

SIYABULELA MAKUNGA | Promotion of entrepreneurship efforts by youth is critical

Access to information is undoubtedly the cornerstone of any developing economy; inevitably, the Competition Commission has placed high on its advocacy agenda the promotion of youth entrepreneurs.

While identifying barriers to entry, the commission has among other challenges identified access to information as a pivotal economic divide between commercial businesses and youth entrepreneurs.

It would be amiss for digital markets, fintech, renewable energy, agriculture and telecommunications, to mention but a few, not to envision a central role played by young people in growing these markets.

For this reason, and working with various state economic cluster agencies, the commission held its inaugural Youth in Business (YIB) Exhibition in 2022. The exhibition was a culmination of the commission's stakeholder engagement workshop conducted in 2019 to understand the barriers youth faced by emerging entrepreneurs.

The commission identified key barriers that affect the entry, participation and sustainability of youth in business. These barriers included limited access to vital information about running a business, recognising financial resources targeted at youth-owned businesses, how to comply with regulations and government funding opportunities.

The 2022 workshop provided a valuable opportunity to 300 young entrepreneurs who gained access to information about government resources, inter alia, funding to youth-owned businesses and mandatory regulatory requirements needed to access such funds.

In November last year, the second YIB Exhibition not only brought government agencies into one space but also invited nine young entrepreneurs to showcase their businesses and share their business journey with other youth at the exhibition.

One of the entrepreneurs who credits the success of her entrepreneurial dream to the support of her family and government institutions, Keatlegile Mnguni, was part of the 2023 workshop.

The young farmer started her entrepreneurial journey four years ago selling bunches of her startup spinach crop in Bronkhorstspuit, about 50km east of Pretoria. Following basic training in beef production and seed funding from Development Funding Institutions (DFIs) – to put to test her processed agricultural products for nutritional information – Mnguni was able to diversify her business to include the cultivation of other vegetables, beekeeping and establishing an agricultural clothing label.

Mnguni's remarkable journey proves that all young entrepreneurs need is a "hand up".

Two DFIs helped Mnguni on her entrepreneurship journey, thanks to the commission's intervention that extended a helping hand to the country's young entrepreneurs.

Their aim is to narrow the information and communication divide between youth and government agencies.

So, the concept of creating a single space where youth could meet with several government agencies and engage face-to-face with their representatives was born.

The representatives are from the department of trade, industry and competition, the National Empowerment Fund, the National Youth Development Agency, the South African Revenue Service, the Small Enterprise Finance Agency, the South African Youth Chamber of Business, and many more.

Youth entrepreneurship is a catalyst for inclusive growth and a greater spread of economic participation by historically disadvantaged persons, youth in particular. It is always fulfilling to meet young entrepreneurs at every YIB Exhibition, especially those who are already visionaries in their business concepts with evident signs of determination to promote products and services that support rural communities.

SA's young entrepreneurs are hard at work to address the country's socio-economic challenges. It is therefore imperative for public and government agencies alike to support youth entrepreneurship to tackle youth unemployment and address food security concerns and the energy crisis, to name a few.

The commission's efforts underscore the importance of promoting youth entrepreneurship as a tool to drive change, ensure young people understand what competition regulation entails, and how our work can help reduce barriers to entry for youth-led businesses.

This is why it is steadfast in its commitment to obliterate the information and communication divide between the youth and government agencies by continuously engaging with young entrepreneurs.

Just last week, we participated in the Green Youth Indaba in Durban, where we met with young entrepreneurs in the renewable energy industry and raised awareness about the Competition Act while visiting a local buyback centre.

I cannot wait to share, in my next column, key insights learned from the indaba, including success stories of young entrepreneurs who, like Mnguni, are fast becoming formidable business leaders.

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