

BUDGET SPEECH 2026

Investing in Education, Youth and Small Businesses for a Better South Africa

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Introduction

A national budget is more than a collection of numbers presented by government. It is a statement of priorities. It tells citizens what kind of country we are building, which challenges we are prepared to confront, and where we believe our future lies. For me, as a higher-education student studying Marketing Coordination and as the director of Tsatsinova Cleaning Services, the 2026 Budget Speech is particularly meaningful because education, entrepreneurship, employment and economic growth are not abstract concepts. They are part of my everyday reality.

South Africa is a country with enormous potential, but we continue to face serious challenges, including unemployment, poverty, inequality and limited opportunities for young people. The 2026 Budget therefore needs to be viewed not only in terms of how much money government spends, but also in terms of whether that spending creates opportunities that allow ordinary South Africans to become economically active and independent.

Education Is an Investment, Not an Expense

Education is one of the most powerful investments a country can make. A student who gains knowledge and skills does not only improve his or her own future; that student can eventually contribute to families, businesses, communities and the economy.

The 2026/27 allocation to the Department of Higher Education and Training is R149.2 billion. University education receives approximately R100.1 billion, while TVET colleges receive R14.7 billion. NSFAS is also expected to grow over the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework.

These figures are important because access to higher education can change the direction of a person's life. However, access must mean more than simply entering an institution. Students need the resources to remain in education, complete their qualifications and transition successfully into employment or entrepreneurship.

As a student myself, I understand that education requires commitment, sacrifice and financial resources. Many students face challenges with transport, accommodation, food, learning materials, data and other costs. Therefore, government investment in higher education must be accompanied by systems that ensure students can actually succeed.

The 2026 Budget must ultimately be judged by a simple question: **Are we producing graduates who are prepared to participate meaningfully in the economy?**

From Learning to Earning

One of South Africa's biggest challenges is the gap between education and employment. A qualification is valuable, but many young people complete their studies without having practical work experience.

Government has recognised the importance of connecting education with the workplace. The 2026 plans include strengthening partnerships between higher-education institutions and industry, workplace-based learning, skills development, artisan development and bursary funding.

I believe this approach must be strengthened.

Students should not have to wait until graduation to discover what the workplace expects from them. Institutions should work closely with businesses so that students can gain practical experience while studying. This would help students understand communication, marketing, technology, customer service, financial management and entrepreneurship in real-world environments.

As a Marketing Coordinator student, I have learned that marketing is not simply about advertising a product. It is about understanding customers, identifying opportunities, communicating value and helping businesses grow. These skills can become powerful economic tools when students are given opportunities to apply them.

Small Businesses Can Create Big Opportunities

South Africa cannot depend only on large corporations and government to create employment. Small, medium and micro enterprises are essential to building an inclusive economy.

My own experience as the director of Tsatsinova Cleaning Services has taught me that entrepreneurship is both rewarding and challenging. A small business requires much more than having a good idea. It requires equipment, marketing, financial management, compliance, reliable employees, access to customers and access to funding.

Tsatsinova Cleaning Services provides cleaning and related services to households and businesses while creating work opportunities for people in our community. Through the business, I have seen that when a small enterprise grows, the benefits do not stop with the owner. Employees earn an income, families are supported, suppliers receive business, and customers receive services.

This is why funding for small businesses should not only focus on giving entrepreneurs money. It should also provide mentorship, financial literacy, marketing support, access to markets, technology and business development.

Government has placed significant emphasis on supporting small and medium enterprises, including women- and youth-led businesses. This is encouraging, but access remains the key question. Funding

programmes must be accessible, transparent and practical for entrepreneurs who may not have sophisticated financial departments or consultants.

Youth Unemployment Requires Action, Not Only Promises

A budget that does not address unemployment cannot fully address South Africa's future.

Millions of young South Africans are looking for opportunities to work, learn and become financially independent. Government has expanded initiatives aimed at connecting young people with employment, education and skills-development opportunities.

These initiatives are important because young people need more than financial assistance. They need a chance to prove themselves.

Work experience can give a young person confidence. A first job can provide dignity. A learnership can provide skills. An opportunity to participate in a small business can reveal the possibility of entrepreneurship.

We therefore need a system where **education leads to skills, skills lead to opportunity, and opportunity leads to sustainable livelihoods.**

Women Must Be Included in Economic Growth

Women are not only beneficiaries of economic development; they are economic drivers.

As a woman entrepreneur, I know that running a business requires courage, persistence and continuous learning. Women entrepreneurs often balance business responsibilities with family and community responsibilities, yet many continue to create employment and provide services in their communities.

Government's focus on women- and youth-led businesses is therefore important.

However, empowerment must go beyond policies and speeches. Women entrepreneurs need access to affordable finance, markets, technology, training and networks. Procurement opportunities should also be accessible to small businesses so that entrepreneurs can grow from micro enterprises into sustainable companies.

The Importance of Technology and Innovation

The modern economy is increasingly digital. Students and entrepreneurs must therefore have access to technology and digital skills.

Technology can help a small business reach customers, advertise services, manage finances, communicate with clients and build a professional brand. For students, technology provides access to information, online learning, networking and employment opportunities.

My studies in Marketing Coordination have shown me how important digital communication is to business growth. A small business with a strong digital presence can compete for customers beyond its immediate neighbourhood.

The Budget should therefore continue supporting digital inclusion, affordable connectivity and digital skills, especially for young people and small businesses.

A Budget Must Be Measured by Its Impact

As citizens, we should not judge a budget only by the size of its allocations. We should ask what those allocations achieve.

If billions are allocated to education, we must ask how many students complete their qualifications.

If money is allocated to youth employment, we must ask how many young people move from temporary opportunities into sustainable employment.

If funding is allocated to small businesses, we must ask how many businesses survive, grow and create jobs.

If government invests in skills development, we must ask whether those skills match the needs of the economy.

In other words, **a successful budget is not simply one that spends money. It is one that changes lives.**

My Vision for South Africa

My vision is of a South Africa where a young person from an ordinary community can obtain a quality education, gain practical experience, start a business if they choose, employ others and participate meaningfully in the economy.

I also believe that students should not see themselves only as future employees. We must also see ourselves as future employers, innovators and entrepreneurs.

My journey as a Marketing Coordinator student and business owner has taught me that education and entrepreneurship can work together. What I learn in the classroom can improve the way I run my business, while what I experience in business helps me understand the practical value of what I study.

This is the type of relationship we need throughout South Africa: **education supporting business, business supporting employment, and employment supporting communities.**

Conclusion

The 2026 Budget Speech presents an opportunity to strengthen the foundations of South Africa's future. Investment in higher education, skills development, youth employment and small businesses can help us move from dependency towards participation and from unemployment towards opportunity.

But government cannot do this alone. Students must take responsibility for their education. Entrepreneurs must be willing to learn and innovate. Businesses must create opportunities for young people. Communities must support local enterprises. Government must ensure that public resources reach the people and programmes for which they are intended.

As a student and entrepreneur, I believe that South Africa's greatest resource is not found underground or in a balance sheet. **It is found in its people.**

If we invest wisely in our students, empower our entrepreneurs, develop our young people and create an environment where small businesses can grow, we are not simply preparing a budget for today. **We are investing in the South Africa of tomorrow.**

The real success of the 2026 Budget Speech will therefore not be measured only in rands and cents. It will be measured in graduates who succeed, businesses that grow, jobs that are created, families whose lives improve and communities that become economically stronger.

A budget is ultimately a promise. Our responsibility as citizens is to ensure that the promise becomes progress.