

# Tech to propel SA's entrepreneurs, says Sahib



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Johannesburg, 20 Nov 2019



Author and business coach Jamal Sahib.

**S**outh Africa lacks a strong entrepreneurial ecosystem but technology can be the catalyst to propel local start-ups to the global stage, says Jamal Sahib, an author and business coach.

In an interview with ITWeb, Sahib, who recently launched his book: "Start with the End in Mind – The 5 Secrets to Life and Business Success", says future entrepreneurs need to be educated about "mindset".

He says contrary to popular belief, there is no entrepreneurial ecosystem in the country that encourages and enables growth.

Sahib believes technology plays a critical role in driving entrepreneurship in SA, as it allows start-ups to automate processes, increase the rate of productivity in their businesses, as well as reduce production costs.

"Through technology, we can become more effective and efficient at delivery. This will give us a better chance of competing with other (often global) producers of goods and services in South Africa."

His assessment comes as SA is in dire need of cultivating entrepreneurship and innovation.

Government recently launched the Small Business and Innovation Fund (SBIF), which is meant to help ambitious start-ups and entrepreneurs to grow quickly.

Small business development minister Khumbudzo Ntshavheni last week announced 100 000 young entrepreneurs will be assisted to grow their businesses with funding from the SBIF.

In broader terms, start-ups in SA are being innovative, particularly in areas such as finance, retail and the food industry, and technology-based approaches and models are being applied across all sectors.

However, Sahib believes more needs to be done and the current government model is unsustainable.

## Jobs deficit

"An ecosystem is an environment that encourages and enables growth. With soaring unemployment and more

than 500 000 jobs lost in 2019, can we really say such an environment exists in South Africa?

"If there was a strong entrepreneurial ecosystem, which allowed small businesses to flourish, then our unemployment rate wouldn't be as diabolical as it is, because small businesses would be employing more people."

Sahib explains that entrepreneurs are vital to turning the economy around. As pivotal job creators in any economy, it is crucial the number of entrepreneurs in SA be increased.

"Government's strategy of creating jobs through the public sector and parastatals, which are funded by tax revenue, is an unsustainable model. It also results in a huge salary burden for government, which weighs down the fiscus," he says.

Sahib argues that entrepreneurs "turn nothing into something in response to market demand; they are creating a sustainable model, which feeds into, and grows, the local economy."

He notes there is a natural circle of life when it comes to any ecosystem.

"The large corporations are the equivalent of lions. The small businesses form the grassroots. Government should be the caretaker of this nature reserve. To create a healthy ecosystem, government needs to understand and nurture the underlying environment."

He says a strong, self-sustaining entrepreneurial ecosystem means empowering entrepreneurs with the skills and infrastructure they need to thrive.

## Abundance thinking

"I think this [abundance thinking] is where the real starting point needs to be. Entrepreneurs must believe nothing is impossible. If entrepreneurs believe that if we can dream it, we can learn about it, then we can plan it, and we can do it, we will do it!"

According to Sahib, abundance thinking posits there are enough resources out there for all.

"When entrepreneurs adopt this thinking, they start to work together and get closer to a naturally functioning ecosystem.

"Instead, government should focus on creating an enabling infrastructure. Firstly, there needs to be electricity. Without power, nothing can be made or processed. Secondly, there must be adequate water. We need water to live, but all industries require this for the manufacturing of resources."

Additionally, Sahib argues logistics and infrastructure are important to entrepreneurship.

"If there is a good rail system in place, small businesses can transport their goods to the ports and export them to anywhere in the world. Furthermore, a reliable road infrastructure must be in place for goods to move from rural areas to towns, where they can be transported via rail. Inevitably, this will result in the creation of additional jobs in these remote communities."