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On the Final Day of Youth Month: Reflecting on Impact, Partnerships, and Youth-Led Change



As Youth Month draws to a close, we take this moment to reflect on the agency and potential of young people to drive meaningful systemic change.

In the face of high unemployment, limited access to education and training and persistent structural barriers, South Africa's youth continue to confront complex challenges that demand our collective attention and action.

This month called on all sectors — government, business, civil society and communities — to reflect on how their commitments are essential to breaking down the barriers that young people face and create meaningful opportunities for their participation and growth. While we reflected on the legacy of the 1976 Soweto Uprising, Youth Month served not only as a commemoration, but as a call to action to build a more just society where young people are empowered to shape their future.

At the [National Business Initiative \(NBI\)](#), this month was an opportunity to reflect on our ongoing work in economic inclusion, particularly in areas of skills development, youth employability and support for township economies. Our work recognises that meaningful economic inclusion requires practical and innovative pathways that connect young people to opportunities, not only as job seekers, but also as job creators.

*"At the NBI, we believe that youth are not just the beneficiaries of change — they are the drivers of it. Through strategic partnerships and targeted interventions, we are working to ensure that young people are equipped not only with skills, but with confidence, work-based experience, and future-focused capabilities needed to participate meaningfully in South Africa's Just Energy Transition," emphasises Gugu McLaren-Ushewokunze, Head: **Economic Inclusion** at NBI.*

One powerful example of this impact is the story of a young entrepreneur who participated in our Programme and now runs a growing Small, Medium and Micro Enterprise (SMME), rooted in his community and contributing to local job creation. His journey offers a tangible illustration of how targeted support can unlock the real potential of South Africa's youth.

From Potential to Performance: How ICN Holdings Transformed through our Incubation Programme



ICN Holdings Pty Ltd, under the leadership of Managing Director Ishmael Nyathi, has undergone a remarkable transformation since joining our Incubation Programme. Through tailored support and practical guidance, our Programme has helped the company unlock new growth opportunities.

"The NBI programme provided me with practical tools and expertise to better manage my finances, leading to increased profitability and reduced costs," he shares. Ishmael highlights how structured business planning and operational improvements followed as a direct result of his participation in the Programme.

He explains, "Through the NBI programme, I developed a comprehensive business plan, outlining clear goals, strategies and tactics for growth. This plan has helped me stay focused and make informed decisions."

Additionally, he notes: *"By implementing NBI-recommended systems and processes, I have streamlined my operations, reduced waste and improved productivity."* Reflecting on the broader impact, he adds, *"the NBI programme has equipped me with valuable insights and skills to make informed decisions about my business, including investments, expansions and partnerships."*

He observes that these internal improvements translated directly into stronger client engagement and the emergence of new opportunities. *"By applying NBI strategies, I have improved my customer service delivery, leading to increased customer satisfaction and loyalty,"* he explains. Furthermore, he adds, *"By focusing on customer needs and delivering value-added services, I have improved customer retention rates, reduced churn and increased revenue."*

Quantifiable growth tells the full story:

- A 25% revenue growth
- A 30% increase in the customer base, with 15 new clients acquired
- A 15% increase in profitability, driven by better financial management and cost reduction

His journey stands as a compelling example of how investing in young entrepreneurs, particularly in township areas, can deliver real economic value and create pathways to employment and innovation.

Collaboration in Action: Absa's role and a Graduate's Success Story

The success of our **Installation, Repair and Maintenance** (IRM) Programme is built on strong collaboration with our funding partners like **Absa**, whose commitment to youth employability and sustainable development is evident in their continued support. Through this partnership, the Programme equips young people with the technical and entrepreneurial skills needed to participate meaningfully in the economy.

“At Absa, we recognise that empowering youth is not just about creating jobs, it’s about building resilient futures. Our partnership with the NBI is grounded in the belief that sustainable impact comes from equipping young people with the tools, skills and confidence they need to thrive in a rapidly changing world,” explains Dr Steven Zwane, Managing Executive: Corporate Citizenship, Absa Group.



As a result of these partnerships, we are seeing the emergence of skilled, confident graduates who are ready to embrace opportunities and shape their own futures.

One such example is Rixile Mbungele, a participant in the 2023/24 IRM cohort, who successfully completed the Renewable Energy Workshop Assistant (REWA) training in partnership with Absa. He now works at Amandla Energy and shares his journey into the renewable energy sector: *“I discovered the Programme through a friend who had recently installed solar panels at their home. It offered comprehensive training in solar panel installation, which enabled me to secure a job in the renewable energy sector. I’m now permanently employed at Amandla Africa Energy as a solar installer.”*

Reflecting on his experience, he adds, *“Through this opportunity, I’ve gained hands-on experience with solar panel systems, including design, installation and maintenance. I have applied the skills and knowledge I gained from the programme to install solar panels for residential and commercial clients, helping them reduce energy costs and lower their carbon footprint.”*

This kind of impact is made possible through collective effort and the support of partners committed to unlocking the potential of South Africa’s youth. By creating access to opportunities — such as those offered through the IRM Programme — we help equip young people with the skills, exposure, and pathways they need to build sustainable future in sectors like renewable energy.



To deepen and expand this work, we invite more partners to collaborate with us in building inclusive, scalable pathways for youth employment and skills development.

Dr Zwane concludes, “The IRM Initiative is a powerful example of what’s possible when the private sector collaborates to open doors for young people. We are proud to support programmes like IRM that are not only developing critical technical capabilities, but also helping young South Africans enter growth sectors like

renewable energy; where their contributions can drive both economic and environmental sustainability.”



The National Business Initiative (NBI) is an independent and voluntary coalition of South African and multinational businesses launched in 1995 by the then President, Nelson Mandela.

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