



## IN CONVERSATION WITH



### THE COLLECTIVE



**Evan Jones** is the CEO of The Collective X and is leading the charge as the initiative sets to double South Africa's output of high-demand digital jobs in the next three years, while simultaneously enhancing youth digital skills, boosting employment and injecting a substantial R300 billion into the economy.

**Q** Your work at both Harambee and The Collective X has been instrumental in driving positive change for youth development and employment in South Africa. Could you please elaborate on some of the key challenges faced by youth in accessing meaningful employment opportunities in the country, and what innovative strategies or programs you have championed to address these challenges and foster the empowerment of young people?

Youth in South Africa, particularly women, face numerous barriers to accessing employment. These obstacles range from spatial challenges to the costs of data, transportation, internet access, visibility in the economy, and unrealistic job criteria, such as requiring work experience for entry-level roles. Harambee has implemented several innovative strategies to address these barriers, including:

- In partnership with the Digital Council Africa (DCA), we worked on policy amendments to enable the roll-out of fibre-optic infrastructure into underserved communities.
- Collaborating with DCA, we engaged with all major telecommunications companies to make the jobs platform [sayouth.mobi](https://sayouth.mobi) fully zero-rated. This initiative ensures that all the earning, learning, and support services provided there are 100% free to access and use.
- Over our nearly 12 years of operation, Harambee has advocated among our approximately 1000 employer partners to prioritize hiring first-time work-seekers.
- We have also engaged in policy work to incentivise employers to hire marginalised youth, particularly in the Global Business Services sector.

**Q** Can you share a specific moment or story that reinforced your belief in the transformative power of digital education and job opportunities, motivating you to continue your work with The Collective X?

At DCA's last annual conference in Cape Town, we invited a young lady from Khayelitsha to share her story of navigating the job market over three years. She went through various digital skill learnership programmes but was declined opportunities because of her lack of experience. After finding herself in an apprenticeship programme she finally secured full-time employment as a software tester with an entry-level annual salary of over R240,000. This job and income have fundamentally changed her and her family's living trajectory, where she now puts her two siblings through school and supports her single father. The exciting thing about this sort of work is that tens of thousands of these sorts of job opportunities are available in the South African market, so the big question on our minds is how we scale these sorts of stories.



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**Q** Collaboration is integral to The Collective X's mission, spanning educational institutions, governmental bodies, and businesses. How does this collaborative effort contribute to not only fostering a thriving future for South Africa but also creating a 'growing ecosystem' for digital jobs in the country? Additionally, considering the pivotal role of businesses, both large and small, could you elaborate on how they contribute to sustainable economic growth and development while actively participating in this collaborative framework?

Digital jobs is an area that cuts across the economy and all sectors. We share a common interest as business and government in finding scalable models to supply these digital skills. Our research indicates that due to the limited supply of digital skills from our educational institutes, there are over 60,000 vacancies among employers and over 20,000 jobs are being offshored out of South Africa due to this low supply. By collaborating with our partners on scaled supply and financing models, we can unlock a significant sector of our economy. In fact, digital jobs are one of the few areas in the South African economy where there is a significant demand for jobs, and this need will only increase given the role of technology in our future.

**Q** For our readers who might be interested in getting involved, what are the practical steps they can take to support The Collective X's initiatives, and what benefits can businesses expect from being a part of this collective effort to transform South Africa's digital landscape?

Readers can visit our website at [www.thecollectivex.org](http://www.thecollectivex.org) and contact us through the enquiry page. The Collective X has a magnificent and dedicated community of partners collaborating to solve for digital skills. We meet regularly, host events and workshops. We are also running several pilots to learn what works and share these with the wider community.

**Q** In your opinion, what qualities or skills make an individual successful in the digital job market, and how do The Collective X's training programs nurture these skills in the youth of South Africa?

It's important to highlight that The Collective X does not provide training programmes. We work alongside and within a wonderful ecosystem of training partners. Our role is to support and enable this part of our ecosystem so that we scale the right digital jobs of the right quality and at the right price so that business can access and absorb the skills they need.

**Q** Beyond the professional sphere, what are your personal hopes for the future of South Africa, particularly concerning the youth and their role in shaping the nation's digital landscape?

South Africa is truly a remarkable country of resilient people. My hope is that we can stimulate the right economic conditions so our economy can grow and, in doing so, unlock employment opportunities for our young people. Our youth are one of our greatest assets, and if we can unlock their potential, we will no doubt create a prosperous future for them and the generations to come. When it comes to digital jobs specifically, we have an enormous opportunity to meet the current demand for these jobs, but more importantly, we must also lay the foundation to create the skills of the future.

**If you can contribute knowledge, resources, time or goodwill, or if you just want to find out more about The Collective X please visit <https://thecollectivex.org/>**