

STREET LEGACY

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SPECIAL EDITION

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MESSAGE FROM ADMINISTRATOR

In this issue, we are reminded of one of the most powerful truths in entrepreneurship: there is no perfect business only people courageous enough to start. Every great venture we admire today began as an imperfect idea in the mind of someone who chose to move, despite limited resources, uncertainty, and fear. Starting with the little you have is not a disadvantage; it is often the very foundation that builds resilience, creativity, and grit.

If large corporations with all their budgets, experts, and influence still invest in teams dedicated to improving, and redesigning their businesses, then surely entrepreneurship was never meant to be perfect. It was meant to be a journey. A journey of starting, refining and learning. A journey that rewards those who take the first step, not those who wait for the perfect moment.

As Street Legacy, we invite you to join us on this beautiful journey of STARTING. Whether you are at the idea stage, launching your first prototype, or simply trying again after a setback, we walk with you as a community committed to growth, innovation, and impact.

One theme that stood out strongly in the stories featured in this issue is the power of family support. Behind every entrepreneur we spoke to was a parent, a sibling, an aunt, a cousin someone who believed, encouraged, or pushed them forward when self-doubt crept in. Their journeys remind us that while entrepreneurship can feel lonely, it doesn't have to be. Families play an incredible role in nurturing courage, sharing resources, offering emotional support, and celebrating the small wins that keep entrepreneurs going.

As you read through this issue, you will see how each story reflects the importance of starting where you are, learning as you go, and leaning on your support system especially family along the way. We hope these journeys inspire you to take that first step, or the next one, no matter how small it may seem.

Here's to beginnings. Here's to courage.
Here's to the Street Legacy journey where we start, grow, and rise together.

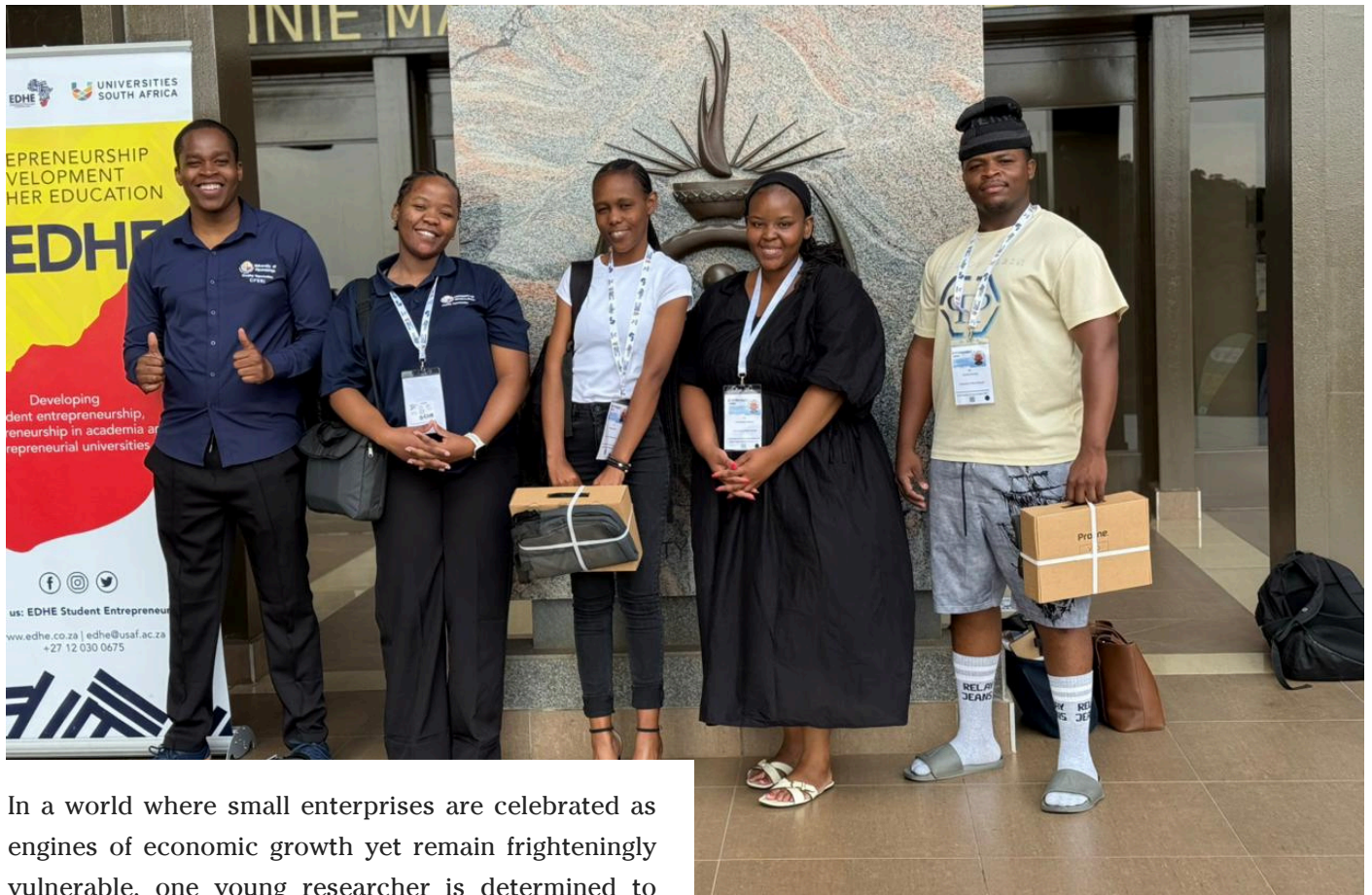
– Editor, Street Legacy



Ntuthuko Ntshiza



Shaping the Future of Sustainable Entrepreneurship in Mpumalanga



In a world where small enterprises are celebrated as engines of economic growth yet remain frighteningly vulnerable, one young researcher is determined to change the narrative. Sandile, a second-year master's candidate in Developmental Economics at the University of Mpumalanga, stands at the intersection of passion, purpose, and experience. His research explores the effects of entrepreneurial support initiatives on the sustainability of SMMEs, with a particular interest in government organizations such as SEDFA, and is motivated by one alarming statistic: over 70% of small businesses fail within their first five years. For Sandile, this statistic is not an abstract academic challenge it is a personal mission. When asked about the origins of his entrepreneurial spirit, Sandile responds instantly, without hesitation, and with deep affection: "his grandmother".

A formidable woman whose hands fed households and whose resilience-built community, she farmed vegetables and sold three-legged pots manufactured by a close family friend. This household enterprise, rich in both heritage and hard work, planted in Sandile the seeds of entrepreneurship long before he learned the term "entrepreneurship" in a lecture hall. Raised by his grandmother while his young mother pursued her own education, Sandile grew up surrounded by entrepreneurial energy. His mother also entrepreneurial supplemented her livelihood by selling Avon, Justine, Tupperware (in its glory days), and later expanded the family's entrepreneurial portfolio by introducing chicken farming.



FROM ASPIRING LECTURER TO ENTREPRENEUR

Today, Sandile's work at the Centre is a testament to his commitment to development. On an ordinary day, he assists both studentpreneurs and external SMMEs in refining their ideas, structuring their enterprises, and engaging with practical business strategies. He has worked with 81 businesses and received 66 reviews; a reflection of his dedication and the trust placed in him by the entrepreneurial community. The Centre offers non-financial support coaching, mentorship, business development tools and plays a crucial role in helping students balance academics with entrepreneurship. As he puts it, "Entrepreneurship is not a substitute for education but rather a complement to practice what you are studying in class."

Entering university, Sandile was convinced he knew his destiny: he would become a lecturer. He saw himself in academia, teaching and shaping minds, and contributing to knowledge. Upon completing his undergraduate degree, he faced the harsh truth: "few academic posts and countless applicants". It was at this crossroads that Sandile's entrepreneurial journey began in earnest. Instead of retreating, he implemented. He started exploring business opportunities and realizing that he could create his own source of income. And then came the moment that changed everything.

His introduction to the UMP Centre for Entrepreneurship and Rapid Incubation happened purely by chance. Accompanying a friend who was pitching at the Centre, Sandile expected nothing more than to be a spectator. However, what captured him was a vibrant ecosystem of dreamers and doers. He watched undergraduate students confidently presenting promising business ideas. He felt energized and inspired. This was not merely a Centre it was a space where possibilities became plans and plans became businesses. Soon he became actively involved and later he officially joined the Centre as an intern.

Having worked with aspiring entrepreneurs from various programmes and backgrounds, Sandile has observed a wide spectrum of motivations. Some are driven by passion, others by community needs, others by curiosity. Yet one recurring motivation, he warns against which is often unsustainable is "the pursuit of instant monetary gain". He expands that businesses built solely for quick financial wins often collapse as soon as early challenges arise. Sustainability he argues, requires purpose and resilience.

According to Sandile, the most popular industry among UMP studentpreneurs is agriculture which is a fitting reflection of Mpumalanga, the "Province of the Rising Sun," known nationally as an agricultural powerhouse. What excites him most, however, is not just the popularity of agriculture but the creative ways students are leveraging Indigenous Knowledge Systems. Many are commercializing knowledge passed down from elders traditional farming methods, cultural crafts, herbal remedies, and sustainable practices. This blend of tradition and innovation demonstrates the richness of rural entrepreneurship.

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He also finds it inspiring that students frequently launch businesses outside their field of study for example, BCom students starting agricultural ventures or science students opening fashion brands. To him this demonstrates courage and curiosity.

Sandile does not romanticize entrepreneurship. He acknowledges the complexity and often harsh circumstances that push students into business. Many venture into entrepreneurship out of necessity rather than passion. However, because of socio-economic pressures, some start businesses as a survival strategy.

PRACTICAL ADVICE ON BUILDING RESILIENCE AND FOSTERING TRANSPARENCY

But once they secure employment, they abandon their ventures highlighting the fragile nature of youth entrepreneurship in South Africa. This reality informs his research interest: understanding how structured support initiatives can turn fragile ventures into sustainable enterprises.

Sandile's story is one of inherited strength, academic exploration, and personal transformation. From his grandmother's vegetable patches to his mother's product catalogues, from his lecture halls to the entrepreneurial hub at UMPCFERI his journey embodies one of resilience and potential embedded in South African youth with regards to entrepreneurship.

As he pursues his Master's research, he is not simply chasing academic recognition. He is contributing to a body of knowledge that could shape policy, strengthen local economies, and uplift the very entrepreneurs who raised him. Sandile is more than a Master's candidate. He is a builder of futures, a challenger of statistics, and a rising leader in development and entrepreneurship.

And this story is only the beginning.



Turning Waste into Opportunity

At just nineteen years old, Sandile Mzimba is already making a name for himself as one of Mpumalanga's brightest emerging innovators. As the founder of Eco-Polish, an environmentally friendly polish created from recycled plastic waste, Sandile is proof that meaningful innovation does not always start in a laboratory it often begins at home, in community classrooms, and in the stories passed down through generations.

Sandile's journey traces back to his matric year at Orhovelani High School, where he entered the Eskom Expo for Young Scientists, a competition that encourages young people to investigate and solve real-world problems.

While many of his peers drew inspiration from science textbooks and online research, Sandile began with something closer to home: the indigenous knowledge shared with him by his grandmother.

Sandile vividly recalls the moment he presented a prototype to his family. Their joy, he says, was overwhelming. "I will never forget how excited and overwhelmed they were," he shares.

When asked about role models with great excitement he mentioned his father who is shaping the entrepreneur he is becoming. A businessman in the mining industry, his father is not a man of many words, but the lessons he shares often quietly and practically have guided Sandile through his growth.





“You must understand your business. Don’t cram your presentation because when judges ask questions, it will catch up with you. Instead, tell the story of your business and your product.”

One such lesson came when Sandile secured his first significant funding and immediately wanted to buy manufacturing equipment. His father gently stopped him. “He taught me about scalability,” Sandile explains. “Just because funding is available doesn’t mean the business is ready. Growth must happen in stages. You expand when the business needs it, not when your emotions are excited.”

Sandile’s rise in the innovation landscape has been remarkable. In 2025, he secured 1st place in the SDSN Innovation Challenge, followed by another national victory as the 1st place winner of the ABSA YAEI Youth Innovation Challenge. These achievements have positioned him as one of South Africa’s promising young changemakers.

When asked about the secret behind winning so many pitching competitions, Sandile laughs humbly and paused before responding. After a moment, he offered a simple but powerful insight: “You must understand your business. Don’t cram your presentation because when judges ask questions, it will catch up with you. Instead, tell the story of your business and your product.”

Sandile manages the dual responsibilities of academia and enterprise with the same determination that has carried him this far. His national win at the ABSA YAEI Challenge came with a R50 000 prize, a milestone he describes as “deeply affirming.” It served as validation not only of his concept but of the countless hours spent prototyping, testing, pitching, and refining Eco-Polish. “This achievement strengthens my confidence as a young entrepreneur,” he explains. Selected for the Top 30 Emerging Innovators Programme, where he will receive mentorship, training, and professional development to prepare Eco-Polish for commercial markets.



As Eco-Polish grows, Sandile is guided by a vision far bigger than himself. He believes that young people in South Africa should be encouraged to solve everyday problems in their communities starting with what they already have, and what they already know. “Impact starts small,” he says. “If we wait for perfect conditions, we will never innovate.”

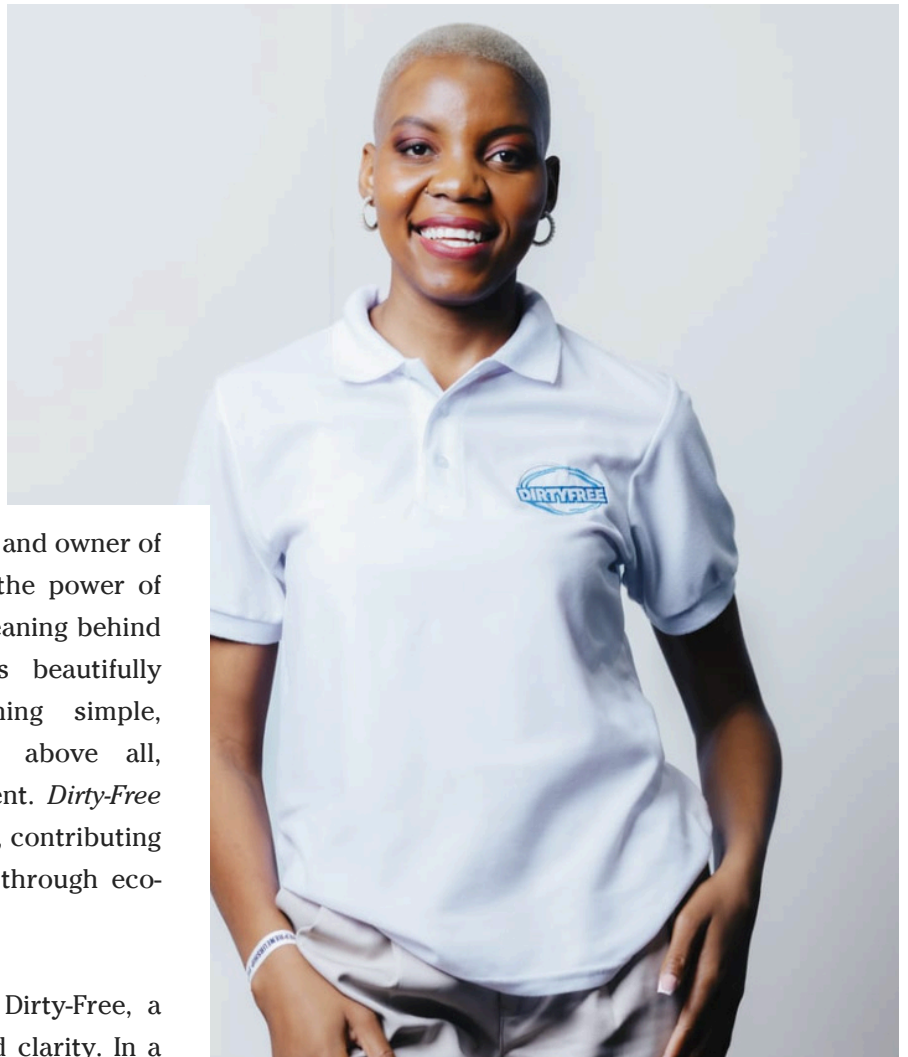
The Clean Vision Behind Dirty-Free

The story of Gracious Sengwayo, founder and owner of Dirty-Free, is one of intentionality and the power of starting small. When she explains the meaning behind her business name, her reasoning is beautifully straightforward: she wanted something simple, something anyone could spell, and above all, something that spoke to the environment. *Dirty-Free* captures the very essence of her mission, contributing to cleaner spaces and a cleaner world through eco-conscious products and practices.

Gracious stands as the sole owner of Dirty-Free, a responsibility she carries with pride and clarity. In a world where many small businesses struggle to even take off, she has managed to grow her enterprise to a point where she now employs two people one permanent and one part-time. For her, creating jobs has always been an important part of the journey. But stepping into the role of employer has come with lessons she never anticipated.

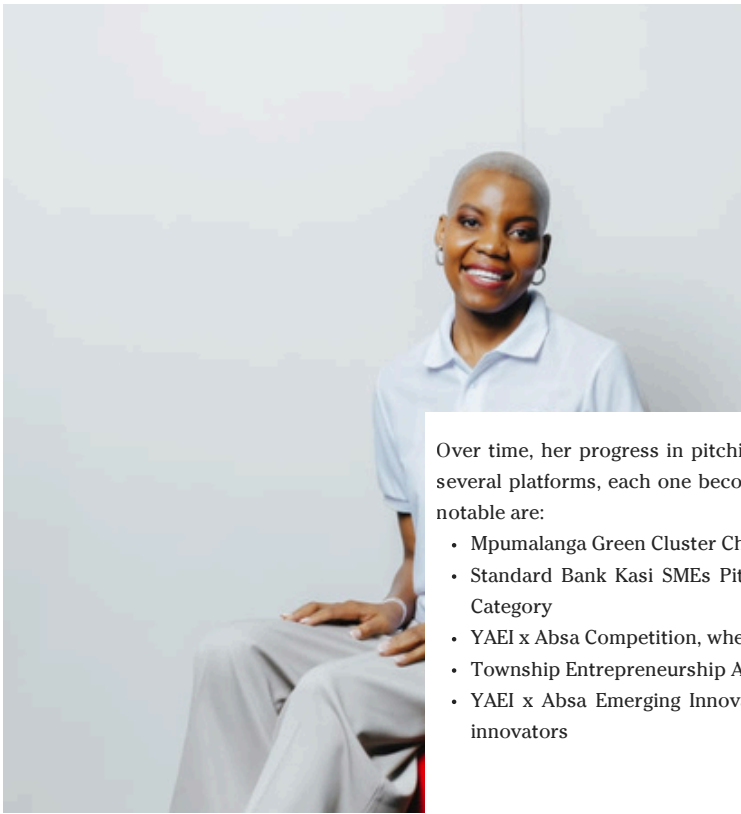
She shares openly that one of the biggest challenges is learning how to bridge the gap between being firm and being warm.

“Staff must not only know what to do but also understand why they’re doing it. If the mission isn’t clear, the work loses its meaning.”



Leadership, she believes, is not just about giving instructions; it’s about finding the balance that ensures productivity while also valuing people. She has learned that being an employer means wearing many hats — mentor, guide, manager, and motivator. One of the key principles she holds is the importance of training. Staff must not only know what to do but also understand *why* they’re doing it. If the mission isn’t clear, the work loses its meaning. By prioritizing training, she ensures that her team understands the heart behind the brand and works with intention rather than routine.

A significant turning point in Gracious’s entrepreneurial journey came when she joined UMPCFERI, where she worked closely with Ms Melody. This support system became a space for her to grow, refine her ideas, and develop the confidence needed to articulate her business vision clearly. Through the mentorship she received, her pitching skills improved dramatically and soon, this growth began to reflect in real achievements.



“You need to understand that every competition is different. And never be shy to talk about finances. Investors want to hear your numbers. They want to know you understand your business.”

Over time, her progress in pitching competitions has been nothing short of remarkable. She participated in several platforms, each one becoming a building block in her entrepreneurial development. Among the most notable are:

- Mpumalanga Green Cluster Challenge, where she took her early steps in formal pitching
- Standard Bank Kasi SMEs Pitching Competition, where she went on to win first place in the Emerging Category
- YAEI x Absa Competition, where she proudly secured a position in the Top 10 in the province
- Township Entrepreneurship Alliance (TEA) Challenge, where she advanced to the Top 6
- YAEI x Absa Emerging Innovators Programme, where she was recognised among the Top 30 emerging innovators

These achievements are proof that with the right preparation and support, young entrepreneurs can rise to impressive heights.

Gracious’s entrepreneurial journey is deeply rooted in personal determination and family support. She vividly remembers the first day she told someone she wanted to start a business. That first person was her mother her unwavering supporter and motivator. Gracious recalls saving part of her NSFAS allowance and using just R400 to buy the ingredients needed to create her very first prototype. The attempt was not fully successful in terms of the final product, but the experience was invaluable. Her mother encouraged her not to give up, reminding her that every idea takes time to take shape. That push that belief laid the foundation for Dirty-Free as it exists today.

When asked about what she considers her “secret recipe” for winning pitching competitions, Gracious speaks with the clarity of someone who has learned through experience.

“You need to understand that every competition is different”. Attend the masterclasses they give you a clearer picture of what that specific competition is looking for.

And never be shy to talk about finances. Investors want to hear your numbers. They want to know you understand your business.”



Gracious Sengwayo is not only building a brand but also shaping a legacy one that speaks to environmental responsibility, youth empowerment, and the courage to start with whatever you have.

Her story is a reflection of what’s possible when passion meets purpose, and when support systems like UMPCFERI provide the tools and mentorship needed for young entrepreneurs to thrive. As Dirty-Free continues to expand, one thing is clear: Gracious is only getting started, and her journey stands as an inspiration to aspiring entrepreneurs across the province and beyond.

Melody Chiume's Story: Growing Where Selling Was Never Feared



When Melody Chiume is asked who the first entrepreneur she ever met was, her answer is simple and bold: herself. Long before titles, programmes, or institutions, Melody was already trading starting as early as her primary school years. Growing up in a home with limited resources, she learned quickly that waiting was not an option. So she began selling.

Her parents noticed it first through small but telling moments. They would ask where she got the money she had, surprised that a child could generate her own income. By Grade 5, Melody had achieved something that still makes her smile today she bought herself a formal pair of shoes to wear to church. It wasn't just about the shoes; it was about dignity, independence, and the quiet confidence that comes from earning something through your own effort.

Melody believes her work ethic was inherited. Her father worked as a telephonic technician in the days before the internet, fixing telephone lines across communities. But a single job was never enough for him. He had side hustles working as a cameraman and selling goods at his workplace.

Her mother, too, played her part as a small-scale farmer. Melody grew up immersed in this world, helping, observing, and learning. As she puts it, "I grew up in a home where people did not fear selling." Today, that entrepreneurial thread continues she is married to an entrepreneur, making business a constant presence throughout her life.

Before joining the University of Mpumalanga's Centre for Entrepreneurship and Rapid Incubation (UMP CFRERI) in 2023, Melody was already deeply involved in enterprise development. She worked in her family business consulting practice, where she trained and supported SMMEs. Through a contract with FASSET, she trained numerous entrepreneurs, equipping them with practical skills to sustain and grow their businesses.

From 2011 to 2021, she worked with an agricultural company, training small-scale farmers with a clear mandate: ensure they operated as proper businesses, not just survival projects.

Along the way, Melody discovered two enduring passions: children and growth. She is, by her own admission, beyond obsessed with the growth of small enterprises. “I always look forward to the time where people grow,” she says, a statement that captures the heart of her work.

When she reflects on her experience at CFRERI, her voice fills with gratitude. When she joined, she encountered Prof. Kanayo’s bold vision, shaped alongside that of the former Vice-Chancellor, Professor Mayekiso. Working with young people gave her renewed purpose. She loves translating complex, technical concepts into language people can understand and use.



In the process, she believes she has grown too overwhelmed, in the best possible way, by the progress she has witnessed around her. For Melody, passion and hunger for growth are non-negotiables: “As long as they are passionate and hungry for growth, there will always be an opportunity.” She sees her role as a privilege and speaks lovingly about being an instrument in others’ journeys.

When asked which two studentpreneurs have touched her the most, Melody pauses. It’s a difficult question—not because she lacks examples, but because there are too many. Each story matters to her. She speaks warmly about so-called “general businesses” which are not always innovative

but built by persistent students who keep going, make their first sale, and start generating income. Those moments move her deeply. She celebrates watching studentpreneurs build teams, create jobs, and take their first real steps into economic participation.

For Melody Chiume, entrepreneurship is not a trend or a theory it is a lifelong environment. From a Grade 5 girl buying her own church shoes to a mentor shaping future business owners, her story is proof that when selling is not feared, growth becomes inevitable.

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