

# CREATING OPPORTUNITY FOR SOUTH AFRICA'S YOUTH (COSY) PROJECT

COSY PROJECT IMPACT REPORT

# Foreword from British Council's Country Director



The British Council's Creating Opportunity for South Africa's Youth (COSY) project is an initiative that fosters inclusive growth and progress on the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It also aims to support sustainable futures of young people in some of South Africa's most excluded communities.

Funded by the EU and delivered in partnership with Business and Arts South Africa, LifeCo UnLtd South Africa and Digify Africa (formerly Livity Africa), the project draws on the strength, knowledge and expertise of all delivery partners, as well as on their extensive experience in different areas of youth development in South Africa.

For the past three years, the COSY project has supported hundreds

of young people – particularly women from rural and peri-urban communities – to become active agents in sustainable and inclusive growth in South Africa, by increasing capacity and supporting entrepreneurship. Furthermore, the project has contributed towards strengthening the support environment for young people at community level; through the provision of grants and support for 20 Civil Society Organisation (CSO) projects.

The COSY project has been successful in upskilling and giving a voice to marginalised youth, often excluded from skills and entrepreneurship training initiatives concentrated in urban centres such as Johannesburg. The project introduced digital literacy, challenged participants to think beyond traditional forms of employment and encouraged them to explore entrepreneurship as a means of livelihood and job creation.

With South Africa's current unemployment rate pegged at 29% and youth unemployment at a dismal 52%, the need to explore alternatives for job creation has never been greater. Programmes such as COSY are relevant and valuable because they demonstrate an understanding of the plight that our youth in South Africa find themselves in. It also exposes young people to the enlightening and hopeful fact that they can indeed be a solution to the problem, in a real and relevant way, and in a global and connected world.

We at the British Council feel immensely proud and inspired

by all the COSY participants, and their individual and collective achievements. Their zeal, drive and passion has impacted many other young people and has been a beacon of inspiration and hope for many. This has resulted in a cohort of active citizens eager to drive positive change at community level. This booklet aims to showcase the project and share their stories of struggle but above all their courage, determination and resilience.

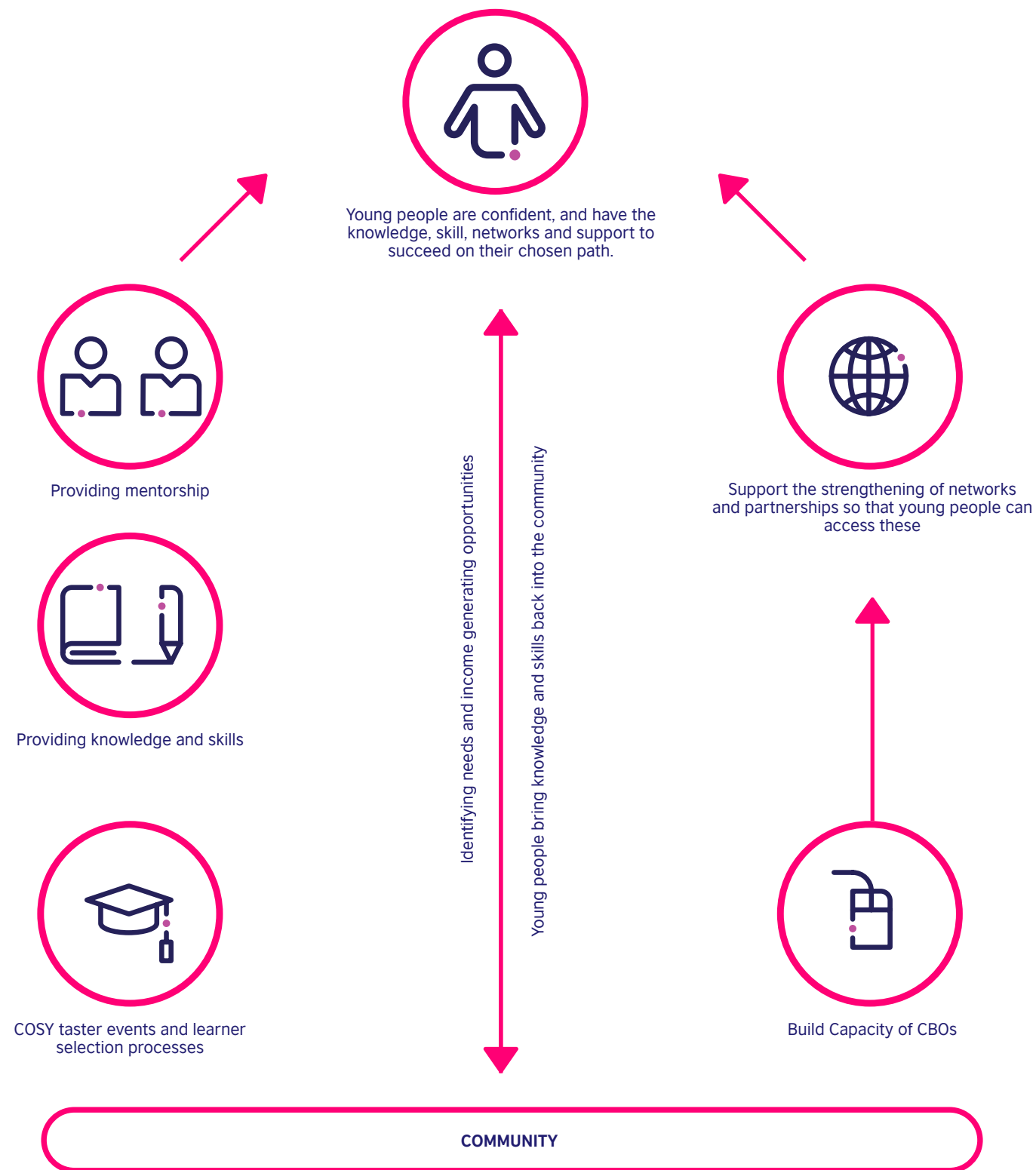
On behalf of the British Council and my colleagues in charge of the COSY project – Itumeleng Dhlamini and Aussie Ndlovu – I would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to our partners and to the EU for their trust, commitment and continued dedication to supporting young people in South Africa, and creating opportunities for a better future for all.

**Susana Galvan,**

Country Director | British Council  
| South Africa

# The COSY Project Goals and Activities

Goal: Young people are economically empowered and are contributing to the economy



Locating communities in need and community mapping

# COSY Project Overview

The COSY project was launched in February 2017 and concluded in January 2020. The project sought to enable young people, particularly young women, in rural and semi-rural areas to be more active agents in achieving sustainable growth in South Africa by building their capacity to become entrepreneurs and by increasing their employability. In addition to supporting South African youth, the project sought to build the capacity of local Civil Society Organisation (CSO) and support youth led, and youth centred economic empowerment programmes. As illustrated below, the project was delivered in 4 provinces, across 8 communities.



Over the years, the COSY project has successfully equipped young people with skills to launch small businesses and increased their employability. The grants allocated to CSOs have gone a long way in strengthening the support environment for young people at community level. Thereby, creating a pathway to sustainability.



# COSY Project Statistics

Project delivered in  
**8**  
rural and peri-urban communities,  
across four provinces in South Africa  
(Gauteng, Eastern Cape, Western Cape  
and KwaZulu-Natal)

The project targeted young people,  
particularly women

**15-25**  
years

**970**

young people trained in skills and  
entrepreneurship

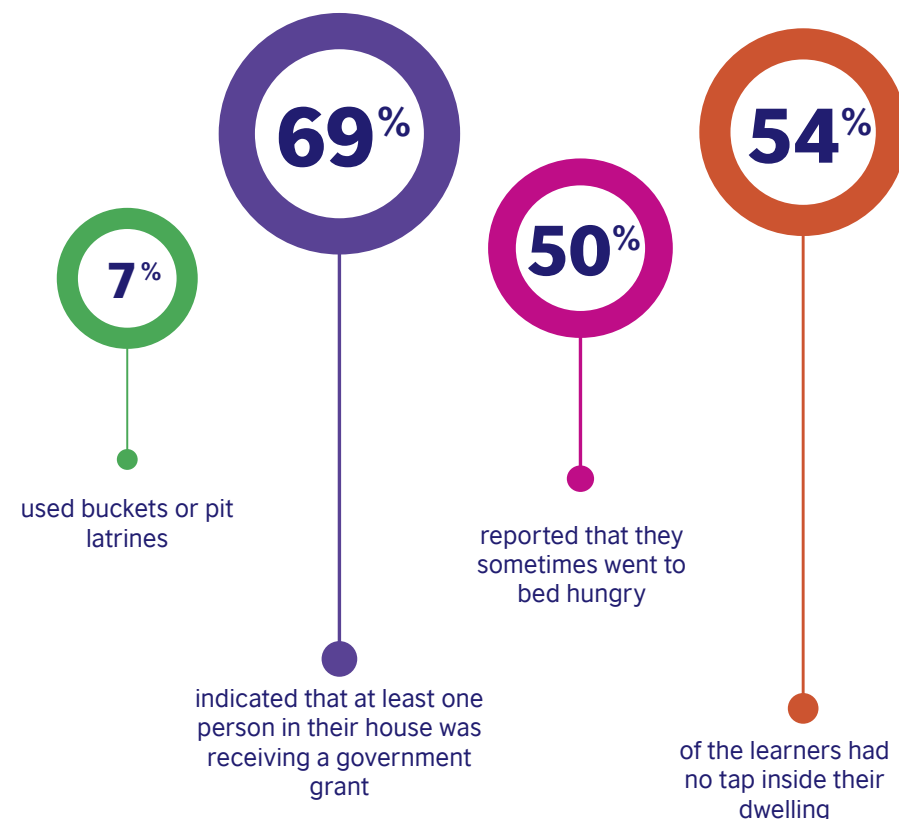
**R200 000**  
in start-up capital was awarded

Reached

**11 000**

South African youth including  
community, civil society and  
business leaders.

Participants were from some of South Africa's most impoverished communities.  
Data indicated that:



**22%**

of participants were involved  
in setting up a support group  
in the community

**20**

Civil Society Organisations  
(CSOs) projects were  
funded

**9%**

of participants took up  
leadership positions in their  
community

**13**

COSY entrepreneurs have  
created employment  
opportunities

“

I was blown away by  
what I found in the  
programme. The  
training styles and the  
content of the training  
material...it was mind  
blowing. It was nothing  
I have ever seen  
before. The way it was  
structured, one topic  
spoke to the next.  
– COSY graduate



“

They taught us about  
creative thinking which  
provoked our minds  
to go out and look at  
the challenges in our  
community and think  
of creative ways to turn  
that challenge into a  
business opportunity..  
– COSY graduate



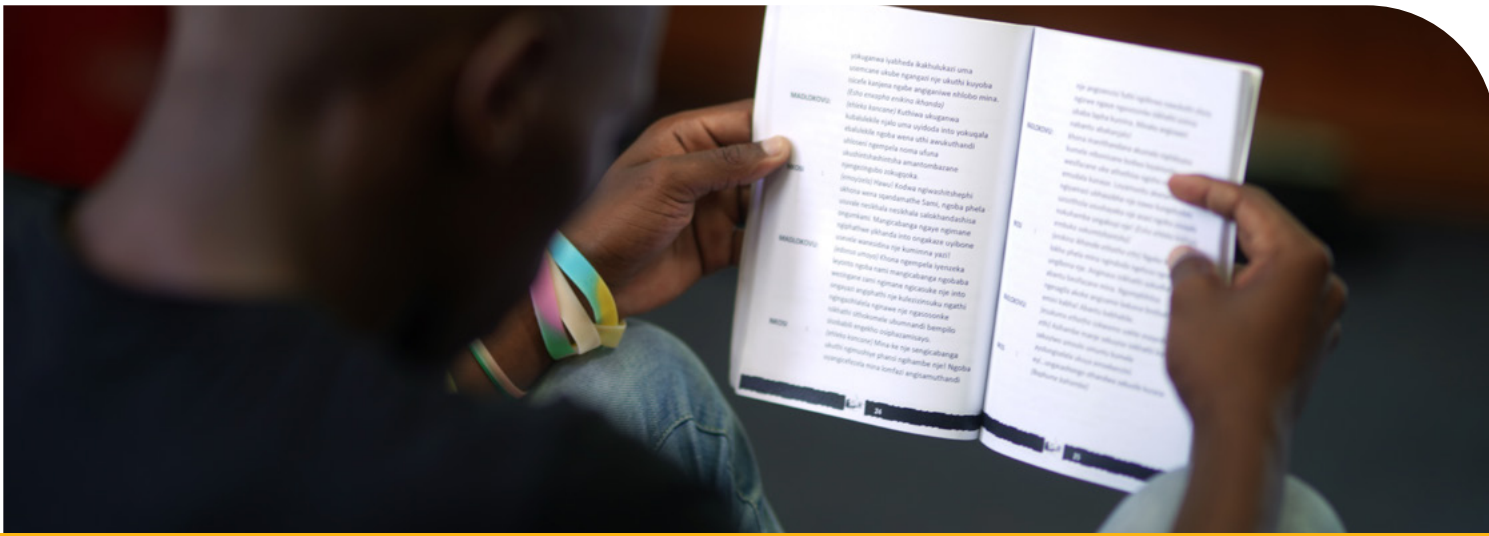
“

So, the programme  
shifted the way I see  
things and how I can  
form part of being  
the solution to the  
problems that we face  
in our community.  
– COSY graduate

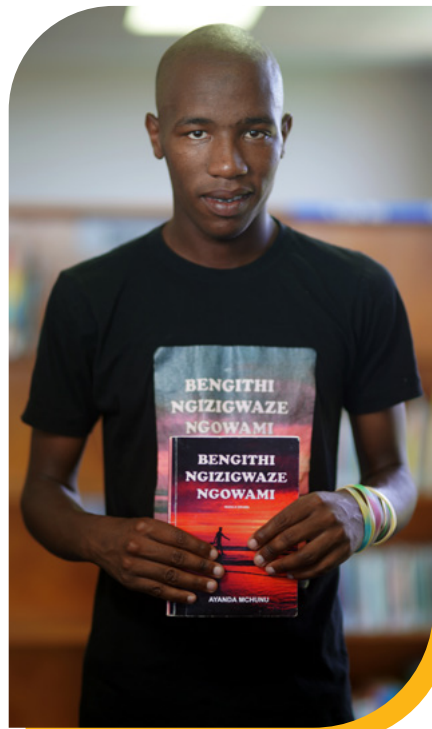


# Impact Stories

The following stories capture our graduates' entrepreneurial journey.



## Aspiring author gains confidence to make publishing dreams a reality



Ayanda Mchunu

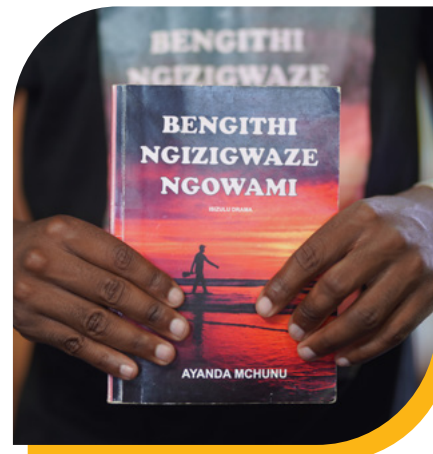
**Ayanda Mchunu** is a 22-year old author and entrepreneur from Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. He established his business, Ayanda Mchunu Book Publishers, in 2018 to help aspiring young authors like himself publish, promote and sell their works.

Ayanda took part in the British Council's Creating Opportunity for South Africa's Youth (COSY) programme and his story falls under Sustainable Development Goal 8: Decent work and economic growth.

### About the business

As a fledgling author, Ayanda experienced how difficult it was for young authors to get their books published. He decided to start his own business to help other aspiring authors get their works published and marketed.

He says he got the idea to make the leap from author to promoting authors like himself when he attended the COSY programme.



**I needed to find a way to improve my own standard of living while helping other young writers to realise their dreams. COSY helped me come up with a viable concept to make this a reality.**

**Ayanda Mchunu**

"I needed to find a way to improve my own standard of living while helping other young writers to realise their dreams. COSY helped me come up with a viable concept to make this a reality."

While Ayanda charges a fee for publishing and marketing the books, all proceeds from the sales go to the authors. He has engaged the help of two published authors to help him edit and typeset manuscripts. To date, he has helped four people with their books and is currently helping a fifth person. The content is written primarily in Zulu and English.

His business is located at Trenance Park, which is close to Verulam (27 kilometres north of Durban in KwaZulu-Natal). He chose the location because of its proximity to the local library and his desire to market his product to people who enjoy reading.

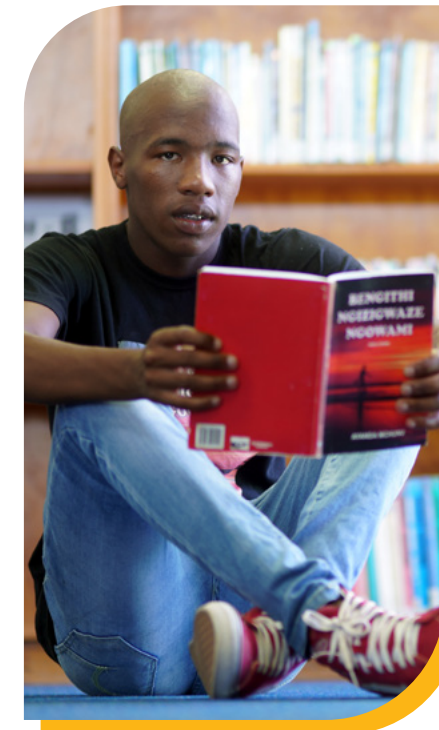
### Lessons learnt and applied

Ayanda was motivated by the COSY programme and says he gained valuable insight into how to create a viable business model and run his business more effectively.

In his words: "COSY helped me a lot, especially when it came to conceptualising and fine-tuning my business idea. My mind was opened up to possibilities. By helping me, COSY taught me to help others.

"I learned that my business needs to stand out from others, which is why I created a publishing company that is different. I do not take peoples' money upfront. I ensure that my clients are happy and see results before they pay.

"I also don't turn people away based on their first draft. I help them perfect their stories and get them ready for publishing. I mentor people and give them opportunities. I learned to make a difference and not go into business just for the money," he adds.



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**Ayanda Mchunu**

### Programme Impact

COSY gave Ayanda the tools and confidence to venture out and fulfil his passion for storytelling and secure a publisher for his book.

"The programme taught me that you can do anything you want to do. The most important thing is that you must want it, then stand up and do it. No one will give you your big break. You need to have confidence and go out and get it.

Ayanda's book, which explores relationships and how people deal with each other in their marriages, was published by TS publishers. "With all the media reports about women being abused, absent fathers and other issues, my book focuses on people getting married for the right reasons and treating each other properly. My book, which is written in Zulu, is currently sold out."

### Find out more

Ayanda Mchunu Book Publishers  
Email: [mchunuayanda126@gmail.com](mailto:mchunuayanda126@gmail.com)

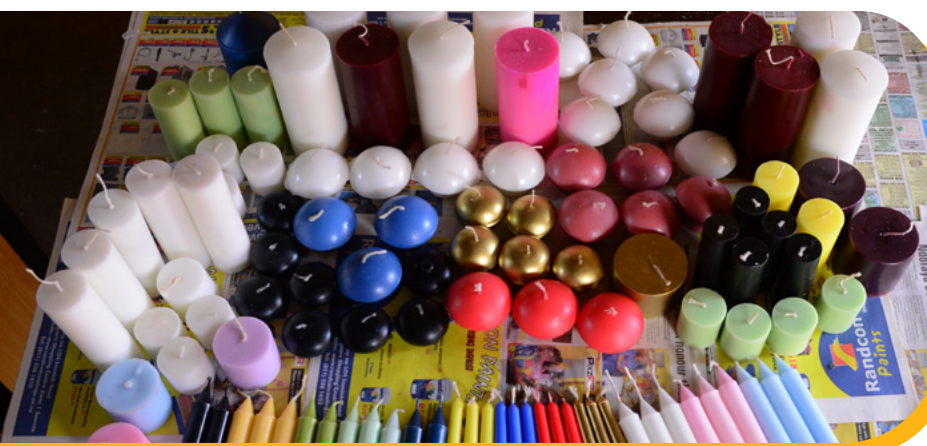


# Entrepreneurial skills help light the way for candle maker

Patience Ngwenya is a self-employed 25-year old, single mother from Meadowlands, Soweto. She is also the founder of Hala na Hala Trading and Projects, which manufactures homemade hand-poured candles, known as Phushy Candles.



Patience Ngwenya



Patience took part in the British Council's Creating Opportunity for South Africa's Youth (COSY) programme and her impact story falls under Sustainable Development Goal 8: Decent work and economic growth.

## About the business

Patience started her candle-making operation because she is passionate about the craft and believed she could offer products that were unique.

She lives in a community that experiences frequent load shedding and needs alternative forms of light. On conducting further research in her neighbourhood, she discovered that some of the local churches used candles and were experiencing challenges with their suppliers.

Patience says she saw a window of opportunity to change her economic status in an area that is characterised by a high unemployment rate. "I also wanted to leave a legacy for my children, rather than just a funeral policy."

Her responsibilities as the business owner include manufacturing the candles and handling the day to day transactions of the business, such as taking orders and buying materials.

She says starting the business was also her way of proving to herself that she could be a leader and persevere no matter how hard it became to run and maintain the business at times.

"As a single mother, my business has helped me to put food on the table and buy all the necessary things my kids need to progress in life. I've also become a leader and

I'm able to grasp the opportunities that come my way to better myself as an individual, as well as improve the business and the lives of my peers."

## Lessons learnt

Prior to attending the COSY programme, which she discovered on WhatsApp, Patience felt she lacked certain business skills that were offered on the programme. With the understanding that it is important to continuously learn and enhance one's skills set, she applied to take part in the programme.

One of the modules delivered by LifeCo UnLtd taught Patience to be more consistent with regards to the day-to-day running of her business. It also provided her with record-keeping skills and the confidence to pitch her business telephonically and physically, leading to more doors being opened for her.

Patience also learnt to be authentic through knowing herself and her capabilities. She gained basic financial skills and the understanding that sometimes one doesn't need funding to succeed.

In her words: "Sometimes all you need is to perfect your craft, treat employees and customers fairly and with respect, while being communicative and having proper financial and process management systems in place. While our financial management needs some improvement, process management has seen us measuring the candles we produce each day so that we can increase productivity, meet demand and increase sales."

On entrepreneurship, Patience says it is not for the faint-hearted. "The entrepreneurship journey can be bittersweet and sometimes sour. It's not glitz and glamour and it needs someone who can persevere through all the hardship, someone who also has the financial discipline and someone who doesn't give up when the going gets tough because it does get tougher."



## Programme Impact

The only manufacturer of customised candles in her community, Hala na Hala was registered in 2013, but Patience only began operating from her living room in 2017. Her target customers include her immediate community, churches, spas, individuals and event planners.

Since taking part in the COSY programme, her business has grown by more than 50% and she currently employs five people and has one shareholder.

In addition, the business has expanded its market in South Africa, Botswana and Namibia. The increase in growth has allowed Patience to move her business out of her home and into a separate workshop. She is also able to hire part-time employees when necessary and pay salaries to her full-time employees.

The COSY programme has also seen additional opportunities open up for Patience such as participating and benefiting from the Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA) programme and the Khulisa Ibiznis funding accelerator programme.

She says all this was made possible by the COSY programme. "It brought out my best leadership qualities and now my business is becoming the success it was meant to be and the growth is exciting."

Motivational speaker and founder and chairman of Nosovo Holdings, KM Baloyi is Patience's mentor. He believes that Hala na Hala's greatest tools for growth are relationships and services.

He says Patience is eager to serve her customers and provide solutions that are in line with her business offerings. "My role is to assist her in meeting her business goals and ensuring that she is able to meet her clients' needs.

"One of the mentor/mentee challenges we experienced was finding time to meet on a regular basis. We overcame this through frequent telephonic communication. I also visit her at her home where the business is located," he adds.

## Find out more

Hala na Hala Trading and Projects and Phushy Candles

Facebook | Twitter | Instagram  
@phushycandle



# Delivery business cycles its way to success in Tsakane

Tsakane, Ekurhuleni, resident and young entrepreneur, Thabang Dlamini, started a bicycle courier service in 2015 to run daily errands for people in his neighbourhood. In 2018, he formally registered the business as Thumamina Express Services.



Thabang Dlamini



Thabang took part in the British Council's Creating Opportunity for South Africa's Youth (COSY) programme and his story falls under Sustainable Development Goal 8: Decent work and economic growth.

## About the business

Prior to starting his own business, Thabang was unemployed, but wanted to do something that would make life easier for his community. Many people in his neighbourhood did not have time to run their own errands, be it due to work commitments or ill health.

Thabang says being unemployed pushed him to think out of the box. "I came up with the idea of starting my own business, which then evolved into Thumamina Express Services. It is the first small courier business in my community, focused on making small deliveries around the township using bicycles."

Women older than 60 form the largest part of his client base. Thabang assists them by collecting their medication or purchasing groceries for them. "Some of them



**The COSY programme allowed me to expand my network and taught me to not only pay closer attention to my finances, but advised me on how best to pitch the business to attract new clients, even on social media platforms.**

Thabang Dlamini

stay alone and have no one to turn to," he explains.

Since starting his business four years ago, Thabang has grown his fleet of bicycles and he now employs three additional people to conduct deliveries in the area. Having recently invested in a tuk-tuk, he aspires to growing his business to incorporate a client base of one million and alternative modes of transport such as vans and trucks, which will allow him to conduct business-to-business deliveries as well.

## Lessons learnt

Thabang says the COSY programme helped him network his business better and taught him to pay more attention to his finances. "Prior to attending the programme, I kept all the information in my head, which meant I didn't always remember everything. Now I record every transaction I make, which allows me to have an overview of all monies in and out of my business."

He has also learnt how to pitch his business and speak confidently in front of an audience, as well as how to use social media to attract clients. "I have a bit of a stutter, but I've learnt how to pitch with more confidence in English. This has helped me attract more interest in my business."

He says he has also learnt that his behaviour as a leader reflects on the people he employs to help him. "I now have 10 people employed in the business, with four of us on the ground, including me. Because we deal with money and valued customer items, honesty and loyalty are key characteristics I look for in my employees."

## Programme Impact

Since attending the COSY programme, Thabang has grown his team on the ground with three additional people and appointed a team of seven executive members, who will help him grow various aspects of the business.

Thabang is also exploring ways to grow his target market. "Until now, my model has been business-to-customer, but my team and I are planning to venture into business-to-business deliveries."

He is also currently creating an app for his business that will make interaction between the business and customers much easier.

Thabang expects his investment in a tuk-tuk to help him achieve his business expansion aspirations as it will allow him to travel further and conduct larger deliveries.

More recently, Thabang was one of four COSY graduates selected to attend the Impact!Africa Social Entrepreneurship Summit held in Nairobi, Kenya, in December 2019. He came away from the event with greater insight into what he still has to do to take his business to the next level.

One of Thabang's delivery personnel, Sipho Ntcobo, says he has been working for Thumamina Express Services for one year. "The job can be physically draining, but Thabang has instilled a "never give up" attitude in us and given us the opportunity to put food on the table and interact with lots of people.

"Since attending the COSY programme, Thabang has created employment and grown his team at Thumamina Express Services. He has also become a great motivator and he teaches us about the things he learns on the programme. He came back from his recent trip to Kenya very excited to share his experience and new ideas with us."



## Find out more

Thumamina Express Services  
**Facebook: Thumamina Express Services**  
**Contact: +27 60 490 0319**  
**Email: Thabangd636@gmail.com**





## Young entrepreneur gives children a leg-up in life



Sibabalwe Joni



**I realised most children in Grade 2 couldn't read or write - an indication that the proper foundation was not being laid in their preschool years.**

Sibabalwe Joni

**Sibabalwe Joni** is a 25-year old entrepreneur from Port Elizabeth in the Eastern Cape. In 2017, she established her business, Cradle to Career, an Early Childhood Development (ECD) centre to help broaden children's mental, educational, social, emotional and physical skills. The business

is run in partnership with non-profit organisation, the School of Excellence for Leadership, which teaches children valuable life skills such as teamwork, structure, discipline and self-worth.

Sibabalwe took part in the British Council's Creating Opportunity for South Africa's Youth (COSY) programme and her story falls under Sustainable Development Goal 4: Quality Education and Goal 8: Decent work and economic growth.

### About the business

Sibabalwe started Cradle to Career because she wanted to create employment for herself and for people from disadvantaged communities, who had skills and experience in the field. She also wanted to educate, empower and provide opportunities for disadvantaged people.

When Sibabalwe started working with children she realised that most children in Grade 2 couldn't read or write, an indication that the proper foundation was not being laid in their preschool years. She started a story-time session to nurture an interest in books, words and stories. Over time, these sessions evolved into a book club.



Sibabalwe says many families rely on two streams of income. "This means there may not be anyone at home to assist with teaching basic literacy skills or helping with homework, which is why Early Childhood Development Centres play such an important role and should not be seen as mere babysitting facilities."

Sibabalwe works with a team of 11 people, who support children on their developmental journeys, providing them with skills and encouragement on their transition from early childhood into adulthood.

She says it is well known that children's inability to learn often relates to poverty, a lack of resources, negative influences or low attendance at school. "One of the things that is rarely discussed, however, is the value and importance of human connections or relationships, something that we believe is critical to human development."

Sibabalwe's main role as founder of Cradle to Career is to identify and obtain support for the business, as well as get advice on various aspects of running the operation, from management planning and business administration, to ensuring service goals are met.

### Lessons learnt and applied

Sibabalwe came across the COSY programme on social media. She applied with a view to boosting her business knowledge and skills.

Prior to attending the programme, she says she was fearful of taking her business to the next level. "The programme helped me overcome my fears, and my team and I have learnt that you are never too young or too old to pursue your dreams."

The programme taught her that failure isn't necessarily bad. Rather, it should serve as a lesson to help inform decision-making in the future.

She also learnt that regardless of the size of a business, there is always a lot at stake when making decisions. In this respect, it is never a good idea to let emotions

get the better of one. Instead, business owners need to make calculated decisions by weighing up all options to ensure they have no regrets.

She was encouraged to believe in herself and not let self-doubt hold back and prevent her from achieving her full potential. "Importantly, I learnt it's not just about me or my competitors, my customer's needs should always take first priority."

Other key learnings Sibabalwe is currently applying in the business include:

- Improved financial management
- Enhanced communication skills
- Getting involved with other entrepreneurs and brainstorming solutions to help solve business challenges
- Continuous learning to advance one's knowledge

### Programme Impact

Since taking part in the COSY programme, Sibabalwe has learnt to stop doubting herself and allowing other peoples' insecurities get the better of her. She has grown mentally and emotionally, and her business knowledge has expanded significantly.

The COSY programme prompted her to muster up the courage to start her operation. "I received immense support from all the facilitators, who challenged me to step out of my comfort zone."

A year down the line, Cradle to Career is currently expanding its operations from Kwazakhele in Port Elizabeth to incorporate three additional branches in neighbouring communities.

She is also planning to expand her marketing efforts to attract single parents and drop-ins, because as she says, "every child deserves a proper education".



Ultimately, she says she has learnt how to handle herself as the person who loves people. "The programme and running my own business have changed me personally, as well as afforded me the opportunity to be an agent for positive change in young children's lives."

### Find out more

Cradle to Career  
Email: [sbazajoni@gmail.com](mailto:sbazajoni@gmail.com)



# Eventing aspirations become reality



Zikhona Mkaba (Right)



**Zikhona Mkaba**, a 24-year old entrepreneur from Duncan Village in the Eastern Cape, wanted to meet her community's needs for eventing equipment such as chairs, tables, and gazebos. From this desire, her business, Zyeos Events and Hiring, was born.

Zikhona took part in the British Council's Creating Opportunity for South Africa's Youth (COSY) programme and her story falls under Sustainable Development Goal 8: Decent work and economic growth.

## About the business

Zikhona points to the lack of hiring and eventing services in her area as the inspiration behind starting her business. While some suppliers in the area are able to assist with various offerings such as chairs or gazebos, her company is a full-service eventing supplier that provides everything, from catering and décor, to cutlery, crockery and equipment.

In operation since 2018, Zyeos Events and Hiring has grown in leaps and bounds and currently employs four individuals – a driver and an assistant, as well as Zikhona's two sisters, who help clean the equipment in preparation for upcoming events.

The start-up capital, provided through the COSY project, Zikhona has been able to purchase additional equipment for the business, thus enabling her to meet the needs of surrounding businesses, such as a local car wash operation. Zikhona met the owner of the car wash, who also graduated from the COSY project, while taking part in the COSY programme and he often calls on her to supply extra chairs and gazebos when the car wash gets busy.

Zikhona believes strongly in the power that technology plays in marketing a business and not only advertises her services via word-of-mouth, but on social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp.

## Lessons learnt and applied

A true believer that the programme would empower her future, Zikhona was so committed to learning as much as she could that she walked to attend a number of programme sessions, even though many were a significant distance away.

She learnt several useful business skills on the programme, including:

- How to behave in a business environment
- How to compile a business plan
- How to form community partnerships
- How to access funding

## Programme Impact

The COSY programme gave Zikhona the necessary skills and tools to successfully manage her business and take it to the next level.

"The programme taught me that running a business is not easy, but that I have to be solutions-driven, think on my toes and continually strive for success, no matter what the circumstances."

Zikhona aims to extend the reach of her business within her community of Duncan Village, and further afield to surrounding communities in 2020.

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The programme taught me that running a business is not easy, but that I have to be solutions-driven, think on my toes and continually strive for success, no matter what the circumstances.

Zikhona Mkaba





# THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

## Closing the digital literacy divide in SA will boost entrepreneurship and foster innovation



**Gavin Weale**

Growth of the entrepreneurial sector is key to addressing South Africa's unemployment crisis, especially amongst the youth. Young people, however, face many barriers to success. Amongst these is a dire lack of digital literacy and access to internet and data.

The British Council's Creating Opportunity for South Africa's Youth (COSY) project partnered with Digify Africa to impart digital skills to young people, particularly young women, in rural and peri-urban areas in South Africa, as part of its broader entrepreneurship programme.

Other partners such as LIFECo and Business Arts South Africa also partnered with COSY to deliver core skills to enhance

young peoples' entrepreneurial knowledge and boost their employability.

Digify Africa Founder, Gavin Weale says a big focus for Digify Africa – and the reason why it wanted to be part of the COSY programme – is to bridge the digital divide in South Africa. “Although there is a lot of excitement around the digital economy and the opportunities it creates, the big risk is that we end up concentrating on improving the lives of people who are already digitally connected.

“This means people who are not connected to the internet get left behind, resulting in a widening of the digital divide as opposed to it becoming a democratising influence and opening up opportunities for everyone. It magnifies the inequality that already exists.”

Weale believes that a massive percentage of South Africans are not digitally literate. “I would estimate that almost 80% of the population is not digitally literate. By this I mean they do not know how to use digital resources as a tool to unlock economic potential for themselves.

“South Africa's lack of digital literacy goes hand in hand with its education and literacy challenges. In the broadest sense, I think it mirrors those challenges, that is, people in poorer communities have less access to resources and often receive a poorer standard of education. Similarly, they have limited access to key aspects of digital such as connectivity, devices and skills,” he adds.

While kids in rural or township schools may have devices such as computers, tablets and cell phones, Weale says they are usually not utilised properly. “This is because there may be no connectivity or limited access to connectivity in the area. If there is access, it may be beyond peoples' means to afford it.”

He says in the formal education context, the teachers themselves often don't have the skills to be able to capitalise on technology. “While cell phones may be more prevalent than other devices, they are currently fairly limited in their ability to drive learning and education.

“Frankly, it is difficult to deliver basic skills such as how to use Microsoft products or spreadsheets or even email using only a handset. This means poorer communities may have a more restricted horizon in terms of the platforms and tools they can use.”

However, this is changing and the prospect of being able to deliver education via cell phones is improving.

Weale says today digital skills are as important as maths and science. “Digital skills are needed in almost every job, whether it's a purely digital job or more conventional jobs in every sector from retail and financial, to construction and agriculture. Every enterprise, large or small, is going through some kind of digital transformation, whether it's a highly sophisticated advertising agency or the local plumber.

“If you have a business, it needs to be searchable on Google. If you understand search engine optimisation, and how to be discoverable on Google and to list your business on Google, or to have a basic Facebook page, you're going to improve your chances of getting new customers.”

He says the big advantage for entrepreneurs who are digitally savvy is how much they can do for free on the internet. “In addition to finding free ways to market their businesses, there are many inexpensive accounting and finance tools available, such as stock tracking tools for those running a retail or distribution business. We see digital skills and digital platforms as a way for people to run businesses on their cell phones with very low running costs.”

Weale says to improve digital literacy in South Africa, two factors will make the greatest impact. “Firstly, South Africans need free and available, or cheap, internet access, and secondly there needs to be a complete overhaul of the basic education system, with digital skills included as a core tenet of the curriculum.

“There are many people playing in the connectivity space and there is a weird patchwork of connectivity around the country. I've attended government forums on the subject and it's not that the infrastructure doesn't exist. It does seem to exist. My impression is that with the right sort of effort and coordination, we could have full coverage.”

Weale says there needs to be a coordinated effort around understanding digital skills and the future of work and skills.

“We cannot just focus on basic education. Tertiary education also needs to be fit for purpose. Universities are not keeping up with the level of skills demanded. In a way, our organisation wouldn't exist if universities were doing their job.

“People come to our 10-week boot camp and sometimes tell us it is more useful to them than a four-year degree when it comes to getting a job. A lot of disruption is also required in terms of HR departments and corporate hiring practices.

“And then, of course, the nature of work, the digital economy and the expectations of what a job looks like for this generation means there are many different moving parts. Everything is constantly shifting. It's not easy to get a handle on things in this ever-changing environment. That's why an agile mindset is critical,” concludes Weale.

**Gavin Weale is an award-winning social entrepreneur and founder of Digify Africa, which is a social enterprise working across the African continent that helps young people benefit from the digital economy with skills, jobs and work opportunities.**



# CULTIVATING CREATIVITY AS A RENEWABLE RESOURCE



**Ashraf Johaardien**

There is a shift from traditional development programmes – where applicants fill in forms, get a certain amount of money and write reports – to programmes that focus on cultivating creativity as a renewable resource in the knowledge that there is only so much money to go around, writes Ashraf Johaardien, CEO of Business and Arts South Africa (BASA).

In 2017, BASA partnered with the British Council, impact investor LifeCo UnLtd South Africa, and Digify Africa, to create the COSY programme, aimed at enabling young people, particularly young women, in peri-urban and semi-rural areas to be more active agents in achieving sustainable growth for themselves. This programme is funded by the European Union.

BASA felt it was important to include asset-based community development (ABCD) and design thinking methodologies into the programme. This was with a view to cultivating creative thinking as a way to help the

participants re-imagine the role or potential role of their businesses in relation to their environment and immediate surroundings, as well as to encourage a culture of experimentation, collaboration and resourcefulness.

Part of this process was to explore ‘abundance thinking’ as a way to respond to diverse contexts and to solve complex challenges. It was also to encourage meaningful collaborations and partnerships as a way to bolster self-reliance and build motivated communities.

The collaboration between BASA, British Council, LifeCo and Digify has been a true partnership, because right from the start – at proposal stage – the idea for the project was developed by the four partners, not with the idea of going into under-resourced areas and encouraging them to go to urban areas and join the competition, but rather to facilitate the process of people working with what they have.

This is contrary to the approach used by some international funding agencies that come into a country with a kind of missionary zeal, with the full knowledge they are the ones with the resources and then dictating how they should be used.

Our approach, underpinned by asset-based community development, has been to reach out to people in peri-urban and rural areas – who have ideas and the desire to be upskilled – and help them identify resources available to them in their communities.

This is not to say that once people have been through the COSY programme they cannot do what they choose, but this is not the intention of the programme. It is not merely focused on benefiting the individual, but about promoting shared value, which means understanding what is of value to the community and how resources and skills can be brought to the

community or be amplified within the community. Removing a catalyst or entrepreneur from a community is a type of resource brain drain.

From BASA’s point of view, everything we learnt on COSY will carry through to our existing programmes such as Debut, a similar programme we run in collaboration with the Department of Arts and Culture and the National Lotteries Council. COSY taught us about giving more energy, time, attention and intention to the knock-on effect and being more cognisant of building shared value and making sure communities benefit as much as participants.

We want people to be able to monetise their ideas. Article 27 in the Declaration of Human Rights says every person should have access to arts and culture, which is fantastic, but according to Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, people also need to feed themselves. So it’s really great when arts, culture and creativity can do all of those things – where it is a right, a way of connecting us to a national identity and sense of community, but where it is also able to put bread on the table.

One of the COSY success stories involves a young man from Tsakane in Ekurhuleni, who began a bicycle courier service in 2015 to run errands for the gogo’s (elderly women) in his community. After taking part in the COSY programme, he increased his courier service to include three additional bicycles. He is now expanding his operation to incorporate other types of vehicles and deliveries to local businesses.

This is an absolute crystallisation of what the COSY programme is trying to achieve. It’s not about buying the bike, but rather realising there is a need in the community which, through innovation, can be addressed: the creation of an entrepreneur and the meeting of community needs.

The challenges the COSY programme faces are similar to the challenges BASA grapples with when it comes to programme design and implementation, especially that of language in rural communities. Shared value is also about understanding the inherent power dynamics when it comes to people who have access and people who don’t. It is important to be mindful of how ideas are communicated and the tools that are used to communicate with people who don’t have access to resources in a way that makes it less intimidating. For example, it is unwise to assume that people have access to cell phones or that they understand and want to communicate in English – this is a resourced assumption.

COSY is an example of human-centered design thinking. It teaches participants to come up with user- or community-centric solutions and to keep remodelling and tweaking them until they work. Participants are taught that their business strategies and plans are not things that are fixed on pieces of paper or in peoples’ heads – they are living laboratories.

The COSY programme itself is the perfect example of how the partners continued to tweak and adjust the programme to achieve greater successes. The point of design thinking is to not live in a world of success and failure, but to understand that a problem needs to be tackled from different angles, that design solutions to problems are not fixed. It is all about agility and flexibility and the knowledge that you can learn a lot from failure..

Abundance thinking is the opposite to an impoverished mind-set. If you think of your world as impoverished, you will be impoverished and feel impoverished; whereas abundance thinking is about learning to recognise what you already have and how you can exploit it, learning

to take challenges and turn them into opportunities – it’s an essential component of design thinking.

Ultimately, asset-based community development, design thinking, shared value and abundance thinking are all inter-related. Often people think that there is nothing going on in peri-urban and rural areas and that nothing can happen. But coming back to the story of the courier entrepreneur – the fact is something as simple as a bicycle can launch an entire business.

**Ashraf Johaardien is the CEO of Business and Arts South Africa NPC (BASA) and former Executive Producer of the National Arts Festival, Makhanda. He works with the BASA board and team to drive and translate the organisation’s purpose and strategy into tangible outputs that create deliberate value stakeholders. Over the past 20 years, Johaardien has worked for a wide range of creative, cultural and academic institutions.**



# COSY Project partners

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