



R3.5 million investment towards skills for rural entrepreneurs

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[Wisdom Ngobeni](#)

Times are tough and jobs are few in Bushbuckridge, Mpumalanga. So 24-year-old Wisdom Ngobeni created Chillas World, a gaming lounge and airstime outlet.

Wisdom Ngobeni had two dreams: the first was to find a lounge-like space where young people could play games and conveniently buy airtime, electricity or betting vouchers.

The second was to engage his community and give his peers a feeling of purpose and connection.

In Bushbuckridge, a town bordering the Kruger National Park in Mpumalanga, Wisdom created Chillas World. Using just basic equipment, his facility was enough to make a loyal customer base. But he wanted to grow and began looking for opportunities to do so.

Wisdom then heard about BANKSETA's entrepreneurial project in partnership with the [Wits Entrepreneurship Clinic \(WEC\)](#), the Wits Development and Fundraising Office ([DfO](#)), and the [MRC/Wits-Agincourt Research Unit](#), which incorporates Bushbuckridge.

Over six months, the project set out to provide comprehensive support to 60 entrepreneurs, prioritising digital and sustainable ventures. R3.5 million was invested in the initiative.

When Wisdom realised he was competing against 60 other promising young business people, he didn't think he'd walk away with the top cash prize of R20 000. When his name was called as the winner of the competition, his first thought (apart from excitement and awe) was to use the money to upgrade his gaming stations, mainly to buy a steering wheel as they're popular.

Wisdom also bought new wifi routers, a surge protector, and X-boxes. His old wifi routers had been damaged by a storm in 2024.

"I also wanted to create a bigger space for my community gaming tournaments. And the prize money has enabled the youth to come together in a safe space, have fun and share ideas," says Wisdom.

He says that the business incubator helped him gain financial management and customer engagement skills. He also learnt about business pitch writing and how technology can streamline Chilla's World's operational and marketing elements.



“I’d like to one day expand and create another Chilla’s World branch,” says Wisdom.

BANKSETA’s marketing and communication manager, Sipho Makgaba, spoke about the importance of strategic partnerships, particularly the leveraging of university resources. “The purpose of the programme is to empower already-hardworking entrepreneurs in the country. Skills must be enhanced while jobs are created. Innovation plays a critical role in fostering productivity, creating new markets and jobs, and driving competitiveness, ultimately leading to a higher quality of life and a more resilient economy.”

The training covered key areas such as financial literacy, business management, and market expansion strategies, enabling participants to enhance their operations, increase profitability, and sustain business growth. The inclusion of mentorship with site visits was particularly impactful, allowing trainers to provide hands-on guidance and contextualised support, addressing real challenges faced by entrepreneurs in their environments.

A logistical factor contributing to the programme’s success was the provision of transport stipends, which ensured that participants could consistently attend sessions without financial strain. This helped remove a common barrier that often limits participation in rural development programmes.

The types of businesses that were incubated include chicken farming, spaza shops, make-up and beauty salons, company registration services, goat and pig farming, tourism (game drives), branding and printing, tailoring and fashion, vehicle painting and recycling.

The BANKSETA project was hosted at Wits Agincourt’s research centre, where a graduation ceremony took place.

“This project has proven to be a transformative initiative. Agincourt’s health and sociodemographic surveillance site is a long-term research project in the area. We have been in partnership with the community for over 30 years, and many job opportunities have arisen out of the work,” says [Ngoni Ngwarai](#), Assistant Director of Systems and Operations at the MRC/Wits-Agincourt Research Unit.

“To increase the area’s prosperity, participants must be linked with resources, opportunities and support. We are working with the Small Enterprises Development and Finance Agency so our entrepreneurs can access further services.”

Agincourt aims to monitor economic, health and social impacts over time. “By capturing and analysing continuous data, the BANKSETA programme can measure both immediate and sustained impacts, offering valuable, evidence-based insights for policymakers,” says Ngwarai.

Professor [Helen Duh](#), the Head of the [School of Business Sciences](#) where the Wits Entrepreneurship Clinic (WEC) is housed, explains that the employment landscape and the nature of work are changing rapidly. “We can harness the rapid development of technology and AI to support and grow viable entrepreneurial businesses,” she says.

This story was first published by the University of Witwatersrand on 4 April and can be accessed here <https://www.wits.ac.za/news/latest-news/general-news/2025/2025-04/r35-million-investment-towards-skills-for-rural-entrepreneurs.html>