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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

FROM IDEAS TO IMPACT: THENSA EMPOWERS STUDENT ENTREPRENEURS TO TURN BUSINESSES INTO VIABLE VENTURES



Students with THENSA representatives, facilitators and potential funders during the workshop

THENSA, in partnership with the Department of Science, Technology and Innovation (DSTI), recently hosted its third six-day, face-to-face Entrepreneurship Workshop for 2026 at the Maharani Hotel in Durban, from 27 September to 2 October 2026. The intensive programme combined foundational entrepreneurial skills training with practical application, equipping aspiring entrepreneurs with the knowledge and tools to develop and strengthen their ventures.

The workshop brought together 30 aspiring student entrepreneurs from the four public universities in KwaZulu-Natal: University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), University of Zululand (UNIZULU), Durban University of Technology (DUT), and Mangosuthu University of Technology (MUT).

Funded by DSTI, the programme aims to equip students with a comprehensive understanding of business, including developing business plans, understanding the fundamentals of running a venture, and building confidence and skills to effectively present their businesses to potential funders and clients.

“This workshop was an important investment in our students and their entrepreneurial futures,” said Kogie Pretorius, Workshop Coordinator and Project Manager at THENSA. “Beyond introducing them to the fundamentals of business and business planning, it provided practical skills and confidence to develop their ventures so that they can engage effectively with potential funders, partners and clients.”

She further expressed her gratitude to the DSTI who continue to support opportunities like this. “Your investment in our students helps create a stronger pipeline of young entrepreneurs who can turn innovative ideas into sustainable businesses and contribute meaningfully to the economy.”

PUTTING ENTREPRENEURIAL LEARNING INTO PRACTICE

Bringing together what the students had learned throughout the week, i.e. the preparation and refinement of their business concepts and ideas, finalizing their Lean Business Canvas and supported by evening coaching sessions, the student entrepreneurs presented their Lean Business Canvases to their peers in the form of PowerPoint presentations for review and feedback.

The peer-review process was engaging and insightful, with students providing analytical and constructive feedback to their fellow entrepreneurs. Prior to the presentations, the students were introduced on how to analyse a business pitch, designed to equip them with analytical skills to conduct meaningful peer reviews and also encourage self-reflection, critically assess and improve their own enterprises. The feedback enabled students to identify areas requiring further development and refinement, ultimately strengthening their business concepts and plans.

Special Awards

The following students received the special awards nominated by their fellow peers participating in the workshop:

- ***Most Financially Viable Business Innovation Award***
  Mr Ndumiso Siphesihle Mngomezulu – Bachelor of Information and Communications Technology in Internet of Things (IoT), 3rd Year, Durban University of Technology (DUT)

- ***Most Innovative and Creative Business Concept Award***
  Mr Samkelo Ndlovu – Bachelor of Law, Final Year, University of Zululand (UNIZULU)

- ***Highest Growth Potential Business Innovation Award***
  Mr Luyanda Njabulo Mchunu – MBCHB, 5th Year, University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN)



Special Awards

STUDENT ENTREPRENEURS PITCH TO INDUSTRY STAKEHOLDERS AND POTENTIAL FUNDERS

Following the students' participation and assessment of their Lean Business Canvas, the following five students were selected by THENSA representatives and facilitators to present to the industry stakeholders and potential funders (Nedbank, Standard Bank, DTI, SEDFA, Polyco, Access Bank and InnoBiz Durban):

- **Mr Ndumiso Siphesihle Mngomezulu – Bachelor of Information and Communications Technology in Internet of Things (IoT), 3rd Year, Durban University of Technology (DUT)**
- **Mr Thandazani Mbutho – Adv Diploma in Information Technology – Software Development, 5th Year, Mangosuthu University of Technology (MUT)**
- **Mr Luyanda Njabulo Mchunu – MBCHB, 5th Year, University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN)**
- **Ms Zekhethelo Gwala – Postgraduate Dip in HRM, University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN)**
- **Mr Samkelo Ndlovu – Bachelor of Law, Final Year, University of Zululand (UNIZULU)**



Top 5 Presenters

The invited guests were afforded the opportunity to engage with the students, sharing insights on their business on how to grow a business and encouraged the students to pursue their entrepreneurial journeys beyond the workshop. Some students were invited to engage further with the invited guests regarding their businesses.



Guest Panellists

STUDENT TESTIMONIALS

Asanda Dumakude, master's student from University of Zululand, said: The most valuable lesson I gained from the THENSA Six-day Entrepreneurship Workshop was that entrepreneurship is not simply about having a good business idea. It requires understanding the problem you are trying to solve, knowing your target market, being willing to receive criticism, and continuously improving your idea. The workshop challenged me to look at my entrepreneurial journey differently and reminded me that passion needs to be supported by proper planning, financial understanding, market research and a sustainable business model.



Luyanda Mchunu, medical student from UKZN, said: The workshop has influenced my entrepreneurial approach, making it different from before. I am now more focused on building solutions that are more practical, evidence-based, and financially sustainable, rather than only technically innovative. It has also encouraged me to engage more with stakeholders, especially industry leaders in the field we are innovating in, early in the development process to validate assumptions. In my view, the workshop did achieve more of my intended outcomes, which we had to identify on the first day. It provided strong foundational entrepreneurial tools, exposure to real-world thinking, and improved my ability to communicate and structure ideas effectively. The interactive nature of the sessions made the learning especially impactful," he added.



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Media enquiries can be directed to Mr Xolani Mathibela – Marketing and Media Liaison Officer
Email: marketing@thensa.co.za | Cell: +27(0)72 174 0692.

About THENSA (https://thensa.co.za/):
THENSA is a catalyst consortium that supports member institutions through technology-focused teaching and learning, applied research, innovation, and entrepreneurial ecosystems, enabling societal transformation. THENSA is a consortium of technology-focused higher education institutions that aims to promote relevant, impactful, and globally competitive qualifications, skills, research, and innovation in collaboration with businesses, industries, and research institutions, both locally and internationally, to foster a vibrant economy in Africa. THENSA is focused on its transformation agenda regarding the 4IR, thereby creating curricula, entrepreneurs, international research, innovation, and business opportunities.