

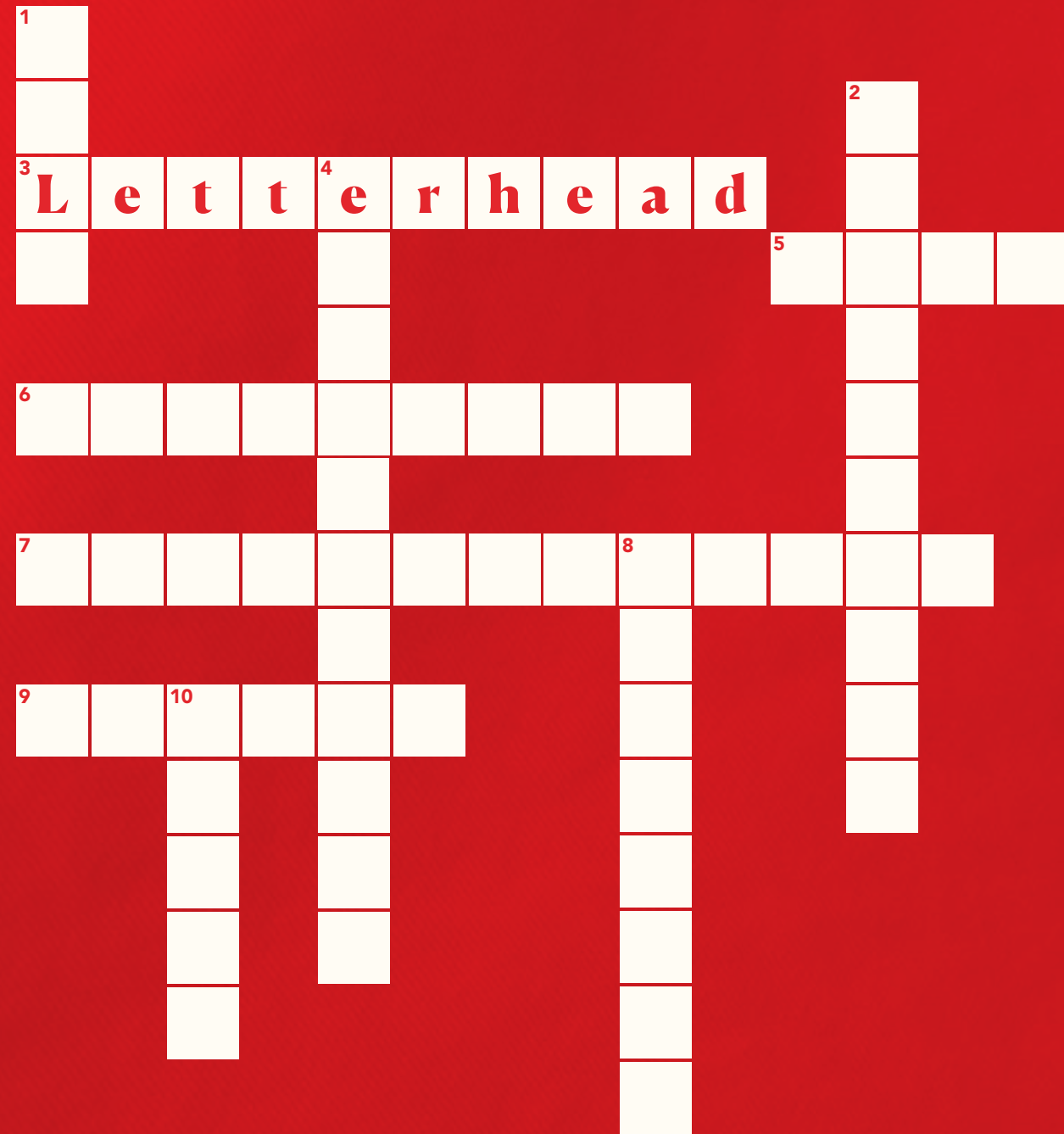


Mail & Guardian

NON POWER OF WOMEN

Women leaders charting the path towards gender equality and sustainability





Down

- 1. Open grassland in South Africa
- 2. A figure of speech in which a part is made to represent the whole
- 4. Capable of having the desired effect
- 8. To make a mark on a surface with an implement
- 10. A recurring idea in a creative work

Across

- 3. Your One-Stop Words Shop
- 5. An important duty or responsibility
- 6. Describing some who holds great knowledge
- 7. A contrast that comes from two things close together
- 9. Shakespeare's favourite five-part meter

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FOREWORD FROM THE EDITOR

I suppose it's a mark of an age when we are flooded with so much information that days or months meant to highlight some of the most important issues that the country faces, such as the cause of women's empowerment, are quickly lost in the battle for relevance. It's most unfair that the challenges women face in South Africa are often a loser in this pursuit of "15 minutes" of fame that has been further fuelled by a plethora of social media platforms that have emerged over the past two decades.

It's why the Mail & Guardian has for many years highlighted the Power of Women and the stories of ordinary women, who are doing extraordinary things in sometimes the most discouraging environments.

The environment for women in this country — especially black women, who remain the most vulnerable and the largest segment of the population — has deteriorated quite significantly over the past decade. It has become all the more critical over the past two years.

We are still in the throes of the aftereffects of the Covid-19 pandemic. During the immediate turmoil of the pandemic, when we were all consigned to our homes, women carried the brunt of that shock to our system. Now they face inflationary pressures as a result of record high fuel prices, slowing growth and a jobs market that is becoming more insecure by the day as the digitisation of the economy even eats into skilled jobs.

Against this backdrop, the plight of all South Africans is desperate, let alone that of the most vulnerable. The onus is then on all of us to celebrate the women in our society who are managing to forge ahead, along whatever their chosen paths with little to no support.

Among the women we've chosen to highlight this year is the coach of the South African women's football team that recently conquered the entire continent by winning the Women's Africa Cup of Nations. Desiree Ellis was one of the early players for the national team that, for most of its life, was seen as an appendage to the men's game — a nice-to-have.



Photo by Lesego Chepape

Today, if it's still seen as such, it is the only successful component of our national footballing body.

With a fraction of the support of the men's game, the team has managed to overcome all manner of adversity to crown themselves as champions. They faced obstacles that I am certain many women face to reach their goals. To Ellis and her team, we can only applaud you.

The adversity faced by Ellis and her players is shared by many women in this country — it's only through their perseverance that they begin to change the hearts and minds of men, such as myself, who are ultimately responsible (purposefully or not) for holding back the progression of women in our society.

As I alluded to earlier, it's the responsibility of us in the media and the Mail & Guardian to continue highlighting the success of women in this country and raising their concerns through our growing platforms. In the battle for attention in this age, we can't afford to let up. Here's to celebrating these 50 stories of triumph in this edition of Power of Women.

CATEGORIES

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“Be careful, think about the effect of what you say. Your words should be constructive, bring people together, not pull them apart.”

MIRIAM MAKEBA



“Freedom cannot be achieved unless women have been emancipated from all forms of oppression.”

Nelson Mandela



In 1956, more than 20 000 women marched to the Union Buildings in Pretoria to protest the extension of the inhumane pass laws to women. Their iconic cry,

“When you strike a woman you strike a rock!”

has been embedded into South Africa’s history, yet its sentiment remains as relevant and powerful as when it was first chanted 66 years ago.

At Coca-Cola, we recognise that we owe a great debt of gratitude to the women of our past. Women’s Day (and



Women’s Month) has evolved beyond commemorating our history to also celebrating the important role that women now play in moving our society, culture, local industry, and national identity forward. We believe in championing women in the workplace and in the communities in which we do business.

According to Stats SA, South Africa’s labour market remains more favourable toward men. Women only account for 43% of total employment, and of those in managerial positions, 67% were men compared to 33% of women.

“We must fight harder for economic participation of women. Research shows that when women are economically empowered, they invest a sizeable portion of their income into the health and education of their children, and their local economies,” says Phillipine Mtikitiki, Vice President of Coca-Cola’s South Africa Franchise. “Our society will progress significantly when more women actively participate in government, NGOs, local business and the broader economy.”

It is for this reason that Coca-Cola firmly believes that the journey towards an equitable future requires that we – the corporate sector – need to be a force for progression and good. “The advancement of women is built into The Coca-Cola Company’s overall agenda. Currently, 55% of the senior leaders that comprise our Africa Operating Unit extended leadership team are women. Globally, we aim to have 50% female executives by 2030, and continue to make progress in advancing our female talent,” says Mtikitiki.

“The advancement of women is far more than a tick-the-box exercise. At Coca-Cola, we want to ensure that



our female associates are equipped to succeed when presented with an opportunity,” says Patricia Obozuwa, Vice President of Public Affairs, Communications and Sustainability, Coca-Cola Africa.

“The statistics show that companies that are more gender-balanced outperform companies that are not.”

According to Obozuwa, equality in the corporate world requires three things: First, there should be a representation of women at all levels from junior to executive. Second, women must be given the power, agency and skills development to succeed in their roles and make the most of the opportunities afforded to them. Third, women should be financially compensated fairly and receive the same pay as their male colleagues doing a similar job. “It is only when companies take intentional steps to bring about change that we will see results.”

Encouraging women to break out of preconceived social limitations and aspire toward greater achievements and leadership positions needs to start in their formative childhood years. “When I was growing up, my brother and I would have to share the household and garden chores. Sometimes he would have to cook, while I would prune the trees and tidy the yard” recalls Mtikitiki. “It was only when I started working that I realised there were gender stereotypes about what work men and women



should do. One of my mother’s greatest gifts was helping us ignore these.”

“Every leader needs to be a great leader, whether man or woman,” says Obozuwa. “But there is an added responsibility for women to be excellent role models for the other women who want to rise within the system. People need to see what we are doing in order to aspire to get there themselves.”

The attitude toward female advancement is also reflected in the Company’s sustainability initiatives. In January 2022, Coca-Cola Africa Operating Unit and its bottling partners announced the launch of Jamii, a new Africa-focused sustainability platform that houses the Company’s existing and new initiatives. The new platform will focus on three areas: water stewardship, the economic empowerment of women and youth, and waste management. One of the very first initiatives under the platform, Jamii Femmes, focuses exclusively on advancing female entrepreneurs, and spans 10 African countries and is set to impact over 20 000 women.

Mtikitiki concludes,

“Coca-Cola’s impact on people extends well beyond our own business. We are refreshing the world and making a difference. We are doing it sustainably, and with the intention of creating a better-shared future.”





Samantha Moleta

Owner and co-founder: The Refillery

- @SamMoleta
- @therefillerysa
- Sam Moleta

For more than a decade, Samantha Moleta and her husband, Dom, worked in the yachting industry and got to explore some of the most beautiful and remote locales in the world.

What they also discovered, sadly, was that even the most unspoilt destinations weren't exempt from human interference.

"We would be out at sea, weeks away from land, and there would be rubbish floating everywhere," Moleta explains. "We would set up the most beautiful picnics for our guests but would spend an hour beforehand cleaning the beach of rubbish. It always felt so pointless having somewhere so beautiful tarnished by people being careless."

Once they hung up their boat shoes, they settled in New Zealand with their kids for a few years, and it was here that they were introduced to Plastic Free July — a global initiative that started in Australia in 2017. The idea is to eradicate (or at least reduce) your plastic usage for the month of July and find alternatives where possible, hopefully cultivating a new approach to waste in the process. Moleta and her family completed the month-long challenge and decided to continue their new-found habits, but quickly realised that grocery shopping and single-use plastic were synonymous. Having encountered plastic-free grocery stores on their travels, they decided that they wanted to create something similar and bring the concept to the South African market. They packed up their family, sold everything they had, returned to South Africa and launched The Refillery.

As the name suggests, the concept is to fill (and refill) reusable containers with staples such as grains, pulses, nuts and cereals — products that would usually come packaged in plastic in a regular grocery store.

We put everything we had into The Refillery and to see it being received in such a positive manner by so many customers makes me proud of what we've created.

Although the concept is simple, getting it off the ground wasn't. "Sourcing suppliers was incredibly difficult. Being new to retail and starting a concept store that no one understood and had difficulty wrapping their minds around was challenging. Every day was a learning curve," she says.

But perseverance and passion paid off and what started as an online store in January 2019 as a way to get their name and concept known has now grown into five brick-and-mortar locations throughout Johannesburg.

Plus, Moleta says, they now call many of their suppliers friends — about 85% of which are small to medium (often family-run) enterprises — which is not surprising, considering their shared goals and wanting to improve how and what South Africans consume.

"It still is the best part of this start-up adventure for me," Moleta comments on finding the right suppliers. "Meeting phenomenal people who are as passionate about their product(s) as we are about our brand and what we wanted to create".

As for the future and what she would still like to achieve in South Africa, she says: "I would love to see environmental sustainability being more of a core focus. From it being taught in schools, to businesses, organisations and the government taking a more proactive approach and focusing on the smaller, more attainable steps that can be achieved daily."

— Shereen Goosen

Nobubele Nzima

Founder and director: Bellarosa WIP Agricultural Primary Co-operative, Bellarosa WIP Productions, Future Builders Foundation

- @bellarosaWIP
- @Bellarosa WIP Productions Pty Ltd
- @bellarosamthathapoultry
- Nobulele Nzima

Focusing on the future is at the top of Nobuhle Nzima's priority list, with youth and women empowerment a prime concern. She hopes to continue expanding her businesses, creating opportunities for the previously disadvantaged and continuing her work as an activist against gender-based violence.

The Mthatha-born go-getter is the director and founder of three business ventures: Bellarosa WIP Agricultural Primary Co-operative, a poultry farm, Bellarosa WIP Productions and Future Builders Foundation (FBF).

Her upbringing in the Maydene Farm township provided her with first-hand experience in learning the needs of rural communities, which has shaped her work with FBF.

"We help five schools in our community with uniforms, shoes and books for learners. We organise workshops for teenagers and young people to help fight drug abuse and rape," she says. "We also encourage the youth to start businesses working with the National Youth Development Agency Mthatha."

I'm all for women in leadership and women empowerment, so any movement that's created to protect women, children and youth, I'll always support with everything in me.

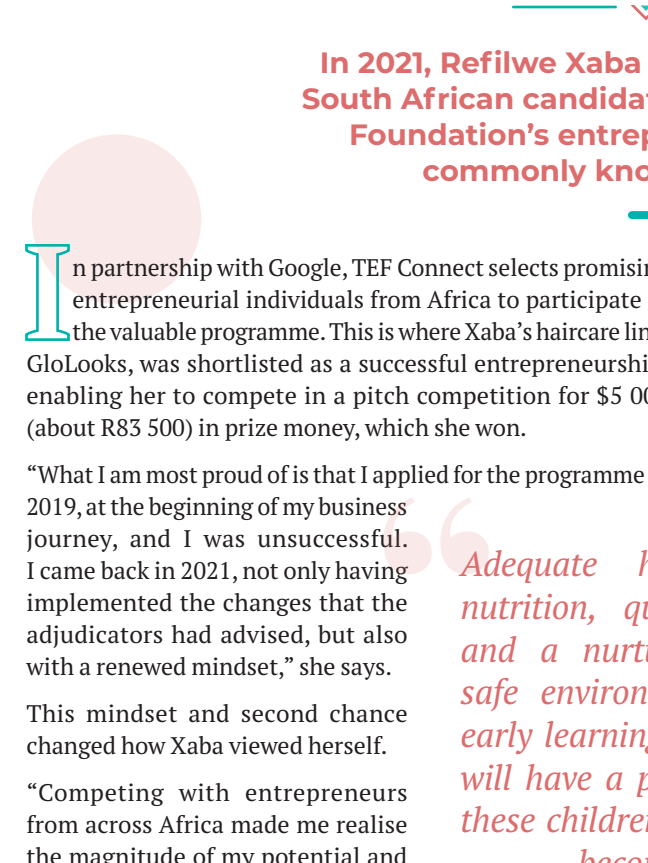
Nzima's work in communities has garnered her significant decorations and distinctions. She was named one of Nestlé Bar One's youth changemakers in its It Starts With One campaign, she was chosen as one of 35 delegates to attend this year's French Embassy Women Agripreneurs Programme and she is a trainee for the World of Innovators, a 100-day challenge that mobilises South Africans in the fight against gender-based violence and femicide.

A life of purpose was always on the cards for Nzima. Her advice?

"Life is full of opportunities for youth and women. Ask for help, talk to people, pray for direction and always remember to be kind to yourself." — Cher Petersen



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Refilwe Xaba

Director: GloLooks

- @Refilwe Xaba
- @refilwe.x
- Refilwe Xaba

In 2021, Refilwe Xaba was selected as one of the South African candidates to join the Tony Elumelu Foundation's entrepreneurship programme, commonly known as TEF Connect.

In partnership with Google, TEF Connect selects promising entrepreneurial individuals from Africa to participate in the valuable programme. This is where Xaba's haircare line, GloLooks, was shortlisted as a successful entrepreneurship, enabling her to compete in a pitch competition for \$5 000 (about R83 500) in prize money, which she won.

"What I am most proud of is that I applied for the programme in 2019, at the beginning of my business journey, and I was unsuccessful. I came back in 2021, not only having implemented the changes that the adjudicators had advised, but also with a renewed mindset," she says.

This mindset and second chance changed how Xaba viewed herself.

"Competing with entrepreneurs from across Africa made me realise the magnitude of my potential and my achievements. It boosted my confidence and assured me that I can trade beyond the borders of South Africa. I have since acquired my export certificate and enrolled for an export readiness course. I believe that GloLooks is an international brand that can compete on any stage."

This was not the first time that Xaba rose to the challenge and came to the realisation that on the other side of fear and doubt lies endless possibility and opportunity. Xaba completed a leadership exchange programme through the University of

the Free State, hosted at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York.

The training focused on diversity, student leadership, citizenship and innovation. In one of these training sessions, a facilitator noticed that Xaba was holding back and encouraged her to share her views.

"He said that I must speak up because I have valuable insight to share. He went on to stress that I earned my seat and that I worked hard to be there and deserved to take part in every moment of the experience. That completely changed my life forever," she says.

"Here I was, a girl from a small town in the Free State, being told that my voice, thoughts and opinions matter by an Ivy League university professor. From that day, I vowed to follow my heart, to speak for what I believe in and to remind others like me that their voices, thoughts and opinions matter. We can compete on any stage, regardless of our backgrounds and where we come from."

Xaba adds: "If you want to empower and equip an adult for the future, you have to start in the early childhood development phase. I have read that the first 1 000 days of a child's life shape their lifelong potential."

— Afrika Bogatsu

Adequate healthcare, good nutrition, quality child care and a nurturing, clean and safe environment along with early learning and stimulation will have a positive impact on these children by the time they become adults.

Bridget Zuma-Rubambura

Commercial and business development management: Air Liquide

- @bridgetzuma
- Bridget Zuma-Rubambura

Bridget Zuma-Rubambura is a commercial and business development manager at Air Liquide, an organisation that provides industrial gas supply to key industries in South Africa.



Air Liquide and was subsequently promoted.

"My proudest achievement of all is raising my kids, but from a career space it's running a geographically diverse team with a strong emphasis on transformation and being one of the highest performing teams for business strategy deployment. Academically, it was being recognised as a Golden Key chapter award winner for my master's."

Zuma-Rubambura's knowledge grew from discussions with people about the success strategies they deployed in leadership roles, receiving guidance from women leaders running organisations like (Southern African Women in Leadership and Women in Mining South Africa).

With a transformative management style, Zuma-Rubambura prides herself on a collaborative approach, which leads to growth and impact. She believes a good leader "has the ability to listen, diligently analyse and guide with respect".

If she could change one thing for South Africa today? "Strengthening our economic status, particularly for young women in South Africa. By strengthening our economy we will have the ability to provide opportunities for talented and trained youth in critical change industries, which is crucial for our country's growth."

She says that the biggest challenges in her career have been striking a work-life balance, as well as overcoming sexism,

ageism and microaggressions. She overcame these by learning how to be strategic with her time, and by calling out and educating people about microaggressions when observed.

"Workplaces should create environments that are conducive for women employees to excel and operate and should ensure that corporate frameworks and guidelines are transformative," she says.

Her advice to women entering the business world? "Be yourself, but don't get comfortable. Always be willing to reinvent yourself on your growth trajectory. Do not be afraid to make mistakes and take bold steps while continuously learning."

Zuma-Rubambura is working on her PhD in metallurgical engineering and is also collaborating with the Aluminium Federation of Southern Africa as a speaker at their international conference this year.

In the future, she wishes to continue to influence spaces by positively driving transformation and she looks forward to potentially working in other parts of Africa as she believes there is a lot of value African women can contribute.

— Louise van den Bergh

“There can be no equal future without the full participation of all women and girls everywhere, and this is the generation to accomplish that.”

NOMZAMO MBATHA



Coca-Cola Beverages South Africa boosts black women to leadership roles



Coca-Cola Beverages South Africa (CCBSA) has announced that it has increased black women representation in leadership roles and senior management, from 89% in 2020 to 94% representation in 2021. This is reflective of CCBSA's commitment to real transformation at board level and in its operations, as well as making a sustainable economic contribution to the country's broader developmental agenda.

CCBSA has retained its level 1 Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE) status. The company attributes this achievement to women empowerment, as well as strategic investments in procurement which saw an increased spend with black-owned suppliers from 50% to just over 61% of its total adjusted procurement

spend — of which 34% is with black females.

CCBSA launched Women@CCBSA in 2018, a women-led network which creates a space for women to engage, coach and mentor each other and ensure they reach their full potential. CCBSA further provides bursaries and other learning opportunities for women and disadvantaged young people within the communities it serves.

Two women leaders at Africa's largest soft-drink bottler, Coca-Cola Beverages South Africa, reflect on what it means to experience South Africa's path to gender equality and empower the future leaders of tomorrow.



Nozicelo Ngcobo

The Director of Public Affairs, Communication and Sustainability at CCBSA is organised, dedicated and committed. Ngcobo believes in building a strong foundation from which anything is possible.

Growing up in KwaZulu-Natal, Nozicelo Ngcobo always thought she would become a medical doctor. Instead, the field of marketing and strategy piqued her curiosity and she has gone on to have an incredible 27-year corporate career with companies like Sasol, Telkom, SAB, Philip Morris International and Tiger Brands, before joining CCBSA in 2020 as Director of Public Affairs, Communication and Sustainability.

She believes in setting goals and being focused. Ngcobo says going to boarding school at the age of 12 was a defining moment in her life.

"I learnt at an early age about the importance of having a plan, of having a goal, of prioritising, pursuing your dreams and allowing nothing to distract you. No matter how difficult things got, no matter how much I missed my family — I had a goal of getting good grades, excelling in school, passing and becoming a doctor.

"I like getting the foundation right. I believe that if you get the basics right, the options are endless," says Ngcobo. "In my view it's better to control your destiny rather than to be responding to things and always being reactive."

With an MBA, BCom and numerous qualifications to her name, some friends refer to Ngcobo as a "serial academic". She credits this to her insatiable curiosity.

"I have a very curious mind. I constantly seek answers and I find learning to be extremely stimulating mentally. The idea of unpacking a topic and bringing it back

together or solving a problem is fascinating to me."

Ngcobo joined CCBSA in March 2020, just weeks before the country went into Covid-19 lockdown on March 27.

"I had to learn a lot, and very quickly, so I could be effective in my job. This time allowed me to appreciate my resilience and my agility. Being new in the business, and in a very senior role, in the middle of Covid-19 and the lockdown felt like being thrown in the deep end," she says.

Ngcobo is driven by finding real impact solutions, especially when it comes to real community problems which align with her personal values.

"It's about that sweet spot where as a corporate we can address challenges and help communities. Sometimes we are in a position to deliver and provide a solution. As businesses we cannot win if our communities are not successful and thriving."

She says the work CCBSA does in addressing water issues, given that South Africa is a water-stressed country, is a source of pride for her. Establishing boreholes to support communities is a good example of this. CCBSA boreholes support over 10,000 families, and more are being drilled to reach even more communities.

Addressing plastic pollution is another significant project that CCBSA works on in partnership with organisations such as the African Reclaimers Organisations (ARO), which has Ngcobo's full support.



Agatha Masemola

The Strategy and Performance Director at CCBSA believes that everyone has a role to play in creating positive change and to build a more sustainable future.

Agatha Masemola joined CCBSA in April 2020 from Absa Corporate and Investment Bank (CIB) Africa, where she held various roles over the past nine years as a Strategy Consultant and Chief of Staff within the Corporate Banking business.

She was a key figure in the build-out of the corporate banking business across Africa. Masemola holds a PhD in Medical Biochemistry from the University of Cape Town and has completed post-doctoral research in South Africa and the US.

Masemola believes that all have a role to play in creating positive change and to build a more sustainable future. This includes a strong emphasis on economic inclusion, driven by procurement and enterprise development to develop women and youth-owned businesses. According to Masemola, the South African landscape is rapidly changing.

Masemola said that some of the shifts in the business in the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic ensured that she could provide clarity for her team and offer assurance about organisation-wide plans to manage the business during the uncertain times.

"With that clarity, it was also important to empower my team to focus on delivering their objectives," she says. "I always maintain that the role of a leader is to transmit clarity to teams, empower the team by removing execution roadblocks and unlock organisational networks to help emerging leaders build relationships with their peers and senior executives."

Agatha leads a team of specialist consultants who work from various

locations, and in the past relied on travel for physical interactions when necessary. While the team is accustomed to working in an office environment, the nature of their work means they could successfully work remotely and still deliver exceptional performance.

"With extended lockdowns, they very swiftly adapted to working from home and established routines to ensure they remain connected and proactively sought to build relationships with other people in the business," she says. "The good news is that my team led a piece of work to understand how megatrends will shape the operating environment. One of those trends is the New Ways of Working project, and the Covid-19 pandemic offered an opportunity to fast-track the migration of work from a physical office to the virtual office," she says.

Her team partnered with the human resources department to shape the New Ways of Work for CCBSA, premised on the idea that remote working will be a long-term feature, especially considering the multi-generational diversity of workplaces.

"To retain and attract millennials and Gen Z, it is important that organisations embrace flexible work arrangements," she adds. "That's exactly the recommendation that the team made to the leadership team, and after 15 months since the first lockdown, I am confident that we have embraced the new ways of working across all generations and have created a work environment that is agile, embraces change but, most importantly, considers the views of all employees and acts on those," Masemola says.



Coca-Cola Beverages South Africa



Ancillar Nombewu wears many hats. As a journalist, she writes for the people. As a businesswoman, she is making waves.

After completing her honours in journalism at the University of Johannesburg, Nombewu dove straight into work for Caxton Community Newspapers. Her writing focused on holding those in power accountable and inspiring action.

Shortly afterwards, her talent and drive caught the eye of a headhunter at Forbes Africa magazine, where she worked for a number of years. During this time, Nombewu's love of storytelling led her to win several awards. In 2016, she was named the CNN MultiChoice Maggie Eales Young Journalist of the Year, as well as Sanlam's Young Journalist of the Year in 2015.

Nombewu believes in the value of unbiased storytelling, as well as the importance of shedding light on African stories. Despite her numerous accolades, Nombewu feels that true success is creating positive change for others.

"I know that I'm here to be of service to South Africa and the world," she says. Her role as a United Nations Refugee Agency Ambassador is one that she does not take lightly: "I've been blessed to have my path connect to my purpose and I'm proud that I walk it truthfully and honestly."

Nombewu's transition into entrepreneurship is another point of personal pride. In 2017, she founded Rallinca Media, an African-focused media and public relations company. The company handles a range of media, from print and digital to broadcasting, as well as conferences and media events.

Rallinca Media has several notable clients including, Sibanye-Stillwater, Native Child and Haute Afrika.

"We continue to introduce new ways of marketing and disrupting the industry to ensure growth for our clients, while also growing our business and team," says Nombewu.

Of course, every career has its learning curves. For Nombewu, the biggest lesson came during the early stages of starting the company.

Not wanting to leave anyone behind, she chose to hire friends and family over more qualified applicants, which negatively affected Rallinca Media. These mistakes caused her to lose clients, which was a hard knock on her business and personal life.

Fortunately, these tough times motivated Nombewu to pause, realign and rebuild from scratch.

Her renewed approach of positivity and decisiveness revolutionised Rallinca Media and its trajectory as a business.

Nombewu knows now that putting on one's "big girl pants" is the only way to succeed. Today, the company continues to flourish.

"I'm proud that I've been able to create change in the various spaces that I occupy," says Nombewu. She is committed to fulfilling her purpose of telling truthful, authentic African stories.

Nombewu dreams of a future in which every woman in South Africa believes in and loves herself. "That would be the beginning of real change, as it starts from within," she says.

— Laura du Toit

"I've been blessed to have my path connect to my purpose and I'm proud that I walk it truthfully and honestly."

Ancillar Nombewu

Journalist, founder and CEO: Rallinca Media

- @Ancillar Mangena
- @ancillarnombewu
- Ancillar (Mangena) Nombewu

Innocentia Mamaila

Founder and game-changer: INO-Biodiesel

- @Inno Mamaila
- Inno_queeneth
- Innocentia Mahlatse Mamaila

Innocentia Mamaila's career has taught her to see change as an opportunity and not as a threat.

With an accounting background and dreams of owning her own business, she completed a bachelor of accounting science in internal auditing at the University of South Africa, followed by a diploma in accounting and business from the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants.

However, like many, Mamaila was driven to reassess her trajectory during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Some of her peers lost their jobs during the lockdown and others, who had to drop out of tertiary education due to poverty, were not employed to begin with.

Left searching for what to do next, she read an article about the merits of recycling cooking oil that sparked her interest. After further research, she discovered an industry built on buying, bleaching and reselling used cooking oil and its conversion into biodiesel. It was this discovery that drove her to take action.

Mamaila went on to complete a diploma in biodiesel at the DTN Institute and in June founded INO-Biodiesel, a company that collects used cooking oil and converts it into biodiesel. The company also supplies biodiesel to the construction, farming and mining industries.

The process to get her first product to market was challenging but taught her a lot.

"I learned to believe in myself and accept failure and rejection as a part of the journey," she says.

Mamaila has found great success with INO-Biodiesel, amassing several awards in a short space of time, including winning the Female Founders Initiative Young Emerging Entrepreneur of the Year Award. She was also recognised by Standard Bank's Top Women in South African Companies project.

Passionate about making a change in the country, Mamaila is expanding the company's activities into social outreach programmes in Limpopo, to be followed by KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga.

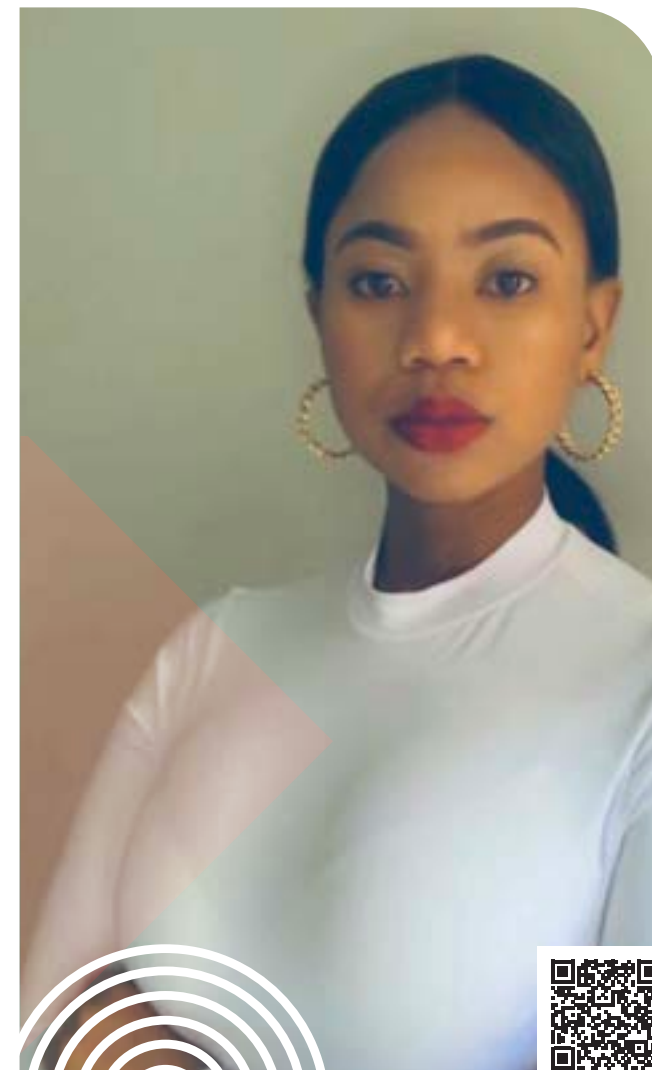
The project will partner with women in rural areas to grow agricultural products that can be processed into 100% cooking oil and then sold. They will also collect and recycle used oil to turn it into biodiesel. The project is expected to launch in October. "The goal is to create a stable, sustainable and economy-friendly environment," she says.

Mamaila believes entrepreneurship to be a crucial factor in improving the state of the South African economy, and wants to see a change in developmental-phase education to a more grounded and practical learning system.

Based on lessons she learned from her mother, her advice to other entrepreneurs is to collaborate instead of compete, and to stand firm through the challenges.

"My mother has been my greatest inspiration. Especially the way she dealt with my challenges and failures and her approach towards solving problems without ever losing hope," she says.

— Robert Sam-Kputu



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Simphiwe Mhlongo

Founder and principal property practitioner: Simpre Properties

- @Simphiwe Precious Mhlongo
- @simphiwen_precious
- Simphiwe Mhlongo

Simphiwe Mhlongo founded her real estate agency Simpre Properties in May 2021.

From a young age, Mhlongo realised that she wanted to be an entrepreneur, that she would own a business one day and that it would be something she would build from scratch.

In 2018, following her resignation from a company at which she had worked for eight years specialising in customer service in the airline industry, she began working as a real estate agent and soon realised the challenges that people encountered when accessing the housing market.

"It's not easy to buy a house in South Africa. The aim with Simpre Properties is to assist people, especially the previously disadvantaged, to access the market and own houses against all odds," she says.

Mhlongo believes that a good leader should possess the qualities of integrity, accountability, empathy, enthusiasm and humility.

"Leadership is about inspiring people to do things they never thought they were capable of doing. It's about motivating people to become the best version of themselves," she says.

Mhlongo feels that employers need to provide support to their women employees by implementing policies that protect women, providing channels of support and investing in the empowerment of women employees.

Two of her proudest moments are graduating twice after she got married and had her two daughters, and then opening her

real estate firm — learning important lessons and skills from entrepreneurship as well as motherhood.

When asked how she has managed to maintain a work-life balance, she says: "Outside of work, I am a wife, a mother, a sister and a daughter. This simply means I cannot work 24/7. Therefore, it is crucial that I plan my day, plan my week, plan my month, so that I can make time for my family and loved ones. When I feel overwhelmed, I take time off. I am not afraid to unplug when I need to."

Mhlongo says that the key to running a successful business is having the right people on your team.

[Firstly], you need people who understand your vision and want to help you achieve the goals of the organisation. Secondly, you need to have a plan. Thirdly, you need to understand that, without your clients, there is no business. You need to treat your clients like they are the last people on Earth. People have a choice to go elsewhere if they do not get what they are looking for."

She also feels that people in business should never take continuous learning for granted.

"The business world is evolving at a rapid pace, so you need to remain up to date with the latest advancements. This helps you to prepare for the future. With the outbreak of Covid-19, every business was forced to learn new ways to keep their businesses going, and a lot of them had to adjust by embracing technology and communicating with customers online."



In the future she hopes to expand her business to all provinces in South Africa, and to inspire women to get into the industry.

"I see Simpre Properties as a global brand with excellent service. One that always puts clients first," she concludes.

— Louise van den Bergh

Her own life is a great example, since technology propelled her to an influential career with Telkom and earned her a string of accolades and opportunities.

Now, as the group executive of innovation and transformation at Telkom, she's in a position to unlock opportunities for other young people too. That includes investing in digital products and supporting young start-ups as they explore new technologies, as well as funding research projects.

"Our investment in technology innovations can be a driving force not only for economic growth, but also enhance the daily lives of South Africans," she says.

One way she does that is through her non-profit organisation, Peo Ya Phetogo, which she established in partnership with UN Women and the Mozilla Foundation.

The organisation runs various programmes focusing on science, technology, engineering and maths to help young people adopt technology careers. Additionally, it runs programmes to help teachers gain digital literacy skills to pass on to their students.

Jantjies also mentors young leaders from various communities. Seeing them excel is extremely fulfilling, she adds, as she acknowledges that her own achievements in her technology career have been the result of constant mentorship and support from others.

Her career so far has blended academia with business, including heading up the Department of Information Systems at North West University and the University of the Western Cape, and being a senior information technology consultant with JB Consulting.

Other roles have included being an adjunct associate professor at the University of the Western Cape and a council member of the South African Institute of Computer Scientists.

Jantjies has earned a string of local and international awards for her contribution to the technology sector, including being named one of 50 people who make the internet a better place by the Mozilla Foundation; one of 50 Inspiring Women in Technology by CoCreate and the Netherlands Consulate; and as a Young Global Leader by the World Economic Forum.

In her spare time, Jantjies runs her own website, mmakij.co.za, where she publishes opinion pieces about technology and society. In one article, she addresses the lack of readiness in South African schools to produce digitally savvy students.

As an academic whose research focuses on educational technology, she highlighted the lack of infrastructure, lack of teacher training and a dearth of appropriate local content as issues to address before technology can do what it's supposed to do and enhance teaching and learning.

"Crucially, introducing more educational technology is about more than the addition of a piece of hardware or some software. It also means introducing novel approaches to teaching and learning. Universities that train teachers need to be cognisant of this," she writes.

"It also requires a review of South Africa's existing technology in education policies and a sustainable plan to ensure that no child is deprived of a skill that is no longer a luxury."

— Lesley Stones

"The lack of equitable access to resources and opportunities is a challenge leading to many societal issues that we face as a country. I use technology in my life as a lever to contribute towards addressing these challenges."

Mmaki Jantjies

Group head of innovation and transformation: Telkom

Computer scientist Mmaki Jantjies knows just how powerful technology can be in transforming people's lives.



- @Mmakij
- @Mmakijj
- Mmaki Jantjies



NISSAN SOUTH AFRICA'S WOMEN LEADERS CHARTING THE PATH TOWARDS GENDER EQUALITY AND SUSTAINABILITY



"KNOW YOUR ABILITY, INTELLIGENCE, DETERMINATION AND GO BEYOND GENDER BARRIERS."

VHUTSHILO DZIVHUHO

Vhutshilo Dzivhuho began her career at Nissan South Africa (NSA) in 2017 as a graduate Quality Engineer. After several rotations within the organisation's Quality department, she was appointed Vehicle Quality Engineer in 2018.

In her role as a Vehicle Quality Engineer, she ensures that all vehicle quality check systems are effective and implemented in line with the trusted Nissan global standards. Her duties involve measuring, analysing, investigating, and testing dynamic functions of Nissan locally assembled vehicles' Quality Variation Characteristics Control (QVCC). Vhutshilo also

led the enhancement project of the organisation's vehicle test track. The determined engineer was one of the South African team members who was on the ground in support of launching the new Ghana production facility where the Navara is assembled.

A significant portion of Vhutshilo's career has been devoted to assisting women at Nissan to grow in their careers, make a significant difference, and create a lasting impact among her peers. She sees it as part of her duty as a woman engineer to build on the understanding that other women need to support each other in getting their voices heard.

Nancy Moodley was appointed as Senior Manager of Customer Experience (NCX), Digital and Customer Relationship Management (CRM) at NSA in 2019. With customer experience rapidly redefining the way we do business, Nancy's deployment was to establish this critical functional area that solely drives cross-functional innovation, digital and physical transformation in support of Nissan's key focus pillar which is the customer being the core of our business.

As part of her responsibilities, she and her team have been integral in driving an aggressive deployment of digital solutions, Martech and data intelligence in supporting the consistent drive in delivering a seamless customer experience.

A strategist with more than 16 years of experience at NSA, Nancy is also responsible for the positioning of the company in the Southern Africa market.

As part of Nissan's commitment to "eliminate inequality and empower women across the organisation", Nancy works to fulfil the requirements of her position while also generating opportunities for her team to develop the necessary skills to grow personally and professionally.

Nancy has a plethora of knowledge and experience to impart to the young women who are entering the automotive sector after more than ten years of ascending the male dominated workspace.

Nancy has contributed towards pulling out a seat for other women to sit at the table.

"MAKE A DIFFERENCE. CONTINUE EXPLORING WAYS TO DRIVE INNOVATION."

NANCY MOODLEY



Chantelle Nkosi has spent more than a decade between Nissan South Africa and Nissan Spain. She first joined Nissan South Africa as a contracted engineer in 2008, worked in vehicle quality and has since grown to senior management as General Manager: Plant Quality. In her time at Nissan, Chantelle has been instrumental in delivering the locally produced Nissan Navara, having started at the very beginning of the process, managing the team and delivery through the Covid-19 pandemic, leading to the coveted 'Car of The Year Award' in the 4 x 4 Double Cab segment accolade.

Through all these accomplishments, Chantelle notes that one of the proudest moments was related to her work as a manager of junior employees.

"For me, seeing some of the graduates that I trained moving into leadership roles and others highlighted that I am becoming a great mentor and Trainer. I truly believe as a team we are stronger together, as such I encourage my team to lean into each other's strengths as only that way, can we do our best work."

"I ENCOURAGE YOUNG WOMEN I MENTOR TO LEAN INTO THE QUALITIES THAT MAKE THEM DIFFERENT."

CHANTELLE NKOSI



Tessa Cooke began her career at Nissan in 2010 as a Marketing Graduate Trainee within the Light Commercial Vehicle Marketing department. Since then she has grown to become Brand and Customer Experience General Manager Africa. Tessa has held various positions across the Marketing Communications, Product Planning and Customer Experience portfolios at Nissan, being responsible for several projects.

A key highlight of her tenure at Nissan is the launch of the locally

produced, now award-winning, Nissan Navara. She provided strategic marketing value to ensure the successful launch of this new product – built in Africa for Africa. Tessa attributes her success to mentorship and says she firmly believes in its transformative potential. She continues to support and encourage other female employees who work in various departments at Nissan by taking part in frequent check-in sessions where they exchange resources and encourage one another's development.

"USE YOUR VOICE AS A VEHICLE TO ADVOCATE FOR CHANGE."

TESSA COOKE



Vuyokazi Quphe is Nissan Africa RBU & Nissan South Africa (NSA) Corporate Communications head. In 2016, Vuyo joined NSA as the Internal Communications Manager before being promoted to NSA's Internal Communications Senior Manager.

From an early age, storytelling and the concept of driving unity and harmony through the written and spoken word fascinated Vuyo. This led her to a career spanning over 18 years as a journalist, media and strategic communications professional.

She has held a variety of positions, including Editor for Edgars' Off-Limits magazine, Assistant Editor for Seventeen, Launch Editor for True Love Babe, as well as being Soccer-Laduma's brand manager.

Vuyo's ambition has been to transform the mobility solutions provider into a business that adds value to the African market through sustained diversity and inclusion practices.

This goal is motivated by the notion that, "better

human experiences create more commercial value". Ensuring women enjoy social and economic equality is a key component of increasing the human experience at Nissan.

Earlier this year, Vuyokazi, a member of the NSA Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) committee, facilitated a #BreakTheBias session for International Women's Day, which included the musician activist, PJ Powers. The discussion focused on diversity, inclusion and shifting boundaries for women in the auto sector.

Through the support, coaching, mentoring of progressive and committed leaders, Nissan continues to nurture a culture that supports career development, positive and authentic experiences for not just herself, but fellow women team members, stakeholders and ultimately, valued customers.

"This inclusive culture and mindset is key to demonstrating that we see, respect, and value all our partners, stakeholders and valued customers."

"THROUGH EFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION, WE CAN ALL CONTRIBUTE TO A MORE ROBUST AND COMPETITIVE AFRICAN MANUFACTURING AUTO SECTOR."

VUYOKAZI QUPHE

From a young age, Tebogo Mocumi had a passion for helping others. Inspired by her father who is an Attorney, young Tebogo followed her passion. Having been admitted as an attorney, she holds a BProc, an LLB and has completed the Practical Legal Training programme. With nearly two decades as a Senior Legal Counsel across various sectors, Tebogo currently holds the position of Legal General Manager for Nissan's Africa Regional Business Unit. Her role involves legal risk oversight and mitigation of any corporate and commercial legal risks that may be encountered within the business. The Legal Counsel acknowledges that legal principles and legislative requirements are diverse throughout the 45 markets where Nissan has a presence. She's quick to note though that an agile mindset, along with a commitment to providing business-enabling solutions is her driving force. With a track record of transforming business functions through 'out-the-box' operational

management principles, making legal matters understandable for everyone she works with, Tebogo acknowledges the importance of collaboration in a winning team. She drives this through active coaching, mentoring and sponsoring young professionals and co-workers. This includes encouraging them to have an organisational-wide mindset, being committed and passionate, which helps in actively contributing to meetings that influence important business decisions. Tebogo believes in the role that every individual in the workspace has in creating an inclusive environment. Most importantly, the mother of two girls is conscious of being a positive role model to the future leaders. "It's important that our children understand the importance of having an informed voice and actively contributing to a future where everyone's basic human rights are upheld," she concludes.

"AN INCLUSIVE WORK ENVIRONMENT IS IMPORTANT IN CREATING PLATFORMS WHERE INDIVIDUALS CONTRIBUTE."

TEBOGO MOCUMI





With a background in project and programme management, Nteleko's passion for technology, accounting and building teams led to her starting OS Holdings, an award-winning business that provides process-driven software solutions to medium and large organisations.

If Nomsa Nteleko could achieve one thing for South Africa it would be to influence the adoption of a curriculum that embraces critical thinking, design thinking, collaborative teamwork, project management, coding and soft skills. She is convinced that this set of skills can enable and empower young people to succeed in their endeavours within the economy and the emerging fourth industrial revolution in South Africa.

Her motivation was to build a professional team that values Africa as being a creator of technology solutions that successfully solve African problems.

The decision to disrupt the market was pivotal. As founder and CEO, Nteleko has built the company on a growth strategy that is dependent on the empowerment and development of her team. The main drive and measure of success for the team is the success of the businesses they impact.

Starting a tech company 10 years ago, in the thick of male dominance within the industry, is an achievement Nteleko is proud of. When OS Holdings was founded it was with the goal to create space for black professionals and boost female representation within the tech industry.

"The vision was to become a leading technology solutions provider for local government and state-owned entities who were receiving backlash due to lack of systems, internal controls, compliance and reporting," she says.

Nteleko describes how these are critical problems of national importance that her "super team" of young, black professionals has the opportunity to transform the tech space from within and impact society on the ground. What has been crucial for OS Holdings is that municipalities operate effectively as

businesses and that OS Holdings provides the much-desired service delivery for its communities.

A decade later, the vision of a futuristic technology company has expanded into being a tech leader in Africa. Seeing this come to fruition entails developing a private sector wing, cloud solutions and incorporating artificial intelligence to add to the solutions that OS Holdings offers, Nteleko explains.

It hasn't been an easy journey for the Entrepreneur of the Year and Top Empowered Company: Business Leader finalist of the Top Empowerment Awards 2022, but Nteleko has learnt many insightful lessons from the process of establishing OS Holdings.

"I had to trust my team wholeheartedly," she says. "We started developing our own software, and it was an expensive and tough journey. We learned a lot in terms of drafting a specification in a precise manner. We had to learn to collaborate with partners of the same mindset and value system."

Returning to her project management acumen, perhaps the most definitive of these lessons is the art of project management, which is, in her experience, "keeping a business afloat while scaling it".

Today, OS Holdings has made strides in Gauteng local municipalities and state-owned entities, and has extended to KwaZulu-Natal with the opening of new offices in Durban.

Evolving into a tech leader in Africa is just a matter of time for Nteleko and OS Holdings by promoting innovative technology solutions that South Africa has to offer to the continent and the world. — *Nelisiwe Masango*

Nomsa Nteleko

Founder and CEO: OS Holdings

@NNteleko

@Nteleko Nomsa

@NomsaNteleko

Nomsa Olivia Nteleko

Mbali Blaai

Founder and managing director: Data Service Agency

Mbali Blaai

Mbali Blaai is the founder and managing director of Data Service Agency, which she founded in 2017 while she was a university student. Her enterprise is oriented around providing academic support to postgraduate students as well as assisting aspiring entrepreneurs, with 37 different services currently on offer.

"My entrepreneurial journey has allowed me to grow and extend compassion where I needed to," she says. Blaai, who has always had a passion for business and philanthropy, has not only completed an honours degree in public governance, but has also received a postgraduate diploma in corporate governance and a higher certificate in entrepreneurial development.

"I would [like to] encourage a more economical state that supports innovation, idea generation and creativity with the intention to compete globally," she says when asked what she wishes to see South Africa achieve one day.

Data Service Agency's most recent endeavour was hosting the Merafong Youth Business Expo. The two-day event provided opportunities for local small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs) and included a business summit, a series of workshops on how to upscale SMMEs, a gala dinner and a keynote address from executive mayor of the Merafong City Local Municipality, councillor Nozuko Best.

"Some [SMMEs] got instant shelf space to some of the biggest chain stores in South Africa, while others received funding,"

Blaai explains. The event also provided an opportunity to promote discourse on how to develop a more sustainable local business system.

Blaai's entrepreneurial journey has taught her priceless life lessons and has also allowed her to learn a lot about herself and what makes a strong, good leader.

I am reminded that as we step forward and follow our dreams, we provide others the same opportunity to step forward and follow their dreams.

"I [have learnt that you] shouldn't view people as robots but rather as humans and extend some compassion when needed," Blaai says.

She also describes how her experience as a leader has created a deep sense of self-awareness. One such occasion was her first time dealing with a labour-related issue. As a solution, Blaai hosted a roundtable discussion with employees to search for a collaborative and inclusive solution that would also hold her accountable.

"It was not easy," she says. "In fact, it was very uncomfortable for me to allow myself to be grilled in that manner because I encouraged everyone to speak their mind."

Blaai encompasses the African spirit of ubuntu in her work and embraces the importance of giving back to the community.



She continues to encourage people, young and old, to break free from a dependency mentality and to "step forward" into your greatest self.

"One part of you that you have full control over is your thoughts. Your thoughts drive the direction of your life," Blaai says. — *Sarah Irwin*



Want to access these profiles online to find out more and share the stories of women changing SA? Scan the QR with your phone camera to view the digital profiles.

Behind the Business Woman: Unaiza Suliman's 'UniQ'

Unaiza Suliman has become synonymous with South Africa's ultimate Brow Queen. A closer look at the woman behind the awards and accolades reveals an aspirational character who epitomises much more. Unaiza is a woman who has conquered challenge after challenge and continues doing so with notable tenacity.

Unaiza believes in staying committed to your dream: "Don't allow anyone or anything to distract you from this. As women, we're already fighting hard in every single area of life." Business is one area she continues conquering and innovating.

Unaiza's "UniQ" approach to business sees her put action to her belief in women's empowerment.

"The UniQ Brows business model is designed to empower women who have never laid a finger on a brow but have always wanted to. In this way, we know we're cultivating exceptional craftsmanship with the foundation we provide because our sole focus is our speciality," she says.

"I want to see an army of confident women — an empowered army of women standing firm in who they are."

As an entrepreneurial mom, Unaiza embodies the role of warrior and understands the fight to survive. Her relatability, authenticity, strength and innate drive to overcome and persevere while weathering any storm have created a multi-faceted motivational speaker that endears herself to women on both personal and business levels.

"The beauty industry is one industry where we get to impact not only our team of colleagues but the man or woman. I have touched many lives beyond those who work for or train with me. From the student to the CFO, from moms and dads to government policymakers, they open up to us, and you're in a position to give valuable perspectives to them."

Unaiza also encourages embracing all of who you are and not being limited to societal constraints.

"Health and fitness have become an outlet for me. Choosing to be the healthiest version of myself is choosing to love me," she says.

Relishing in the journey of discovering more about herself as she evolves and embracing the approach of being the best version of herself on all fronts, Unaiza continues her personal growth and development.

"To the young people in particular. Success doesn't just appear. It comes your way because you do the self-work. It comes your way because you're constantly evolving into a better version of yourself. This industry is ever-evolving and requires an intimate knowledge of your skillset and the latest technologies, business and trends. It demands that you provide the best advice for the client in your seat to develop long-term relationships because you add value to their lives. Success is a result of the work you put in. Continuous education in this industry is



UniQ Brows, pioneered the quick and affordable art of brow and lash design allowing women, men and children to join the brow revolution.

The UniQ brand has expanded to incorporate a host of other specialities, including scalp micropigmentation, piercings and skin. Simultaneously, an outstanding franchise opportunity lowers the barrier to entry for women, allowing them to establish their own business with minimal capital outlay, unlike any other franchising opportunity in the beauty industry.

"It's about giving someone a chance to start and then a chance to build and grow from strength to strength," she says.

Employing Unaiza's skills and the senior staff she has developed, UniQ has created engaging online courses that can be accessed from anywhere around the world to upskill professionals in the beauty industry. Her belief in continuous education to be on par with a global standard continues to set her, her brand and her team of Master Therapists apart in the beauty industry.

With her maintaining a global standard of excellence, Unaiza is referred to as a Master Trainer in brow and lash design. While "browfection" and the art of lash design remain the foundation, this was only the beginning of her entrepreneurial journey.

Unaiza raised the bar by launching UniQBrows brow and lash growth serum into the market. Available in-store and online, along with premier products that compliment her brow empire, UniQ products deliver what they promise. She is wholly immersed in the product development of her business, having also launched the UniQ Brow Jam. Unaiza has honed her expert understanding of the world of aesthetics and somatology, with detailed knowledge of packaging.

Brand Ambassador

Unaiza understands the joys and challenges of motherhood, making her relatable as a working mother. Naturally, she is the ideal fit for brands needing to partner with a content creator and thought-leader in this industry. With an innate sense of style and beauty expertise, Unaiza appreciates the value of quality clothing that enhances who we are. Her mindfulness around being the best version of herself, through living a holistically balanced, fit and healthy lifestyle, has gained the respect and trust of every person engaging with her.

The UniQ Brand

Unaiza has redefined the world of beauty in South Africa. Her salon,

UNIQ BROWS

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GROWTH SERUM



Our Growth serum is amazing!!!

For thicker, fuller eyelashes and eyebrows. Biomimetic peptides combined with red clover extract. Protects eyelashes and brows from further damage. Prostaglandin free. If you have sensitive skin opt for this formulation. It is formulated with anti-inflammatory ingredients. Extra Gentle while promoting growth.

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Kefilwe Lekabe

Business consultant, digital skills trainer and entrepreneurship development educator: Kefilwe Tsela Academy and Digify Africa

Kefilwe Lekabe has entrepreneurship running through her veins. As a qualified business consultant, digital skills trainer and entrepreneurship development educator, Lekabe is a triple threat.

What began as a way to assist others with their goals turned into a lifelong mission and led to the creation of her business, Kefilwe Tsela Academy, that creates more access to resources and empowers young people through education.

At an early age, Lekabe's grandmother encouraged her to learn, saying: "If I had received an education, I would have been working in a career I want. If you get educated, you can become whatever you want."

From that moment on, Lekabe knew that there was a great power in creating educational opportunities for others, which, in turn, uplifts communities and improves the lives of even more people.

With research showing that 41% of black women are unemployed, Lekabe's career has been focused on decreasing this statistic by bringing digital and technological skills to young people in South Africa.

She strongly believes that if we can improve business and entrepreneurship education in schools, it could play a significant part in alleviating the socioeconomic divide and decreasing the levels of unemployment in our country.

The academy's name is an ode to her vision and a nod to her namesake – Kefilwe Tsela, meaning "given a way".

The school exists to make opportunities accessible to the less privileged and marginalised groups, with the hope of one day establishing colleges.

After becoming a certified entrepreneurship educator at Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS) last year, Lekabe was promoted as generalist mentor to entrepreneurs and small business owners through GIBS' Entrepreneurship Development Academy.

Along with GIBS, she worked to bring entrepreneurial training and digital skills to small business owners through collaboration with HerVenture, a mobile app that helps entrepreneurs access resources and build confidence in skills when running their businesses.

Lekabe was contracted by Glencore Mine as a business coach to assist in advising their suppliers and vendors. In 2021, she became a certified digital marketing professional and digital marketing associate through Digify Africa. She's since provided digital skills training and social media marketing courses to more than 5 000 small and medium enterprises.

On 21 August, Lekabe hosted a Women in Business Celebration as part of the Kefilwe Tsela Entrepreneurship Academy.

"I envision a world where women receive the respect they deserve for their skills, abilities, contribution, creativity and innovation," she says. "And especially respect for the impact

@KefilweLekabe
@kefilwe.lekabe
@kefilwe_tsela
Kefilwe Lekabe



of their work through recognition, equal pay, opportunities, promotions and growth."

Her hope is that one day entrepreneurship and business skills will be introduced into schools so that more people are exposed to them from an early age.

"The inequality, affordability and accessibility to quality resources, especially digital or technological resources, and a backward education system are not equipping young people with in-demand skills that the current and future labour force need to change."

Our children are the future of the country, and Lekabe hopes that with this nurtured interest they become adults with ventures of their own, where they can empower themselves and in turn uplift the South African economy. — Olive Hodge

Having worked in the male-dominated IT industry as a young woman, Surika Sookram faced many challenges. Sookram now works at Nippon Telegraph and Telephone Corporation (NTT), a Japanese telecommunications company that operates in more than 200 countries and regions.

Sookram's role at NTT is senior consultant, data governance, within the data management domain. Her work entails the implementation of data governance strategies, frameworks and roadmaps, enforcing and implementing policies and procedures that ensure data is used and maintained properly, as well as implementing common information models by understanding databases, data structures and data classification, among other data-based responsibilities.

Through her research, she has developed a framework that she hopes will aid two million South African small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in implementing an IT strategy.

Sookram says: "Through technology and innovation, NTT delivers a secure and connected future that empowers its people, clients and communities. The company delivers on business priorities through technology-led initiatives."

Sookram believes that a healthy family life is the best foundation for girls to flourish and reach their dreams. With this in mind, she became a Family South Africa (FAMSA) board member. FAMSA is a non-profit organisation that focuses on individual and family intervention services, including parenting skills, fatherhood programmes, crime prevention and assisting victims of gender-based violence.

She has been instrumental in creating and spearheading FAMSA's first formalised strategy, which aided the national South African office and 28 affiliates to be at the forefront of getting funding for gender-based programmes, as well as several other initiatives, including addressing the crisis of teenage pregnancy, gender-based violence and teaching self-efficacy through entrepreneurial skills.

"I am proud that FAMSA offers tools and skills for young girls and women because we need to change the narrative so girls

and women can achieve their ambitions," she says.

Sookram says that she has had to work extra hard, show perseverance and continuously bring her passions to the table. She remembers being the only woman in her graduating class awarded a PhD in information systems at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

"This journey has led me to believe in making a difference now and for the next generation. I work to be a voice in emerging technology, SMEs and skills development. I have learnt to lend my voice and skills to create more initiatives across South Africa.

"[I want] young girls to see women who are not afraid to speak their minds so that they can aspire to do so as well. I learnt to be an influence to ensure intentional action is taking place and I want to be at the forefront of programmes aiming to address these issues."

When asked what she would change in South Africa, Sookram says: "I want to focus on elevating and changing the discussions with leaders. Leadership in corporate, communities, on platforms — everyone who is in a role or a position of power.

"[I want] to deliberately make the decision to recognise and give women tangible opportunities to develop. It doesn't always have to be about putting women in positions of leadership. It's about changing the mindset about giving women opportunities — it starts with me," she says.

"In a lot of instances, you may feel that you're not well-equipped and that's okay. Put your hand up and take the opportunity because you never know what will come of that. So it starts from the bottom to our leaders saying, 'it starts with me'. The difference we can all make goes a long way and the more we come together, the broader we can expand."

— Patrick Visser



Surika Sookram

Executive committee member and board member: Families South Africa; senior consultant: Nippon Telegraph and Telephone Corporation (NTT)

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Surika Sookram



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Kwena Mmamaro, who hails from the Sekhukhune district in Limpopo, is the founder and director of Naum Kwena Cleaning Service, a thriving entrepreneurial undertaking.

Mmamaro's company manufactures cleaning detergents and, as an offshoot to the primary business, also runs a grass-cutting service.

With several business-related qualifications under her belt, Mmamaro — much to the initial dismay and confusion of her family and friends — declined her first job offer following her studies. Instead, she was determined to start her own business.

She knew this was a risky choice as there are no guarantees in business, but being entrepreneurial felt like her calling. Mmamaro was business savvy from a young age, even selling snacks to her classmates during break time in primary school.

Going into detergent manufacturing was a no-brainer for her. "I like the cleanest space — if an environment is clean, your mood will always be happy and you can think clearly and creatively."

Her interest was sparked when she visited some office spaces in her community and was concerned about how dirty and neglected they looked. Mmamaro also realised that there would always be a demand for cleaning products because every household and business needs them.

Since she founded the company in 2019, her community has been very supportive and the business is growing steadily.

Something Mmamaro has always loved about having a business of her own is how it allows her to be independent. It is important to her to be able to stand up for herself and to

do things for herself. She also loves that she is able to share what she has with those in need.

"I don't have much, my company is not making millions, but the little that I do have I like to share with people," she says.

In 2021, the Limpopo co-operative governance, human settlements and traditional affairs department built 100 houses in the Apel community. Keen to get involved, Mmamaro put in the labour and helped a Mpogeng family to build their house.

She spent her 28th birthday at the Maretlagadi Welfare Centre volunteering with children with disabilities. Since then, she has befriended the children and visits, volunteers and donates to the centre whenever the opportunity arises. She also contributes by buying school shoes for young learners.

In the future, Mmamaro hopes to upgrade her manufacturing plant by buying a machine that will aid her in producing the detergents and assist in growing her business, creating more employment opportunities for those around her.

In line with her intent to lead with empathy, Mmamaro also dreams of starting a foundation where she will be able to help children with disabilities and to feed those in her community who are hungry. — *Shaazia Ebrahim*

Kwena Mmamaro

Director: Naum Kwena Cleaning Service

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@Naum Kwena Pty



Noxolo Fani has long been a pioneer in the construction industry, with a career repertoire spanning nine years. As a graduate of the Gordon Institute of Business Science, Fani's life experience and business acumen has ensured transformation within her sector.

"Growing up in a township, I came to see many inequalities quite early on. It became a great burden watching these inequalities reach the extent that they have, which fuelled my passion for change," she says.

Following her studies, Fani became an entrepreneur at 25, pivoting into the construction industry and founding and running her company, Phenomenal Light Construction (also known as PL Construction), over the past four years.

"I had to be extremely creative when I entered the construction industry. I had not one ounce of education in the industry, but because of the help of those in the field, I have come this far."

In 2019, Fani travelled to Berlin, where Phenomenal Light featured in the Built Environment Sector with Investec for its Global Exposure Programme. In collaboration with First National Bank, the company featured in the "She Means Business" podcast last year and as a company video profile for First National Bank XTV this year, showcasing how Fani has managed to push boundaries as a businesswoman in a male-dominated sector.

Earlier this year, Phenomenal Light was selected by Sasol for the 15 Women in Engineering Incubator Programme.

One of her proudest achievements to date was being awarded the Milpark Hospital project by WBHO to complete all concrete repair work and finishes in the first month of starting up her company.

Another of Fani's many career successes was closing the Discovery head office deal with WBHO and TIBER Construction.

"That was a big one — it was actually a turning point for me in that I really became aware that I can truly do what I set out to do, despite the many obstacles and challenges."

Fani believes businesses have a social responsibility, beyond profits, to provide work and opportunities, that will lead to sustainable growth and combat unemployment and poverty in South Africa.

Phenomenal Light has served as an employment channel for young adults, particularly women from poverty-stricken areas, and as a training space, assisting in securing mentorships for youth who require guidance.

Fani's passionate leadership and initiative has ensured that youth from townships are employed and trained in an environment that fosters creative problem-solving skills and a sustained cycle of change.

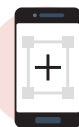
Her company's development of infrastructure has expanded to develop opportunities for young South Africans and the development of society as a whole.

"Young people are the driving force for development, but only if they are provided with the skills and opportunities to reach their potential," she says.

Beyond her work in construction, Fani will launch a new initiative, Career Guardian, based on her previous success with Platform Excel, which will serve as an affordable online platform that offers career guidance to South African learners seeking employment after high school.

Fani featured in Forbes in 2021, where Platform Excel was selected as one of the 25 African female tech companies by the Future is Female mentorship programme run by C Moore Media International Public Relations.

Fani believes in "inclusive and equitable quality education that will change communities, South Africa and the whole world eventually". — *Danielle Dowling*



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@noxolo_fani
@Noxolo Fani
@noxolo_fani
Noxolo Fani



Noxolo Fani

Owner: Phenomenal Light Construction and Career Guardian (previously Platform Excel)

A visionary, Fani's voice has shed light on the inequality she has witnessed, particularly in her role as a Future Females Johannesburg chapter ambassador for the empowerment of women.

Desiree Ellis

Head coach Banyana Banyana: South African Football Association

@descaptain @Desiree Ellis

desiree_ellis06 Desiree Ellis

As the coach of South Africa's women's football team Banyana Banyana — the continent's reigning champions after winning the Women's Africa Cup of Nations — Desiree Ellis is an inspiration to many girls and women in South Africa and around the world.

A lifelong athlete, Ellis recalls playing a variety of sports at school, but football was always her favourite. As a child, she could be found playing in the streets with her cousins almost daily.

In 1978, she got her first big break playing for Athlone Celtic. She then went on to realise her dream of joining the South African national team in 1990 on February 11 — the same day that Nelson Mandela was released from prison.

From 1994 to 1995, she was the vice-president of the Western Province Women's Football Association. Nominated for the African Woman Footballer of the Year Award in 2000, Ellis retired from playing in 2002, the same year she was awarded a Silver Presidential Sports Award.

An ambassador for the 2010 Fifa World Cup and appointed as interim manager for the national team in 2016, she became the head coach of Banyana Banyana in 2018.

Her impact has been immense — she has coached the team through various milestones, from ranking 50th in the world to winning the continental title this year. Her incredible accomplishments have garnered her recognition as the Confederation of African Football's Women's Coach of the Year three times in a row — in 2018, 2019 and 2022.

Ellis encourages parents to support their children's dreams, even if they are "unconventional". She says: "My late father and mother supported me, so I never minded what people thought."

Driven by a desire for excellence, Ellis believes football has an important role to play in nation-building, citing how millions of people gather to support a national team as an important indicator of sport's impact on society. This, along with the joy millions experience from watching a game, keeps her passion for soccer alive.

She also sees drawing children into sport as a way to improve and change their lives and circumstances because, as she puts it, it definitely changed hers.

Banyana Banyana's victory has validated the dreams of many girls and women who want to enter professional sports, and Ellis would like them to know that there is a place for them in the arena. Being a player isn't the only role, she says — there are also positions in management, coaching and administration open to those passionate about the field.

Ellis is active in her Cape Town community, where she started her own foundation and works with other organisations in Salt River and Hanover Park to support and uplift those in need.

Inspired by a desire to do her best and to see the positive outcomes of sport manifest in South Africa, she continues to play her part, garnering success for herself and others she meets along the way. — *Oratile Mashazi*



THE M&G CONGRATULATES BANYANA BANYANA



Photos: Tobi Adepoju / Gallo Images



Mantoa Selepe

Director, gender equality activist:
AbafaziPhambili

- @mantoa_selepe
- @Sis Mantoa AbafaziPhambili
- Sis' Mantoa Selepe

One woman who has committed herself to fighting the injustices experienced by women in this country is Sis' Mantoa Selepe.

By educating women about their lawful rights and employment opportunities, the organisation encourages them to find success and financial independence.

Selepe says that she was influenced by fellow activist Mariama Bâ, the late Senegalese author and feminist. In her novels, Bâ eloquently articulated "women's ability to transcend the negative consequences of the irresponsible use of power in a traditional, patriarchal society".

Patriarchy is a system of oppression that South Africa is still grappling with, a system Selepe believes is perpetuated by cultural and religious beliefs. Religion and culture should be a source of strength, hope and courage, but instead these beliefs

breed misogyny, sexism, androcentrism (the belief that men are superior), hegemonic masculinity (the dominance of male-centred values) and, consequently, the continued pervasion of patriarchy.

According to Selepe, government's attempts to address gender inequality have failed woefully due to corruption and maladministration. Its "eloquently written" laws and policy frameworks have left women at grassroots level at the bottom of the "socioeconomic heap".

She says attempts by the South African government to address the injustices and violence suffered by women have all proved ineffective due to lack of expertise at ground level, and by being out of touch with the vulnerable women who need it most.

Selepe is working to create equal, inclusive and diverse opportunities within society by enabling a conducive environment for women to master their financial freedom. Her vision is to achieve gender equality across all communities and the safe and healthy well-being of all human beings, where the country's resources are shared equally to the benefit of all.

She believes that South Africa's social, economic and political systems, as well as our cultural and religious beliefs, have blinded women to their subordination, submissiveness and domesticity. It is time, she says, for women to "stand up and move forward in order to achieve societal equality".

Selepe dreams of a society where a child is born and raised with no gender roles.

"Just throw every toy in their cot without telling them their biological gender until they find it themselves," she says. "In that way, they will perceive one another as equal human beings." If this were to be achieved, she says, "then gender inequality has been conquered and AbafaziPhambili will close".

— Carol Chamberlain



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Gender-based violence and femicide (GBVF) is a hyperendemic scourge that pervades every part of South African culture.

Selepe is a long-time activist against GBVF and the founder and director of AbafaziPhambili, a non-profit organisation that works to empower women who are dominated within a patriarchal system. She is particularly focused on "the emancipation of the most abandoned, neglected and underprivileged women of our society".

AbafaziPhambili's aim is to educate and equip women, predominately at grassroots level, with the necessary skills that will enable them to leave toxic and violent environments.

Tarisai Mchuchu-MacMillan

Executive director: MOSAIC Training Services and Healing Centre for Women

- @tarisaimch
- @Tarisai Mchuchu-MacMillan
- @tarisai86
- Advocate Tarisai Mchuchu-MacMillan

Mchuchu-MacMillan is the executive director of MOSAIC, a training, service and healing centre that aims to combat abuse and gender-based violence.

Maya Angelou famously declared: "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but they will never forget how you made them feel." These are words that never cease to inspire Tarisai Mchuchu-MacMillan and they have formed the foundation of her life's mission.

As one of the largest service delivery organisations in South Africa, MOSAIC responds to survivors of domestic violence regardless of any obstacles.

During the lockdown, they more than 20 000 domestic violence survivors and assisted 8 000 people with safeguarding through access to protection orders.

"The future hope for MOSAIC is that it will not need to exist because we will have achieved our purpose," says Mchuchu-MacMillan.

Growing up in Khayelitsha, Mchuchu-MacMillan was surrounded by gender-based violence. Although she was never a victim herself, she wondered why violence and abuse was accepted as the norm. "But I never had the voice to challenge it," she says. "Inequalities were contributing to the nature of violence in [Khayelitsha] and I wanted to change that."

Mchuchu-MacMillan believes that her law studies at the University of Cape Town and her participation in the student council and its societies, including the Student Health and Welfare Organisation (SHAWCO), helped her to find her voice.

She says that her proudest achievement to date is her contribution to the development of violence prevention and reduction programmes.

Mchuchu-MacMillan designed Siyakhana (Building Each Other), which formed the foundation of Young in Prison's COPOSO (Contributing Positively to Society) model, a holistic rehabilitation and reintegration programme for young people in conflict with the law. The programme aims to create an environment that encourages participants to want to better themselves so that they do not become repeat offenders.

Mchuchu-MacMillan also developed the SAFE programme. The SAFE proposal formed the basis for the baseline research report, Protection Orders Must Protect: Exploring the Implementation of the Domestic Violence Act (116 of 1998) at Magistrates' Courts and Police Stations in Cape Town and the Cape Winelands 2021.



Hangwelani Magidimisha-Chipungu

Professor in town and regional planning:
University of KwaZulu-Natal

- @Hangwelani Hope Magidimisha-Chipungu
- Prof Hope Magidimisha-Chipungu

Hangwelani Magidimisha-Chipungu is a professor in town and regional planning at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, where she made history by being the first black South African woman to graduate with a PhD in the subject.

Magidimisha-Chipungu has a long list of titles and accolades to her name, including being an National Research Foundation-rated researcher and South African Research Chairs Initiative chairperson for inclusive cities, serving as a city planning commissioner for eThekweni municipality with the responsibility of strategically advising the executive committee and councillors.

She has also served on the advisory committee of co-operative governance and traditional affairs, where she advised the office of the premier in KwaZulu-Natal on spatial equity. Furthermore, Magidimisha-Chipungu is a chair for transformation committee member, The South African Council for Planners, a national professional body that governs the country's teaching, and practice of, town planning.

At a global level, Magidimisha-Chipungu served the International Society of City and Regional Planning (ISOCARP) in co-directing the first workshop for Young Professional Planners (YPP) in South Africa in 2016, and was recognised as the most influential woman by the UK's The Planner magazine.

Magidimisha-Chipungu says that throughout her career, she has learnt that you don't have to be great to start, but you have to start to be great.

I have fallen several times in my life but I refused to remain on the ground. It's not how many times I have fallen, but how many times I got up after falling. That is how I measure my success.

And speaking of her numerous successes, Magidimisha-Chipungu is an award winner by nature. She was honoured by ISOCARP for the outstanding role she played during the YPP workshop and for her participation in organising the congress in September 2016.

Commenting on introducing the concept of group supervision, she says: "In my field, innovation is often seen as the ability to create value for use by others, and this has been my strategy when reaching out to others."

"One of my innovative interventions focuses on ways to enable a greater number of students to complete their master's degree programmes in a relatively short period of time, while still in keeping with university regulations. The approach of group supervision removed the element of solitude among students, and helped to boost their morale."



Naledi Moeti

Finance director and chairperson:
Dennilton Educational Movement

- @naledi_moeti
- Naledi Moeti

21-year-old Naledi Moeti is in her final year of Environmental Management studies at the University of South Africa. During her matric year, Moeti received incredible support from the Dennilton Education Movement, which prompted her to join the organisation in 2019.

"There is always a struggling learner, or a learner who has given up; a future leader who has lost hope in themselves — my job is to remind them of their power and that it can be done," affirms Moeti.

The Dennilton Education Movement has a clear vision and mission, which is to encourage excellence, hard work and diligence while discouraging things that might hinder the progress of learners.

"We want to guide young people through the right channels of success and make education fashionable," adds Moeti. The mission of the organisation is to equip the youth through education and to build safe, educated and productive communities.

Striving for gender equality and education is what drives Moeti. One of her dreams for South Africa is the actualisation and implementation of gender equality, especially in poor and rural communities.

For her, teaching a girl how powerful and brilliant she is, is a stepping stone to achieving that. "I want the girl child to love and accept herself for who she is. To know that she does not have to live up to society's beauty standards and that education is indeed the key to success," says Moeti.

As part of her commitment to girls, Moeti was part of the 2022 Menstrual Hygiene Campaign, where she had the opportunity to engage with learners from a local high school on the issues they face around period poverty and period stigmatisation.

"Learners in underprivileged rural communities face challenges regarding access to menstrual products, education about menstruation and period-friendly sanitation facilities. This campaign aimed to raise awareness of these issues and more," Moeti says.

One of her proudest achievements is appearing on the popular South African television drama series, Gomora.

When asked if she would pursue acting or continue to explore environmental management once she completes her studies, Moeti says: "Acting can be a very rewarding career, but it is also extremely competitive and demanding. Don't get me wrong, I really love acting, but I think it's always good to have a backup plan." — Ncumisa Lerato Kunana

"The graduation of many students in a relatively short space of time was enough testimony to the success of this intervention measure."

Magidimisha-Chipungu, who is also the founder and chief editor of the Journal of Inclusive Cities and Built Environments, says that if she could achieve one thing for South Africa, it would be to "make cities more inclusive, smart and resilient".

— Patrick Visser



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Balancing the scales of gender in dispute resolution and the legal sector

By Lucinde Rhoodie, Director in the Dispute Resolution practice at Cliffe Dekker Hofmeyr

According to the Lexis Nexis Legal Tech Report for 2021/22, there are 54 000 estimated advocates, attorneys, conveyancers, notaries, and candidate attorneys in over 13 000 law firms in South Africa.

Look a little closer and you will see that only 27% of these firms are fully female-owned and 26% comprise joint male and female ownership.

"These numbers demonstrate that while women are well represented at lower levels in legal practice, there are still huge discrepancies at senior levels," articulates Lucinde Rhoodie, director in the Dispute Resolution: Litigation, Arbitration and Mediation practice at commercial law firm Cliffe Dekker Hofmeyr (CDH).

This change is discernible in the annual intake of candidate attorneys where females account for more than half of the split between their male counterparts. However, Rhoodie says fewer female associates are retained post completing their articles. For her, the biggest challenge is retaining female candidates in the profession to ensure that they become directors of law firms, senior advocates, and judges in due course.

Rhoodie started her articles in 1998, an era when women, even at candidate legal practitioner level were few and far between. "I can recall going to counsel and being in chambers with no other females and almost being expected to serve coffee."

Advancement in the Dispute Resolution practice has everything to do with the right attitude, asserting yourself, and letting your presence be known. "I never felt that I was held back. I climbed the ranks as swiftly as my male counterparts. But, in the same breath, you can never really escape the feeling that you'll always be part of the few women in Dispute Resolution wherever you go."

In the last ten to fifteen years, Rhoodie says CDH has made a concerted effort in improving inclusivity and female advancement within the firm. Dispute Resolution is generally perceived as a male-dominated practice area of law; however, women are not completely unrepresented although, it is more difficult for them. Female attorneys are sometimes thrust into specific practice areas and sectors, for instance, Rhoodie says there is an unjustified generalisation that most family lawyers are women. Rhoodie believes CDH is doing particularly well in female progression at every level and predominantly in Dispute Resolution. "You need to have the drive it takes, and you see that in junior associates climbing the ranks that consist of more females than there were six years ago."

There is also greater attrition of women in the profession than males due to factors such as motherhood and other gender issues. You cannot get away from the reality that it is challenging to be a working mother and that having children has an impact on whether certain women will stay in the profession or not.

This is not limited to the legal profession. Rhoodie points out that many occupations were built around men and a lot of these norms have stuck around. Fortunately, women are being empowered to be professionals and homemakers. There are a lot more mothers in high-level positions than there were 12 years ago. "CDH has done a lot to establish proper policies to ensure women

apposite the family, the work-life balance they need," says Rhoodie.

In spaces such as alternative dispute resolution (ADR), women serving as mediators and arbitrators were the exceptions in the past. Though there is still room for improvement, positive and effectual developments have been made. Arbitration, and especially mediation, has become more flexible, and flexibility is key for inclusivity, particularly from a more traditional female perspective. "ADR has made it easier because it's a process by agreement, hours can be customisable to suit respective schedules." However, women are still unrepresented in this practice, notes Rhoodie.

Since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, the world has become more virtual, "I have run several arbitrations over long periods through virtual platforms, this has made a huge difference in advancing inclusivity," says Rhoodie.

Although the scales tip towards a male majority, Dispute Resolution takes a specific type of person, this goes for men and women. To some attorneys, other areas of the law are more interesting and stimulating than Dispute Resolution and some practitioners just do not see the appeal in the confrontational spectre of the practice.

Rhoodie stands firm in the notion that correct training and equal advancement opportunities at candidate legal practitioner level would go a long way in levelling the playing field. "Proper mentoring and training at grassroot level can steer junior candidates towards their desired area of practice. Flexibility has ensured that you can be the best litigator working remotely, as we have adapted and are ensuring the significance of the family, and work-life balance from a female perspective."

CDH offers training and has programmes that look after the mental and physical wellbeing of all practitioners as well as certain programmes that focus on female practitioners to ensure inclusivity at every level.

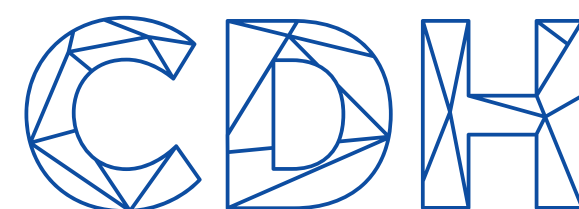
For Rhoodie, it goes without saying that to be an outstanding Dispute Resolution practitioner, you need to be articulate and detailed. Additionally, organisational skills are a given, working with multiple high-volume files is a requirement. Lastly, stress management is crucial in this demanding, fast-paced field. "I feel that these attributes come naturally to most women, which gives female practitioners an edge in Dispute Resolution, as well as ADR," chortles Rhoodie.

Rhoodie also believes a strong will and personality are a bonus in Dispute Resolution. "Some of my fiercest opponents are female. The stereotype that women are too soft is a thing of the past. Certain women will make certain men cry in the courtroom – you're either suited for the practice or you're not – gender has nothing to do with it."

Although the legal sector has made great strides in the last decade, particularly in Dispute Resolution, Rhoodie says there is still a long way to go. "This is not limited to the legal sector, but in all vocations. It's important to keep in mind that we are not where we are supposed to be yet. There's still a lot of work to be done to get there. The legal space is still male-dominated, and this needs to change from legal firms to the bar, all the way up to the judiciary and everywhere in between."



Lucinde Rhoodie, Director in the Dispute Resolution practice at Cliffe Dekker Hofmeyr.



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Cindy Ross

Founder: Imani Consult and Jala Peo Foundation

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“As a woman, it’s almost as if you need to pick a box and stay there. I’m trying to challenge that. I’m not picking a box,” says Cindy Ross, an attorney and founder of Imani Consult.

Ross, who sits on various boards and is doing her MBA, says she has had to work twice as hard to earn respect in the legal field. “I think especially as a coloured woman, you’re not just given respect,” she reflects.

She has spent years in the field, working her way up to founding her own consulting firm and says that she has learnt to “show up differently” by being more assertive in the male-dominated industry.

Ross is passionate about social justice and in 2012, she, her brother and some friends started the Jala Peo Foundation, a sports for development organisation that uses mountain biking to uplift and up-skill children in Diepsloot. Although she had no intention of starting an NGO, the organisation grew to be highly successful.

Her brother and friends started cycling and children in the area would come and watch them. Ross read to the children who came to watch, but after asking friends to donate bicycles, water bottles and their time, the foundation evolved to become a space where children felt safe.

“We were corporates. We weren’t skilled at what we were doing, but we just gave our time and that is what grew the organisation,” remembers Ross.

Through the years, I’ve realised that I can’t fix things for everybody, but what I can do is inform a space that becomes fair, where everyone has the same starting point. That’s effectively the basis for everything that I do — creating spaces that are fair.

The initial pushback they received from the mountain biking community — including a meeting that was held to try to exclude the Diepsloot children from the sport — inspired the foundation to persevere.

“It got to the point where we told them, ‘we will sue you for racism if you kick us out,’” says Ross.

The foundation also teaches the children comprehension, arithmetic and culinary skills. The safe space that Jala Peo has created allows children to excel.

Ross has had the privilege of watching children who participated in the programme graduate and win mountain biking rider’s titles, with one even opening up a restaurant.

The foundation has been publicly acknowledged and supported by various corporate funders, as well as through the Absa Cape Epic, where they were an official NGO.

Surprisingly, Ross describes the biggest success of the



organisation to be that it’s splitting up, as many of the children who started with the foundation have grown up and are mentoring on their own.

“They need to be independent; we can’t perpetuate the cycle of them consistently getting funding through us,” she adds. The foundation has also inspired the start-up of other mountain biking NGOs in the community.

Ross feels that the earlier you are able to make a positive impact on children’s lives, the better. “[You can] change the trajectory of where they’re going.”

She believes that making a difference in society starts with helping those around you and she has demonstrated that social impact starts with something as simple as donating your time.

— Khadeeja Allie

She prides herself on defying the systematic exclusion of young black women in spaces that continue to say, “we are doing you a favour by having you here”.

Karabo Mokgonyana is a lawyer and development practitioner at Sesi Fellowship and Skill Hub, a womxn- and youth-led organisation that provides young women with mentorship and skills development.

After completing her BCom and LLB at the University of the Witwatersrand, Mokgonyana gained extensive experience coordinating human rights programmes with institutions and organisations that include the UN, AU, Webber Wentzel, Change.org and CIVICUS, among others. Mokgonyana was an AU African Youth Ambassador for Peace and a Youth Advisory Panellist for the UN Population Fund.

In most of the spaces Mokgonyana works in, she is either the youngest person, the only black person or the only woman.

“The industries I am in are not very transformed. There are still many narratives around young people being subjected to tokenism and black women being undermined by virtue of identity,” she says.

Through this experience, she has come to understand the reality of the sentiment, “you have to be twice as good as them to get half of what they have”.

Despite age, gender and race being markers of unfair discrimination and barriers to access and opportunity, Mokgonyana has been able to cement her worth in international and domestic development and legal institutions by bringing substance, untapped narratives and resilience.

For her, excellence has become the best deterrent to racism and sexism in her life, and she will continue to fight to dismantle such an unfair reality for those who come after her.

“Some of the successes I have experienced have been about the amount of impact that the work that I do has had on the lives of those I serve,” she says. “I have been recognised through several awards and by also mentoring the next generation of black female activists.”

Mokgonyana would like to see more young people taking a stand against unethical and poor leadership, and actively participating in governance and accountability.

“I hope to give marginalised identities the hope and courage to push beyond boundaries and seek justice, accountability and transformation using their own voices and power.”

“The fact that our voices are not effectively represented in the creation of solutions intended to help us to progress is highly problematic — pushing for representation is important to me. We need to understand our power as young people and how we can shape the governance in this country.”

Driven by the existence of social injustice and the lack of socioeconomic freedom, Mokgonyana says: “Being a young black woman means that I walk through communities that experience poverty, sexual and gender-based violence, racism, huge levels of economic disempowerment, the harsh effects of corruption and other social issues. This is a huge reason to wake up every day and push the work that I do.”

Her advice to young women in South Africa is to “invest in your growth, believe in your dreams and allow excellence to be reflected in your work despite systematic exclusions”.

— Afrika Bogatsu



Karabo Mokgonyana

Lawyer and development practitioner: Sesi Fellowship and Skill Hub

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Hephzibah Rajah

Advocate: Thulamela Chambers

@hephzibah.rajah @Hephzibah_Rajah Hephzibah Rajah

Accompanying her title of advocate at Thulamela Chambers, Hephzibah Rajah also holds the designations entrepreneur, public speaker, pastor, wellness coach, author and mother.



Hephzibah Rajah who received her bachelor of laws (LLB) degree from the National University of Lesotho and was admitted to the Johannesburg Society of Advocates in 2010, practices administrative and constitutional, corporate and commercial, labour, competition and tax law. She has appeared in the high courts, the Supreme Court of Appeal, the Land Claims Court, the Labour Court and the Competition Tribunal.

In this predominantly male-dominated industry, Rajah has carved out her career path as an advocate with great integrity and resilience. She explains that the stereotypes of the legal

profession being better suited to men are created and upheld by attorneys, clients and advocates alike, and that she has lost work at times for simply finding her voice and standing her ground.

Despite the continual challenges that women face in her position, Rajah advises that it is important to find allies in both men and women who will respect and support you.

“Work hard,” she says, “and your product will speak for you. They may deny your gender or race, but they cannot deny your product.”

Advocacy has also given Rajah a voice to speak out about other passions without any restrictions. She advocates her religious beliefs as a pastor, and serves as a wellness and success coach for women through both verbal formats and the books she has written.

Rajah has had the opportunity to speak when invited to women’s conferences, as well as at her own conferences and coaching platforms.

In October, she will be hosting her annual women’s conference and launching her book Visionary Woman, with the theme #SeeHerBeHer. She will also be offering a Vision Billboard Experience, where she will coach women to create or reignite their visions through creating vision boards.

Rajah’s role as a mother has forced her to grow up quickly and given her a unique sense of purpose, knowing that so many lives are hers to shape in a positive or negative way.

“I am determined to grow future leaders in our society who believe in themselves and the power of both men and women working in harmony and synergy,” she says. “Most women in the profession do not have children or only join the bar when their children are older because of the gender bias and stereotypes connected to women who have children early in this profession.”

When asked what she’d like to achieve in South Africa if she could, Rajah responds: “I want to help women overcome adversity and to see themselves as overcomers rather than as victims.”

She goes on to say: “My advice is ‘clearly much has changed and much has not’, don’t give anyone an excuse to treat you differently. Work hard, perfect your craft, form beneficial networks, don’t have a victim mentality, be willing to be bold enough to speak and wise enough to know when to keep quiet.”

“Time and experience are great teachers. No matter how tough it gets, you are a tough cookie and you can make it.”

— Georgia Satchwell

Mamokgethi Phakeng

Vice-chancellor: University of Cape Town

@Mamokgethi Phakeng @Mamokgethi Phakeng @fabacademic Mamokgethi Phakeng

Mamokgethi Phakeng, professor and vice-chancellor at the University of Cape Town (UCT), is an internationally acclaimed researcher who is resolute in helping young people obtain higher education.

If she could achieve one thing for South Africa, she says that it would be to create “a sense of urgency in our young people about succeeding in higher education”.

Phakeng was born in Eastwood in Pretoria in 1966, but since her family was forcibly moved as a result of the Group Areas Act during apartheid, her birthplace no longer exists. However, this did not stop her from graduating from four different universities — North-West University, the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), the University of Bristol (UK) and the University of Ottawa (Canada).

She obtained her PhD in mathematics education from Wits, and her tireless dedication earned her the National Science and Technology Forum award in 2011 for being the most outstanding senior black woman researcher for the previous five to 10 years in recognition of her innovative, quality research on teaching and learning mathematics in multilingual classrooms.

Balancing academics with leadership, Phakeng has also won several awards for her research and community work. Her devotion to higher education is evidenced in her Adopt-a-learner foundation.

The non-profit organisation, which she founded in 2004, provides financial and educational support to students from townships and rural areas to acquire higher education qualifications. This year, the foundation is supporting two students at higher education institutions.

“A powerful woman is a highly accomplished woman who is unapologetically herself; comfortable in her perfect imperfection; recognises her agency; and boldly owns her voice.”

Additionally, she donates 20% of her salary to UCT to fund postgraduate women students. Each year, at least five students receive 100% wrap-around funding from the Mamokgethi Phakeng Scholarship Fund.

Apart from her awards and qualifications, Phakeng’s proudest achievement is seeing her three sons grow up to become good men.

Being an academic and the vice-chancellor of an internationally recognised university, one has to ask: What is it that keeps her motivated and strong in her everyday responsibilities?

Phakeng says that the thing that she does not neglect, despite a packed schedule, is meditation and prayer “every morning before I get on with my day. It keeps me grounded in the knowledge that I am nothing without God, He is within me and greater than anything that is in the world.”



On her recognition as a Powerful Women 2022, Phakeng reflects on what she feels makes a woman powerful.

“A powerful woman is a highly accomplished woman who is unapologetically herself; comfortable in her perfect imperfection; recognises her agency; and boldly owns her voice.” — Eunice Stoltz

Celebrating life

Reconstructive breast surgery to restore, uplift and empower cancer survivors

Jamaine Krige

Breast cancer is the most common cancer and the leading cause of cancer-related deaths in women worldwide; it is also the most commonly diagnosed cancer in South African women and accounts for around 20% of all cancer cases. In addition to the physical strain that women undergoing treatment experience and the psychological trauma of a potentially fatal diagnosis, studies have found that around half of breast cancer patients often struggle with self-esteem, body image, sexual expression and mental health.

In South Africa, one in every 26 women is at risk, and 16% of cancer deaths are as a result of breast cancer. However, a lack of screening and poor access to medical care, especially for black women, means the diagnosis usually comes at a late stage. Dr Brian Monaisa is the head of plastic and reconstructive surgery at Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital in Johannesburg and runs a private practice in Krugersdorp on Gauteng's West Rand. He says screening and early detection are key to ensure that women are protected and empowered in the fight against breast cancer.

This is particularly important in the case of triple-negative breast cancer, an aggressive type of breast cancer that is increasingly found in young, black women who have historically been considered a lower risk group. And is harder to treat than other types of breast cancer.

"It's not enough to just deal with the aftermath of cancer," Monaisa explains. "We're not raising enough awareness, we're not screening enough, and by the time we detect the cancer it is often quite advanced. This needs to change."

Surgery saves lives, but can impact self-esteem

Once a diagnosis is made, a number of treatment options exist, especially if the cancer is caught early on. A lumpectomy is known as a breast-conserving surgery, where the tumour and some of the surrounding tissue is removed in an effort to stop the spread of cancer. A mastectomy is a life-saving surgical intervention that removes all of the breast tissue on one or both sides.

Surgery is often a first line of attack against breast cancer, and although it is an important weapon in the fight for survival and health, it can take a serious toll on a patient, Monaisa explains.

"You fear for your life, for what will happen to your family if they were to lose you, but you also fear the losses that might come while you are still alive – the loss of your breasts and the perceived loss of femininity that accompanies that. Afterall, breasts are seen to represent womanhood, motherhood, sexuality and desirability, and their removal can impact the way a woman views herself."

One study found that 33% of women who had undergone surgery for breast cancer said that it had negatively affected their relationship with their partner, with 31% reporting that they felt less attractive and 30% saying that they felt their partners found them less attractive. Around 80% of younger women and almost



Dr Brian Monaisa says women should have a choice even if they can't afford the surgery. This year's fundraising Fusion Art Auction extravaganza will be held at the Cradle Boutique Hotel.

60% of older women said they cover their body during intimate contact. More than 70% of women across all age groups reported a deterioration in sexual activity and sexual satisfaction.

Reconstruction as an act of self-love

Breast reconstruction can help cancer survivors to feel at home in their bodies again, but it is not for everyone. "Deciding whether to have

surgery is deeply personal, and there are no right or wrong choices. After extensive surgery to remove the cancer, many women decide that they would rather not undergo more operations."

Other women, however, see reconstruction as a reclamation of self and a celebration of life.

"Many of my patients view the procedure as an act of self-love, and of restoring hope and joy," he says. "It can be an act of empowerment, and it's a privilege for me to be trusted to walk

that road with someone," he says.

For those who decide on reconstruction, some women opt to have the surgery at the same time as the cancer-removing surgery, while others wait months or even years to go under the knife again.

This reconstruction, however, does not come cheap – the cost ranges between R70,000 and R250,000 depending on the type of procedure. The surgery, often regarded as cosmetic, is not covered by most medical aids.

"Many women do not have the funds for reconstructive surgery, while others can partially fund their surgery but not cover the full cost," he explains. "It's heartbreaking to see women stripped of the opportunity to choose simply because they cannot afford it, especially when they have been through so much already."

It was his interaction with women who wanted to reclaim their lives through breast reconstruction but could not afford it, that inspired Monaisa to take action.

Smile Artists Africa

The Smile Artists Africa initiative is a fundraising art auction that raises money to reduce the financial burden on breast cancer survivors and empower them to live their fullest lives – on their own terms.

"I'm vocal about the reconstructive work that I do and the impact it can have, and I think this passion is contagious," Monaisa laughs. "I'm also an art lover and an art collector, and Smile Artists Africa is where these two aspects of my life collide."

Monaisa rallied established and rising artists to donate work towards the cause – the response was overwhelming. The annual Smile Artists Africa Fusion Art Fashion Auction, which this year will be held at Cradle Boutique Hotel in October, is a star-studded extravaganza and one of South Africa's most high-profile charity events.

"What we do on the day is champion South African culture and South African expression through the arts," Monaisa says.

The funds also go towards raising awareness and promoting screening initiatives and early detection, especially in high-risk groups.

"October is Breast Cancer Awareness month, and our artists and celebrities also get involved in the month leading up to the event to promote self-screening, raise awareness and talk about prevention," he explains.

Last year, a number of fashion designers decided to join the party too, with each dressing a celebrity and an artist as part of the art exhibition.

"The event gives you the chance to talk to creators and artists about the work that they do and what drives them – that's an opportunity that does not come along every day!"

He says it is an occasion to engage with and celebrate beauty – beautiful people in beautiful clothes at a beautiful location, surrounded by breathtaking art, all for a good cause.

"While it is a glamorous occasion and an exhilarating experience – for example, last year we had luxury cars donated for the day and sculptures coming out of the walls – we never lose sight of the message," Monaisa explains. "And that message is that ordinary people can join hands to do something amazing and make a positive impact by doing what they do best."



For more information about Dr Brian Monaisa's work or the 2022 Fusion Art Fashion event, email info@smileartistsafrica.com or visit the Smile Artists Africa website at www.smileartistsafrica.com



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Kealeboga Mokomane

Communications manager (Africa):
The ONE Campaign

As the first person in her family and the only child on her street to finish grade 12 and attend university, Kealeboga Mokomane knows first-hand the difference education can make.

This, along with a passion for youth development and women empowerment, set her on a path towards finding ways to uplift young South Africans.

"If I could change one thing in South Africa, it would be that every young person receives the best education and career opportunities despite their location, background or financial standing," she says.

Driven by a desire to be a catalyst for change, Mokomane has founded two community upliftment initiatives in Gauteng, helping more than 3 000 girls, boys and women in the process. Her projects have garnered her recognition as one of the Junior Chamber International's Top Outstanding Young Persons in South Africa in 2017, where she received the Humanitarian and Voluntary Leadership award.

Founded in 2011, her first initiative, Fab Glam, was in operation for six years. During this time, she facilitated the support, development and growth of women of excellence through mentorship programmes, personal mastery seminars, high teas and "dignity days".

Dignity days, Mokomane explains, provide a safe space for girls to openly discuss issues affecting them. These events tackled topics such as puberty, feminine hygiene and menstrual management, and included activities like vision board building, career mapping and basic psychometric testing to help determine their strengths and weaknesses.

Her second initiative, GenZet, which she founded in 2019, follows a similar framework — she hosts dignity days, career

days and other education-focused events centred on uplifting young people in various communities.

"From the dignity days that we have hosted to date, we have seen young girls rise up and become leaders, not just in their schools but in their respective communities too," she says.

Over the next five years, Mokomane plans to extend GenZet's reach into other provinces, because, as she puts it, "people are always looking for opportunities to learn and advance themselves".

Working as a communications manager for the ONE Campaign, an international non-profit organisation that seeks to end poverty and preventable diseases, is another way in which she is contributing to making a difference on an even greater scale.

"Working at ONE has opened my eyes to the issues we are facing as a continent," she says. "I hope that through my work at ONE, I get to make an impact that contributes to alleviating extreme poverty."

When not working or running her initiatives, Mokomane gives talks in schools — a project which began when she worked for the Cyril Ramaphosa Foundation's Kagiso Shanduka Trust. Her motivation?

"I truly believe that real and lasting change will be driven by a new generation of young people who are well educated and who have the tools to find solutions to the challenges facing Africa today. The youth of the continent have so much potential to be great — we just need to be given equal access to opportunities." — Jessica Littlewood

I love talking to young people and being one of the catalysts that opens up their thinking and challenges them to dream bigger.

Masindi Netshakhuma

CEO: Renof Productions

@Princess Netshakhuma @masindi_princess_netshakhuma Masindi Netshakhuma

"Women are the best leaders, if they are given the chance to lead," is something that Masindi Netshakhuma firmly believes. A brief glance at her multidisciplinary career proves that she embodies this sentiment.

Born in Itsani village outside Thohoyandou, Limpopo, Netshakhuma developed a love of learning and storytelling at an early age. After matriculating in 2015, she enrolled in the University of Limpopo, where she obtained a bachelor of education.

Netshakhuma's first English poetry book, Vision and Legacy, was published in 2018, and since then, her poetry has amassed an impressive list of accolades.

Her poem "Lushi" placed fourth in the 2019 AVBOB Poetry Competition and she was shortlisted in the National Library of South Africa Young Voices Poetry Slam. In 2020, her poem "Vhufa Hashu" was selected by the French Institute of South Africa and Impepho Press for inclusion in the anthology, History and Imagining Realities.

Netshakhuma's proudest achievement is the project Woman, My Breed, in which she published stories about gender-based violence (GBV) by young women writers from Limpopo.

"I come from a very deep rural area where GBV is the norm," she explains. "When a man raises a hand to his woman, it's

called love. Woman, My Breed is a project implemented to raise awareness of gender-based violence and to give women [a voice in] what they are going through, especially those who feel they cannot talk about the issue."

I never stopped dreaming, nor did I stop pushing those locked doors to be a published author. That's what motivated me to start a publishing company that has a special focus on women and GBV awareness. The fact that women are still treated inferiorly to men is the reason I push so hard to help women publish their stories.

The fight against GBV is a thread throughout all the work that Netshakhuma does. "If I had the ability to change one thing for South Africa," she says, "I'd change the narrative and give young women the power to use their voices against gender-based violence."

The fact that women still are unable to talk about this issue "because they are not given enough legal protection to speak up when they are being abused, [shows that] it is very important to have such freedom in our country".

In 2021, Netshakhuma donned yet another title — that of CEO — when she founded her own publishing company, Renof Productions, with the aim to promote literature in the arts and culture industry and to create job opportunities for more up-and-coming talented writers.

Renof Productions was one of the 2021 winners in the Kenya-



South Africa Chamber of Business SME competition and was awarded the opportunity to exhibit work to presidents Cyril Ramaphosa and Uhuru Kenyatta.

"I grew up being told my dreams were invalid for a black girl from the villages," Netshakhuma recalls. But as a testament to her tenacity, these words merely fuelled her fire to succeed and to help others succeed alongside her. — Madeleine Bazil



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INDUSTRIAL EFFICIENCY IN SOUTH AFRICA





A real corporate chameleon when it comes to finding new avenues to extend a helping hand, Feroza Aitken has dedicated her career and life to supporting others.

Aitken has a number of diverse qualifications under her belt, including business management training from The Tony Elumelu Foundation. She obtained a bookkeepers certification from Damelin in 2010, as well as a systemic wellness coach qualification from Ubuntu Addiction Community Trust.

With experience in a variety of professions — including running a successful beauty salon and working as a banking financial administrator — Aitken put her multiple skills to use to create Thriving Founders, an innovative organisation that assists women entrepreneurs and business leaders beyond financial support.

From emotional and spiritual development to well-being and guidance, Aitken's organisation focuses on people as individuals and not the conglomerates they work for. She believes a woman is a life-giving force of nature with a multitude of complex layers, which is why unpacking and discussing emotional and mental struggles is so important.

By empowering, equipping and educating women in business, Thriving Founders aims to assist them to realise their full potential. As Aitken has experience in changing career paths, she advocates the notion of knowing one's values and not being afraid of restarting and rediscovering one's true career calling.

She says that her proudest achievement was being acknowledged by the British Embassy in November for "highlighting exceptional young people".

Women empowerment to me is complete self-acceptance. It's letting women stand in their truth, heal and grow in ways that are fulfilling to them.

Before moving her focus to empowering businesses and leaders, Aitken assisted and coached a number of substance abusers and addicts who are in recovery. As a certified systemic wellness coach, she believes preconceived assumptions of the human experience need to be challenged and that active listening must take place for healing people.

Aitken is also the founder of Amani, a home and self-care essentials business that is focused on transforming homes into a calming sanctuary.

With the uncertainty that the Covid-19 pandemic brought to the lives of individuals, she advocates for sound mental health as an important foundation to allow us to thrive.

The importance of well-being is discussed in her digital wellness workbook, titled Master Your Emotional & Mental Well-being. From achieving goals to using practical tools to develop an individual's emotional intelligence, this how-to manual allows readers to take charge of their hindering and negative emotions.

Aitken believes that it is vital for South Africa's young people to realise their worth and untapped potential so that they understand that they are much more than their circumstances dictate.

She would also love to see the availability of financial literacy in the school curriculum so women can make informed choices early on. — Louise Bell



Tammy Maistry
Women in Technology — How we roll at OneConnect

Recruitment is not really for the faint-hearted. People often say you have to wear your hair on your teeth to survive this industry, you have to be born with a flame, a desire and a passion, it's more of a higher calling rather than just a job or career and that is what our foundation at OneConnect is fostered on.

Starting our recruitment journey just over eight years ago, in one of the fastest growing industries globally, we faced many challenges. How was OneConnect any different to the countless recruitment agencies that provided day-to-day staffing services? Exactly how are we going to make a difference in this niche skill industry?

We chose to embrace the power we have to tackle failed recruitment trends

to improve our outcomes. It was quite a rude awakening. The first step was to teach the skills that the industry urgently needed, and so our skills academy was born. Not only did we create niche skills in the market, we also created employment opportunities by training and empowering over 100 interns over the years through various programmes.

We also enhanced our recruitment process by understanding the business needs of our clients. We became specialists in our field.

We created and improved job descriptions, which simplified and streamlined the process along with assessments to eradicate hiring glitches, such as inadequate job descriptions. Choosing quality over

quantity, we tailored the candidate experience — communicate clearly and succinctly, became our motto.

Our journey over years has moulded and shaped us into a leading tech recruitment house led by a team of pragmatic, persistent and tenacious women who are people-focused, with high emotional intelligence, empathy and creativity. So if you are looking for a recruitment experience with a special touch, reach out to our team of executors.

At OneConnect we believe in gender equality. Women are the backbone of our organisation, and we will continue to support women's empowerment as we continue to fly the flag high.



Lorraine Zwane
Balancing work and life in the ever-changing world of technology

blare most of the time.

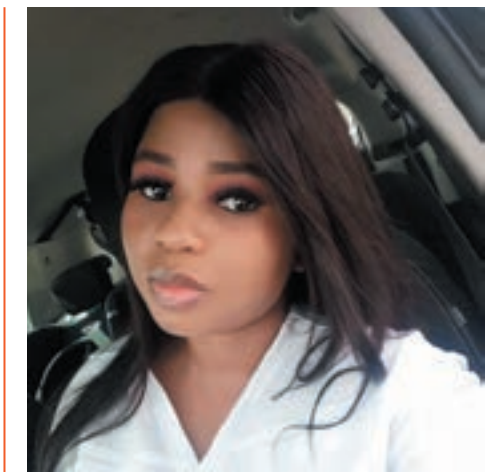
As Business Process Management Technical Lead, and the only woman, I lead the team. This means that I don't only focus on my work, I also support, manage, motivate and drive the team. I believe the reason that I'm a great leader is because of the support that I get from my line manager at Telkom and the OneConnect management, especially the head of human capital. I still struggle a bit with the work-life balance but the invaluable support I receive is what allows me to be more. More of everything — more of a force of nature, more dedicated, more of an example to my daughter that the sky's the limit and more can be achieved regardless of your gender.

It feels like I have been in the technology industry for a lifetime, from different sectors of banking and insurance, to government and telecommunications. Throughout my career in this male-dominated industry, I have learned, taught, mentored, been supported, challenged and overlooked at times; but the biggest challenge that I have faced as a career-driven woman is achieving work-life balance.

In technology if you are not ahead, you are way behind. When innovation strikes, the team starts to collaborate at any time of the day or night. For me as a primary caregiver, the balance between work and home life turns to

Throughout my IT career, I have worked with some of the best people and also some of the worst people if I'm being honest. Through it all, there has never been a dull moment — the work is never mindlessly routine. There is always something new to learn, argue about, criticise and get excited about.

Innovation is the cornerstone of IT — the only constant thing is change. Once you willingly and enthusiastically accept the ever-changing world in technology, a career in this space is a never ending roller-coaster ride.



Bonolo Itumeleng
Women in IT value one another and support one another's empowerment

Over the past seven years, I have worked as a Developer and System Analyst. I found out early in my life that I wanted to work in a groundbreaking field that is constantly changing and evolving and that is how my journey into the tech space began. I studied for my BSc in Information Technology at North West University. With a degree in hand, the sky has been my limit.

I consider myself fortunate to work in this field because there are no restrictions on what can be done with the extraordinary tools we use. Being a developer is incredibly exciting. The tech space is enticing and because of

the openness to do things differently and the fast pace of innovation, I learn something new every day. The tech space is a global industry, and it has afforded me the opportunity to not only to meet and connect with a lot of people, but to travel around the world as well.

I have never experienced difficulties or discrimination due to my gender in my work. The women in the IT community are special because we all value one another and support one another's empowerment. In my experience, tech women naturally bond and want to share knowledge and support one another and the strong corporate culture makes all the difference.

I attribute a large part of my experience to OneConnect Technologies' emphasis on selecting qualified candidates and providing them with opportunities to thrive.

I would like to encourage more women to pursue technology degrees and professions. Young girls need to realise that they have the chance to transform the tech space and make a positive impact. The possibilities go far beyond coding and programming. Girls should never be intimidated or believe the boys are more skilled than them.



Sam Gqomo is passionate about empowering women in Africa to reach their potential, which is why, in 2012, she founded the WoMandla Foundation.

WoMandla, a combination of "women" and "amandla" (meaning power or strength in isiXhosa and isiZulu), aims to inform, empower and equip women and girls by building sustainable communities.

In roughly a decade, the WoMandla Foundation has made significant strides. The organisation, made up of a team of executive committee members who are committed to educating, equipping and empowering African women, is on the spheres of science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics, as well as mentorship and entrepreneurship.

Alongside key partnerships, the foundation has awarded 20 African women bursaries to MANCOSA, an education provider in Cape Town. It has held career expos at two schools in Langa, Cape Town, which exposed more than 3 000 learners to the possibilities of further study.

Gqomo, who is known for her go-getter attitude, strong work ethic and enthusiasm for any task set in front of her, was among the participants in the first Academy of Women Entrepreneurs course in South Africa, an initiative funded by the United States.

In 2019, she was commended as a #CTHero by the Cape Town government for WoMandla Foundation's role in women empowerment in the face of gender-based violence (GBV) and, as a result of her experience and advocacy, she has been invited to the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, as well as the World Youth Forum in Egypt.

This year, she represented South Africa in the Youth Giving Summit — an international youth grant-making programme that supports independence and fosters leadership

development — that focused on catalysing the impact of global youth.

Gqomo has learnt important lessons in the workplace. Having experienced burnout one too many times, she knows that no one can pour from an empty cup.

So, every day, she shows up as her truest self. This means making tough decisions and having uncomfortable conversations, as well as being honest with herself. Time and space to learn and live passionately is important: "If I want to go the distance and build world-changing organisations, I cannot sacrifice myself."

Gqomo has big dreams for WoMandla's role in the future. One of her chief goals is to end GBV, a widespread and entrenched problem in Africa that deeply affects the psychology, dreams and futures of women across the continent.

"Our goal as an organisation is aligned with the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 5, which is to achieve gender equality and empower 100 000 women and girls by 2030," says Gqomo.

With the right opportunities, she is committed to empowering women in South Africa in every way possible. "If I could change anything, it would be the mind-set of our society and the gendered power inequalities rooted in patriarchy that keep us back as a country."

Gqomo knows that with resources, education and opportunities, every woman can rise up and reach their potential. — Laura du Toit



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Tshogfatso Setumo
Step up to the challenge, find your voice and be bold

I am the mother of two beautiful girls, a business woman, fitness enthusiast and an IT Operations Manager at OneConnect.

I have been in the IT industry for more than 15 years and started as an intern in analysis and development and pre-sales. I moved to operations and back to analysis and design before becoming an operations team leader.

My career development and journey in this industry has been an extremely challenging one, but equally rewarding. When I came into the world of IT, there were very few women in my organisation and none in management and executive roles. I was mostly assigned a male mentor, which was both a blessing and a curse. Immediately when I was assigned a

mentor, my mission was clear, and that was to absorb every ounce of knowledge from them and that part came easily.

However, I found male colleagues were either too helpful to a point where they would do your duties for you, or too neglectful in the hope of reminding you that as a female, your place is not in the boardroom. In some cases, while sitting in meetings, I would be stopped from voicing my opinion by a male colleague saying "I got this", or I would be assigned to take minutes. What this does in the long run, is to teach women self-doubt, to constantly ask for their work to be reviewed prior to submission and seek validation from others.

The ripple effect of this is that it

extends to our children. You cannot teach your children that which you are not. When I started seeing myself in my eldest daughter, I knew change had to happen. I started becoming more vocal, taking on more challenging tasks and I continued to work with the same male colleagues. Although it was uncomfortable at first, the "dudes" started to see me as their equal because I started to treat myself as their equal.

So ladies, yes, IT is still a male-dominated industry and we are changing this daily. It is at OneConnect where I was given limitless opportunities of growth, irrespective of my gender. Opportunities are limitless, but highly contested. Get up and grab yours!

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@eltenadirksrethman
Eltena Rethman (nee Dirks)



Eltena Rethman

Head of training and communications:
Community Chest of Western Cape

With more than 24 years of experience across different sectors in a number of local and international organisations, Eltena Rethman is an expert in the NGO landscape.

Having grown up in a township in a working-class family, Rethman's circumstances were anything but easy. As a child, she lived and witnessed trauma and abuse, which she believes allowed her to develop empathy.

Seeing the way her "swartskapie" (black sheep) brother was treated by her family and community, and his subsequent descent into drug abuse and then prison, is an experience that shaped her future.

Later on in her career, Rethman would go on to run counselling and rehabilitative programmes in juvenile prison.

Today, Rethman heads up training and communications at Community Chest of Western Cape. Heading up both departments does not come without a packed schedule, but this suits Rethman, as she says she thrives on adrenaline and pressure and enjoys a good challenge.

Most days, Rethman's day begins at 3am when her family is asleep. As a mother of two boys, Rethman keeps firm to her commitment not to take out her laptop when her children are awake.

"Being in humanitarian aid, I don't want my children to say I had so much time for other people and I never had time for them," she explains.

Initially without a matric, Rethman took on a part-time job to complete her schooling. She has never stopped studying since. She holds various qualifications in education, business management and development studies.

Now at age 47, Rethman is completing her master's in education and was selected to present at a conference in Senegal later this year. Her findings have already been published in an early childhood development book, and she hasn't even completed her degree.

Rethman strongly believes that education is one of the variables — but not the only one — that can change your life.

In her twenties, bright-eyed and eager to see the world, Rethman quit her job and took up au pairing in Belgium. The first of many trips abroad, she says travel opened her mind and changed her worldview.

Rethman hopes that girls from townships can get the opportunity to travel and have access to life-changing experiences. For her, travel and experience are other important variables: "As much as education and knowledge shapes who we are, your environment is your biggest teacher."

During her honours degree, Rethman became blind in her left eye. She then had to learn to adapt to her world as a partially-sighted woman. While this was difficult, she realised that her adversities are her strengths and this only whetted her appetite to do more.

In the future, Rethman hopes to achieve her doctorate in education. She also aims to influence decision-making at a societal level, particularly for women like her. She envisions collaborating with other successful women to form a mentoring and support network to make meaningful change.

Rethman hopes this network can give women from marginalised backgrounds and women with disabilities access to resources and a safe space to develop emotionally, psychologically and physically into their best selves.

"I want to see other women rise above their circumstances and environments, whether it's gender-based violence and abuse or their home situation," she says.

Rethman is driven to open doors for these women in townships, providing them with the support she needed when she was younger. — Shaazia Ebrahim

"I want to see other women rise above their circumstances and environments, whether it's gender-based violence and abuse or their home situation."

Tebello Motshwane

Attorney: Sister In Law

@bellz_motshwane @Tebello Motshwane Public @bellz_motshwane Tebello Motshwane

Tebello Motshwane's chosen route may not be the most conventional in the eyes of the legal world, but her expertise as an attorney is put to good use helping women to become educated, empowered and equipped in all things pertaining to the law.

Through her business, Sister In Law, Motshwane uses her qualifications to help women.

"I package and simplify legal concepts in an understandable way so that women can make informed decisions about their lives," she explains.

With this thinking, her goal is for more South African women to become educated about principles of the law and understand how it applies to them. She believes that this will enable women to empower themselves and their families.

Sister In Law was founded in 2018 as a blog and has grown into a successful resource to aid women with legal advice.

"Women are already largely empowered in other fields, so I grabbed this opportunity with both hands and I have not looked back since," Motshwane says.

She feels that women too often find themselves at a disadvantage when the family unit is divided and that family law support should be accessible to all women. Her aim is to continuously encourage women to take back their power through providing practical and easy-to-consume legal advice.

At the beginning of 2020, she started a podcast called "Sisters

In Conversation" in which she profiled women of colour in the legal profession. "I wanted a platform where I could share the challenges and highlights of the under-represented gender and race while creating awareness of the varying areas of practice that exist."

"My vision was and still is to demystify the law and show women that the law exists for their benefit and empowerment. It's not a tool reserved for a certain class of people."

The podcast has hosted in which 40 women from various backgrounds and has become a tool where "each one teaches one — a passing of the baton to the next generation of women in law", she says.

Besides being a notable changemaker and mentor within her industry, she has acquired many accolades over the years, including what she deems her proudest moment — being selected as a fellow for the Nelson Mandela Washington Fellowship 2020/2021.

"The fellowship ran for six weeks and I was selected in the business category. I am now officially an alumni of the prestigious fellowship."

Throughout her many career and personal achievements, she has never stopped her mission to help women ensure that they take control of their legal affairs.

The weight of responsibility in a profession of this nature



— and the role Motshwane has carved out for herself — is no easy feat. "[I may be] a relatively small role player in the legal profession, but my vision is to keep educating women about their rights purely because, when you know more, you are enabled to make better decisions," she says.

Given the climate of our flawed legal system and its persistent discrimination against women, Motshwane recognises that this can make women feel despondent or as though the law is against them.

She is driven to continue inspiring women, as the impact of equipping one woman at a time can lead to a ripple effect of change. "Empowering one woman has the potential to empower a family unit and that is what keeps me motivated." — Alexandra van Nieuwenhuizen

LYNETTE NTULI

CELEBRATING WOMEN OF POWER

This women's month, CEF recognises and celebrates the incredible contribution that our strong women make to the energy sector.

<p>Ms. Ayanda Noah Group Chairperson</p> <p>MD of AN Duke Engineering Solutions, CEO at Enerdigm, she previously served at Eskom as Group Executive for Distribution & Customer Services Division and CEO of Utility Coach.</p>	<p>Adv. Priakumari Hassan Non-Executive Director</p> <p>Established Women of Africa Investment Group which is a women-owned, women-managed, Black-Economic Empowerment company strongly committed to gender empowerment.</p>	<p>Ms. Nolubabalo Sondlo Non-Executive Director</p> <p>CEO of Sondlo Chartered Accountants with skills that include external audit, internal audit as well as audit clean-up operations in the private and public sector.</p>	<p>Ms. Unati Figlan Non-Executive Director</p> <p>Runs Hlonela Engineering Solutions, chaired several committees at Eskom distribution and served as an Executive Director of PowerTech Transformers.</p>	<p>Ms. Gosetseone Leketi Non-Executive Director</p> <p>Chief Director: Petroleum and Petroleum Products at the DMRE as well as director at the Chieta-Base Chemicals and Petroleum Chamber.</p>	<p>Ms. Ditsietsi Morabe Group CFO & Executive Director</p> <p>With 26 years' experience, she oversees Corporate Finance, Supply Chain Management and Treasury functions in the CEF Group.</p>	<p>Ms. Brenda Moagi Group Executive: Legal, Compliance, Risk & Security Management</p> <p>Corporate lawyer with over 20 years' experience and oversees the Legal, Compliance and Risk as well as Security Management portfolios at CEF.</p>	<p>Ms. Zinhle Thupana Group Executive: Corporate Services</p> <p>Certified Ethics Officer who oversees HR & Payroll, Learning & Development, Employee Relations as well as the Facilities functions for CEF Group.</p>
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Tshegofatso Phetlhe

Creative director: VMLY&R, Johannesburg

[in](#) Tshegofatso Phetlhe

“If we need to fight the good fight, I will fight it,” says Tshegofatso Phetlhe, an award-winning creative director who uses her advertising work to transform the South African narrative to one that is more socially inclusive.

Phetlhe is inspired by the intimacy of human connection that the advertising industry requires, both with her audience and her team that she works with. As a black creative, she represents various, often othered, black subcultures in her campaigns to create work that is impactful. “Without that very true human connection, the work is just wallpaper,” she says.

The Nando’s #rightmyname campaign has been Phetlhe’s most meaningful project to date.

The campaign highlighted the red line that appears under names written on platforms like Google and Microsoft, indicating a spelling error. The idea was conceived when she noticed the red line under her name after signing an email.

“It started with a conversation and then it spread into this beautiful campaign,” she remembers. The work she did saw the campaign win in multiple categories in the 2018 Loerie Awards.

Phetlhe values social transformation and uses her work to create conversation and change. “It’s a personal fight,” she says.

As a black woman, she is able to advocate for advertising projects that she knows will represent and resonate with black women. “When people see themselves in the work, it’s probably my favourite moment,” she explains.

She also uses recruitment to empower black women. As a creative director, she has the ability to bolster a team with people who look like her. “I’m putting down the ladder behind me. I’m not going up alone,” she says.

Generating this transformed workplace allows the people in it to create more freely without having to over-explain the black experience in South Africa. “They [black women] don’t have to carry some of the stuff they have to carry when they walk into other rooms.”

A goal that Phetlhe is working towards is to change South Africa’s status as the rape capital of the world and she is using her campaign work to get there.

“It’s in the language,” she remarks. Using language in advertisements to represent women, especially black women, as being something more than just strong will create space for them to be vulnerable and speak out against their abusers. “It’s audacious, I know. It’s also ambitious, but it’s close to my heart,” Phetlhe explains.

“Winning alone is not an option,” she emphasises. Teamwork is one of the most valuable aspects of her job. Campaigns created in advertising require a lot of collaboration, and Phetlhe not only recognises this but refuses to be acknowledged without her colleagues.

“I never want to win alone because it’s not as fulfilling as taking everyone with you,” she says.

“The saying ‘You strike a woman, you strike a rock’ is powerful, but what this metaphor does is encourage a narrative that women are only strong. I am also soft. I am also powerful. I am also funny. I am all these other parts of life and humanity.” — Khadeeja Allie

I never want to win alone because it’s not as fulfilling as taking everyone with you.

Rethabile Mashale Sonibare

Managing director: Molo Mhlaba

[f](#) @Rethabile Mashale

[t](#) @drdashale

[in](#) Rethabile Mashale Soniba

There are a number of factors discouraging young girls from developing an interest in STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) subjects, says Rethabile Mashale Sonibare, pioneering founder and managing director of the global initiative, Molo Mhlaba.

Girls are not socialised early enough through STEM toys, schooling and content. STEM toys are predominantly associated with, and marketed to, boys,” Sonibare says.

Although it may seem obvious, research into this cultural occurrence — how gender divides start in early childhood development — clearly supports Sonibare’s thesis: young boys are systemically encouraged to believe that they make natural scientists, instigators, thinkers and inventors, while girls receive the cultural message that they do not.

This, together with possible hostility in STEM-related working environments and persistent patriarchal attitudes in our social landscape, presents a considerable obstacle to young women — barriers Sonibare is determined to overcome.

Her impressive non-profit start-up organisation Molo Mhlaba champions the right for all to quality education in the fields of technology, science and mathematics.

Since its inception in 2018, it has gained remarkable traction despite the seemingly insurmountable challenges presented in 2020 by the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. The organisation now boasts eight global chapters, reaching as far afield as Belgium, Canada and Italy, while honouring its ethos of championing education, justice and gender parity.

Regardless of continued efforts to improve representation in the field, systemic change is slow and sometimes reluctant. Research shows that about 60% of young people effectively drop out of school with no school-leaving qualifications to their names.

Girl learners seem to have been particularly vulnerable to the catastrophic consequences of the pandemic on education, with national school shutdowns further compounding the existing problems.

To dismantle gender bias in education requires commitment and drive from key decision-makers who are involved in transforming

educational policy, something Sonibare advocates for passionately and vocally.

“There is a lack of political will to radically reimagine education so that it is forward-thinking, community-owned and depoliticised.”

This is why Sonibare’s work through Molo Mhlaba is vital. Not only does it facilitate quality education for female learners in areas where they have been historically disenfranchised, but it also introduces them to the growing variety of formidable women pioneers in the field.

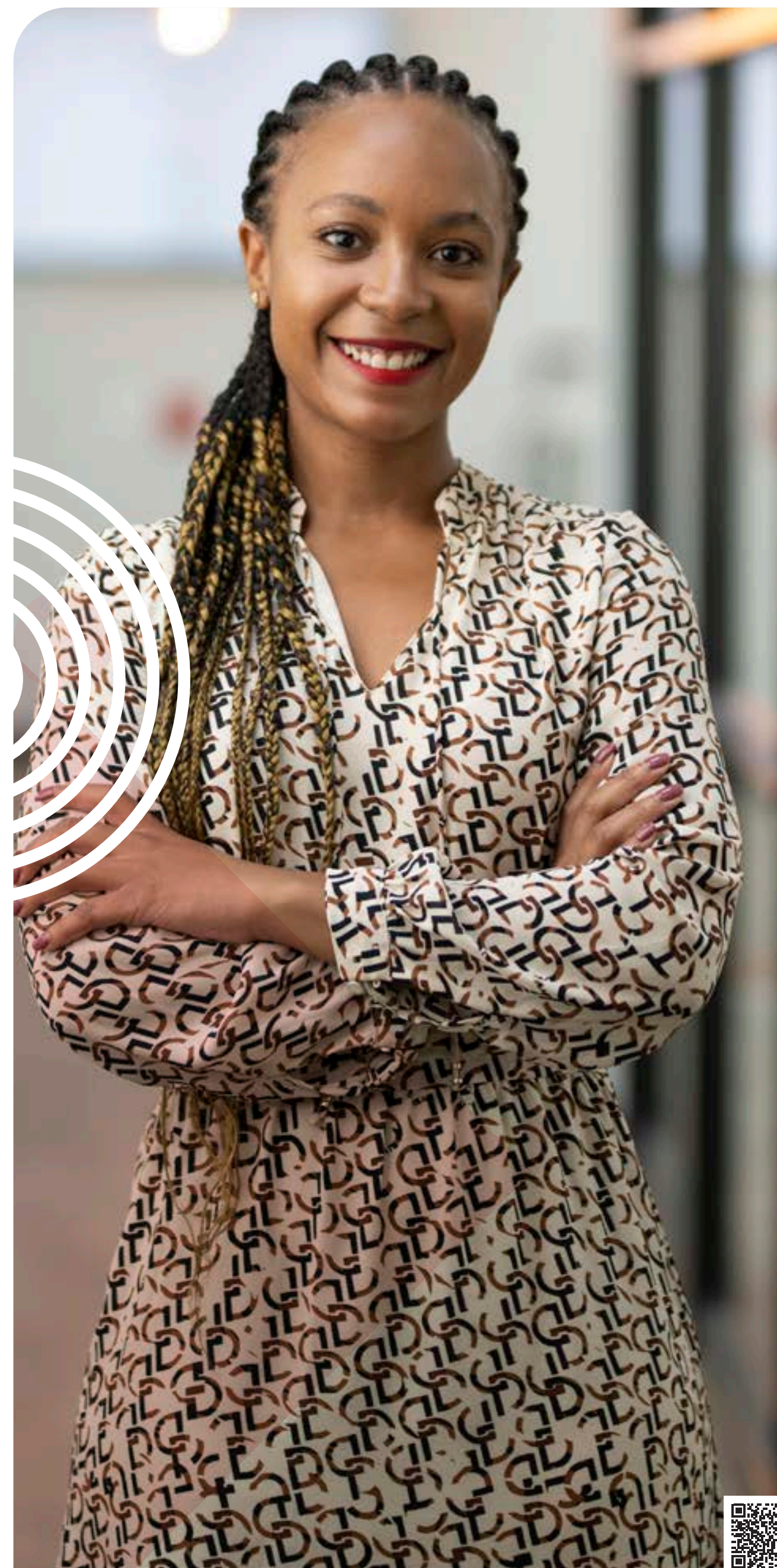


The programme provides a safe space for girl learners to grow, thrive and be heard — crucial now more than ever in a country struggling to address the ongoing scourge of gender-based violence (GBV).

The climate of violence against women severely curtails any young woman’s ability to imagine a future where her contributions and achievements are honoured and celebrated. It retards social growth and impedes a woman’s ability to function, succeed and develop, says Sonibare.

“Social punishment and our justice system do not work in harmony to create a culture of intolerance for GBV. We are always going to have this problem if we don’t normalise a culture of non-acceptance,” she adds.

Of South Africa’s tendency to see advocacy against the problem as a “women’s issue”, Sonibare’s stance is decisive: “Women are not responsible for educating and advocating for an end to femicide and GBV. It’s a societal issue and we are all responsible for ending it.” — Francesco Nassimbeni



Farai Mubaiwa

Chief partnerships officer: Youth Employment Service (YES)

[f](#) @Farai Mubaiwa

[ig](#) @feminist_farai

[in](#) @Farai Mubaiwa

Farai Mubaiwa embodies the idea of leadership through action. She is passionate about building a better South Africa, acknowledging the youth as a crucial foundation in achieving this outcome.

Mubaiwa has dedicated herself to empowering young people through her involvement in several projects geared towards youth development, with a focus on tackling the unemployment crisis in the country.

At 27 years old, Mubaiwa has already accomplished a great deal — from obtaining her master of science degree in the political economy of emerging markets with distinction from the University of London to managing projects at The Aurum Institute, a leading African TB and HIV research and implementation organisation.

One of her main projects, Youth Health Africa, focused on limiting the spread of HIV and reducing the high levels of youth unemployment through education and skills development programmes.

In 2015, Mubaiwa founded the Africa Matters Initiative after witnessing the disparity between the public’s solidarity with France after the Charlie Hebdo attack, as well as the lack of support after the terror attack in Baga, Nigeria, a few days later.

Her goal is to change the African narrative by upskilling and educating young Africans to play their part in bettering their societies. “Young people are capable of leading. We are not the leaders of tomorrow. We are the leaders of today,” she says.

Mubaiwa is the youngest executive at Youth Employment Service (YES), a non-profit organisation that works with government and labour entities to create policies that promote job creation for young people in South Africa. As the chief partnerships officer, she works on strengthening relationships with key partners in civil society, government, youth development agencies and other collaborative stakeholders.

During her time at YES, she has taken on several strategic and operational teams, developing her teammates and sparking innovations and processes to better the organisation. She has also ensured that YES is actively involved with the Presidential Youth Employment Intervention.

Mubaiwa believes that addressing the unemployment crisis in South Africa requires collaboration and structural changes, especially in education, beginning at the grassroots level.

She has taken up positions that make her an active collaborator in bringing about change, example, attending a president convened meeting of key stakeholders to discuss how to combat South Africa’s unemployment crisis and create opportunities for our unemployed youth at scale.

“We need to look at how we massify employment opportunities for unemployed youth, particularly for young black women, who are often excluded from the formal economy,” she says.

Despite the challenges she has faced in her career, she remains driven. Her advice to young black women is to believe in themselves.

“We need to know our worth, recognise our value and step into our power. We are powerful!” — Robert Sam-Kputu



CUT WOMEN ARE THE HEARTBEAT OF ITS VISION

Ace Moloi

The Central University of Technology (CUT) understands that to be a pioneering and innovative institution, it has to treat the women in its employ with respect and invest in their development. Not only does the institution produce ground-breaking technologies that revolutionise industries, but also a crop of outstanding women who can compete with the best minds in their respective fields.



Gloria Pule, Deputy Campus Director, Welkom

Integrity, fairness, excellence and a listening spirit are the driving values behind the newly appointed CUT Welkom campus deputy director, Gloria Pule, who became a junior lecturer at the institution in 2016. Shortly thereafter, she rose to the position of departmental manager: accounting and auditing. A fine product of CUT, Pule holds a National Diploma and B-Tech in internal auditing, and has also gone on to obtain a Master's degree in Higher Education from the neighbouring University of the Free State. The 41 year-old Pule admits that it is not easy for women to rise in spaces that were once seen as strongholds for men. She mentions that, often times, they have to hold back how they really feel to avoid being called emotional. Again, their decisions are constantly questioned in a manner that's rare for men. Despite all that, Pule believes that being a woman is a superpower that allows her to connect deeper with the people she leads. "As Africans, we're taught to value people as people, regardless of their status. So, the way you help each and every person that comes your way, that's what makes you the cream on top of everything," she concludes.



Ayanda Nyathi, Deputy Director for Protection Services, Institutional

The pulse of CUT's responsibility to provide a secure working and learning environment is a 33 year-old daring strategist, Ayanda Nyathi. Born in Mpumalanga, Ayanda identified God's window of opportunity to break into an industry that's typically known for being a man cave. With two Master's degrees in security management and business administration respectively, and a track record in central banking and intelligence, it's not surprising that Ayanda is the first woman in the history of the university to occupy her current position. "It's hard to find women within the space, especially in leadership positions," she says. For her, this means being part of making history. "It's challenging in a positive way because you understand that you are standing there as a woman, you're an example as well as you're creating history for the women that are to come after you," she explains. Although Ayanda encounters backward mentalities when she engages external stakeholders who don't expect a woman to be in her position, she states that internally, the CUT community is progressive. For example, during protests, she has found that open communication is a more effective strategy to manage tensions. "I think it's not even a situation of being tough but of being strategic. You make them realise that your concern is their safety and security. You need to work with the police and crowd control to ensure that everyone is safe during demonstrations," shares the accomplished security manager who feeds her fashion design passion when she wants to let her guard down.



Dr Mantoa Molete, Lecturer, Welkom Campus

To communications and linguistics scholar, Dr Mantoa Molete, what makes CUT an attractive space is its commitment to inclusion. "To be a CUT woman means that you are part of diversity. We are a very diverse group of people. And the fact that you can embrace yourself and it feels like home, which is what a lot of workspaces don't have," describes the charismatic academic, stating that the university further recognises women for their authenticity. The fact that Dr Molete was born in Welkom, and is currently based in the mining town, gives her the opportunity to contribute to the development of a community that shaped her. "The most important thing for women is to stay authentic. We as women have a tendency to want to copy these characteristics that men have of wanting to show that we have power. Don't try and change who you are to fit the space; the space must adapt to who you are," she advises. At just 35, Dr Molete has cut an iconic figure that makes education fashionable to many young black youth, especially in the Free State. Among others, she prides in is that she has supervised and promoted a couple of Master's students, all this while keeping her life balanced with sleep, social activities and creating fun TikTok videos.



Dr Ritu Bhagwandeem, MSTE Departmental Manager, Bloemfontein

While the trending stereotype is that people in science are nerdy beings that lack artistic interest, CUT Welkom's Dr Ritu Bhagwandeem has gone against the myths to enjoy life in its lengths and breadths. She says in addition to cooking and gardening, she loves listening to Indian music and has a passion for various forms of classical and folk dances. Professionally, Dr Bhagwandeem inhales and exhales science and maths. Currently, she is CUT Welkom's Departmental Manager for MSTE education and lectures chemistry to undergraduate, pre-service teachers, as well as supervising master's and doctoral candidates. Dr Bhagwandeem, who joined CUT in 2011, regards the institution's offer as the best out of the three she had received, and has since stayed with the university for more than 10 years. Being a woman to her means an inherent grace to bring everyone on board as she rises. "My biggest strength is that I am a woman who is confident, resilient, and God fearing! Being able to handle stress, taking ownership and accountability of my actions helps me to be proud of myself. Being a woman, one could accommodate a broader community, staff and students and at the same time walk with those falling behind," states the 52 years old scholar who holds an M.Phil, MSc as well as PhD, among others.

Faith Mangope

Founder and managing director: The Faith Mangope Technology and Leadership Institute

[@FaithMangope](#) [@Faith Mangope](#) [@FaithMangope](#) [Faith Mangope](#)

Faith Mangope was studying at the University of Texas in Austin when she received a call from the White House asking her to write and recite a speech about the development of the African continent. She was told that the president at the time, Barack Obama, had specifically asked for her. She was just 26 years old and didn't have the qualifications many of the other candidates had.

This catalysed a chain of events that resulted in her founding the Faith Mangope Technology and Leadership Institute, a school that teaches South African women the skills required to find work in a fast-paced world governed by the internet and ever-evolving technology. "That moment was specifically orchestrated so that I could deliver a certain message about where we are as a continent and where we have potential to be," she recounts.

It was later, during a talk that she was giving to a group of matrices, that Mangope was struck with the realisation that for South Africa to reach its full potential, she needed to change the face of education. The schooling system needed to grow from a place of constant catch-up to one of intentionality, where children learn skills that fit the requirements of the 21st-century workplace.

Mangope realised the need for an amendment to the curriculum. In order to find gainful employment that benefits both a community and an individual, it is important to know how to think logically and systematically, but also critically, she says.

One needs to know how to solve puzzles within a limited timeframe, and have confidence in one's ideas and solutions.

Mangope's institute teaches exciting new developments in the world of technology, while also preparing girls and women for collaboration and leadership.

Mangope believes that this is her formula for success: Adaptability = IQ (intelligence) + EQ (empathy) + CQ (creativity) + SQ (spirituality). To adapt and thrive in any chosen workplace, one needs to have a balance of each quotient, she says.

Intelligence is built from a practice of problem-solving, assessment and the ability to analyse and draw conclusions. Emotional literacy is crucial in understanding cultural norms, communication and collaboration. Keeping in touch with one's creativity breeds innovation and growth, while spirituality nurtures the connection we have with ourselves and our communities.

Mangope believes that an understanding of the self is crucial for success.

"Content is great, but it doesn't make you an asset. For that, you need agency. It is this self-actualisation, the understanding of who you are in a community, that allows you to be a valuable team member within a diverse space."

When asked what advice she would give to a woman trying



to find her place in the working world, her response is: "Seek your passion. Find what moves you. Look inward before looking outward. Do research and travel. Get exposure and an understanding of the wider world."

With each year that passes, the Faith Mangope Technology and Leadership Institute is irrevocably improving the lives of more and more South African girls, helping to create a nation of formidable women. — Jennifer Worthington-Smith

Thato Mphuthi

Founding director: Enabled Enlightenment

[@_mphuthithato](#) [@Mphuthi Thato](#) [@_mphuthithato](#) [Mphuthi Thato](#)

One day I woke up and was limping," she says. "If more people realise how easily this could happen to them, I think it would do a lot to eliminate stigma."

Mphuthi's time in school was difficult, not only because of the physical barriers but also because some learners would taunt her and steal her walking aids. After multiple suicide attempts, she hit a turning point when she discovered poetry in high school: "It helped me express what I could not say."

Through publicly sharing her poems, Mphuthi built her confidence, enhanced her public speaking skills and succeeded in making her peers and teachers aware of the great difficulties that she was facing each day.

At college she found herself in spaces where issues such as HIV, sexual health and gender-based violence were being tackled. She noted that disabled people were rarely considered in these discussions, prompting her to start Enabled Enlightenment.

Enabled Enlightenment's main goal is to create a sense of belonging and confidence among the young and disabled population. "It's tiring navigating this ableist society," she notes. "So we hold space for one another."

The NPO was created to focus on disability empowerment and justice, as well as Mphuthi's other passion: reproductive health.

"I want to create spaces for other young people with disabilities to meet people like them, have conversations and feel normal," she says.

Since launching Enabled Enlightenment, Mphuthi has used her love of public speaking to educate communities about what

it means to be disabled in South Africa, the barriers disabled people face and how to meaningfully include disabled people in society.

The NPO posts webinars, provides sensitivity training for companies, and holds drives to gather supplies for underprivileged disabled people.

She has received a South African Heroes Award for her work in community development and has also been nominated for a Woman of Stature Award and for the JCI Ten Outstanding Young Persons programme. This year, Enabled Enlightenment has been nominated for a South African Heroes Award in the Specialised Care category.

Mphuthi also collaborates with other organisations to educate groups, including clinicians and social workers, on the intersection between disability and sexuality.

"Professionals need to know how to cater to young disabled people and understand that we are diverse," she says.

Through her work, Mphuthi hopes to reduce the stigma around disability, include disabled people in important conversations and one day be able to influence policy.

"We exist and we matter," she says. "We don't want to be othered anymore — we want to be treated with integrity." — Andie Reeves



Want to access these profiles online to find out more and share the stories of women changing SA? Scan the QR with your phone camera to view the digital profiles.



Gostina Malope

Principal and director: Touted Agriculture College South Africa

[@gabbey.malope](#) [Gostina Gabbey Malope](#)



Gostina Malope believes that agriculture is the cornerstone of the South African economy and should be invested in as such. Rural upliftment through farming is one of the most sustainable forms of social development, she says.

As the principal and director of Touted Agriculture College South Africa, Malope applies her passion for the sector by helping to bridge the skills gap among the youth in her hometown of Bushbuckridge.

In partnership with the agricultural, culture, art, tourism and sports sector education and training authorities, among other educational partners, the college offers courses leading to formal qualifications that will empower students to create employment through small enterprises

or improve productivity in their existing businesses.

Malope holds diplomas in plant production, animal breeding and mixed farming and has extensive experience as a training facilitator.

She discovered that she has an innate ability to be a peer educator while working for non-profit organisation Siyaphila Youth Services, which focuses on HIV education and projects aiming to alleviate poverty. Six years later, she registered her company to offer her facilitation skills on a more formal level.

After completing additional training courses, Malope had the opportunity to become a training specialist in farming, while also managing the farm where she produces crops.

Through Touted Agriculture College South Africa, Malope has assisted more than 2 000 farmers and more than 5 000 young people. The college has also received recognition for several learning programmes in remote areas.

Various courses in agriculture, education and training, management, business and leadership, and hospitality faculties are offered through distance e-learning, contact and blended learning.

A tenacious student in her own right, Malope incorporates the intuitive knowledge she gains from her pupils into her own learning, for a more forward-thinking business approach.

"The process of training rural farmers to be commercially viable has also taught me a lot about respecting people who share as much wisdom as they do. They have such extensive and invaluable experiences on the subject, even though they didn't have formal qualifications," she says.

Malope's commitment to the community in which she was born and raised has allowed her to conceptualise learning programmes that cater to specific rural needs. Beyond her acute understanding of running a farming business, her ability to make empathetic connections with others — having been a counsellor previously — breaks down boundaries of communication between her and her students.

That humility in her perspective is what makes Malope's work even more impactful — the respect she has for agriculture and her ability to adapt to different environments.

"In my formal education and in what I continue to learn, it is how to use agriculture to sustain families. Even seeing how much our involvement in our community has impacted lives has been life-changing for me," she says. — Jabulile Dlamini-Qwesa

Gugulethu Mahlangu

Aquaponics horticulturist: Finleaf Farms and House Harvest

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Gugulethu Mahlangu is an aquaponics horticulturist who grows nutritious, chemical-free food with Finleaf Farms, a scalable biological farming brand.

Aquaponics is a combination of aquaculture (the growing of fish and other aquatic animals) and hydroponics (the growing of plants without soil).

It feels as though Mahlangu was born to be in agriculture — her grandmother and great-grandmother farmed to support their families.

Although she took no interest in it at first, eventually her strong heritage won out and she is now the proud owner of House Harvest, a 14-hectare farm that boasts 10 hydroponic tunnels and produces leafy green vegetables in Boksburg, Gauteng. She is also the aquaponics horticulturist at Finleaf Farms, an aquaponics farm situated along the border of Gauteng and North West province.

The beauty of nature — and the independence that being a farmer allows — is what drew Mahlangu to the agricultural industry. She describes it as a "career that you can build from the ground up".

Inspired by how the work of her hands feeds the community and profits her business, she is living a life that brings her joy and fulfilment.

As a successful "agripreneur" and a woman thriving in a sector that is dominated by men, Mahlangu has a lot to be proud

of. She says her proudest achievement to date is starting #farmspacesafrica on Twitter Spaces.

By using the digital platform to connect with farmers in Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Botswana, Namibia, Tanzania, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo, she is building an agricultural community across the continent.

Coming from a line of women who worked the land, she wants more women and young people to get involved in agriculture, as she believes it can create employment and build a solid foundation for South Africa's future.

Using her grandmother's wisdom to keep herself disciplined, resilient and optimistic, she believes that "life constantly gives you lessons, learn from each and every one".

When asked what being a woman brings to the agricultural space, Mahlangu notes how women look after their households and communities. "The way women think is holistic and collective; educating a woman is an investment into uplifting a community," she says.

Mahlangu feels that she brings her experience and voice to the industry, as well as her drive to support other women with



knowledge and skills, particularly when it comes to agritech and smart farming.

She wants women to know that they can have a career in agriculture and that there are opportunities including training and funding specifically allocated for black women.

Mahlangu describes the women of South Africa as "resilient, intelligent and nurturing", and she wants them to be empowered with land and the skills to build a life of their own choosing. — Oratile Mashazi

Abueng Leepile

Founder and director: Bokamoso Abu Farms

@AbuengAbueng @abueng.leepile1 @abueng.leepile

Agricultural entrepreneur Abueng Leepile is the founder and director of Bokamoso Abu Farms in North West province.

This flourishing agribusiness contributes to one of the country's most vital food production value chains — growing various vegetables, including beetroot, butternut, peppers, chillies and onions.

For Leepile, the driving force behind her business is to provide healthy and delicious vegetables to the public.

Leepile says that she always had a soft spot for farming, but it was the realisation that South Africa was facing a food shortage that really stoked her fire.

Through her own research, she discovered that the average age of a South African farmer is 62. "[This meant] that within the next 20 years, more than half of all the farmers in South Africa would be too old to work, retired or deceased," she says. This understanding inspired her to follow her dream of becoming a farmer and providing food to people within South Africa and beyond its borders.

Bokamoso Abu Farms has three permanent employees and on weekends and holidays, Leepile's siblings and cousins pitch in to help on the farm.

"They are the most supportive people in my life and I've never been more grateful for anything. They are simply the best," she says.

Leepile adds that one of her proudest achievements is being named one of the 100 South African Shining Stars for 2020 by Inside Education. Her journey to this point was not plain sailing, though.

More women in agriculture will pave the way for a better future. It is our responsibility to empower the next generation of women to take on the challenges of the world's growing food needs.

As a woman entrepreneur in farming, she faced many challenges working in an industry that is dominated by men and is thus highly male-oriented.

"Resilience, determination and the help from my family make it easier day by day," says Leepile.

One of the most valuable lessons she learnt was when she started operating the business.

"I didn't have funding and hoped that I would get something, but it did not happen," she says. However, through networking and idea exchanges, she took her mentor's advice to start her small business with what she had instead of waiting for funding. "Start small, develop and grow — I used her advice and never looked back," says Leepile.

If she could change one thing in South Africa today, Leepile says that it would be to see more women joining the workforce and having a seat at the table where high-level decisions are made.



Leepile wants to be known as someone who gave more than she took. "With hard work, discipline and consistency, young women — especially in rural parts of Africa — can build true wealth and systems to develop their society without having to depend on men for their livelihoods," she says.

Her favourite quote is by former president of Burkina Faso, Thomas Sankara: "He who feeds you controls you." Leepile believes that if we can feed ourselves, we'll have control of our future and our dignity will remain intact. — Alexander Brand



While we were all cooped up inside at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, Vuyo Mrwata found herself facing an additional hurdle: the country's economic shutdown left her struggling to keep her first entrepreneurial endeavour in the beauty industry afloat.

Her business may not have seen the other side of lockdown, but Mrwata's spirit never waned. Having learned a few lessons about the unpredictability of entrepreneurship, she came back stronger. Her goal? To build a "recession-proof business".

Cut to the present day, and despite the pandemic's setbacks, Mrwata has successfully kickstarted a new enterprise — Licebo Farming.

Mrwata spends her days harvesting a variety of vegetables and legumes along with her employees. Through her recent work, she has not only learned a new trade, but has also proven the value of her resilience.

"Although the journey wasn't easy," she explains, "seeing the harvest from all the seeds I had sown finally coming to fruition has to be my proudest moment."

Through her work, she has also sought to create jobs for other South Africans. After graduating from the University of Johannesburg with a degree in accountancy, she struggled to find a job, an experience many graduates share. Being able to expand job opportunities has been one of her biggest motivators.

By taking her life into her own hands, she's simultaneously combatting job scarcity and working hard to positively affect the lives of others.

Despite all that she has achieved, Mrwata is no stranger to self-doubt, but she has refused to allow it to be a deciding factor. In an Instagram caption in which she reflects on her journey, she writes: "I had to talk myself out of thinking my first business was a failure and so was I."

With therapy and support from her husband, she was able to bounce back and prove to the world that self-belief is crucial.

Beyond being a farmer and an entrepreneur, Mrwata is many other things — a mother, YouTuber, home- and lifestyle blogger and beauty guru.

Between sponsorships, getting her children to school and harvesting her produce, she has a lot on her plate. Nevertheless, she takes the time to appreciate the moments in between, documenting them thoroughly through her photographs and blogs, and always prioritising her family.

She is a self-described "queen of planning", constantly working on improving herself, forming new habits and gunning for "progress over perfection".

At the core of farming is a balance of self-sufficiency and community, providing for oneself while laying the foundations that will support one another for years to come. Mrwata embodies these qualities.

She relies on her network and her family just as much as they rely on her. Through her values and her experience, she teaches us the importance of self-celebration.

She uses her story to remind others that starting something new and getting up again and again in spite of perceived failure can make all the difference. — Alice Sholto-Douglas

Vuyolwethu Mrwata

Farmer: Licebo Farming

@Vuyo Mrwata

@mrs_mrwtwa

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Motlanalo Lebepe is the executive director of Nkuzi Development Association, a non-profit organisation that aims to aid historically disadvantaged communities by informing them about their rights and assisting them in gaining access to land.



@MotlanaloLebepe @Motlanalo Lebepe Motlanalo Lebepe

Motlanalo Lebepe

Executive director: Nkuzi Development Association

In doing this, the organisation aims to drive land reform and enable rural and underprivileged communities to develop their local economies and uplift themselves. The business has been in operation since 1997 and has completed work in Limpopo, northern Mpumalanga and rural Gauteng.

Lebepe's leadership has allowed the Nkuzi Development Association to succeed for over two decades and remain an important member of the International Land Coalition.

The farm dweller programme has been their most successful initiative, helping to raise awareness about eviction issues across both print and broadcast media. Moreover, the organisation has helped to ensure that the Occupational Health and Safety Act is upheld in rural communities, especially among women farm workers.

By offering legal support to farm dwellers, the Nkuzi Development Association allows them to take action against mistreatment and labour violations.

Lebepe has also been extensively involved in the educational aspects of the organisation, hosting workshops and training women to become leaders in their community.

In January 2020, the association hosted a training session that equipped 24 women from mining-affected communities with the skills that they need to negotiate better benefits from mining projects and remain active participants in decision-making processes.

Lebepe cites this work as her proudest achievement, saying: "Rural women are capable of meaningfully engaging in land development initiatives when they have the necessary support."

Inequality is undoubtedly a serious problem in South Africa, but

many are all too happy to quietly ignore the systemic issues that reinforce it. Lebepe is not one of them — instead, she is driven to make a real difference for those who have the least resources in the country.

Her willingness to directly involve herself in the struggles of rural and underprivileged communities is a testament to the strength of her conviction.

Although each legal battle that Nkuzi Development Association assists with, and every workshop that they offer, is of incredible importance, their larger mission is to return the land to those who work it.

Championing a pro-agrarian philosophy that is strongly opposed to the exploitative practices used by companies to disenfranchise people who have been historically marginalised, Lebepe represents the kind of person South Africa needs now more than ever.

Her commitment to the cause has significantly helped communities and individuals, but what is most impressive is the larger impact her work has had.

There is a domino effect created through each person that she has empowered — from what they have learnt and experienced, they are able to educate and enable others who, in turn, can do the same, creating a network of people who are able to stand up to the corporate interests that seem determined to keep them poor and powerless.

Lebepe's greatest wish for South Africa is "to promote, protect and provide independent land rights for women, especially on customary land and among farm dweller communities".

— James Nash

Nombini Zingisa Gono

Project co-ordinator and founder: Macazinga

@Nikilitazn @nombini.gono @zingisa-nombini-gono-40910980

Nombini Zingisa Gono, who hails from Port Edward in KwaZulu-Natal, has been making an impact in environmental, water and grassroots food production since obtaining a BSc in environmental science from Walter Sisulu University in 2013.

During her undergrad years, Gono participated in various campus clean-up campaigns and took on the mantle as a leader in the student church following her qualification with an honours degree in geosciences from Nelson Mandela University.

Gono's research focused on water scarcity in Mzamba village in the Eastern Cape, which she chose to focus on when the lack of tap water in 2016 forced inhabitants to buy water from vendors. She approached youngsters in the village to help with data collection, which sparked their interest in practical science and how that can be used to find solutions to the problems people in the region face.

She is proud of her close working relationship with her community, and one of her proudest achievements was developing a vegetable plot with a widow as a demonstration of how to grow your own food in a small space.

While studying, she was a science communicator at the Nelson Mandela Bay Science and Technology Centre, where she handled science exhibitions, shows and workshops for learners in conjunction with Nelson Mandela University. She

also completed research on waste management to understand people's behaviours and perceptions. From the findings, the centre drafted educational material on the economic benefits of good waste management strategies.

The company brings solutions to our communities and environment — it creates employment opportunities, finds solutions to environmental issues and is a beacon of hope to those who seek inspiration.

Gono started Macazinga in Bizana in 2018 and is the project co-ordinator. The business, with its apt slogan, Engage Inspire Impact, provides agricultural goods and services as well as environmental support services.

In 2020, she trained again, this time at the Mandela Bay Development Agency as education and programmes co-ordinator before becoming a volunteer at the Water Institute of Southern Africa's Woman in Water initiative.

Gono and Macazinga's influence in the was acknowledged three times in 2022, with the Water Research Commission's Top 25 award, as a finalist in the TotalEnergies Top 15 Startupper Challenge for her social entrepreneur pitch and the GreenPitchSA award.

Gono says the Covid-19 lockdown taught her the importance of food production at ground level.

"It was during this time that most people lost their jobs and



had nothing to bring to the table. That's when I realised it is important for everyone to have a small piece of land where they can grow their own vegetables."

The lockdown made her realise that, as a community, they must work together to grow their own food on available land, create employment and empower the community with skills.

What would she like to achieve for South Africa?

She longs for a country where everyone goes to bed daily with a full stomach and hopes for the next day. — Frans Meyer



Tebogo Makoe

Executive director: Human capital and transformation: AfroCentric Group

Tebogo Makoe, a specialist in human resources and Sasol's former vice-president of HR operations support, boasts a storied career in people management that's been thriving for more than a decade.

Her time spent at leading educational and business institutions has had an incredible impact on Makoe, helping her grow from strength to strength, and ultimately leading her to her most recent position.

At the beginning of the year, she joined AfroCentric Group as the new group executive of human capital and transformation for health. Although she has a wealth of experience in people management and HR, this is her first foray into the healthcare industry after years spent at Eskom and Sasol.

"AfroCentric is on a mission to transform healthcare by making it affordable and accessible. The impact is big and opportunities to make a difference are many," Makoe says, outlining how she was drawn to the position.

During her time working for these large companies, the University of Cape Town and University of the Witwatersrand graduate has learned the value of teamwork and surrounding yourself with the right people.

"Establishing a strong senior team as early on as possible helps in positively managing your energy. Surrounding yourself

with knowledgeable people and connecting with colleagues has a positive impact on one's journey to becoming a senior," she explains.

Being an intermediary between employees and executives has its challenges, but Makoe is adamant about reaping the benefits too, especially as she's climbed the corporate ladder herself.

Rather delay fast-tracking being in a senior position and instead empower yourself with knowledge so that you seize the next opportunity with confidence and engage equally with your peers.

"Treating the chief executive, executive committee team and board as a source of insight and advice rather than an obligation has transformed each engagement into a source of energy rather than a drain of energy."

Through her experience engaging with employees up and down the corporate structure of businesses, Makoe often leads diverse teams from various fields. She has always been drawn to developing people and offers a wealth of knowledge to professionals, both young and old.

When asked what advice she has for girls and young women, she says: "It can be done, it can be achieved, go get it. I hope in our paths as senior executives we do not fail them, but enable them to go get it." — Nabeel Allie

It's all about looking for untapped potential while creating an enabling environment for others to develop, creating sustainable generations of leaders," she says. To stay sharp, she continues to hone her professional skills.

Makoe is a graduate of the Gordon Institute of Business Science Business School as well as the Harvard Business School.

"Investing in personal development is priceless," Makoe believes. "Mingling with great minds at global educational institutions is an extraordinary experience that cannot be easily substituted. It helps with staying ahead of the curve."

Mzikazi Nduna

Dean of health sciences: University of Fort Hare

@MzikaziNduna @DrMziNduna @mzikazinduna Mzikazi Nduna

The culmination of more than 20 years of teaching and learning has led Mzikazi Nduna to be appointed the new dean of the faculty of health sciences at the University of Fort Hare in Alice in the Eastern Cape.

Nduna began her career as a high school teacher in 1995, when South Africa's national education system was going through many changes. The introduction of life orientation to replace career guidance stirred an interest in the young teacher to promote healthy sexuality and safer sexual behaviour.

Prior to taking up the position of dean, Nduna was the head of the School of Human and Community Development at University of the Witwatersrand. There, she started and led a research group focused on fatherhood in South Africa, Father (Dis)connections, also known as FACT.

"We realised that there are different ways in which fathers are absent and different ways that people are connected and disconnected from their fathers," she explains.

FACT's research had a strong advocacy component, presenting at conferences and participating in policy conversations. One of FACT's victories was advocating for fathers' names to be mandatory on birth certificates.

"For us to take fathers seriously as parents, it needs to start from the day the child is born; the father's name should be there. It saves the mother and the child later on [if] trying to find the father or going to home affairs," she says.

Professor Rachel Jewkes was one of those mentors, Nduna says. "[Jewkes] sparked the belief in me that we need more women in science — she continues to be my mentor," Nduna explains.

Leadership challenged me. I learned the value of communication and using policy for health advocacy. I am certainly a better leader today because of the advice and support from mentors.

Aspiring academics, Jewkes and Nduna met while working for the Medical Research Council in the early 2000s. Along with other researchers, they collaborated on the council's Stepping Stones project — a group intervention aimed at sexual behavioural changes across communities in the Eastern Cape.

"The country had learned a lot about HIV through the A-B-C approach — abstain, be faithful, condomise. But for it to be effective, social norms should support it. We needed to interrogate our assumptions about young people and see if traditions and cultures supported A-B-C," she says.

Rather than inviting a guest speaker and filling up a school hall for a once-off talk, Stepping Stones was a three-month-long project that engaged people throughout. "With this approach, you see the course through with the participants and there is accountability," Nduna says.

Her proudest achievement? "Successfully running three separate research projects that supported early career academics and postgraduate students who today are PhD



holders and professors in their own right. I am proud to know that I contributed to the development of the current and next generation of researchers, most of whom are black, African and women." — Nabeel Allie

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Mpume Zenda

Obstetrician-gynecologist-sexologist and founder: WeSeeYou

@celebgynae @dr.gynae @dr.gynae Dr Mpume Zenda

Zenda strives to help women understand, love and work with their bodies throughout their life.

Nompumelelo Zenda has always been passionate about women's health, but it was especially during her pregnancy that she realised the need for safe spaces where women could feel seen and heard — and not dismissed or unattended to — while going through the vulnerable and confusing stages of pregnancy.

Fuelled by this insight and determined to make a positive impact on women's lives, Zenda founded WeSeeYou, a health and information consultancy based in Johannesburg that seeks to provide sexual and reproductive health and wellness solutions.

Through engaging educational videos and posts, Dr Gynae, as Zenda is also known, informs her audience on all things female — from vaginal health and sexual intimacy to pregnancy and menopause.

"Since embarking on educating women about sexual health online, I've learnt how hungry people are for credible information. It has taught me that it matters as a clinician that I create a safe space and make my clients and audience feel seen and heard," she says.

Her online content was nominated for a DStv Content Creator Award within its Cause Award category.

"It's an honour to be able to create content around women's health, talk about sex education and demystify topics that we all received so little education about," she says.

Every woman deserves to feel great about themselves. At WeSeeYou, we believe that the well-being of women makes our families, communities and the world go well too.

Apart from her online content, Zenda's reach extends to television and radio interviews, live social media talks, content writing and public speaking.

After obtaining her MD in medicine at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, and specialising in obstetrics and gynaecology at the University of the Witwatersrand, Zenda went on to study at the ESSM School of Sexual Medicine in Budapest in 2018. Thereafter, she qualified as a medical sexologist at the Fellow of the European Committee of Sexual Medicine in 2020.

"Receiving the sexology fellowship was definitely one of my proudest career moments," she says.

Zenda, who is a member of the International Society of Sexual Medicine, says that she dreams of one day changing South Africa for the better, starting by aligning the country's policies with tangible delivery of accessible and safe women's healthcare throughout their lives.

She says she would like to focus on celebrating girls' menstrual debut, eradicating teen pregnancies and maternal deaths, improving the experience of pregnancy for all women and encouraging women to prioritise their own sexual health and pleasure. — Luca Hart

Candice Chirwa

Founder and director, menstrual activist, academic: Qrate

@Candice_Chirwa @Minister of Menstruation @candice_chirwa Candice Chirwa

Affectionately known as the Minister of Menstruation, Candice Chirwa's proudest achievement to date has been her work in changing the disempowering narrative surrounding periods.

The South Africa-based menstruation activist and academic is the founder of Qrate, an NGO that seeks to educate young people by outlining some of the difficulties that are encountered and endured by women and girls.

"I am extremely proud of the work that Qrate has done for communities in providing menstrual education," she says.

Although absenteeism due to period poverty is unproven in South Africa, it is widely acknowledged that girls miss school due to their periods, which is one of the challenges Chirwa aims to educate children, parents, guardians, guidance staff and teachers about.

The 26-year-old is also a published author, having written Perils of Patriarchy and co-authored Flow: The Book About Menstruation. Chirwa is a University of the Witwatersrand master's graduate and is in the process of completing her PhD in development studies.

She says that becoming an advocate for menstrual and period education has been a journey filled with doubt, which has made her learn that doing what one loves will not always be easy.

"I have had days when it's been really hard and I wanted to give up the role of providing menstrual education and awareness, but I always remain grounded by the fact

that I'm doing what I love. I have taken the days of doubt and embraced them as signs of growth and renewal," she says.

I believe that reshaping how periods are seen — in a positive light — and having the opportunity to give girls and women who menstruate the ability to be empowered has and continues to be my proudest achievement.

Chirwa notes that she often recalls a conversation with her mother in which she was encouraged to pursue her passion in life. However, along the way her passion has been put into doubt when people have disputed the importance of the work she does.

"I would even go so far as to highlight my academia experience where I was informed by the head of department to drop out as he believed that menstrual health was not relevant enough. That moment will always remain with me."

Chirwa's master's research focused on process tracing men's perspectives on menstruation in order to understand the true nature of period stigma and taboos.

"I still stand by my mom's dedication to passion. To further drive my commitment, I am reminded by Rumi's words: 'Let the beauty of what you love be what you do.'"

If Chirwa could achieve one thing for South Africa it would be to make paid period leave a reality. Disorders such as endometriosis and polycystic ovary syndrome are debilitating and excruciating, and they both cause menstrual problems, which can lead to heavy bleeding, making it difficult for women



to carry out daily tasks. "Menstruators deserve to take the time off from work when their period symptoms (cramps in particular) are severe," she says. "Paid period leave is not a new concept. Japan was the first country to implement this policy in 1920. I'd like to see that [here] in my lifetime," she says. "Let's change the world one period at a time." — Anathi Madubela

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AfroCentric Group Women in Healthcare



Tshepiso Shabalala

Tshepiso Shabalala is a Senior Manager: Cyber Security Operations, SOC and Threat Intel at AfroCentric Technologies. She has a passion for teaching and mentoring, especially young women, in order to curb the skills shortages faced in the IT industry. Her mentorship spans not only internally among her colleagues, but also externally to young women within her community. She teaches basic computer skills over the December break in the rural village of Lillydale in Mpumalanga, to expose the less privileged to the technology sector. She is also currently working on an initiative to build an IT academy in the village.

“This academy will enable everyone, young and old, to access IT services for the betterment of the community. My vision also includes an artisan component, where skills such as beadwork can be taught and the products sold on the premises” said Tshepiso.

Tshepiso’s contribution to the industry led to her being recognised by WiCySA (Women in Cyber Security SA) and she will be speaking at CISO Africa conference in October 2022. When not in the corporate space, Tshepiso runs her own ancestral practice as Gogo KhanyaKude. The acceptance of her ancestral journey has helped to remove the stigma of poverty associated with this spiritual practice.

Susan Lin

Susan Lin is a first-generation immigrant in South Africa, her family having moved to the country from Taiwan. Coming from a migrant working-class family, she was exposed to the diversity of communities and cultures within South Africa that sparked her interest in working with community development projects. Since

her schooling years, Susan has been involved in a number of youth leadership development and mentorship programmes that saw her to be elected as Chairperson of International Leo’s Club. She has led groups of youth in serving the community and fostering leadership in all facets of life.

Working with communities shaped Susan’s passion in healthcare. She went on to obtain a Bachelor of Pharmacy degree from Rhodes University and began her career serving as a dispensing pharmacist in the public as well as the private sector, but she later progressed to the ,managed care industry, where she managed several portfolios. Among her notable achievements are the public and private partnership initiatives to enable access to care. She consulted for a number of segments within the healthcare industry, where she facilitated the streamlining of access to primary healthcare and the development of technologies to support maternal and child care.

Currently, Susan heads the Health Policy Unit at Medscheme, where she is responsible for the development of strategies for enabling access to pharmaceutical, technological and medical procedures. One of her ambitions is finding sustainable solutions in building reimbursement models to facilitate the funding of medicines used to treat rare diseases in South Africa. She is now in discussions with local community leaders in Mitchells Plain, Cape Town, to facilitate workshops the youth around skill development, focusing on career planning, health awareness and leadership training. Her plan is to rally professionals in all sectors to provide training and mentorship to youth to foster positive thinking and motivate the youth to make better decisions for their future.

Ncumisa Hlalo

Ncumisa is a Business Intelligence Senior Specialist at Medscheme. Her experience spans across the retail, banking and healthcare sectors where she led and contributed to ground-breaking data projects to advance organisations. She is passionate about promoting data literacy and is an advocate for the development of young talent in data careers.

Ncumisa is also the founder and host of a platform and podcast, Data Talk Podcast with Ncumisa, where she invites Data Analytics industry leaders to mentor, coach and share tips and information with young people for Data Analytics careers advancement.

“I advocate for the representation of women in STEAM & leadership and I currently serve as the South Africa Country Head for Strategic African women in Leadership (SAWIL), an organisation dedicated to the representation and development of women in leadership. Within SAWIL I am also the chairperson of the Women & Girls in STEAM committee, where I lead programmes directed at championing the representation and empowerment of women in STEAM careers and create interest in girls to take up STEAM careers,” said Ncumisa.

“My greatest achievements have been being named among the Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans for 2022 and being a runner up for the Young Data Analytics Professional of the year 2022 Award.”



Samantha Le Roux

Founder and president: Cornerstone Woman

@cornerstonewoman

@Samantha Le Roux

Samantha Le Roux

“To change one life is a blessing — we’ve changed many. Have we changed enough? Certainly not,” says Samantha Le Roux, founder and hands-on president of Cornerstone Woman.

Le Roux says that she attended “the school of life” and she left formal schooling at the age of 14 to run her family’s restaurant business. After working in hospitality in South Africa and London, she successfully pursued a career in IT. Her career took a turn when she established a mentorship business after realising her passion for uplifting and enlightening people.

Life took her on this new path after she got out of an abusive relationship of nearly eight years. “Eventually, I was locked out of my own home, my car was taken and all financial support was cut off,” she says.

With the support of her friends and family, Le Roux got back on her feet — stronger than ever. Realising that her recovery is not a reality for many victims of domestic abuse, Le Roux saw a glaring gap in the services that were available.

Knowing that these survivors have little to no support to regain their lives after destructive cycles of abuse and that families lack the necessary support to heal loved ones to regain their hope for a different future, Le Roux was inspired to establish a dynamic organisation.

Cornerstone Woman is a support network for victims of domestic abuse as they go through their processes of healing and getting back to living the lives they aspire to.

Cornerstone Woman is a faith-based not-for-profit organisation built around the idea of bringing healing to the family structure as a whole.

“We support everyone,” says Le Roux, who adds that society has viewed domestic abuse as a “low-income issue”, when it actually affects every sphere of society. She feels that the middle-to-affluent demographic has previously been misunderstood in this regard, and therefore these people often do not seek help for fear of judgement.

Cornerstone Woman supplies financial, legal and psychological support to sustainably help victims heal after trauma. Trauma can include the effects of intimate partner violence, criminality, addiction and many other issues affecting families.

The organisation’s family-centred approach incorporates the whole family unit in the healing process to enable a new start for all the parties involved.

Le Roux says: “We don’t want to be an organisation that encourages the breakdown of a family. We would rather be the organisation that puts families back together, and holds families together.”

Le Roux and her team, consisting of men and women who have been in abusive situations or witnessed them first-hand, have structured the organisation to openly accept potential victims who, in many cases, may be too afraid to reach out.



A risk analysis is completed and those in danger are helped to a place of safety when necessary. Thereafter, an interview is conducted, which professional counsellors and mentors use to inform an individual support programme according to the immediate and long-term needs of the person and their family.

Le Roux describes domestic abuse as an issue not confined to a particular race, gender or income group — it is a people problem.

She wishes to empower families to grow and heal together, as her family was able to with her. When asked what her proudest achievement is, Le Roux says it is changing the lives of women who have experienced domestic violence, and being a mother to her three children. — *Simon Dey*

Commission for Gender Equality strives to achieve A SOCIETY FREE FROM ALL FORMS OF GENDER INEQUALITY.



“We urge all South Africans to take a stand against Gender-Based Violence and Femicide and treat women and girls as equal members of our society”

Commissioner Dibeela Mothupi.

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Women must be included in health R&D

SAHTAC (South Africa Health Technologies Advocacy Coalition) advocates for an enabling environment for research, development and access to life-saving health technologies and innovations for all.

It wasn’t until 1993 that women were required to be included in most research studies. Studies that did include women were overwhelmingly related to reproductive science, showing a failure of the scientific community to recognise that the spectrum of a woman’s health extends much further than her ability to have children.

The exclusion of women in research and other fields of health care was also due to the cycling of hormones which made them imperfect candidates for research, although hormones take place in men as well. Most research in the 20th century was done using young men. The implications of this lack of diversity are still felt today. Countless drugs still used have only been tested on men (unequal representation), leaving women susceptible to care that is less effective or even harmful.

This historical exclusion of women from research has not only affected our knowledge and mechanisms of certain drugs but also means that the scientific community is behind when it comes to other domains of women’s health.

Moving forward, SAHTAC calls for health research and development to fill the gap of knowledge of our differences in biological sex, impact disease pathways and health outcomes.

Sizwe Nombasa Gxuluwe, WACI Health Programs Manager

“Advocating for domestic investment for Health R&D so that women and girls’ access to focused HIV prevention education and technologies is realized.”

Carol Ruffell, DNDI GARDP Southern Africa Head of Office

“I am privileged to lead a small, passionate and mostly female South African team that delivers on the DNDI and GARDP vision. We aim to improve the ability of health and R&D systems to deliver necessary treatments for neglected patients and those struggling with resistant bacterial infections and women are so often at the core and are the neglected patients. They are the backbone of the health systems and increasingly becoming leaders in innovation.”

Neetha Morar, Senior Research Manager HIV and other Infectious Diseases Research Unit (HIDRU)

“It is our collective responsibility to be empowering each other as change agents of making health interventions accessible to all women and their partners. Together we must amplify the voices of all women so that their health and social well being is optimized and they become advocates in their local community.”

Nthabiseng Montsho-Mngoma

Director: NthabiM Coaching and Training

@soulfulmomentsw @Nthabi Nonjabulo Montsho-Mngoma
@Nthabi_Montsho_Mngoma Nthabi Montsho-Mngoma

Nthabiseng Montsho-Mngoma is on a mission to empower South Africa's women, especially the vast number of women who have experienced, or are trying to overcome, gender-based and intimate partner violence.

Recognising that these institutions are inadequately assisting women, her organisations seek to provide a holistic path to empowerment for those who find themselves in these situations.

The services her organisations provide facilitation of post-traumatic healing; self-mastery skills training; exploration of personal purpose; practical skills training; entrepreneurship; financial education in partnership with Old Mutual; life skills training through Lesedi Life Skills; business start-up facilitation; and networking and social outings for morale and relationship building.

Through this extensive and all-inclusive approach to empowering women, Montsho-Mngoma hopes to not only give women physical and financial support, but also the social and emotional means to rebuild a happy and fulfilled life.

Montsho-Mngoma feels that although there is no best way to deal with gender-based violence, we need to fix the multiple broken or ineffective institutions that refuse to punish perpetrators or protect survivors.

On an individual level, she believes in bolstering women through self-defence, economic empowerment and gender

equality, as well as community interventions intended to save women from dangerous situations.

One of her proudest moments has been her inclusion in the Zanele Mbeki Fellowship. This came at a time when she really needed the encouragement and opportunity to see her own value and to feel empowered again after her emergence from trauma. It allowed her to see the possibility of healing through building oneself up and goal attainment. This is a principle she is actively applying in her work.

Montsho-Mngoma's advice to young women who may look up to her is, firstly, "be good to yourself". To her, this includes nurturing, developing, being kind to, honouring, respecting and loving yourself.

Through these actions, she believes that you will attract the things you want and need while having the wherewithal to reject the things that don't serve your progress and happiness.

Her second piece of advice is to always be conscious of yourself and your surroundings and to always trust your gut instincts. As many of us know, trusting your gut is one of the best ways to keep yourself safe. — Anita Makgetla



Her organisation, NthabiM Coaching and Training, along with its subsidiaries, Lesedi Life Skills and My Safe Space, provide a wide range of services that aim to equip women with skills that help them to build fruitful and joy-filled lives that insulate them as much as possible from future violence.

Montsho-Mngoma, like many of the women she works with to help, is a survivor of intimate partner assault and has faced the terrifying near-death realities of gender-based violence. She has first-hand experience of the way the state, courts, police and society in general fail women in violent and vulnerable situations.



The Women's Month theme for this year, Women's Socio-Economic Rights and Empowerment: Building Back Better for Women's Resilience, calls for society to take tangible steps forward in responding to the most persistent challenges affecting the lives of women and girls.

Aurum has long been driving the women's empowerment agenda with women taking up 70% of senior and professional positions in the organisation. These women lead the work we do to create a healthier world for future generations, including finding innovative solutions and delivering interventions for women's health.



Ms Phangisile Mtshali, Board Chairperson

At the helm is Ms Phangisile Mtshali, Aurum Board Chairperson. She is the Director of the Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation responsible for programming in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia. Mtshali is a member of the Institute of Directors in Southern Africa, with more than 30 years' experience in programme development and management as well as strategic communication initiatives. She also served as a founding member on the board of governors for the South African Business Council on HIV/Aids (SABCOHA), a chapter of Global Business Council on HIV/Aids and represented Bristol-Myers Squibb on the Private Sector Delegation of the Global Fund.



Prof Salome Charalambous, Group Chief Scientific Officer

Prof Salome Charalambous, Group Chief Scientific Officer, is the Principal Investigator on a number of clinical trials and large cluster-randomised epidemiological studies at Aurum. She has vast experience in medical research in the fields of HIV and TB. As part of programme implementation, she also conducted research studies and published articles on TB-HIV integration, HIV programme evaluations and other topics related to HIV and TB.



Dr Regina Osih, Group Global Health Officer

Aurum Group Global Health Officer Dr Regina Osih is an infectious disease specialist with more than 18 years' experience in public health. She brings technical expertise in infectious diseases, specifically HIV and TB, as well as epidemiology and operational research. In 2020, she was appointed Adjunct Associate Professor at the Department of Medicine in the Vanderbilt University School of Medicine.



Dr Ntombifike Mtshali, Deputy CEO of Aurum South Africa and Managing Director: Health Systems Division

Dr Ntombifike Mtshali has over 10 years' experience in the health sector as a clinician in both the private and public sectors. She has been a champion for the right to accessible and cost-effective quality health care for all. Having recently been appointed Aurum SA Deputy CEO, Mtshali is also Managing Director of the Health Systems Division. She leads a multidisciplinary team of operational, support and technical experts providing technical assistance, health systems strengthening and direct service delivery in the HIV/TB response in South Africa.



Charlin Ntuli

Enterprise and supplier development superintendent: Glencore Operations South Africa

@charlin_ntuli
Charlin Ntuli

Charlin Ntuli is on a mission to readdress injustices of South Africa's past in the economic sector, as well as drive transformation for women and young girls across the country.

Ntuli is the enterprise and supplier development superintendent at Glencore Operations South Africa. There, she is concerned with the development of emerging black-owned enterprises.

Ntuli has always wanted to make a difference in the lives of others. She describes how she has witnessed small, black-owned businesses being taken advantage of within the private sector, often used for fronting (or virtue signalling) purposes. She believes that these businesses deserve an equal chance to excel, as they are just as capable as any other emerging business.

"My role is to unlock opportunities for small black-owned businesses within our supply chain," says Ntuli. "I also need to ensure that these small businesses are sufficiently capacitated in every way possible. This can be by means of training, procuring assets for them, arranging coaching and mentorship, and providing financial support."

The goal of developing and mentoring these small businesses is to allow them to not only successfully fulfil contractual obligations, but also provide them with the opportunity to grow and remain sustainable.

Ntuli and the Glencore team have managed to support some of their businesses with equipment valued at R1-million and

above, long-term contracts, ad hoc short- to medium-term opportunities and rolling out development programmes in collaboration with the University of Pretoria's Gordon Institute of Business Science to teach business management skills.

The journey of transformation is not a simple one. Resistance to change is a constant internal and external battle. As a black woman in the mining industry, which is heavily dominated by men, Ntuli has learned to remain strong and stand her ground to drive transformation without compromise or fear.

"Each day I battle to ensure we change the status quo," says Ntuli.

Ntuli is not only concerned with equality in the economic sector, but is also making a difference in providing sufficient access to menstruation products for young girls in South Africa.

"From a young age I knew I could make a difference and had hope that one day I will be in a favourable position to change lives and I will ensure that young girls [receive menstrual care] and do not go through what I went through," she says.

In July, Ntuli and the Glencore team summited Mount Kilimanjaro in the Trek4Mandela campaign to raise funds for sanitary pads for underprivileged girls in order to keep them in school. "We live in a world with so many inequalities — I believe women and girls should have equal access to sanitary protection."

"I have learned that 'impossible' only exists when there is no purpose, commitment and determination." — Sarah Irwin



Want to access these profiles online to find out more and share the stories of women changing SA? Scan the QR with your phone camera to view the digital profiles.

Tebogo Mosito

Chief executive officer: Temo Foundation and Ditsogo Engineering

@tebogamosito6 @Tebogo Mosito @tebogamosito_ Tebogo (Mashego) Mosito

Growing up in a family of entrepreneurs, Tebogo Mosito always knew that she wanted to start her own business. Today, Mosito is the founder of Ditsogo Projects, a 100% black women-led business that specialises in the fabrication of metal products, steel engineering and plant maintenance.

Mosito has received much recognition over the years, being awarded as one of the 100 Global Inspirational Women in Mining, as well as being a finalist in the Standard Bank Top Women Awards 2018 in the category of Fast Growing Women-Owned Organisations.

Mosito was born in a rural village in Rustenburg and spent her childhood in close proximity to the platinum mines, nurturing an interest in mining from a young age. Despite observing how male-dominated the industry was, and still is, Mosito entered into it without fear, seeing the world of mining as an industry that was brimming with opportunities for women. This is a belief that she maintains today.

"Women need to believe in their abilities," she says. "There is a lot of support and opportunities being offered to women. They must just not be afraid to take [them]."

She believes that many women fear taking this path, as girls are often not encouraged to pursue engineering and similar subjects while they are growing up. This mentality is changing

and Mosito is playing an active and important role in enabling more women to upskill themselves in these areas.

At the end of 2019, shortly before Covid-19 brought our lives to a standstill, Mosito registered Temo Foundation, a non-profit organisation that supports entrepreneurs in rural communities.

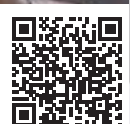
The foundation proved to be invaluable during the height of the pandemic, when most businesses and schools were forced to migrate their services online. This put a large portion of the population who did not have access to digital facilities at an immense disadvantage.

The focus of the Temo Foundation quickly became to "help rural entrepreneurs navigate through Covid-19 and stay in business". The foundation also provided resources, such as data, to schools in rural areas that otherwise would not have access to essential devices and online platforms.

The work of the Temo Foundation enabled several entrepreneurs to keep their businesses afloat during a time that would have likely forced them to close their doors.

The Temo Foundation is a testament to the value Mosito places

"We must work towards closing this gap and providing a safe working environment for women. The pandemic had a huge impact on women and there needs to be greater support for [them], both emotionally and psychologically."



on community and providing support to one another. Within her own business, she found that getting support from a strong network of women leaders was key to its survival.

Mosito believes that the exchange of knowledge and experience should not only be among leaders.

"An important quality as a leader is to learn from your employees," she says. "You must be willing to engage and share knowledge with employees."

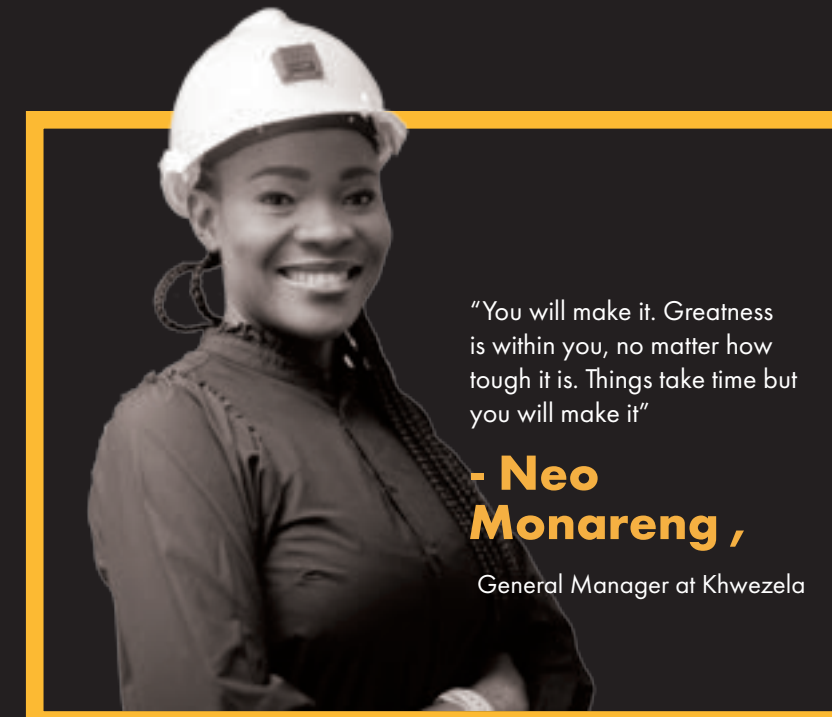
As a person who works with a diverse range of people, she emphasises the importance of understanding their backgrounds in order to be an empathetic leader.

Opportunities for women in mining have increased exponentially, however, despite how far the industry has come, Mosito believes that there is still a noticeable wage gap. — Natalie Fraser

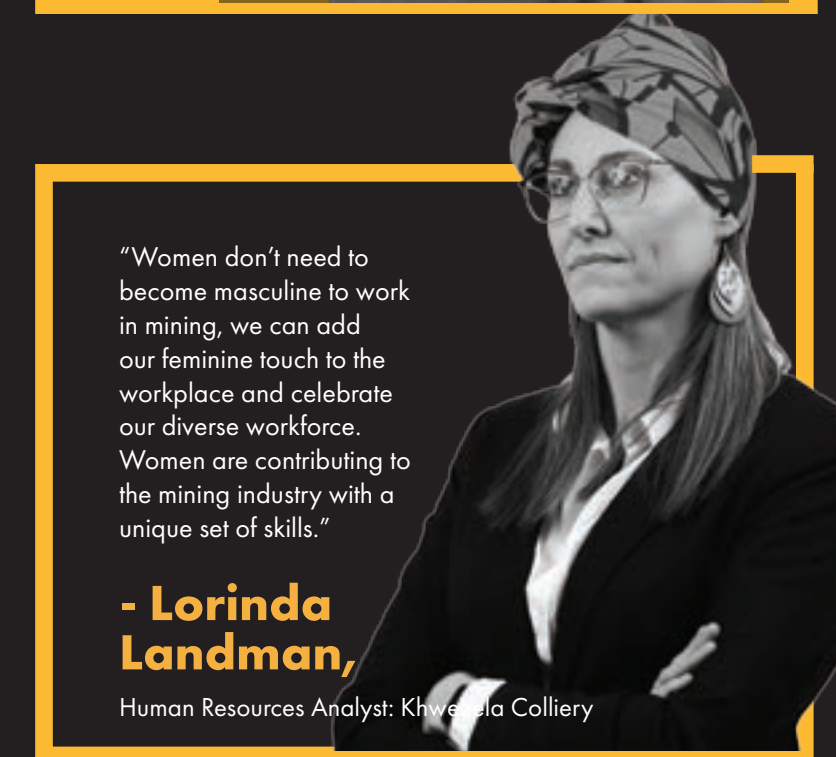
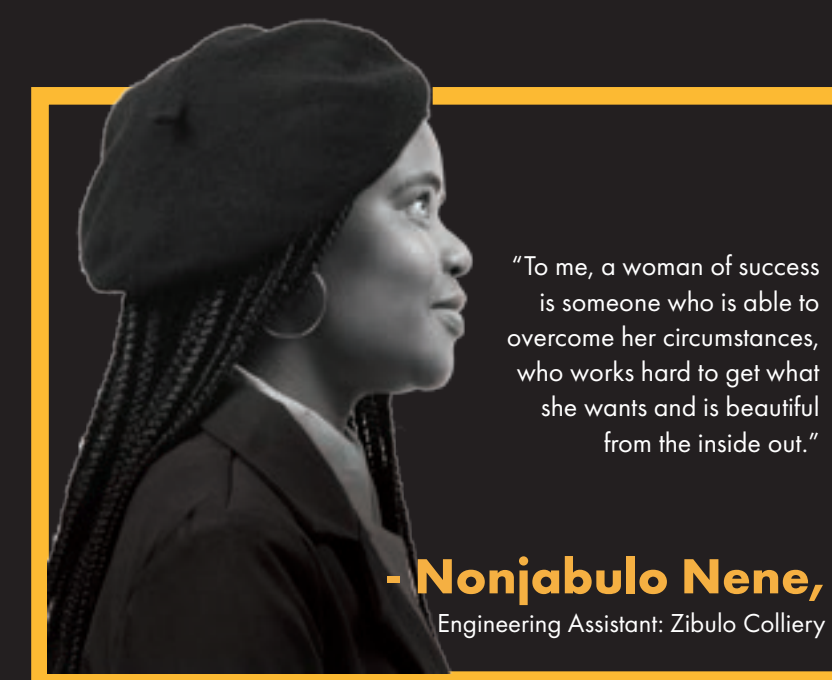
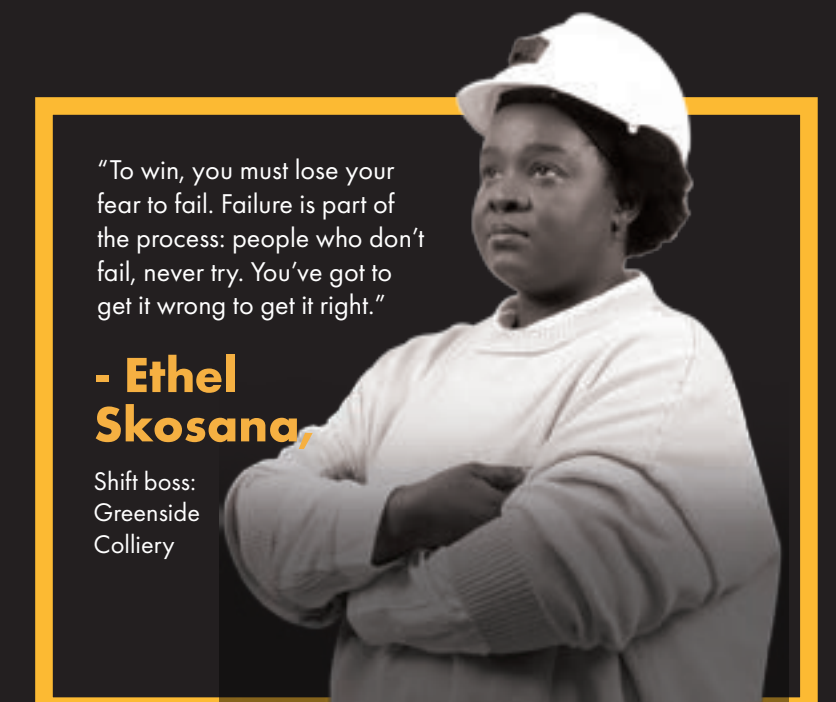
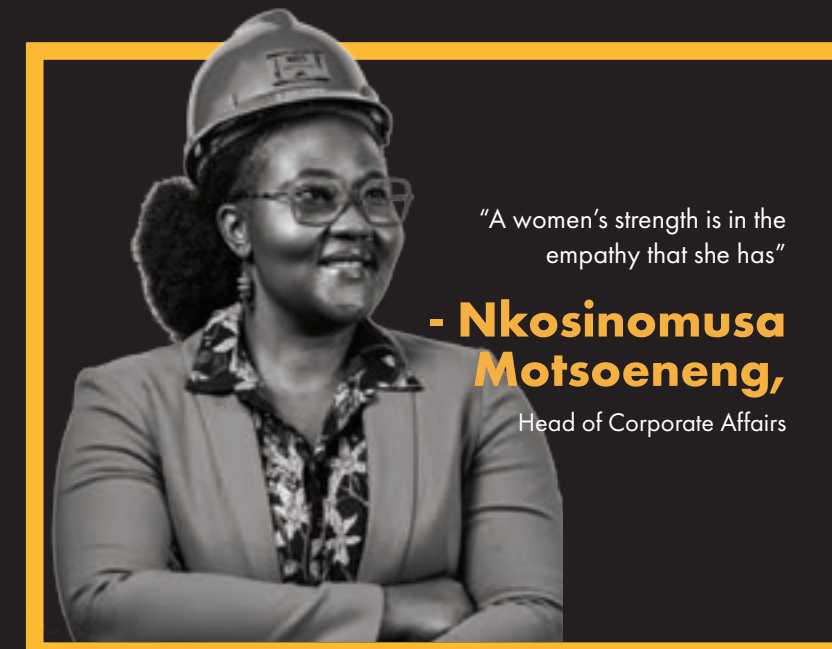
Women wear many hats:

Mother, Mentor, Sister, Manager, Volunteer, Daughter, Nurturer, Mediator, Entrepreneur. But the Hard Hat is not typically top of mind. At Thungela we are committed to diversity, inclusivity, and equity.

Why? Because representation matters.



Our women, and the progress they're pioneering, deserve to be celebrated.





Shoeshoe Qhu loves telling stories through the radio. Growing up in rural Makuatlane in the Eastern Cape, radio was the only form of entertainment and connection to the greater world that her community had.

Qhu, a broadcast journalist and digital enthusiast, began her career in radio in 2004 as a volunteer field reporter for Cape Town-based community radio station Radio Zibonele. Almost two decades later, after working at Kaya FM and the SABC, among other places, she has settled into her role as programming manager at Radio 702, a commercial FM station based in Johannesburg.

“My worldview was shaped by what I heard and what I could imagine. I didn’t immediately think I was going to be a broadcast journalist, but I was curious about people on the radio, and the power and influence they had with the stories they told,” she says.

One of Qhu’s proudest achievements is her work mentoring young journalists while working as station manager at Voice of Wits, a 24-hour campus radio station. Some of her mentees now work in the SABC newsroom and commercial broadcasters like EWN.

Qhu offers training to journalists and radio broadcasters through the Wits Radio Academy, National Electronic Media Institute of South Africa (Nemisa) and Primedia.

“I am an advocate for media freedom and play an active role in engaging industries and the media on the subject through interviews and as a board member of the Freedom of Expression Institute,” says Qhu, who also serves on the Black

Management Forum Sandton manco. “I am actively looking to play a role in transformation in our country. This anchors me as a black woman living in South Africa.”

One of Qhu’s goals is to run an up-skilling programme for 20 young people — 10 from a township, 10 from a rural area — with multimedia and basic coding skills, as well as digital tools to assist them with starting up a content hub to publish their unique stories online.

“I hope to inspire girls to believe that it is possible to become anything that they want to be — even with the fears and the obstacles. I stand on this side with a stretched arm, ready to mentor and train more young women.”

“I would run the programme once every year and scale it with time and funding availability,” she says.

Qhu lives by the Sesotho idiom, “Khom ha lina motloha pele” — cows do not have a first-mover advantage. It doesn’t matter who starts first.

“This has helped me deal with the pressures of life and the need to see instant results. So in all I do, I put in my best and trust the process,” she says.

Looking to the future, Qhu wishes to elevate oral storytelling traditions to the levels of literary works that are recognised by the likes of the Booker Prize and the Pulitzer Prize. “There is a need to bridge the gap using emerging technologies and new media platforms — often with very little barriers to entry — to empower ordinary South Africans to tell and document their stories,” she says. — *Alexander Brand*

Shoeshoe Qhu

Programming manager: Radio 702

- @ShoeshoeQhu
- @ShoeshoeQhu
- Shoeshoe Ntsoaki Qhu

Zandile Mkwanzazi

CEO and founder: GirlCode

- @Zandi_Mkwanzazi
- Zandile Mkwanzazi
- @Zandile.Mkwanzazi
- Zandile Mkwanzazi

Zandile Mkwanzazi is on a mission to empower 10 million women and girls with tech and coding skills by 2030.

As the CEO and founder of GirlCode, she is focused on women, education and technology, and how the powerful combination of these three elements can transform and strengthen South Africa and Africa for the better.

“I am inspired by all women who are breaking the glass ceiling; women who refuse to sit back and let things happen to them,” she says.

The tech industry is still male-dominated, something that Mkwanzazi is working hard to change. Putting her BSc honours degree in computational and applied mathematics from the University of the Witwatersrand to good use, Mkwanzazi helps to provide historically disadvantaged women with skills in computer literacy, coding and design.

GirlCode’s mission is to create a network of women who can use these skills to create innovative and sustainable solutions where they reside — making a visible difference in the communities that they live in.

Mkwanzazi wants to see more women taking up space in all aspects of life and business, from the private sector to the public sector. More specifically, she wants more women to actively be a part of the technology space. As there is almost no industry

where technology is not involved, and she believes that if we don’t have women in the rooms where these technologies and innovations are being created, we are missing a critical perspective.

“The world will try to convince you that you are not worthy, that you do not belong in certain spaces, but I am here to tell you that they are wrong. Your thoughts and ideas are what is really needed in this world — you have just as much right as anyone else to occupy space wherever you feel you can make a contribution,” she says.

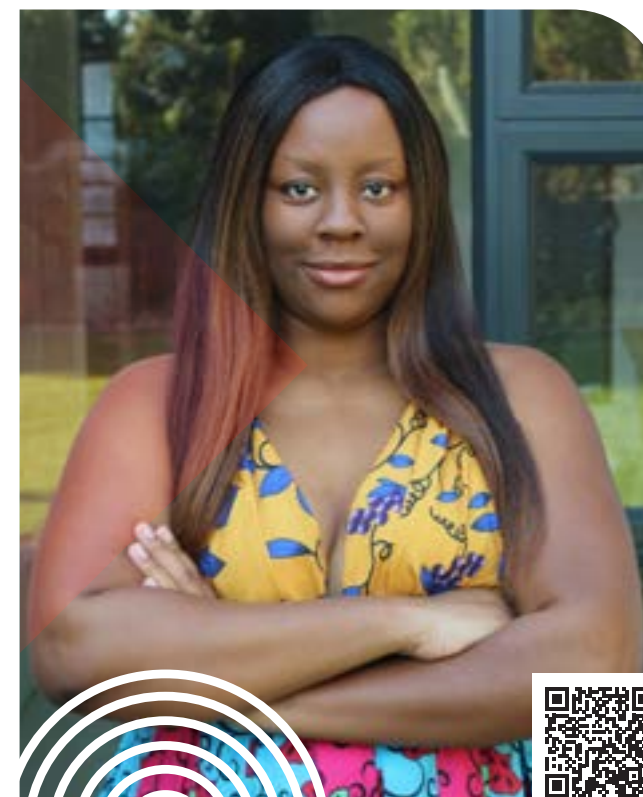
“The thing that keeps me going is knowing that I am making a positive impact in my country and, most importantly, for many young girls out there, I remain passionate about changing the education landscape in South Africa.”

There have been many initiatives run by GirlCode, but one of the more notable ones is the GirlCoder Club. This is where GirlCode visits various high schools on a Saturday and teaches girls how to code. The driven, curious and ambitious students arrive and are able to hone their digital skills to set themselves apart. They are given direct access to women working in various IT

companies to gain skills and ultimately be recruited by top tech companies.

The best piece of advice Mkwanzazi ever received? “Do not be afraid to make tough decisions.”

As we all know, 2020 threw everyone a curveball and Mkwanzazi realised that she had to make some difficult decisions to ensure



her organisation survived.

“Change is inevitable — growth is optional. I have learnt that you must push yourself outside of your comfort zone to truly grow as an individual and a professional,” she says.

Mkwanzazi’s work has been recognised internationally and locally. In 2018, she received a social entrepreneur award from the premier of Gauteng, and in the same year, the Netherlands Embassy acknowledged her as one of South Africa’s Top 50 Inspiring Women. — *Eva Murphy*



Ofentse Pitse

Conductor: Anchored Sound

- @ofentse_pitse
- @Ofentse Pitse
- @ofentse_pitse
- Ofentse Pitse

Ofentse Pitse is the first black South African woman to conduct her own all-black orchestra. The Tshwane resident says her family’s involvement in the church through the Salvation Army is what led to her playing her first instrument. This is what got the ball rolling and culminated in her starting her own orchestra.

Pitse began by playing the English horn, which piqued her interest in classical music. She has since experimented with other genres including church music and jazz.

What started out as a hobby became something of a passion project, and has since evolved into a quest for increased representation of young black people in classical and choral music.

Pitse’s all-black orchestra, Anchored Sound, consists of 20 choir members and a 45-strong instrumental ensemble. Pitse says she started with the choir and had the idea to add more instruments to complement their songs as they practised. The band expanded as she added more instruments, and today it includes musicians of all ages from Katlehong, Benoni, Tembisa, Soweto and Pretoria.

Pitse is a qualified architectural technologist, having graduated from the University of the Witwatersrand, and says her main objective is to continue to contribute to raising the profile of black orchestra players in South Africa.

Her overarching goal for the orchestra is for it to help propel other young black performers to excellence while

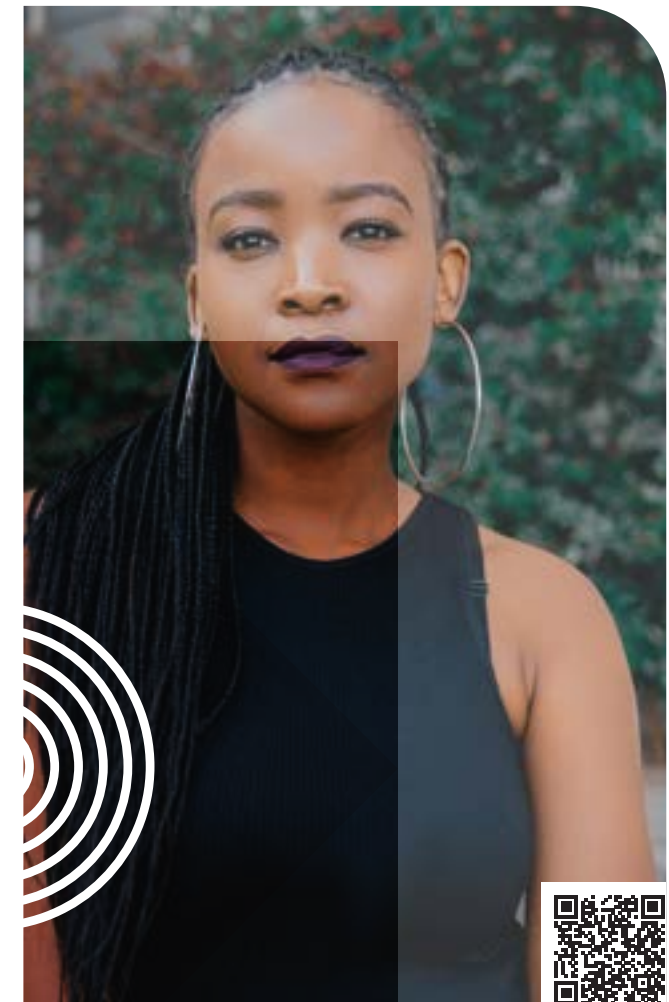
drawing attention to African composers. A performance of orchestrations by Anchored Sounds, led by Pitse, highlights classical standard arias such as *Nessun Dorma*, concertos like Vivaldi’s “Four Seasons”, and contemporary compositions by African performers like Judith Sephuma and Sun-El Musician.

An achievement she’s incredibly proud of is being recognised as the keynote speaker at the *Veuve Clicquot Bold Woman Awards*. The programme is designed to support women entrepreneurs and gives them a voice, encouraging future generations to be even more audacious in their dreams.

The award aligns with Pitse’s goals to help improve the inclusion, impact and visibility of young black women in various fields.

“To me, music and architecture are very closely linked,” Pitse says. “When I design, I think of harmony, spirit, structure and meaning. Music is about those same elements, whether it’s Tchaikovsky, Stravinsky or Mozart.”

Pitse says she wants to be involved in building a contemporary South African theatre space. This, she says, would be the result of her being able to marry her love of performance with her architectural knowledge, and help to create an inclusive space



where more local stories can be told.

“I am also really hoping to expand Anchored Sound to include a kids orchestra because that would extend its reach and have an impact on generations to come.” — *Neo Khanyile*

Easlyn Young

Chairperson of the First Youth Theatre Company and eThekweni Municipality Chair of the Portfolio Committee for Sport, Recreation, Arts and Culture (Ward 31)

- @Easlyn Young
- Easlyn Young

“When we women realise that we are the catalyst for unity — the bond of love and nurture that fosters growth and development — we will be the answer South Africa needs,” says Easlyn Young.

Young holds many titles. She is the chairperson of the First Youth Theatre Company, the eThekweni Municipality Chair of the Portfolio Committee for Sport, Recreation, Arts and Culture, a community activist, a swimming coach and a mother.

As a student, Young was inspired by the sentiment of “umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu” (I am because you are) while volunteering to help the residents of a retirement home purchase groceries, spring-clean their rooms and do their hair.

After receiving various diplomas in education and management, a career in community development — which, as Young describes, was in her youth known as a social justice intervention for the “have-nots” — became the most natural place for her to practise and express empathy and compassion, to raise awareness and to address injustices.

Through her involvement with the Black Consciousness Movement and the direct influence of leaders like Bantu Stephen Biko, Young found her calling working with vulnerable communities in need of a voice.

For Young, the best part of engaging in leadership is learning to listen.

“Listening,” she says, “affirms participants and teaches one more than one could ever imagine; a book of lessons unfolds as one listens.”

Leadership and community activism provide Young with a licence for creativity that stimulates thinking, dialogue and vision, and challenges her humility in accepting the opinions and ideas of others.

She explains: “No one is an island unto themselves just because [they] hold a leadership position. Leadership is the joy of having people around who will hold one’s hand and walk along through it all.”

For Young, the biggest difficulty that spans across her various careers is accepting that people will come and go. She has learned that by understanding and respecting the journeys of other leaders, facilitators and participants, egotistical interference can be avoided.

If she could achieve anything for South Africa today, it would be the enhancement of an assured identity among the coloured community and, by extension, the advancement of a non-racial society with authentic pride and patriotism.

Young believes that the leadership potential of women in South Africa is beyond measure. She implores: “Do not allow patriarchy to manipulate us into position seekers and status mongers. The ‘Queen Bee’ syndrome is our undoing. Do not sting other women, embrace them. This starts at home, and must be the representation of who we are in every sector of society.” — *Grace Winkler*

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PORT
DESIGNS

QUALITY PERIPHERALS
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