary schools where the programme was introduced around 2013-2014
- Lessons learnt that contribute to our continuous effort to strengthen the PfP operational model and delivery processes.

2 Overview of the partnerships launched in 2018

This section provides an analysis of the partnerships launched in the financial year 2017-2018 (up to February 2018) and in the first half-year of 2018-2019 (i.e. up to August 2018).

Number of partnerships launched

In spite of a challenging economic context in South Africa in 2017-2018, PfP maintained its growth trajectory by launching more partnerships across the country than in the year before. In the first half-year of 2018-2019 (March to August), the Symphonia for South Africa team launched 133 new partnerships; almost as many as in the entire financial year of 2017-2018. In total, since the programme’s inception, PfP has impacted close to 20,000 teachers and an estimated 661,500 learners.
Extended spread across South Africa’s provinces

Not only has the number of schools reached by PfP increased: the programme’s geographic spread has also extended. Gauteng and the Western Cape, which in 2014-2015 represented 91% of partnerships launched, now account for only 54% of them, with almost half of partnerships launched between March and August 2018 being in other provinces.

PfP’s tremendous growth in the Northern Cape is particularly noteworthy and is bringing much excitement and relief in this province which severely lacks opportunities to strengthen its education system.

The North West Province is the only one of the country’s nine provinces where no PfP partnership has been launched to date. This will change later this year when the first PfP leadership circle is launched in Potchefstroom.
School profile

In line with its commitment to putting early stage education first, in the last 1.5 financial years PfP has continued to focus the majority of its efforts on primary schools. Of the 269 partnerships established between March 2017 and August 2018, 172 are primary or preparatory schools.

In terms of school quintiles, the move into other provinces has gone hand-in-hand with a stronger representation of national quintile 1-3 schools (which, by law, are forbidden to charge school fees). Quintile 1-3 schools make up 57% of the new partnerships launched between March 2017 and August 2018.
Outlook into 2019: new areas

While the coverage of schools in the main urban centres will continue to grow, the PfP team is gearing up for an increasing presence in outlying provinces. The following regions have been/will be added to the PfP map during the second half of the 2018-2019 financial year: Pofadder (Northern Cape), Potchefstroom (North West). The following geographic areas are currently being explored as possible regions for leadership circles in 2019:

- Eastern Cape – Jeffreys Bay, Humansdorp
- Free State – Bloemfontein
- KwaZulu Natal – Midlands, Pietermaritzburg, Empangeni, Newcastle
- Limpopo – Modimolle, Hoedspruit
- Northern Cape – Kimberley, Springbok, Hantam, Hotazel, Prieska.
- North West – Hartebeespoort

3 Short-term outcomes from the 2016-2017 partnerships

Note: this section is a summary of the findings of an internal evaluation conducted by the M&E team of Symphonia for South Africa in April-May 2018. It covers partnerships launched in the financial year of 1 March 2016 to 28 February 2017 (and completed in the 2017-2018 financial year).

The internal evaluation and its findings were peer reviewed by Cara Hartley, evaluation consultant at Palmer Development Group. The peer reviewer’s judgement was positive.

This evaluation report is a valid representation of PfP participants’ completion rate, views and experiences of the programme. The results are based on accurate analysis.

Completion rate

At Partners for Possibility, we appreciate that the success of cross-sectoral partnerships is dependent on a multitude of personal, relational and contextual factors. While we support every partnership as closely as possible and coach them through challenging episodes that most inevitably experience, we know that occasionally circumstances arise that make it impossible for a particular partnership to reach the end of the programme. Our goal is that at least 90% of the school principals who start the programme will complete it twelve months later.

While this is an ambitious target, we are pleased to have reached it again in 2017-2018, with a completion rate of 94%.
Of the 177 partnerships launched between 1 March 2016 and 28 February 2017, 159 were unproblematic, while 18 were problematic in some way.

- Five partnerships dropped out of the programme and three were discontinued with the principals going back to the waiting list (meaning that they will be given another chance – in fact most of them were already re-partnered during 2018)
- Three business partners completed the year without their principals
- Two principals completed with a new business partner and two business partners completed with a new principal
- And three principals were transferred to a new school, but remained in the programme.

These challenges are inherent to the complex and unpredictable environment in which PfP operates; however, the 94% completion rate remains above our target of 90%.

Satisfaction levels

The satisfaction of school principals and business partners who have participated in the PfP programme is assessed through a post-programme survey.

All PfP participants are asked to rate their satisfaction about various aspects of the programme and to provide feedback about the outcomes they have experienced. The results for the 177 partnerships who completed the programme in 2018 show that the large majority found the programme to be substantially beneficial to their leadership and to their schools. Both principals and business partners are asked to rate, on a scale of 1 to 5, their overall satisfaction with the PfP programme. From this cohort we received 98 responses from principals and 110 from business partners. The average rating by principals was 4.7/5 (excellent) while the average by business partners was 4.4/5 (very good).
The pie charts below show the principals and business partners’ satisfaction with the programme:

With a response rate of 52%, 97% of principals indicated that they found the programme “definitely beneficial” with 98% signifying that they would “definitely” recommend the PfP programme to other principals. In addition, 90% of the principals indicated that they “definitely” intend to continue their partnership beyond the 12 months of the programme.

Similarly, business partners also conveyed very high satisfaction with the programme. With a response rate of 58%, 91% of the business partners reported that their participation in the programme was “definitely” beneficial and 85% would “definitely” recommend the programme to other business leaders. Lastly, 80% signified the intention to maintain their partnership beyond the facilitated year.
Short-term outcomes in the schools

While most of the impact in PfP schools only becomes apparent two or more years after principals join the programme, we ask participating principals to estimate how much their schools had benefited from the programme within the first year. In this evaluation a comparison of the “before” and “after” scenarios shows that, while there is still room for improvement, principals feel that their school has made clear progress in all four target areas of the PfP programme.

Source: Post Programme Survey (2016-2017 cohort), based on 98 responses
(The “before PfP” rating is as assessed by the principals retrospectively at the end of the programme)
Short-term outcomes for the business leaders

Our post-programme survey for business partners asks them to indicate the extent to which PfP has impacted their level of competence in six key leadership skills (considered by the Centre for Creative Leadership to be the Most Important Leader Competencies). As the chart below shows, the feedback from business partners indicates that their ability to build collaborative relationships and to manage change are the skills most strongly developed by the PfP programme.

In conclusion, the evidence collected for this internal evaluation confirms that, in 2017-2018, PfP once again delivered on its promise. As the peer reviewer noted:

A credible picture is emerging of a programme that consistently / predictably maintains a high completion rate and that is perceived by a large majority of participants to be substantially beneficial to their leadership and their schools, in line with the intended benefits of the PfP theory of change.
4 The long-term impact: performance of primary schools that joined PfP in 2013-2014

Note: This section presents the findings of a study conducted by Symphonia for South Africa between July and October 2018 among primary schools in the Western Cape that joined the PfP programme in 2013-2014. Because of the critical importance of literacy for the attainment of all other learning objectives, the focus of the study was on performance in:

- Grade 3 literacy
- Grade 6 literacy

Because the Western Cape is the only province that conducts annual systemic tests (of Grade 3, 6 and 9 literacy and mathematics) relevant data is not available for other provinces.

NB: It is important to note that partnerships established by PfP do not have a specific mandate to focus on improving literacy, but rather to improve/strengthen their school as a whole.

Change in systemic results in 2013-2014 PfP schools: Grade 3 literacy

Of the 128 partnerships launched across the country in 2013 and 2014, 36 were public ordinary primary schools in the Western Cape. We analyzed data for the entire sample of 36 schools to assess quantitatively the extent to which literacy performance had changed. The WCED supported the project by providing access to the systemic results of those schools.

We studied the performance of these 36 schools in the systemic Grade 3 literacy tests and compared this to the performance of other schools within the province. For consistency, the first year analysed for all schools was 2014. The chart overleaf shows the results.

In 2014, the cohort of 36 PfP schools was, overall, performing below the provincial average for Grade 3 literacy. Three years later, they had largely caught up. Since then, as the red bars in the graph below show, performance in Grade 3 literacy has improved at a substantially higher rate in PfP schools than in non-PfP schools across the province.

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1 This sample may seem small compared to the 866 partnerships that PfP has established. The choice of the sample was determined by 3 constraints: (1) nature of the programme (2) need for sufficient time post-programme and (3) sample size.

(1) The initial 2-3 years of PfP (2011-2013) were “trying and testing” years and the current programme structure was only introduced towards the end of 2013. We therefore excluded schools that joined the programme in 2011 and 2012 from the cohort whose results were analyzed.

(2) Due to the time required for strengthened school leadership to translate into visibly and sustainably improved academic outcomes, PfP’s impact on learning outcomes can only be tested in partnerships that have been in existence for at least 4 years. The latest available systemic results are for 2017.

(3) Focusing only on schools that joined PfP in 2014 would have yielded a small sample size (16 primary schools in the Western Cape), so we chose to incorporate two full annual cohorts: primary schools where partnerships were launched either in 2013 or in 2014.
Change in systemic results in 2013-2014 PfP schools: Grade 6 literacy

A similar observation was made in Grade 6 literacy. While in 2014 the schools from the PfP cohort were performing at a higher level than the provincial average, their improvement across the period was still visibly higher than the average improvement in the province.
Breakdown by quintile

Acknowledging that school performance in South Africa is strongly correlated with the socio-economic circumstances of schools themselves and the communities they serve, we refined our analysis to look at possible differences per national quintile (with the limitation that the sample of quintile 1-3 PfP schools is not large enough to yield conclusive results).

The analysis confirmed that PfP schools in quintiles 4 and quintile 5 were performing below their peers in 2014. However, in both quintiles, while they have not entirely caught up, PfP schools have shown greater improvement in performance than non-PfP schools.

While this analysis merits being probed more deeply in terms of its statistical significance, the findings are encouraging and consistent with PfP’s theory of change that improving the quality of a school’s leadership, and mobilising support from its external community, can – over a period of 3-5 years – lead to an improvement of the school’s academic performance.

Factors that contributed to improved results in schools:

Through qualitative research (triangulated by interview evidence), we have been able to identify the main factors which caused the PfP schools to significantly improve their literacy performances. The findings suggest that they have improved with the help of the following three groups of factors:

- **Strengthening of the school’s internal functionality, including:**
  - Collaborative and caring leadership by the school principal who, for example, provides a compelling vision to teachers, acknowledges them and supports their resilience
  - Developing healthier organisational cultures, resolving internal conflict
  - A Foundation Phase Head of Department (HOD) who is leading his/her team with a strong culture of teamwork and mutual support
  - Making better use of data-driven management, analysing and being responsive to the findings emerging from the analysis.

- **Enhancing the collaboration with key school stakeholders, including:**
  - Communicating more openly with parents and mobilising them to fully play their role in the education of their children
  - Building strong relationships of trust with district education officials, and in particular with Foundation Phase curriculum advisors.

- **Specific support by organisations that have a focus on literacy and learner support**
  - Organisations involved in many PfP schools include: Wordworks, Shine Literacy, Living through Learning, Help2Read, Reading & Writing solutions.
  - On average, there are more organisations providing support to the 36 PfP schools in this study than in other public primary schools in the Western Cape. Moreover, these interventions are often more impactful in PfP schools, than in schools with less effective leadership.
5 A matrix-type summary of 2018 impact data

The diagram below summarises the main impact metrics contained in this report.

### 0. Inception and Completion

- **Continued growth of PfP presence across more provinces.**
- The completion rate has been **consistently above the 90% target** in the last 3 years.

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<th>2017-2018 metrics*</th>
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<tr>
<td>Total number of partnerships launched</td>
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<td>Programme completion rate</td>
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### 1. Reaction

- Both business leaders (BL) and school principals (SP) have expressed **very high satisfaction levels.**

### 2. Learning

- **Business leaders** strengthen important leadership skills.
- ** Principals** acquire skills in listening, stress management, contracting and consulting

### 3. Behaviour

- There is evidence of more confidence and **more effective leadership practices** by principals: better engagement with staff and school stakeholders.

### 4. Short-term outcomes at the school

- Principals report substantial improvement in their schools’ readiness for change.
- Observed changes are consistent with the PfP Theory of Change (and are expected to be deepened in the following years).

### 5. Long-term impact on school performance

- Western Cape primary schools where PfP partnerships were launched in 2013 and 2014 report improvements in systemic Grade 3 and 6 literacy test results that exceed the improvement by other schools in the province.

### Programme completion rate

- **Average rating: BL** 4.4/5
- **SP** 4.7/5
- **Net promoter score** 83
- **Increase in BL’s score:** +0.8
- **collaborative relationships:** +0.9 (average)

### Proportion of principals who report definitely improved practice:

- 96%

### Increase in score:

- **SMT Cohesiveness:** +1.5
- **Teacher enthusiasm:** +1.6
- **Involvement of parents / community:** +1.4 (average)

### Improvement in pass rate, 2014-2017

- **Grade 3 literacy:** +8.4%
- **Grade 6 literacy** +4.5% (average)
As a learning organisation, Symphonia for South Africa is constantly keeping its ear to the ground, observing trends, and striving to improve the design and implementation of the PfP programme to ensure maximum impact. Based on observations and team discussions in 2018, the following adjustments to the programme were agreed for 2018-2019:

**Placing more emphasis on the pre-launch process**

To a large extent, the trajectory that a partnership, and the leadership circle that it forms part of, follows during a 12-month period is influenced by what happens in the early days of the circle – at, or even before, its formal launch.

Therefore, we have become more intentional in ensuring that the recruitment and on-boarding of principals and business partners follows sound contracting principles, and that the pre-launch process is conducted in a collaborative and structured manner. This has involved:

- Strengthening internal communication procedures ahead of launches to ensure seamless coordination of the efforts of all team members in establishing a circle
- Ensuring that school principals are selected rigorously and are taken through a process of clarification and contracting before being accepted onto the programme – this includes being very explicit about the fact that the PfP programme is not about access to funding, but about leadership development
- Similarly, ensuring that business leaders who join the programme have a full understanding of what the programme entails and what their commitment is
- Ensuring that participants are recruited and partnerships are matched well ahead of a circle’s launch, and that each pair ideally meets with their learning process facilitator before the circle is officially launched.

While there are still occasions when school principals find themselves too overwhelmed by work and/or stress to make themselves fully available for the PfP programme, recent observations show that these occasions are diminishing in frequency. We are now striving to ensure that similar progress is made with the recruitment of business partners.

A post-circle debrief procedure has been designed and introduced to ensure that all PfP team members have access to relevant communication and information on each leadership circle.

**Adding coaching for principals**

In the past, the PfP model was designed to offer coaching specifically to business leaders. This came from the realisation that many business people were feeling uncomfortable, both with the immersion into a very unfamiliar environment, and the process of engaging in a partnership and context in which they have no formal control.
Through engagement with the teams delivering the programme on the ground, the need to extend the coaching sessions to school principals, subject to their willingness, emerged. After internal consultations, it was decided to revise the model to allow for principal coaching.

**Extending and broadening the support**

**PfP Year 2**

After embarking on their PfP journey, principals and business partners soon realise that a year is too little time to complete the projects that they have envisaged, and often they are left with doubts about their ability to have a true impact on a school’s trajectory. Realistically, the facilitated PfP year lays the foundation for in-depth work that will be far more impactful if the partners can commit for several years.

In this spirit, in 2018 we began to pilot an optional “Year 2” community of practice (CoP) in Johannesburg, which has given PfP “alumni” principals and business partners the opportunity to stay in contact, keep practicing the skills they have learnt on the programme, and collectively advance the capacity-building projects that they wish to pursue.

The success of this pilot thus far has motivated the Cape Town PfP team to also set up a Year 2 programme in 2019 for the partnerships that are reaching the end of their Year 1 in 2018.

**Symphonia for South Africa offerings**

Another development that has the potential of deepening the impact of PfP in schools is the effort to connect our alumni schools with opportunities arising from the Symphonia for SA network. In addition to the School Leadership Forum, which has for several years played the role of deepening the knowledge and networking effects of the PfP year, new offerings are continually becoming available to PfP schools through the Symphonia for SA network. These opportunities include, for example, signposting or connecting to other members of the Coalition for Quality Education in the Western Cape, or partner organisations in other provinces, intern or learnership placements at PfP schools, financial training workshops for SGBs, and many more.

**Knowledge Sharing platform**

To support our new partnerships, and alumni schools, in reaping the benefits of the knowledge and experience which has been accumulated over the years in more than 800 partnerships, we have now initiated a vast project of setting up a knowledge sharing platform, in partnership with A Better Africa.

In addition to building an online repository of knowledge and services, our efforts will help to nurture and support a community of users (particularly school principals and business partners) who will engage with the knowledge, contribute to it, and ensure that the platform is alive and useful to new partnerships.
7 Conclusion

In spite of a difficult economic context, the year 2018 has proven to be an exciting year for Partners for Possibility with strengthened evidence of the quality of its offering and the high levels of satisfaction of its participants, as well as the long term impact of PfP on educational outcomes.

New developments in the programme design and implementation are ensuring that we maintain those high satisfaction and deep impact while the footprint of PfP continues to grow across the country.

We are grateful to our funders for their continued support and in making this possible.
Appendix A - Partnership enablers, 2017-2018

Listed below are the institutional funders which provided funding for partnerships, between March 2017 and August 2018. The list does not include private donors, or donors which provided organisational funding.

Trusts and Foundations

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Corporate funders

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<td>NORMAN BISSET &amp; ASSOCIATES GROUP (Pty) Ltd</td>
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<tr>
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<td>SUN INTERNATIONAL MANAGEMENT LTD</td>
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<td>SWISS RE LIFE and HEALTH AFRICA (SWISS)</td>
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<td>TEREBINTH CAPITAL (Pty) Ltd</td>
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<td>PFIZER LABORATORIES Pty Ltd</td>
<td>THE SPAR GROUP</td>
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<td>PIONEER FOODS (PTY)Ltd</td>
<td>TONGAAT HULETT Ltd</td>
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<td>POLYOAK PACKAGING (Pty) Ltd</td>
<td>TUHF LTD</td>
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<td>PPECB</td>
<td>TWINSAVER</td>
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<td>RAND and MERCHANT BANK</td>
<td>UMGENI WATER</td>
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<tr>
<td>RED PENCIL GROUP</td>
<td>VIRTUAL MARKET PLACE (Pty) Ltd</td>
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<td>SA HOME LOANS (Pty) Ltd</td>
<td>WCB BOERDERY Pty Ltd</td>
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<td>WESBANK</td>
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<td>SABRE SLITTING (Pty) Ltd</td>
<td>WINDLAB DEVELOPMENTS SA (Pty) LTD</td>
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<td>SAPPi SOUTHERN AFRICA LIMITED</td>
<td>WOOLWORTHS FINANCIAL SERVICES</td>
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<td>SASOL PTY LTD</td>
<td>XINA SOLAR ONE (Pty) Ltd</td>
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<td>SILICA HOLDINGS</td>
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<td>SIMBITHI ECO ESTATE HOMEOWNERS ASSOCIATION</td>
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Special acknowledgement to our key enabling sponsors for the period*

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sponsor</th>
<th>Partnerships</th>
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<td>OLD MUTUAL LIFE ASSURANCE</td>
<td>20 full partnerships</td>
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<tr>
<td>MAPULA TRUST</td>
<td>18 principals, 14 business partners co-sponsored</td>
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<tr>
<td>NEDBANK FOUNDATION TRUST</td>
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<tr>
<td>FEM EDUCATION FOUNDATION</td>
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<td>ASTRON ENERGY</td>
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<td>FIRSTRAND GROUP / FirstRand Volunteers</td>
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<tr>
<td>ASSMANG Ltd</td>
<td>10 full partnerships</td>
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<td>SISHEN SOLAR FACILITY</td>
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<tr>
<td>HUMULANI EMPOWERMENT TRUST</td>
<td>10 principals, 5.5 business partners</td>
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<td>SOLAR CAPITAL DE AAR Pty Ltd</td>
<td>7 full partnerships</td>
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<tr>
<td>JULIUS BAER FOUNDATION</td>
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* The number of partnerships listed here corresponds to partnerships that were launched between March 2017 and August 2018 and may differ from the total commitment made by the funder.