

# How can we establish a pro-youth and entrepreneurship strategy for South Africa?

 By [Nicci Botha](#)

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Entrepreneurial and small businesses have been touted as the panacea to cure South Africa's high unemployment rate, especially among the youth. The panel of experts at the second session of the University of the Free State (UFS) Thought-Leader Series looked at how this can happen in the real world.



Image source: Getty/Gallo

The talking points included the high unemployment rate among South Africa's youth, which is typically twice as high as the already high national unemployment rate of 27%.

Secondly, international studies have shown that the country's school system is very weak, and does not support a future world of work that demands increasingly multi-skilled employees.

The quality of education needs to change, said Brownhilder Neneh, associate professor and academic chair, Department of Business Management, UFS, to encompass a mixture of theory and practical application. "We need to teach people to be resilient."

She pointed out that young people need to realise that they are not necessarily going to walk into their dream jobs, and they

must be prepared to be sidetracked.

Young people also can't just sit back and wait for opportunities to present themselves, they must be proactive and "do something, anything", even if it falls outside of what they ultimately want to do.

Entrepreneurship among women is on the rise, Neneh explained. And what makes this interesting is that their business ideas are usually interlinked with family. For example, women will see a gap for something that will make their lives easier within the family context. These ideas can materialise into small businesses.

## Making people employable

A qualification does not necessarily guarantee a job. In fact there is often a disconnect between young people looking for jobs and businesses saying they can't find the right person for the job, said Maryana Iskander, chief executive officer of [Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator](#).

Employers are getting it wrong, she explained. They are testing for skills, rather than the capability of someone to do the job. "About 99% of employers give a maths test as part of a job interview. This does not demonstrate the candidate's abilities to problem solve, but rather highlights the poor quality of the maths education they received."

A recent Harambee study, along with Oxford University, Duke University, Stellenbosch University and the World Bank, shows that there needs to be dimensions of employability.

The study investigates the impacts of providing an unemployed person with information about their other attributes and measures its impact on their ability to find work. Early findings show that when jobseekers are given a summary report to share with potential employers, their likelihood of finding work increases by up to 17% and their earning potential increases by up to 32% compared with a group who didn't receive the report.

The study also explores which signals employers value by ranking standardised candidate profiles. Communication abilities were found to be the most predictive for employment and earnings. Grit and resilience are also valued. If these kinds of signals provide a young person with better access to work, it's imperative to provide them with information about themselves that is considered useful by employers.

They need information that can help them better navigate the job market, including how to look for jobs, how to use their networks. "Not all jobs are advertised on conventional forums," she said.

Read more on the first session of the UFS Thought-Leader Series here



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## ABOUT NICCI BOTHA

Nicci Botha has been wordsmithing for more than 20 years, covering just about every subject under the sun and then some. She's strung together words on sustainable development, maritime matters, mining, marketing, medical, lifestyle... and that elixir of life - chocolate. Nicci has worked for local and international media houses including Primedia, Caxton, Lloyd's and Reuters. Her new passion is digital media.

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