

MUAH NEWS



11

Animation Studio

From his living room
to the world

6

Chancellor's Fund

Supporting
entrepreneurship as a
powerful tool

16

Global Camp

Mandela University
students gain global
experience



63 Businesses in 3 Months

Welcome to the first issue of MUAH News, which we'll publish online three times a year to keep you updated on the many activities of the rapidly expanding Mandela University Africa Hub (MUAH). We'll also be publishing our annual BizYouth magazine.

We are very pleased to share that we're on a strong, targeted trajectory. From 2025 to 2026, our MUAH team helped to develop 55 SMMEs, growing their turnover by more than 5%, incubated 63 businesses, and created 119 jobs between January and March 2026.

A continent in conversation

The year began with energy and action at the inaugural Education Collaborative's Southern Africa Hub from 14 to 16 January, with Mandela University as the host institution at the Marriott Hotel in Sandton.

Our Vice-Chancellor, Professor Sibongile Muthwa, opened the convening that brought together higher education leaders and partners from across Africa to collaborate on how to improve graduate outcomes and empower students with the skillsets to lead business, industry, society and economies. Entrepreneurship was a core discussion and we can learn a lot from each other.

In East and West Africa, for example, young people are not waiting for their governments to save them or to solve the unemployment crisis. Everyone is busy doing something, no matter how small or large, to create a stake for themselves in business and the economy. Kenya, for one, is known as 'Silicon Savanna' for its fast-growing landscape of youth-owned, tech-enabled, e-commerce startups. They are addressing needs, creating value, and driving socio-economic change.

A global stage

In late January I accompanied MUAH project specialist Dr Chuene Semono, and a group of 11 undergraduate and postgraduate students to the ten-day Global Entrepreneurship Camp in Thailand. It's essential for our students to gain experience on a global stage, engage with global peers, establish networks and expand their thinking.

Back home in GQ, a distinctive highlight this quarter has been Mandela University's official launch of the Chancellor's Entrepreneurship Fund on Friday, 27 February, bringing together leaders from business, government and academia in the drive to transform young people from job seekers into

job creators, with MUAH as the springboard. During the fundraising gala dinner, more than R10-million was pledged in financial support, as well as in-kind support in the form of mentorship, internship programmes, and enterprise development. The Fund is a legacy initiative of Mandela University's outgoing Chancellor, Dr Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi, who said: "We're not just funding businesses; we're fuelling a mindset."

Momentum across borders

Earlier that day we participated in an inspiring Masterclass presented by corporate leader Michael Ajuokwu, who has 40 years of experience in banking, governance, entrepreneurship and board leadership across Africa. We are honoured to have him as our MUAH patron.

In the first week of March, MUAH was part of a Mandela University delegation to Belgium for the Institutional University Cooperation (IUC) Programme. This 10-year collaboration empowers partner universities as drivers of change for global sustainable development through theme-based sub-projects.

I am a co-leader of the IUC Sealifer sub-project, together with Anneke Kenens from Hasselt University in Belgium, to conduct ocean research with deliverables focused on training staff, students and community to advance sustainable entrepreneurship in the coastal and ocean economy.

While in Belgium, we were invited to the South African Embassy and met former Deputy President of South Africa, Ms Phumzile Mlambo Ngcuka, and South Africa's Ambassador to Belgium, Luxembourg and the European Union, Ms Tokozile Xasa.

Partnering with influential people, industries and companies is essential for growth and we can proudly say that MUAH is attracting wonderful support.

We hope you enjoy the newsletter and please share your thoughts, ideas and entrepreneurial insights with us by emailing our public relations officer, Zimasa Mbovane, Zimasa.Mbovane@mandela.ac.za.

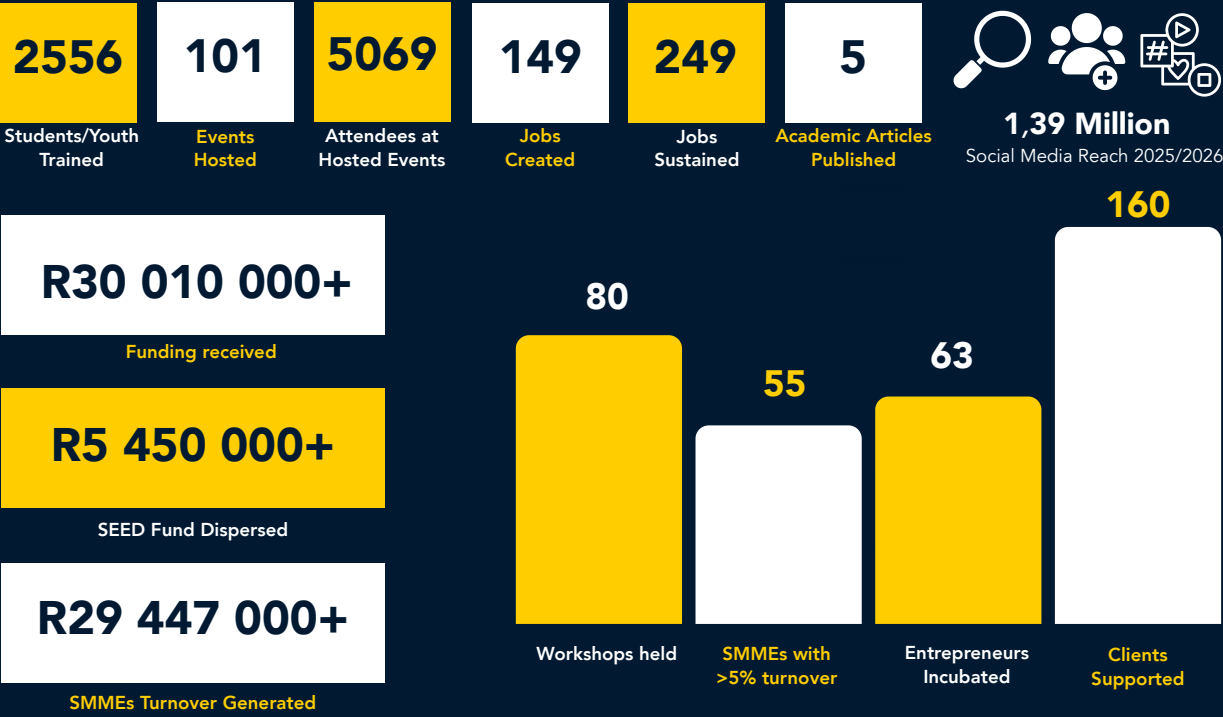
Yours in entrepreneurship

Prof Thobekani Lose
Director: Mandela University Africa Hub (MUAH)

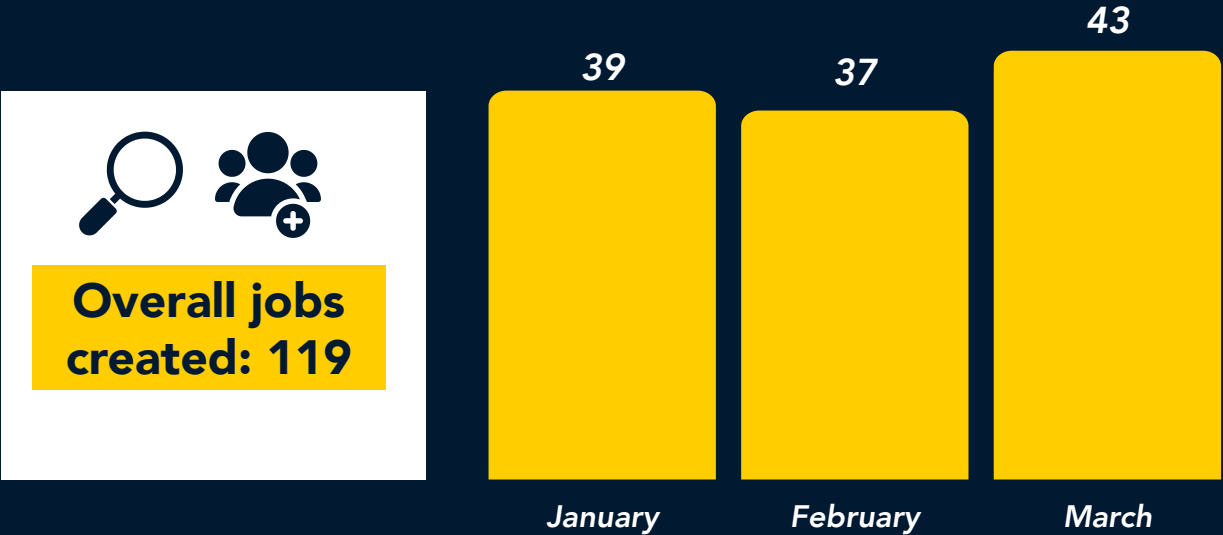
2025/26 IMPACT REPORT

A Progress Analysis Report providing a comprehensive overview of the MUAH's performance in 2025 and 2026.

Mandela University Africa Hub Performance Overview



JOBS CREATED IN THE FIRST QUARTER OF 2026



A new Southern Africa hub

Nelson Mandela University is leveraging its lead role in the Education Collaborative's Southern Africa Hub to strengthen the link between research, entrepreneurship and student success across the continent.

The University hosted the Hub's inaugural convening in Johannesburg in January 2026, bringing together higher education leaders from across the region to focus on practical ways to improve student outcomes and drive economic impact.

The convening marked a shift from traditional academic collaboration towards more applied, outcomes-driven partnerships, centred on how universities can translate teaching and research into real-world opportunity.

As Dr Palesa Mothapo, institutional lead for the Collaborative at Mandela University, explains, the focus is on ensuring that "what we teach can be converted into something that's going to create employment and innovation and opportunity – things that are tangible and not just about research outputs".

Proactive partnership

Through the Mandela University Africa Hub (MUAH), this approach is already taking shape. The Hub is leading work on entrepreneurship and employability, alongside research development and ethical leadership, with dedicated communities of practice connecting universities across the region. These platforms enable institutions to share expertise, co-develop programmes and support student mobility, while also unlocking funding for collaborative initiatives.

A key differentiator is the Collaborative's emphasis on building a knowledge economy. Rather than focusing on small-scale student enterprises, the model encourages students to develop innovations with commercial potential, supported by research, incubation and continental partnerships.

"We need a knowledge economy – that's why we are in a university," says Dr Mothapo, pointing to a growing pipeline of student-led innovations with the potential to scale beyond campus.

The Hub model also strengthens regional collaboration by creating both strategic and technical platforms for action across the continent. The first hub was established in West Africa, followed by a second hub in East Africa. Dr Naziema Jappie, Deputy Dean: Teaching and Learning at



the University of Cape Town, is the regional director for the new third hub, covering Southern Africa.

For Nelson Mandela University, the value lies in this ability to connect research, innovation and entrepreneurship within a broader African network. It positions the institution not only as a participant in continental collaboration, but as an active driver of new models that link academic work to economic and social impact.



Speaking at the launch, Mandela University Vice-Chancellor Professor Sibongile Muthwa described the convening as "a symbolic and historic moment" for higher education in the region, underscoring the importance of collective effort in addressing shared challenges.

Education Collaborative executive director Rose Dodd said that connected hubs enable institutions to "lead where they are strong, learn where they are still building capacity, and share solutions in ways that respect local realities", reinforcing the value of partnership in strengthening the sector.

Chancellor's Fund supports entrepreneurship as a powerful tool

At the launch of the Chancellor's Entrepreneurship Fund on Friday, 27 February 2026, more than R10-million was pledged in financial support, as well as significant in-kind contributions including mentorship, internship programmes, business consulting and enterprise development support.

Held at the Boardwalk Hotel and Convention Centre in Gqeberha, the launch brought together leaders from business, government and academia, all united in their commitment to entrepreneurship as a powerful tool to transform young people from job seekers into job creators, and from dependants to wealth creators.

Investing in entrepreneurial growth

The Fund is a legacy initiative of Mandela University's outgoing Chancellor, Dr Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi, who said: "This is an active investment in the boldness of our student and community innovators. We're not just funding businesses; we're fuelling a mindset. We're saying to the next generation: your idea to solve a water crisis, to revolutionise informal trade, or to create sustainable fashion has a home here, and we will back it."

The theme of the launch was 'Towards human flourishing: changing the world through entrepreneurship', and the funds raised will be managed by MUAH to mentor and develop student, graduate and community entrepreneurs to establish, grow and scale Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs).

"The funding is the spark, but MUAH provides the oxygen," added Dr Fraser-Moleketi. "A grant recipient doesn't receive a cheque and get sent on their way. They get embedded in our ecosystem – mentored by seasoned entrepreneurs, connected to industry networks, and supported by peers."

Entrepreneurship as economic inclusion

Minister for Small Business Development, Ms Stella Tembisa Ndabeni, delivered the keynote address, and pledged R1.5-million to the Fund, underscoring government's commitment to building an entrepreneurship-led growth path. She emphasised how expanding the country's base of MSMEs is essential to inclusive economic participation, noting that millions of new MSMEs are needed to drive employment and long-term growth.

SUPPORT the Chancellor's Entrepreneurship Fund



"The Chancellor's Entrepreneurship Fund is more than a programme. It is a practical tool to address youth unemployment in the Eastern Cape and beyond, to help graduates apply their qualifications and professional skills, and to create pathways for meaningful economic participation," she said.

For young South Africans aged 15 to 24, the official unemployment rate stands at a staggering 58.5%. Mandela University has over 34,000 students. When they enter the world of work to start their careers, in addition to finding meaningful employment, they can be innovators, pioneers, and engines of economic growth.

Mandela University's Deputy Vice-Chancellor of People & Operations, Mr Luthando Jack, who has been a driving force in support of entrepreneurship, said: "the Chancellor's Entrepreneurship Fund is not a once-off fundraising initiative; it is the beginning of a long-term movement. Let's be part of the quest to build a society of youthful entrepreneurial spirit, innovation, hope and employment, and contribute to an upward development trajectory in our country and continent; to change the world for the better, together."

A driving force

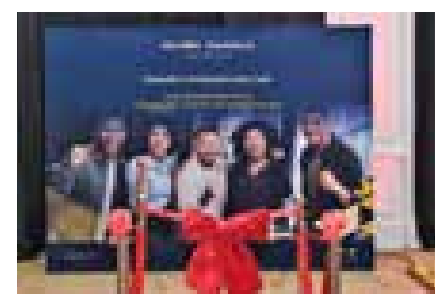
Deputy Vice-Chancellor: People and Operations, Mr Luthando Jack, who has been a driving force in entrepreneurial growth, says: "For millions of young South Africans and throughout our continent, entrepreneurship is the only viable path forward to a better future, hence student and youth-driven entrepreneurship is not merely desirable; it is essential. It must become a centrepiece of our national psychology where innovation, boldness and reinvention are not luxuries, but lifelines."

Business backing for entrepreneurship

Businesses, from small enterprises to large corporates, responded positively to the call to support the Fund. Chief Executive Officer and President of Samsung South Africa, Simon Lee, announced an estimated R3.6-million commitment through the Samsung Innovation Campus – marking the beginning of a three-year partnership focused on equipping students with coding and programming skills, critical in the digital era. "Entrepreneurship is not just a pathway to economic growth, but a catalyst for societal progress and human development," he said. "By partnering with Mandela University, we aim to equip young minds with the skills, knowledge and opportunities they need to thrive in an ever-changing world."

Renowned business leader, Michael Ajukwu – who was recently appointed Patron of the MUAH – echoed the need to drive entrepreneurship in South Africa and continent-wide. Ajukwu was among those who expressed tangible support, committing to a "significant six-figure" pledge, while the Alfred Nzo Agricultural Incubator committed mentorship, training, and R100 000 in sponsorships and events.

MUAH Director Professor Thobekani Lose pledged R250 000, while Adapt IT Education's pledge included R300 000 worth of procurement value and 30 internship opportunities, prioritising software development, 4IR and project management areas. Local businesses large and small, including the Kasi Investment Group, made significant in-kind pledges, adding to the impact of the entrepreneurial ecosystem.



Top from left: CEO and President of Samsung South Africa, Simon Lee, outgoing Chancellor Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi, Vice-Chancellor Prof Sibongile Muthwa, Minister Stella Tembisa Ndabeni and Chair of Council Judge Nambitha Dambuza.

BIWA conference unites industry and academia

The Business Incubation Web Association (BIWA) is positioning itself as a rare bridge between academia and industry, with its third annual conference set to take place from 30 September to 2 October in East London.

What began as a platform for entrepreneurs to share strategies and access funding networks has, in three years, evolved into a national collaboration linking universities, the business world and policymakers.

According to Prof Nkosivile Madinga, Chair of BIWA's Committee of Reviewers and Deputy Dean of Research and Internationalisation in the Faculty of Commerce at the University of Cape Town, that evolution has been deliberate. The early focus on peer learning among entrepreneurs has expanded to include a strong academic component, bringing research and practice into direct alignment.

"The community of practice sets the agenda," Prof Madinga explains. "Academics then respond with research that speaks directly to the challenges entrepreneurs are facing."

Peer learning to collaboration

This model now defines BIWA's unique value. Unlike conventional academic conferences, where research can remain abstract or disconnected from implementation, BIWA structures its programme so that industry challenges drive inquiry. Entrepreneurs, researchers and support organisations engage in the same space, interrogating findings and exploring real-world application.

The scale of participation reflects that shift. The second conference, in 2025, introduced a formal call for papers and received 57 submissions from more than a dozen universities, far exceeding expectations for a first academic iteration.

Rigorous peer review processes were implemented, with each paper assessed by multiple reviewers to ensure academic quality. Five of the strongest papers were published in a special issue in the journal of Acta Commercii, a DHET-accredited journal, signalling both credibility and scholarly impact.

National reach and credibility

This year marks another step forward, says Prof Madinga, as BIWA is moving to establish its own conference proceedings. The organising committee is working hard to ensure that the conference proceedings meet DHET



Prof Nkosivile Madinga

subsidy requirements, so that the authors and participating institutions can benefit from the subsidy associated with their research outputs.

The 2026 conference theme, "From Incubation to Industrialisation: Scaling African Innovation Through Standards, Digitalisation and Inclusive Ecosystem" reflects a broader ambition, namely to move beyond startup support towards making a wider systemic impact.

After its launch at Nelson Mandela University in Gqeberha in 2024 and the second conference in Cape Town in 2025, this year's event will be hosted by Walter Sisulu University, with other institutions already expressing interest in future editions. This reinforces BIWA's national imprint.

Student participation is also expanding, both through research presentations and opportunities for student entrepreneurs to showcase their ventures.

For Prof Madinga, who has attended conferences across more than 30 countries, the BIWA format remains distinctive. He describes it as the first he has encountered where industry and academia are so tightly integrated, with those facing challenges and those researching solutions working "under the same roof".

Groundwork for digital futures

A competitive selection process and strong industry backing has set the stage for an ambitious eight-month tech journey, with the Samsung Innovation Campus at Nelson Mandela University already building momentum, carefully selecting talent, forging partnerships, and connecting students to real-world opportunities.

February 2026 marked more than just a prelude to the Samsung Innovation Campus programme at Nelson Mandela University; it was a deliberate and carefully orchestrated setup for what promises to be a transformative experience. While lectures officially began in April, the groundwork laid during these early months speaks volumes about the programme's ambitions.

Selecting a high-potential cohort

The recruitment process signalled the calibre of what is to come. Marketed as a prestigious, industry-backed opportunity, the programme drew interest from postgraduate ICT students and recent graduates eager to sharpen their skills.

With only 30 spots available, selection was anything but easy. Applicants were assessed not just on academic merit, but on their potential, commitment and readiness to take on an intensive, fast-paced learning journey.

At its core, the eight-month programme blends coding, programming and artificial intelligence with practical, real-world experience. Through Work Integrated Learning (WIL), hands-on lab sessions and exposure to tech entrepreneurship, students will not just learn; they will build, test and engage with the kinds of challenges they are likely to face in industry.

Building the right foundation

Behind the scenes, equal care has gone into assembling the right team to guide them. Three facilitators have been appointed, each bringing a distinct mix of academic depth and industry insight. This balance ensures that students will not be confined to theory; they will gain a practical understanding of how technology operates beyond the classroom.

Connecting students to opportunity

This early exposure is intentional. The programme is designed not just to teach technical skills, but to open doors, linking students to networks, mentorship and career pathways that extend beyond the classroom.

With a carefully selected cohort, a strong facilitation team and meaningful industry engagement in motion, the Samsung Innovation Campus programme is off to a confident start. As it moves into its training phase, the foundation is in place for something far more significant than a short course – it is the beginning of a pipeline for future innovators.

SAMSUNG

Early industry exposure

Even before their first lecture, participants attended the Chancellor's Entrepreneurship Fund Gala Dinner, where they engaged with industry leaders, including representatives from Samsung Electronics South Africa. For many, it was a first glimpse into the expectations, opportunities and impact of working in the tech space.



A catalyst for transformation

The Nelson Mandela University FALF-FREF Chair in Entrepreneurship and Financial Inclusion was approved in March 2025, followed by a soft launch at the Female Academic Leadership Fellowship five-year celebration on 8 August 2025.

It is the 19th research chair at the University and is based on Second Avenue campus.

The vision of the Chair in Entrepreneurship and Financial Inclusion is to be a catalyst for gender and racial transformation in research and higher education, inspiring inclusive leaders who pioneer knowledge production, mentor others, and deliver lasting societal impact.

Its mission is to cultivate Black female researchers who advance knowledge, shape entrepreneurial and inclusive academic spaces, and mentor the next generation of scholars and supervisors, driving research, innovation, and societal transformation. This includes influencing policy to create and sustain inclusive economic growth.

A mission with vision

FALF (Female Academic Leadership Fellowship) seeks to develop a pipeline of South African, African and Africans of mixed ancestry female academic leaders in tertiary institutions, also known as Chancellor's Fellows.

FREF (FirstRand Empowerment Foundation) is a charitable trust, supporting public benefit activities across five focus areas:

- climate change
- agriculture
- education
- health
- gender-based violence.

The FALF-FREF Chair in Entrepreneurship and Financial Inclusion initially was led by Prof Keo Motaung, a

biomedical scientist and entrepreneur advancing women in STEAM innovation.

Before her death in November – sadly, only a few months after taking up the position – Prof Motaung taught postgraduate students not only to conduct rigorous research but also to think entrepreneurially, equipping them to create jobs and contribute to the economy in a country where unemployment remains high.

“Prof Motaung was an inspirational out-of-the-box thinker, energetic, driven and a straight talker who challenged us to think big and bold. She brought the concept of research entrepreneurship to life,” says Dr Palesa Mothapo, Director: Research Support and Management at Nelson Mandela University.

“Both of us were very proud Aggies, sharing roots in the University of California Davis, USA, where she did a PhD and I, a Mandela Washington Fellowship. She exposed students and researchers to the concept of design thinking, research translation, commercialisation and entrepreneurship; a non-traditional approach in mainstream research and STEM careers.”

Together, FALF, FREF, and Nelson Mandela University are advancing a shared vision: to cultivate inclusive, transformative leadership in academia and ensure that women – particularly from historically underrepresented groups – take their rightful place at the forefront of knowledge creation and societal progress.



Wits University Chancellor **Dr Judy Dlamini** founded FALF in 2020 to nurture the next generation of knowledge producers, research chair holders, directors of centres of excellence, and academic leaders from the designated group: black women – specifically African and Coloured South African women – as defined by the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Act (B-BBEE Act).



From his living room to the world

When Stuart Forrest graduated from Nelson Mandela University with a BTech Fine Art (cum laude) in 1996, few could have predicted he would one day be shaking hands with Disney and Netflix as the CEO of Triggerfish. With its headquarters in Cape Town and studios in the UK, it is one of the most acclaimed animation studios in the world and a defining voice in African animation.

In true startup spirit, Forrest's journey began in his living room, where he created stop-frame animations. After winning a 30-second animation advert for a Multichoice competition, he was offered a job by Triggerfish. This led to him becoming a partner in the company and taking over as CEO in 2004.

Partnering with African talent

He has been instrumental in the company's growth and success over two decades, focusing on partnering with African talent and producing outstanding animations for local and global audiences. Triggerfish's first two feature films were *Zambezia* and *Khumba*, together selling nine million cinema tickets globally.

A third feature, *Seal Team*, was on Netflix's global Top 10 chart in 2022. Some of Triggerfish's other high-profile projects are: *Kizazi Moto: Generation Fire* (Disney+), *Supa Team 4* (Netflix), and *Star Wars: Visions*.

Forrest is also the driving force in The Triggerfish Foundation and the Triggerfish Academy – an online training platform to develop African animation talent.



Leading advice

“Build a team you trust and think in decades. If you can come up with at least one audacious idea and goal, and spend 20 years developing yourself single-mindedly in that direction, the odds are high that you will achieve a strong measure of success. I've followed this path and achieved far more than I could ever have imagined.”



Enterprise Development Fund gathers speed

Mandela University's Enterprise Development Fund fuels small business growth, giving student and township entrepreneurs grants to scale, formalise and create jobs.

With funding from the Small Enterprise Development and Finance Agency (SEDFA), the Centre for Entrepreneurship Rapid Incubator (CfERI) provides an 18- to 36-month incubation programme and other services to students, graduate entrepreneurs, unemployed young people and young township entrepreneurs.

The incubator is active at several universities in South Africa and was established in 2024 at Mandela University. It has already generated 42 small businesses, creating 96 jobs.

"Incubated businesses need capital to grow and as the Mandela University Africa Hub (MUAH) and CfERI at Mandela University, we decided to create an Enterprise Development Fund," outlines Prof Thobekani Lose, Director of the Hub.

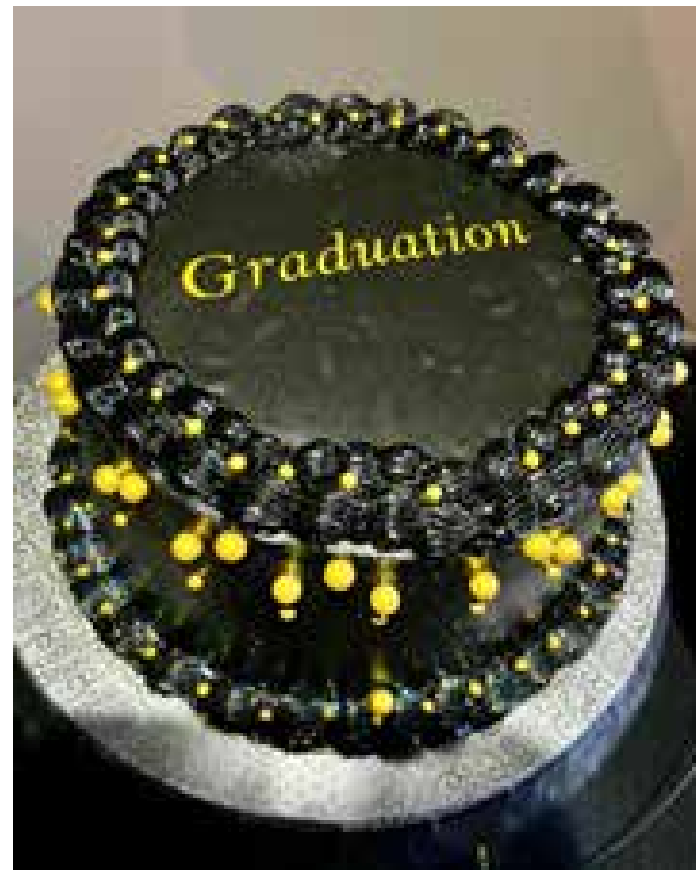
In its first year, the University's finance division disbursed R2.7-million in support of student and community small business development to this fund through MUAH and CfERI.

"The money was divided into grants of R100 000 and awarded to 27 entrepreneur incubatees – 85% students and 15% community-based entrepreneurs, all of whom established and are running small businesses. The terms of the grant is that it is used to take their businesses to the next level."

In December 2025, in its second year, MUAH disbursed a further R2.2-million from the Enterprise Development Fund to 21 businesses – student, township and community.

"The terms of the grant is also that it is used to take their businesses to the next level, and the incubatees all have to provide CfERI with business financials to show how they invested the R100 000," says Prof Lose.

Nomvuyo Singapi's Norris Décor and Restaurant is one of these businesses.



FROM DÉCOR to dining

New Brighton entrepreneur Nomvuyo Singapi has taken her Gqeberha décor-hire firm Norris Décor into hospitality by opening a restaurant.

From décor hire to a live, if still lean, township dining venture, Singapi's latest move reflects a consolidation of the skills she has been building over time.

The New Brighton businesswoman has formally opened Norris Décor and Restaurant on Ferguson Road, extending her existing Norris Décor business into a hybrid hospitality offering built on what she already owns, knows and can control.

It is a pragmatic next step, enabled in part by the Enterprise Development Fund grant she received at the end of 2024 through Nelson Mandela University's Centre for Entrepreneurship Rapid Incubator (CfERI), as part of the Mandela University Africa Hub.

A business takes shape

Where her earlier venture hired out table settings and event infrastructure, the restaurant now uses that inventory as a fixed, income-generating base. Customers can eat, but they can also host small celebrations on site, with décor layered in as an add-on. The business model is one asset, but multiple revenue streams.

"I saw that customers wanted a space where they could celebrate as well," Singapi said of the decision to open an eatery. "So, the décor and the food go hand in hand."

The restaurant operates from the same premises previously used for Norris Décor, with a deck, outdoor seating and music creating an informal township-style dining environment. The menu is equally accessible: pizzas, burgers and braai plates, alongside grilled wings and drumsticks.

Operationally, it is still early-stage, and Singapi works across front and back of house herself. The restaurant currently trades three days a week, with a small staff complement. As it grows, she hopes to create more job opportunities.

Strong foundations

The Enterprise Development Fund grant did not directly finance the restaurant build-out. Instead, it strengthened the underlying business: Singapi bought a laptop to formalise administration, a marquee tent to expand event capacity, and additional stock. In effect, she used the funding to create the operational backbone that now supports the restaurant.

The roots of the concept, however, predate the décor business. Her family's previous venture, Brighton Bistro, operated in the same area before closing because of security pressures. Its closure forced a reset.

The reopening, under the Norris brand, reflects both improved conditions and a more resilient business structure – one less exposed to single-income risk.

Building beyond informal trade

The University's non-financial support has been equally valuable. Through CfERI's incubation and subsequent accelerator programme, Singapi formalised her business, registered for compliance and gained access to peer networks and mentorship.

While she notes gaps in sustained mentorship after graduation, the initial intervention appears to have shifted her from informal trading to structured enterprise.

"My mentor kept on saying, 'why don't you open again, just start small'. As a result, I'm operating on Friday, Saturday and Sunday and, as the word goes out there and business picks up, I will consider adding more days."

There are already early signs of ecosystem effects. The restaurant is hosting collaborations, including a baking masterclass with another programme participant. These linkages, while small, point to the kind of peer-driven growth the Hub is trying to catalyse.



Nomvuyo Singapi has expanded her décor and catering business to include a restaurant

Global pathway for research-driven startups

The StAfrica Germany Call 2026, hosted by the Mandela University Africa Hub (MUAH), identified and supported emerging research-driven entrepreneurs, creating pathways for global collaboration, innovation exchange and access to Germany's EXIST startup ecosystem.

The StAfrica Startup Germany–Africa initiative is designed to strengthen innovation exchange between Africa and Germany. The programme aims to make Germany more attractive as a destination for African founding teams and research-based startups, while also supporting German startups seeking entry into African markets. Through this reciprocal model, the initiative fosters job creation, cross-continental collaboration and expanded innovation networks.

Creating pathways for research innovation

At Nelson Mandela University, the StAfrica Germany Call 2026 was coordinated by MUAH as part of its ongoing commitment to advancing entrepreneurship and research commercialisation.

The call specifically targeted science-based and research-driven innovators, offering them a structured pathway toward participation in Germany's prestigious EXIST Business Startup Grant ecosystem. The 2026 call generated strong engagement across the university and broader innovation community. More than 21 applications were received, primarily from PhD candidates, graduates and early-career researchers from diverse academic disciplines. The programme also attracted two international teams, highlighting its growing regional and global relevance.

From application to pitching stage

The submissions reflected a range of sectors, including technology, engineering, agriculture, health sciences, sustainability and education innovation. This breadth underscored the programme's interdisciplinary appeal and its capacity to support innovation across multiple knowledge domains.

Following the application phase, two structured pitching sessions were hosted by the MUAH. These sessions gave shortlisted applicants the opportunity to present their concepts, refine their business models and receive developmental feedback aimed at strengthening venture readiness.

International review and next steps

The process culminated in a pitching event held on 10 April 2026, marking a milestone in the selection journey. The final session was enriched by the participation of two guest judges from Germany, representing the StAfrica programme, who brought international expertise and comparative insight to the evaluation process.

A total of seven finalist teams presented their startup concepts during the final pitching round. The presentations demonstrated strong innovation potential, research depth and entrepreneurial ambition. Following deliberations by the judging panel, three teams were selected for further review, moving one step closer to representing Nelson Mandela University in Germany.

Throughout the process, emphasis was placed not only on idea quality but also on scalability, research application and cross-border relevance. The structured pitching format enabled participants to progressively strengthen their proposals while gaining exposure to international evaluation standards.

The StAfrica Germany Call 2026 marks another significant milestone for MUAH in advancing global entrepreneurship pathways and reinforcing the university's role in research commercialisation, innovation and international collaboration.



Think BIGGER

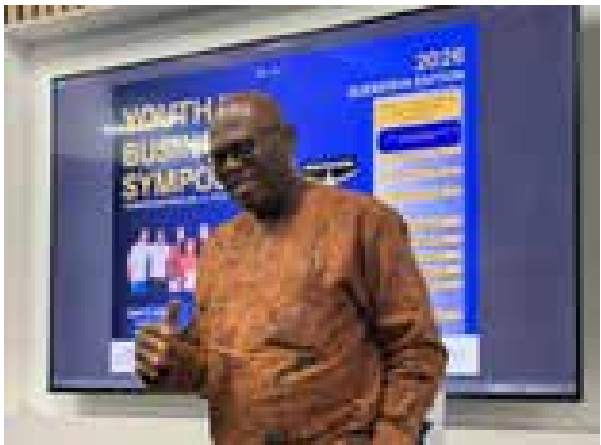
Entrepreneur and patron Michael Onochie Ajukwu delivered a focused masterclass during the Chancellor's Entrepreneurship Fund programme on 27 February this year, equipping emerging entrepreneurs with practical insight on building impactful and scalable ventures.

The MTN Nigeria Independent Non-Executive Director's masterclass, titled *Changing the World Through Entrepreneurship*, spotlighted the realities of building sustainable businesses for aspiring entrepreneurs.

His session centred on three key principles: vision, relevance and scalability.

Ajukwu emphasised that entrepreneurship begins with the ability to identify opportunities before they are fully formed. He encouraged participants not to wait for perfect conditions, funding or validation, but to act on well-informed ideas and refine them through execution. In his view, progress is driven by action, with credibility and results following over time.

He also highlighted the importance of grounding business ideas in real community needs. Drawing from the African context, he pointed to challenges such as unemployment, food insecurity and limited access to services as areas where entrepreneurs can create meaningful value. He noted that businesses built on a clear understanding of these realities are more likely to remain relevant and sustainable.



Michael Onochie Ajukwu

Experience shaping perspective

The session also addressed the need for entrepreneurs to think beyond immediate impact. Ajukwu encouraged participants to design solutions that can grow and be replicated, allowing ventures to extend beyond individual beneficiaries and contribute to broader economic development.

This perspective is informed by his professional background. With more than 21 years of experience in the banking sector, he has expertise in the Nigerian political economy, particularly in energy, real estate and education.

EDHE Champion Awards 2025

At the Mandela University Africa Hub (MUAH), entrepreneurship development is the core mission, fostering entrepreneurial thinking and promoting innovation both on and beyond campus.

Starting life as the Madibaz Youth Entrepreneurship Lab, MUAH has since been recognised as the first recipient of the Entrepreneurship Development in Higher Education (EDHE) Champion Award.

The inaugural EDHE Champion Awards took place in Johannesburg on 26 November 2025, with four MUAH representatives in attendance.

In his opening address, Dr Edwell Gumbo, Director of Entrepreneurship at Universities South Africa (USAf), emphasised the significance of the awards in recognising teams and institutions that have contributed meaningfully to advancing entrepreneurship within higher education in South Africa.

MUAH received the award within a category comprising 17 universities nationwide, including six historically disadvantaged institutions, with nominations spanning a range of academic portfolios. This recognition not only affirms the Africa Hub's impact in advancing entrepreneurship within higher education, but also reinforces its commitment to shaping a generation of innovative, self-reliant graduates who will drive sustainable economic growth in South Africa and beyond.



2026 Global Entrepreneurship Camp *Thailand*

A group of 11 Mandela University students – five postgraduates and six undergraduates - were selected by MUAH to participate in the 2026 Global Entrepreneurship Camp in Bangkok, Thailand, in late January and early February. They were part of a group of 74 students from 14 universities in 11 countries.

"It was a wonderful opportunity to benchmark ourselves internationally, and to learn from other entrepreneurial universities how to elevate the work we do," says Dr Chuene Semono, project specialist at MUAH, who coordinated the visit. "We spent a week in Bangkok and then travelled to Suranaree University of Technology (SUT) for an additional nine days."

SUT's equivalent of MUAH is SEDA – Student Entrepreneurship Development Academy. It is impressive, with a 24-hour co-working space and access to specialised equipment for prototyping, including 3D printers and laser cutting machines.

"They strongly focus on converting transdisciplinary research projects into products and solutions for commercialisation, and are proactive about design protection, patenting and licensing," Dr Semono explains.

"One example is an innovative health care solution called Bederly. The founders are spinoff researchers from the SEDA incubation and acceleration programme. One of their designs is a hospital bed, using AI to enhance patient comfort, such as tilting the patient to distribute bodily pressure and prevent bedsores."

Dr Semono explains that, through SEDA, SUT creates partnerships with spinoff companies, where they help to support them over several years, and the company then pays a percentage to the university, which assists with financial sustainability and holds the business accountable.

"SEDA also uses an excellent tool for guiding idea development and assessing product and business readiness, called the KTH Innovation Readiness Level™ Model. We learnt from this to advance our impact assessment metrics."

Top Left: Dr Chuene Semono and PhD chemistry student Zizipho Ngayeka registering at the Global Entrepreneurship Camp. Right: Sinxolo Manengela's group won the Genius Award in the entrepreneurial solution pitching competition



Katekani Mabunda leading her team at the Global Entrepreneurship Camp

Everyone is on the move

Katekani Mabunda is doing an advanced diploma in economics and is a student entrepreneur coordinator for MUAH.

"It was my first time in Thailand and quite an eye-opener. Bangkok is huge and very busy. Everyone is on the move all the time; there is no pause, irrespective of the time of day. Food-wise, they eat a lot of rice and noodles, with egg and chicken or pork. For transport, a lot of people use Uber, but their version includes rides on small motorbikes.

"We used the translation tools on our phones to translate from English to Thai and vice versa, and it worked well for conversations. What we needed though, was a universal payment method, because in Thailand our Google and Apple Pay didn't work, so I had to draw cash, which is expensive.

"I did quite a bit of shopping, as it is cheap there. I bought four pairs of All Stars for the price of one here at home. And I bought Thai snacks and noodles for my siblings to try. The rest of my money was spent on this most amazing caramel milk they have, and on ice cream!"

With regards to the entrepreneurship camp, she says: "The experience validated what we are doing at MUAH and how to grow. Entrepreneurship is universal in terms of the systems and methodologies used to mentor and equip young entrepreneurs, including design thinking and the business model canvas.

"I was the team leader of our group for the entrepreneurial solution challenge to address the Sustainable Development Goals 3 and 13 (to promote well-being and combat climate change). Our group included a student each from Thailand, South Jakarta and Durban University of Technology. We created a solution for organic waste from restaurants, which could be collected and sold to our target audience of local pig farmers.

"What I loved about the whole camp experience was how well everyone worked together, irrespective of where in the world we live. When people are likeminded and have the same goal, wonderful things happen and I'm very appreciative to have had this experience."

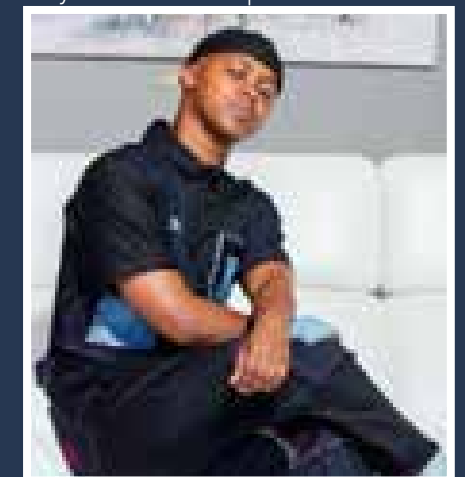
We made global friends

Third year BCom accounting student entrepreneur **Sinoxolo Manengela** is the founder and managing director of the NDIMBI clothing brand www.ndimbi.com. He has been part of MUAH's entrepreneurship ecosystem since 2023. "Bangkok was breathtaking, and the volume of retail was amazing. It was my first international trip and through the camp we met and made global friends.

"A highlight of the camp was winning first place – the Genius Award - for the best idea in the entrepreneurial solution pitching competition for our circular economy business Trashion – based on upcycling pre-loved denim for sale online and in-store.

"Members of the public could donate their old denim and get points for a discount on the upcycled garments, namely jackets and jumpsuits. The idea was based on my existing business, NDIMBI, and our group all wore NDIMBI garments to showcase them during our presentation.

"Overall, the SUT Thailand experience was enriching, empowering and deeply motivating. It gave us the opportunity to represent South Africa on an international platform, engage with fellow innovators, and gain exposure to new ideas, cultures and perspectives. I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to MUAH and Mandela University for the opportunity and to everyone who made it possible."



Shaping Shared Futures at the Ocean's Edge

The SEALIFER Formulation Week at Nelson Mandela University focused less on formal planning and more on building the conversations, partnerships and shared understanding needed for long-term coastal collaboration.

In early March 2026, Nelson Mandela University hosted the IUC SEALIFER Formulation Week. On paper, it was a planning session. In practice, it felt more like the start of something still taking shape, where conversations, ideas and partnerships were beginning to find direction.

Rethinking how knowledge is built

SEALIFER, part of the Institutional University Cooperation (IUC) programme, brings together local and international partners to think differently about coastal research. The focus is not only on producing knowledge, but on how that knowledge is created, who is involved, and who it ultimately serves.

Being based in the Eastern Cape gives the project a very real point of departure. The challenges being discussed – climate change, inequality and ocean governance – are not distant or theoretical. They are part of everyday life in many coastal communities. In such a context, collaboration, especially with Indigenous and First Nations communities, is not treated as an add-on, but as a starting point.

Listening before planning

Contributions from Indigenous and Traditional leaders grounded the space, reminding everyone that research does not begin with answers; it begins with listening.

Community shaping the process

Stakeholder sessions created space for honest input, making sure that community perspectives were not something to be considered later, but something shaping the work from the beginning. Discussions around policy and international partnerships also highlighted the need to connect local realities with broader systems.



Teams spent time unpacking what their individual projects could look like, where they connect, and where the gaps are. Some conversations were straightforward, others more challenging. There were questions around relevance, coordination, and how to make sure the work does not stay locked in academic spaces.

Linking local realities to wider systems

There was also the practical side of things, including budgets, structures and coordination. These conversations helped take the bigger ideas and make them workable, giving everyone a clearer sense of how things will come together going forward.

What also became clear is how SEALIFER fits into something bigger at the university. It supports the idea of an Africa Hub as a tangible driver of enterprise development, social innovation and resource mobilisation. It brings together partners from different spaces and keeps the work rooted in local realities, helping to position the university as a place where meaningful collaboration across the continent and beyond can take shape.

SEALIFER is still finding its shape, and that is part of its strength. If it continues in the same spirit – open, collaborative and willing to listen – it has the potential to grow into something that goes beyond research: something that connects people, ideas and communities in a way that feels real and lasting.



CONTACT DETAILS

T 041 504 3743
K Projects Block, Building 225,
North Campus, Nelson Mandela University
Gqeberha

E muah.mandela.ac.za
E cferi@mandela.ac.za

entrepreneurship.mandela.ac.za



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