

Engineering, Built Environment and Information Technology

You need to know about the business incubator, TuksNovation

By Anéa Burke le Roux

TuksNovation is a technology business incubator that provides specialised support to entrepreneurs throughout their growth journeys. From access to mentorship and bespoke training by leading industry and academic experts to product prototyping facilities, TuksNovation helps young entrepreneurs navigate the journey of starting, building and growing a business. Our ecosystem fosters innovation by connecting science and technology innovators with corporates, academics and government. One of the successful start-ups that is supported by TuksNovation is FundaBotix.

FundaBotix

Ntombikayise Banda is the inspirational entrepreneur behind FundaBotix. Ntombikayise is an alumna of the University of Pretoria and a University of Cambridge PhD candidate, specialising in artificial intelligence applications in education. Drawing on her academic expertise and passion for E-STEAM education, Ntombikayise has developed low-cost robotic kits designed to teach school-going learners programming, engineering, and critical thinking skills in a fun, engaging, and tangible manner.

The robotic kits are modular in design, and easily extendible with more electronic components and sensors. Ntombikayise hopes to increase learner access and exposure to robotics and related 4th Industrial Revolution skills, particularly for neglected segments such as townships and rural areas. In early 2019, FundaBotix was successfully accepted into TuksNovation's Virtual Incubation Programme.

Ntombikayise has refined the robotic kits and has conducted a pilot with schoolchildren. TuksNovation has assisted FundaBotix with business mentorship and advisory, business model refinement as well as the rebranding of the company developing a go-to market strategy.

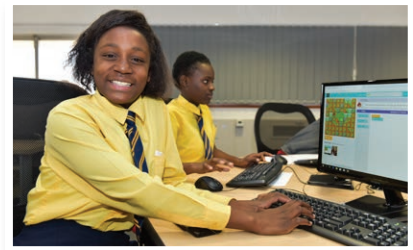
Ntombikayise also received business support and mentorship to help the company better position itself for funding opportunities. The mentorship bore fruits as FundaBotix was one of 20 social enterprises (out of 600 applications) to be selected as finalists for the 2019 SAB Foundation Social Innovation Awards and was awarded a Seed Grant of R200 000 to support its initiatives.

Ntombikayise cites TuksNovation as having been a pillar of strength for her and the company, as she received mentorship, networking opportunities, and access to facilities. As a result of incubation at TuksNovation, she was able to formalise and strengthen her business model, formalise her business identity, including the trademarking of FundaBotix and develop a go-to market strategy.

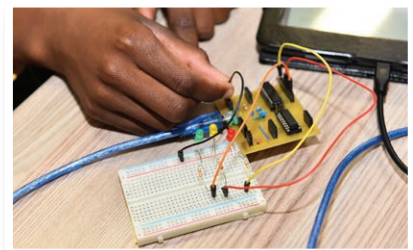
A key lesson that Ntombikayise highlights from her journey is realising the importance of **continuous user feedback**, an element that she says needs to be integrated in all phases of product development.

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↑ FundaBotix students learning the principles of coding through a game-based software.



↑ Simulating the operation of a traffic light using the FundaBotix "brain" board.



↑ Ntombikayise and a FundaBotix learner, Somila Fanta, testing the robot that has been programmed to follow a light source (in this case, a torch).



Watch the FundaBotix video here:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1-X8p-8qcTOIGBN7z_jgdOuoYRNcR0FOU?usp=sharing