



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Contribution of Local Economic Development (LED) Initiatives to youth Enterprises in the South African Township

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: Jul 17, 2025	The conversion of townships into sustainable economic hubs remains challenging due to historical socio-spatial and economic planning issues in South Africa. Recent legislation, such as the Township Economic Bill, aims to invigorate this sector, particularly for young entrepreneurs. The bill aims to improve community lives through better products and services, focusing on innovative strategies and operational mechanisms to tackle youth unemployment. To investigate the impact of LED initiatives on youth enterprises in the township economy, this study adopted a mixed-method approach. The qualitative questionnaire assessed respondents' views on the Gauteng Township Economic Development Bill, while the quantitative questionnaire identified essential components for improving township enterprises to gain a competitive edge. The findings indicate a gap in the implementation of developmental strategies and their outcomes. Therefore, to foster a supportive environment for economic development, effective policies should provide practical support, attract investment, and address the needs of historically marginalized townships. This study recommends, among other things, that local governments should invest in infrastructure that enables economic activities, including financing options, mentorship programs, and expanded market access.
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## INTRODUCTION

The township economy in South Africa has long been a focal point for socio-economic development (Turok et al. 2024). The conversion of townships into sustainable economic hubs remains challenging due to historical socio-spatial and economic planning issues. Recent legislation, such as the Township Economic Bill, aims to invigorate this sector, particularly for young entrepreneurs (Gauteng Provincial Government 2014). The Township Economic Bill aims to bring hope to young entrepreneurs and communities, emphasizing innovative strategies to tackle unemployment and improve lives. To achieve the Township Economic Bill, a Local Economic Development (LED) strategy should be in place. Local Economic Development (LED) is crucial for self-reliance and economic improvement in community areas. It aims to empower communities, reduce poverty, and foster sustainable business networks (Venter et al. 2019). The National Framework for LED emphasizes developing learning economies and supporting enterprise development, which is vital for sustainable development and competitive advantage in township economies. Mogale City, particularly the Kagiso Township, faces unique challenges due to its rural-urban divide. The area's economic activities are diverse, including mining, agriculture, manufacturing, and tourism. However, townships like Kagiso have limited access to services and facilities, hindering their economic potential.

Despite LED initiatives in Kagiso Township, the relationship between strategic township renovation and LED remains unclear. To achieve inclusive growth, clear communication between township renovation strategies and enterprise support is necessary. This research aims to investigate the impact of LED initiatives for youth enterprises in the township economy to stimulate local competitive advantage. The research objectives are as follows:

1. To analyse the processes required to bridge the disparities within township economies and promote equitable economic development.
2. To establish the effectiveness of the Gauteng Township Economic Development Bill

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Township enterprise: Kagiso Township Context

Township enterprises engage in various economic activities, from spaza shops and street vending to industrial services and stokvel (Maseng 2022). These enterprises are essential for local economies, providing goods and services that cater to the needs of township residents. However, these businesses often face challenges such as low capital turnover and limited skills.

Kagiso Township in Mogale City is characterized by underprivileged areas with limited access to services and facilities. The township economy includes various informal and formal enterprises crucial for local economic sustainability (Thwala et al. 2023; Scheba - Turok 2020). Despite the presence of LED initiatives, the relationship between strategic township renovation and LED remains unclear in Kagiso Township. Scheba - Turok (2020) highlight that South African townships have significant entrepreneurial potential, though SMMEs in these areas face issues such as resource access, infrastructure, and skills. The businesses in townships primarily offer products and services aimed at meeting basic societal needs within the township market. Notably, township entrepreneurs typically do not manufacture most of the products and services they sell commercially.

The Gauteng Provincial Government (2014) advocates for township youth to use their skills, infrastructure, and technological innovations to produce as much as possible within the township. Township businesses are encouraged to focus on value-added products and services that meet the fundamental needs of the township economy. Supported SMMEs are believed to enhance commercial sustainability, generate "multiplier effects," and address socio-economic issues such as poverty (Adanlawo et al. 2021; Wiid - Cant, 2021). Strengthening economic progress requires initiatives like the Department of Trade and Industry Strategy, focusing on micro-enterprises and formalizing informal sectors. Small, Medium, and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs) are crucial for local economic progress (Bvuma - Marnewick, 2020). They drive local economic development (LED) by creating jobs and fostering inclusive growth. Xaba et al. (2025) explain that effective town planning and the use of planning tools are necessary to reinforce spatial planning and LED. The National Framework for LED outlines strategic pillars to support local economies, emphasizing skill development and enterprise support.

### 2.2 The Localisation Programme(s)

Localisation policies in South Africa aim to attract investment and develop industrial capacity to address past injustices. Since the 1990s, the South African government has supported various localisation policies, which have been shown globally to attract foreign investment, boost manufacturing development, create jobs, and foster economic growth (Rogerson 2016). However, these policies may also result in increases in domestic prices and economic inefficiencies. Localisation policies in South Africa are primarily implemented through government-owned entities. Maphela - Godana (2025) explain that "almost all government procurement" is coordinated through the "Preferential Procurement Policy Framework Act (PPPFA) of 2017," "which" supports a "sectoral" "approach to local" procurement, apart from the "Renewable Energy Independent Power Producer Procurement Programme (REIP4)" introduced in 2011 ().

Another significant localisation policy is the framework for "Black Economic Empowerment (BEE)." The Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) Act of 2007 detailed seven categories for scoring bids, with ownership and preferential procurement being the most important. In South Africa, localisation policies are designed to attract foreign investment and build local expertise while addressing historical injustices (Croese - Duminy, 2023). Although these policies have led to new investments and job creation, they sometimes fall short of their intended objectives and come at a cost. European Union investors recognize South Africa's goals and do not see local content requirements as a barrier. Localisation has reduced costs for EU companies, enabled local supply chain development, and supported regional export markets (Kaziboni - Stern, 2020).

For local manufacturing, there is potential for local industrialists to participate in the "localisation programme," producing items listed in the government's directory of 1,000 items. These include food and beverages, beauty and skincare products, cleaning supplies, hair care items, drugs, and apparel. Financial aid and market access support should be provided to ventures in this program to meet quality manufacturing standards (Shelton - Minniti, 2018). Several enterprises already generate capital from local commerce, including financial institutions and telecommunication providers. Therefore, binding stakeholders to support the township economy's progress idea.

### **2.3 The Gauteng Township Economic Development Bill**

The Gauteng Township Economic Development Bill aims to promote and develop the township economy, create a conducive environment for this purpose, provide licensing for township-based enterprises, and manage funds through the Gauteng Township Economic Development Fund. Additionally, it establishes principles for municipalities to draft and adopt bylaws, addressing related and incidental matters (Singo 2024). On April 29, 2022, Premier David Makhura officially authorized the Bill, turning it into an Act. This Act amends previous regulations, tracing its origins back to 2015 under the "Transformation, Modernisation, and Re-industrialisation of Gauteng City" initiative. The Bill aims to leverage opportunities within the township economy and advocate for a favourable environment to achieve these goals. It supports the accreditation of township-based businesses and manages finances through the Township Economic Development Fund of Gauteng. Furthermore, it facilitates the establishment of standards for municipalities in drafting and adopting legislation. Rogerson (2018) highlights that the Bill will drive renovation in the township and broader commercial sectors, altering commercial prospects locally. A civic partnership fund will support township-based enterprises and incentivize local governments to expand taxi ranks into micro-central commercial districts (Singo 2024).

The Bill's guidelines will stimulate commercial growth and job regeneration. Mamo et al. (2023) emphasize that municipalities should foster socio-economic development by initiating and directing entrepreneurial initiatives, ensuring long-term outcomes like employment, foreign direct investment, and corporate social responsibility. The Bill requires local enterprises to obtain licenses to operate. This licensing framework is a victory for township activists, who have advocated for foreign-owned businesses to be authorized and contribute to the national tax base.

The Bill aims to stimulate local economies, promote commercial gains, bridge rural-urban gaps, and integrate formal and informal markets for socio-political benefits. Turok et al. (2024) assert that the Bill encourages residents who have faced generational dispossession, promoting financial privileges cherished in the 1955 Freedom Charter, which emphasizes equal rights and opportunities and socio-economic and spatial justice. However, Rogerson (2018) notes that in fulfilling the directive to build and maintain infrastructure and provide essential services, local municipalities need to engage in contractual relations with private sectors in enhancing service delivery. According to Turok (2024), the Township Economic Development Bill's success relies on the active participation of townships, youth, and civic society. Its effectiveness depends on contributions from various stakeholders, including the Gauteng financial advancement branch and industry partners.

### **2.4 Importance of Enterprise Improvement and Sustenance**

Small-scale enterprises significantly contribute to South Africa's commercial sector. and Nkomo and Adanlawo (2024) emphasize the need to strengthen small-scale retail due to its positive impact on South African commerce and sustainable economic growth. These enterprises not only help alleviate poverty but also contribute over a quarter to the GDP. In free-market economies, there are various academic opinions on the role of entrepreneurship in commercial growth, with some suggesting it is less significant in semi-periphery states compared to advanced nations.

Mokoena (2019) states that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are key contributors to government revenue. Despite the strong support from the small-scale sector, South Africa faces low entrepreneurial activity and high insolvency rates comparable to unemployment figures. Encouraging youth participation in commerce is critical. There is a need to provide opportunities for youth to have collective bargaining power in the economy (Schnabel 2020). Also, government recognition and support are necessary for these high-performing entities to thrive (Owolabi et al.

2024). Efforts should be made to motivate and advance them. Access to finance is crucial for SME development and sustainability; without it, businesses may fail to launch, survive, or mature.

## 2.5. Strategies for Youth Entrepreneurs

For two decades, the South African government has executed various strengthening strategies to boost commercial innovative projects and SMMEs, with the likes of “Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE), the Youth Enterprise Development Scheme (YEDS), the Local Procurement Accord, and the Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA).” Gangiah (2024) expresses that the strategic context of South Africa in sustaining youth entrepreneurial pursuits and evolving their enterprises is broad in content. These strengthening techniques supplement the extension of youth business visionaries, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) is a South African government initiative aimed at reducing economic inequities caused by apartheid. It is a comprehensive framework meant to alter the economy and improve Black South Africans' engagement in the formal sector. The primary purpose is to empower previously disadvantaged individuals and communities through numerous efforts, such as ownership, management control, skills development, enterprise and supplier development, and socioeconomic development.

The Youth Enterprise Development Scheme (YEDS) aims to increase youth economic participation by encouraging self-employment, business expansion, and entrepreneurial activities. The Department of Trade and Industry in 2013 (DTI 2013) was tasked with the conceptualising of YEDS with the mandate to multiply the quantity of youth who are self-entrepreneurial. It addresses difficulties that young entrepreneurs face, such as a lack of funding, skills, and market access. Several programs, like the Youth Entrepreneurship Programme (YEP) and the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA) grant program, provide both monetary and non-monetary aid in the form of market contacts, business training, and mentorship.

The Local Procurement Accord is an additional governance programme set in motion to encourage youth training and was authorised to champion the administration and coordination of enterprises. The Accord involves fostering the growth of domestic production and supporting the establishment and success of financially sustainable public enterprises that can meet the needs of their customers (Biyela et al. 2018). The South African government, in 2004, in backing the small-scale commercial policy, instituted a SEDA. The Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA), overseen by the Department of Small Business Development (DSBD), provides non-financial assistance to cooperatives and small businesses. SEDA has programmes for women and youth, and it operates in several townships and rural areas.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-method approach, employing both “quantitative and qualitative questionnaires. The qualitative questionnaire examined respondents' views on the Gauteng Township Economic Development Bill, while the quantitative questionnaire was used to identify processes required to bridge the disparities within township economies and promote equitable economic development. The study was conducted in Kagiso Township, focusing on youth enterprises and their role in the local economy. The primary units of analysis were the township commercial structure and youth enterprises in Kagiso, Mogale City, chosen for their relevance to current policy frameworks supporting SMEs and the township revitalization economy. These youth entrepreneurs offered critical insights into the role of small enterprises within the local micro-economy.

The study population consisted of 25 youth-owned enterprises operating in the Kagiso area. Businesses were selected purposefully from different sections of the township to capture a comprehensive perspective. Following Perera et al. (2022), the sampling strategy combined purposive random sampling for the quantitative component and convenience sampling for the qualitative component. For the quantitative sample, youth aged 18–35 conducting commercial activities within Kagiso were chosen using a purposive non-probability approach. The qualitative component used convenience sampling to gather responses from youth entrepreneurs who were readily accessible in the area.

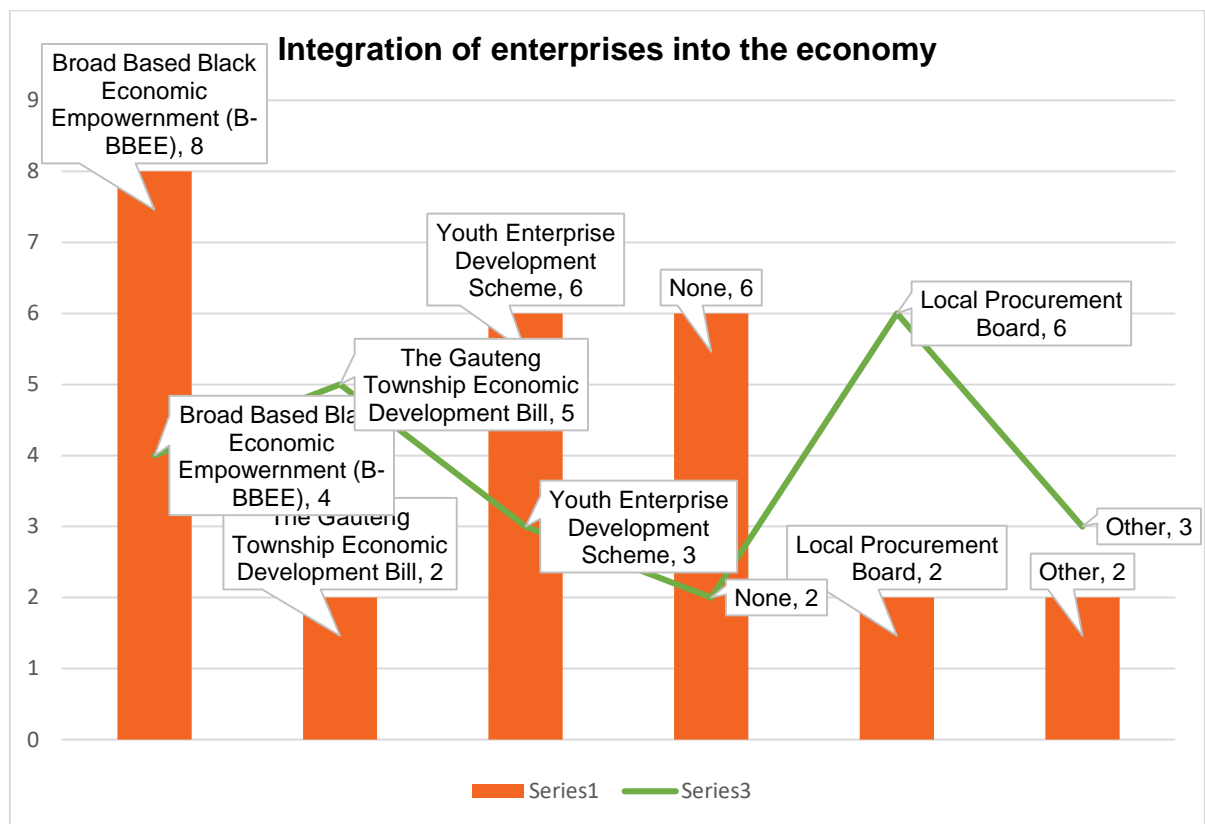
Data was collected through online questionnaires, distributed via digital platforms including WhatsApp, email, and SMS, to ensure ease of access. This electronic distribution aligns with the fourth industrial revolution's focus on digital innovation (Chaka - Adanlawo, 2024). The quantitative questionnaire used a Likert scale to gather data, which was then analysed numerically through frequency distributions and percentages on Microsoft Excel. The qualitative data was analysed thematically, while quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics. The findings were calculated and generated on Excel, with findings represented through crafted graphs and charts.

#### 4. Data Analysis

##### 4.1.1. Business Integration into the Economy

In addressing objective 1 of the study, the study sought to analyse the processes required to bridge the disparities within township economies and promote equitable economic development.

The integration of enterprises into the economy is critical for the development of the enterprise and the sustainability of the local economy they operate in. This study identified partner agencies that the enterprises in Mogale City are working with as part of their integration into the economy.

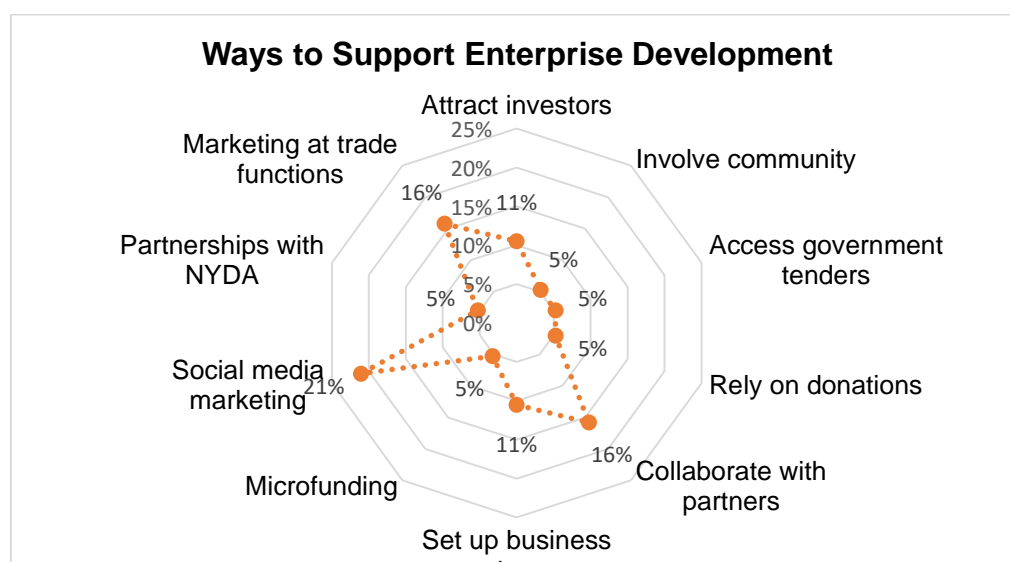


**Figure 1. Integration of enterprises into the economy.**

BBBE has a majority influence on the enterprises at 31%, revealing how many businesses are receiving more support from the BBB-E than other agencies. The Local Procurement Board was a partnership agency for 8% of the enterprises, and the YEDS collaborated with 23% of them to develop their businesses. As a result, the enterprises have formed alliances with platforms that can help them grow.

##### 4.1.2. Ways to Support Enterprise Development

The study participants shared different views on how their businesses could supported and grow.



**Figure 0.32. Ways to Support Enterprise Development**

In completing the questionnaire, the study participants suggested strategies for growth support. As shown in *Graph 1*, 29 percent identified social media marketing as a key growth tool, while 16 percent pointed to marketing at trade functions and partner collaboration with partners as being effective in supporting the development of the businesses. Additionally, 25 percent emphasized attracting investors, and 11 percent highlighted the importance of establishing business savings or investments to drive enterprise development.

#### 4.2. The Effectiveness of the Gauteng Township Economic Development Bill

In addressing objective 2 of the study, the researchers sought to establish the effectiveness of the Gauteng Township Economic Development Bill since its inception in 2021. The below table presents the respondents' Effectiveness of the Gauteng Township Economic Development Bill since its inception in 2021.

**Table 1. Respondents Perceptions on the Effectiveness of the Gauteng Township Economic Development Bill since its Inception in 2021**

On a scale of 1 - 5 how best would you rate the effectiveness of the Gauteng Township Economic Development Bill since its inception in 2021. (1 - Lacking, 2 - Moderate, 3 - Still too soon to tell, 4 - Things are getting better, 5 - It's making an Impact)			
Respondents	Rate	Please provide a detailed explanation for your choice of selection in the question above	What plans / strategies do you rely on to support the development of your township enterprise?
1.	3	<i>It's still too soon to tell whether the bill has been or will be effective. In all honesty, the only time I come across dialogue related to the Bill is before and during elections. I've read through the bill and came to find that on paper it looks implementable. It has just become part of political talk over the years.</i>	<i>Collaboration with other suppliers especially in the field where we use our enterprises to tender.</i>
2.	1	<i>I reserve my comment.</i>	<i>As a means to integrate IPPs. In the past two years attendance at energy conventions has helped in meeting and linking with other entrepreneurs in the energy space, which has helped with reaching other consumers and the</i>

			<i>addition of import products related to energy.</i>
3.	2	<i>Only available to people who have direct access to information and consultants</i>	<i>Word of mouth and social media marketing.</i>
4.	3	<i>It's early days before we see a measurable boom with this Bill.</i>	<i>Through Integrated design and collaboration of architecture design and innovative solutions. Links with Innovative Privates sector NGOs.</i>
5.	4	<i>When launched by Premier Makhura in 2018 as an enterprise, we benefited. We were enabled by a platform to showcase our trade and receive some funds. There has since been no movement of the intensification of this act or law, maybe as per the Covid shutdown. No one still maintains the site visits and progress of our enterprise. We are on our own.</i>	<i>The entertainment sector would show us love. As an enterprise, we'd partner with local talent / kasi celebrities, and that was a strategy that worked for us as we as an enterprise we were showcased on music videos. WhatsApp has been helpful in getting out known out there, although broadband tech is a new thing in our township nevertheless, everyone has WhatsApp.</i>
6.	2	<i>Since the pandemic, no government scheme or initiative has been operational in my view. The scheme to be given most attention nowadays is the R350 initiative.</i>	<i>As a manufacturing enterprise we have collaborated with local or available recycling parks. Not a lot in our area, sometimes we have to rely on Westonaria. We seek to do more with local supermarket brands.</i>
7.	1	<i>I honestly only have read about this Bill long before Covid. I really would say I have not paid attention to it as I rarely see governments schemes aimed at SME's take flight.</i>	<i>Showcasing at Market trade functions where we as local enterprises get the opportunity to showcase our trade or craft, attendance to SME workshops by NGO's. Being supported by local community-initiated groups like the township economic alliance.</i>
8.	1	<i>This Bill lacks grounding and is not well represented, which makes me doubt its effectiveness or if it is happening on a material level. By local government or established governmental departments. It's literally a spaza shop initiative that is illustrated in posters and city halls and almost always during local and national elections.</i>	<i>Micro-funding in the enterprise is responsible for things like crowdfunding, it really assisted my enterprise especially, when parents came together, and crowdfunded for preschoolers to come and visit my practice on oral health matters.</i>
9.	1	<i>With government schemes, it's either you enforce all power or all patience, nothing is guaranteed in the end, though if I were to scale it, it would be a 70/30, with 30 being the probability of you succeeding.</i>	<i>The ICT space is one which is promising.</i>
10.	4	<i>At its beginning, we benefited as the first group that participated. It was more like a localised tender scheme. And with its profits, my dream of starting a township bakery was possible.</i>	<i>What has enabled my business over the years is word of mouth and social media posting from my clients yah.</i>

11.	4	<i>Just like every other government initiative or bill, the successful implementation of it also relies on our pushbacks as youth especially in townships. We must not tire of calling and following up. As an enterprise that partakes in local government tenders, sometimes even making friends and creating plugs goes a long way. In my entrepreneurial experience nothing comes easy, and as enterprises we must always be willing to see things through 7/10 times.</i>	<i>Investment into online stocks and flexible savings plans that are readily available to counter any shock to my enterprise operations e.g. the Covid pandemic.</i>
12.	1	<i>Materialization has not taken place. Just like BEE we usually only read about it but no solid township gains.</i>	<i>Would partnering with NYDA count? We've in the past partnered where arts and culture initiatives were considered. A strategy maybe that is seasonal but helps the studio is supplying arts and culture events hosted by the municipality as a registered enterprise on their database.</i>
14.	4	<i>Implementation of the Gauteng Township Economic Development Bill of 2021 is evident that the bill is proofing to assist townships such as the Tshwane Automotive Special Economic Zone that they are constructing with Ford. 45% of this project has been localized, and the contracting of SMMEs in the area of Mamelodi by including previously excluded townships in the economic zone is making it possible to alleviate unemployment and increase job opportunities. also improve the mentality around entrepreneurship ventures in townships by allocating funding appropriately and recognizing the need to support townships, as there are approximately 22 million South Africans that live in townships that could be given the opportunity to start entrepreneurship ventures, businesses, and companies, and this could increase South Africa's GDP.</i>	<i>Government tenders, private and public investors.</i>
15.	1	<i>I have not seen improvements in small businesses.</i>	<i>Involve as many community members as possible.</i>

The table shows that the Gauteng Township Economic Development Bill fosters inclusive economic growth and promotes a more cohesive, equal society. However, a significant minority disagrees. Understanding the reasons for these differing views is essential for a critical analysis of the Bill's impact. While there is evidence of partial success, substantial challenges and areas for improvement remain.

## 5. DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION and RECOMMENDATIONS

Assessing Local Economic Development (LED) initiatives is crucial for fostering enterprise growth in Kagiso township. Revitalizing Kagiso's township economy requires a comprehensive strategy that tackles both structural and operational challenges. By emphasizing innovative Local Economic Development (LED) approaches, bolstering community associations, and investing in supportive infrastructure, Kagiso can foster sustainable growth and enhance residents' quality of life. Although the township economy has strong growth potential, effective stakeholder collaboration and customized commercialization approaches are essential to overcoming challenges and building a vibrant, inclusive economy for all. This highlights the importance of cooperation among various stakeholders and tailored strategies to address specific needs, ensuring that economic initiatives are



relevant and effective. By doing so, Kagiso can create a more dynamic and equitable economic environment that benefits all community members.

This study's findings illustrate that the Gauteng Township Economic Development Bill aims to foster a supportive environment for economic development by stimulating local economies, supporting enterprise growth, and creating employment. Key initiatives include business incubation, technology transfer, and capacity building to establish a sustainable, thriving township economy. However, challenges such as limited resources, stakeholder cooperation issues, corruption, and weak governance may hinder its effectiveness. This study's findings highlight the need to assess whether the Bill effectively targets these development goals. Further evaluation is essential to identify potential gaps in implementation and to ensure that the intended benefits reach the communities most in need. By addressing these challenges proactively, stakeholders can work towards a more robust framework that truly empowers local entrepreneurs and enhances the overall economic landscape in Gauteng townships.

Unlocking South Africa's economic potential hinges on a multifaceted approach that prioritizes a conducive business environment, effective policy implementation, and robust enterprise development. By creating an ecosystem that nurtures innovation and investment, the country can not only attract local and foreign businesses but also stimulate sustainable growth across various sectors. The successful execution and monitoring of policies will ensure that these initiatives are not just theoretical but translate into tangible benefits for communities. Furthermore, focusing on enterprise development aligns with local economic development (LED) objectives, empowering individuals and fostering resilience within communities. Together, these elements form a comprehensive strategy that positions South Africa as a frontrunner in sustainable development while harnessing its rich resources and diverse talents for future prosperity.

The study concludes that fostering a conducive environment for business growth and investment is paramount to unlocking South Africa's full economic potential and sustainable development. A unilaterally adopted policy remains critical; however, more critical is the implementation and monitoring of it. Enterprise development is seen as one of the key drivers in realising LED objectives. Therefore, based on the findings, the following recommendations have been formulated:

1. Local community associations should be empowered to support local businesses through targeted capacity-building initiatives and funding access.
2. Local governments should invest in infrastructure that enables economic activities, including financing options, mentorship programs, and expanded market access.

Future research should focus on measuring the specific outcomes of the Bill's initiatives in terms of technology transfer and acquisition.

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