

Games have the power to inspire a culture of entrepreneurship amongst young people

By [Musa Ncula](#), issued by [Irvine Partners](#)

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Youth unemployment has reached dire levels in South Africa and over the past two years, the Covid-19 pandemic has further exposed young South Africans to extreme economic shock and insecurities. The combined effect of unemployment with the economically devastating impact of Covid-19, now more than ever, requires South Africa to find innovative ways to drive transformative change amongst young people who are struggling to find formal employment.



Inspiring a culture of entrepreneurship must be considered as a meaningful way to address this challenge.

Following the 2022 State of the Nation Address, Professors Natanya Meyer and Daniel Meyer [reflected on President Cyril Ramaposa's speech](#) saying, "without a positive enabling environment, our dream of a rapidly growing economy driven by a dynamic small and medium business sector cannot be achieved".

We can agree that this topic has a lot of moving pieces yet placing emphasis on entrepreneurship education and development from the grassroots level is imperative and can alleviate some tensions and drive sustainable impact.

Innovative digital engagement solutions, including animation and games, can play a critical role in building entrepreneurial capacity and competencies. These mediums have the power to convey complex ideas in a visual and accessible manner; not only because they can do so in a way that cuts across language, culture, and literacy levels, but also because they scale cost-effectively. The combination of these digital solutions can be used to determine baseline knowledge, deliver ongoing content and engagement to improve knowledge levels, and ultimately shift attitudes and drive behavioural change.

These "serious games" are powerful tools and there are already a number of use cases in South Africa that demonstrate their worth in the entrepreneurial space.

One of these is 'My Lemonade Day' based in Houston, USA which runs an entrepreneurship programme for kids aged 7-13 which teaches them to start, own, and operate their businesses, using a fun, digital platform. Jim Clifton, Chairman, and chief executive of Gallup has said that "the program inspires kids to go beyond the status quo. There is a level of independence and self-determination gained from Lemonade Day's lessons, and we will continue to ignite the

entrepreneurial spirit of our children”.

In South Africa, the African Entrepreneurship Initiative (AEI) launched a social enterprise that delivers entrepreneurship development initiatives (training, mentoring, coaching & funding) to youth (18 – 35 years old) in townships & peri-urban areas. The initiative is aimed at empowering marginalised youth and increasing access to resources. Working with Sea Monster, AEI has developed an entrepreneurship training game that is optimised for low-income contexts and accessible across a range of devices.

AEI has identified a number of issues that youth entrepreneurs in South Africa face; ranging from complicated policies to a shortage of impact-driven training and development initiatives. Anele Mkuzo, AEI’s Founder says, “there’s no one size fits all for entrepreneurship, but entrepreneurship education and development seems to be a necessary first step.”

Entrepreneurship also requires strong socio-emotional skills including empathy, resilience and problem solving, and games provide players with a safe space to make mistakes and practice desired behaviours such as these. A game developed for Capitec Bank, for example, allows players to practice decision-making under pressure and makes players see the real consequences of their choices without putting their lives or careers in real danger. FNB’s Fundaba platform meanwhile, empowers small business owners with the information they need to start and scale their businesses, using gamified, interactive learning, presented in five South African languages.

Each of these examples has been designed with a different audience and outcome in mind. However, they are similar in that the ultimate goal is to inspire change.

In a country where approximately two-thirds of youth are unemployed, we owe it to the entrepreneurs of both today and tomorrow to support their learning and development in ways that are engaging, relatable, and fun, while equipping them with the tools to change their lives.

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Musa Ncula is the client service lead at Sea Monster.

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