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SA youth is optimistic

Survey findings contradict that the future is bleak

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On the eve of the 35th anniversary of the watershed 1976 uprising by students in Soweto, an authoritative survey has found that young South Africans are optimistic about their own future and that of our country.

They believe that SA is full of opportunities not available elsewhere.

The findings contradict the often held belief that young South Africans face a bleak future and are pessimistic about their future.

The annual Futurefact survey provides an in-depth understanding of the attitudes, values and belief systems of South Africans on a wide range of current issues.

Dudu Skosana is one of millions of young people who believe that South Africa is alive with possibilities.

The 26 year old, who was raised by her domestic worker mother, is now a team leader at a leading insurance company.

She says she is happy with her life and the developments taking place in the country.

“Lots of good things have happened in this country and I strongly believe we have the potential to do more,” Skosana said.

“We should be grateful we have opportunities that our parents never had.

“We went to multiracial schools and had the privilege of getting the best education. Today black and white people work in the same environment and we are treated equally. I mean, life could not be better.”

Skosana shares the same sentiments as more than half of young South Africans between the ages of 15 and 24, according to the survey that interviewed 2524 people above the age of 15, living all over South Africa.

“Our children are lucky to have lived in a society where you are encouraged to be the best that you can be,” said Skosana’s mother, Tozane Gwebu, who is still a domestic worker in KwaNdebele.

“I never had the opportunity to go to school because I lived on a farm. At the age of 15 I was already a domestic worker earning less than R500 a month.

“In the early ’90s I took my kids to an Afrikaans school because I wanted them to be educated and have the things that I never had in life.

“I am happy when I see them all grown up and successful in their own ways,” she said.

Skosana’s life is a typical South African story: half the people included in the Futurefacts survey, who felt that they were getting ahead, said they had experienced some difficulties in their lives.

Lauren Shapiro, an executive researcher for Futurefact, said the survey had found there was a general sense of optimism among South Africans but young people had a more positive outlook about their future.

And it revealed that young people are far more likely to believe that their standard of living and education have vastly improved when compared to their parents.

The research also revealed that:

- 81% of them were very excited to be living in a time of so much change
- 54% of them believed that their standards of living are better than what their parents had
- And, 78% felt that their standard of education is far better than what their parents experienced.

One of the major patterns that emerged, according to Shapiro, was that young people do not necessarily believe in entitlement.

“About 68% of youths believe the only way they can get things done is by doing it themselves,” she said.

“This shows that the youth wants to get out there and do things for themselves instead of waiting for government to feed them.

“This survey gives one a sense that young people have a positive outlook about their future.”