

Young entrepreneurs continue to strive towards business growth

As South Africa's unemployment rate increases to a staggering 30.1%, the far-reaching impact of Covid-19 on businesses, both big and small has become an ever-growing concern.



Zamile Mzizi, Brian Makwaiba, Beth Mahlangu and Edwin Sebilwane

However, as highlighted by President Cyril Ramaphosa in a recent address to the nation – entrepreneurs and SMME's present the greatest growth opportunity for our economy and a major source of desperately needed job creation.

While access to funding and the skills transfer needed for business resilience remains the biggest challenge for many young entrepreneurs, creativity, dedication and support from larger enterprises such as Mondelez South Africa's Enterprise Development programme Kasivators 2.0. have helped uplift the sector.

According to a new research paper from the Anzisha Prize, a partnership between African Leadership Academy and Mastercard Foundation that looks specifically at young entrepreneurs- just 77 of 122 Anzisha Fellows created over 2,000 work opportunities. Fifty-six percent (56%) of those jobs were for young people under 25. This illustrates the youth's insatiable appetite for success.

“What started out as training for spaza shop owners evolved into engaging with young local entrepreneurs to develop their businesses, that could be absorbed into the Mondelez value chain in the long term.” said Navisha Bechan-Sewkuran, manager corporate & government affairs: South, Central & East Africa.

“ Sales and marketing was identified as an area of entry that would allow us to absorb new vendors and make the biggest impact. We had a real passion to build township economies so focusing our efforts on SMME development within township marketing was a very natural fit. ”

The Enterprise Development programme currently empowers four black-owned brand activation businesses through business training, mentorship, tools of the trade and business grant. This investment in turn, on average - more than doubled their staff constituent.

“Entrepreneurship is often a very lonely path. There are many challenges to navigate so having that additional support system in the form of mentorship and coaching made a real impact for me personally. From guidance on the day to day running of my business to the grant which meant I was able to up-scale our distribution systems. The program helped us increase our overall profitability and in turn, our capacity to create more jobs,” said Edwin Sebilwane, creative director and co-founder of SirBillionaire.

Innovative thinking needed for success

Global brands such as Mondelez International have a wealth of skills and experience that typically place them at the forefront of the innovation and thinking needed for success. It is these learnings that have been built into a sound Enterprise Development programme and grantees are committed to paying it forward.

“This experience has helped us become braver and go after bigger brands and contracts that we would not have necessarily been able to seek out before. It has seen us increase our staff component by almost 50%. We’ve placed over 5000 students who are now able to add invaluable work experience to their CV’s and move out of unemployment,” adds Zamile Khuzwayo, owner of ZamsHive.

As the economy has reopened, many entrepreneurs operating with lockdown restrictions have had to reinvent ways of working and get creative with their business solutions. One such entrepreneur is Beth Mahlangu, managing director of Republic 360°, an emerging experiential marketing company that offers below the line marketing support in rural areas. Her business once thrived on the hustle and bustle of month end supermarkets through promotions but has now reengineered her offering by introducing mystery shoppers that gather shopper insights into the rural market.

One of the four entrepreneurs that embarked on the programme. Brian Makwaiba, CEO of I AM Emerge, paid it forward by hosting sessions to empower other youth entrepreneurs and was able to scale up his business and extend their offering to two additional townships.

“What is most encouraging is the knock-on effect of guiding strong players in this fiercely competitive informal sector as a vehicle to support economic growth, especially as our country continues to navigate uncertain waters due to the current pandemic, which will place even greater demands on entrepreneurs to stabilise the economy,” concludes Bechan-Sewkuran.