

# Forbes AFRICA

DECEMBER 2021 | JANUARY 2022

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LUXURY  
FASHION GUIDE

**SOUTH AFRICA:**  
VACCINES ON  
RAILS

**RISE OF THE  
TOWNSHIP  
ECONOMIES**

**SPECIAL ISSUE**

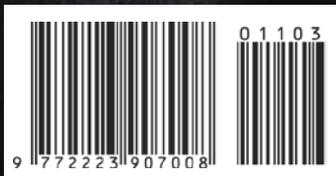
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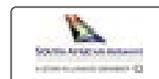


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*Jeunes créateurs*, a concept that came about in Paris in the 1970s, seems to be upon us again, with the emergence of an almost youthful, colorful and even playful flair in the way designers seem to be creating now. The shift arrives just in time for the festive season as luxe-lovers emerge out of prolonged lockdown and quarantine modes. A handful of African designers are catering to this newfound freedom with elaborate, cutting-edge collections set to stir a fashion frenzy.

Compiled by Keabetswe Mafora

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# ARE WE SEEING THE GREAT UNLOCK YET?

**T**HE LAST TWO YEARS WERE AKIN TO BEING enrolled into a master's program, unlearning and learning together with our human cohorts in a new global Covid-19-induced university featuring unwieldy textbooks and sleepless, bleary-eyed nights. Some of the new subjects on the program? Agility, adaptability and empathy, and new, humane ways to communicate to a workforce post layoffs and lockdowns, even as the office of the future was being constructed.

As one of the entrepreneurs in this edition says about the new mantra for his business: "Our mission is to keep commerce human."

It's a brave new world that we have entered and 2022 will cap a period in history that came without a textbook preamble.

It's almost like we developed a new muscle or new neuron pathways to comprehend the changing semantics of a new world order.

Are we seeing The Great Unlock yet?

The globe in its new masked-up incarnation is hard to recognize, the supply chains are only just revving up and countries are still teetering on the edge with bated breath and cautious optimism for the stirrings of a full economic recovery.

The same can be said about the climate change dialogue heating up across the world and that 2021 bore full witness to in addition to the other two Cs that continued to hog headlines: Covid-19 and cryptocurrencies.

With the new battle cries for social distancing and bringing temperatures down, we also concomitantly entered a new era of money-making, a trend we will no doubt pony up our plans to focus more on in the new year on all our platforms – from cryptos to the metaverse's immersive internet, VR and NFTs.

This we will do with content that will inform – and perhaps even make you richer.

Indeed, it's an exciting time to be a reporter unearthing new meanings in everything that's changing at Pentium processor speed. We will keep learning and refocusing our mandate to provide news on pockets and profits that matter.

But not just that, to also focus on what can be better.

A fitting example is our story on the grit, growth and gumption of South Africa's township economies rising from the embers of Covid-19 and the civic unrest that shook the entrails of its being this year.

The moonlighters, hustlers and involuntary entrepreneurs that emerged from the cracks deserve mention too as they ploughed on in ways that kept the value chains alive.

2022 is at our door, and she already has an inkling of what she is bearing for us, but she won't tell just yet. But one thing we know: that she holds new promise, and perhaps a kinder touch, as hopefully, it can only get better from now.

Happy 2022, everyone! 🙌

RENUKA METHIL,  
MANAGING EDITOR

letters@abn360.com  
editor@forbesafrica.com  
www.forbesafrica.com



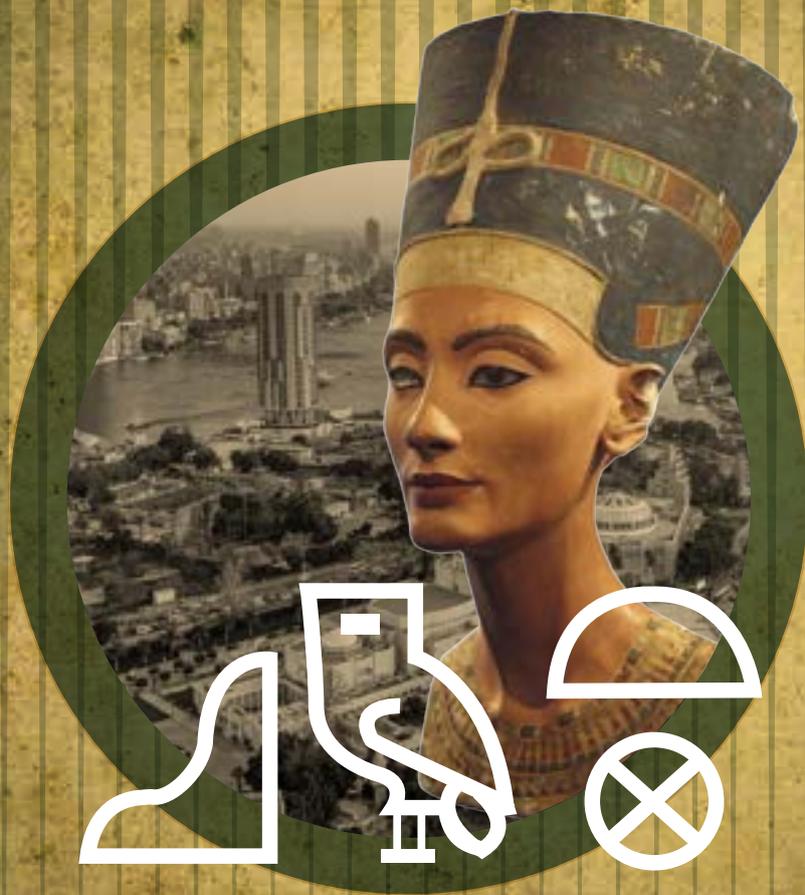
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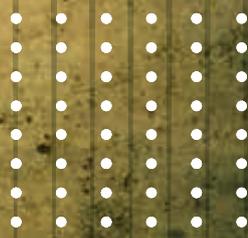


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# Thoughts, Lessons And The Mindset Change For The Future

BY RAKESH WAHI, FOUNDER AND PUBLISHER, FORBES AFRICA

**A**FTER ALMOST 19 months, I was finally able to return to our home in Johannesburg. It seemed like eternity that we were away but something about reaching South Africa fills our family with warmth, which is no different from when we reach home in Dubai or Delhi. Johannesburg has been home for 17 years almost to the month. As we disembarked from the plane, we found the travelator at the airport was not working – the most likely culprit the power outages one is now increasingly accustomed to in South Africa. There was a lady walking with us and in typical South African style, she said: “Eish, it’s great to be back home, nothing has changed.” My wife and I looked at each other and had tears in our eyes that no one could empathize with, and it wasn’t the power outage. It was just good to be back home.

There were many reasons for coming back; the most obvious one being able to meet our team at the office after so long. However, this has been a very reflective period for me personally and one of my main goals was to connect with all our friends who have made this journey



Rakesh Wahli

over the last 17 years memorable. Covid has changed our lives and while delivering my speech last month on the move to our new university campus from East Legon to Tantra Hill in Ghana, I made the point that our world will now be defined by two eras: Before Covid (BC) and After Covid (AC). There is absolutely no doubt in anyone’s mind that our lives will be changed irreversibly, and every dimension of our daily

life is impacted by change that has been catalyzed by this horrific act of nature that has impacted all of us. I had made several observations in my columns in FORBES AFRICA over the last 18 months on the need for change in behavior and for human beings to think more clearly and prioritize once this cloud has lifted. We are going through a period of metamorphosis and for once our leaders can make choices for the future that will make this world hopefully a better place for future generations.

Travel has restarted and we have made some trips over the last few months and can say with a reasonable amount of confidence that traveling is being managed extremely well by airlines and the associated support organizations at airports. Hotels have transformed to Covid protocols and are taking extreme care to ensure that proper sanitization is being carried out for the

“

**The worst mistake any leader can make is revel in past glory, live in denial and become complacent about the future.**

wellbeing of guests. An important milestone has been the increase in the number of vaccinations and the requirement to carry a vaccination certificate while traveling. There is a long journey ahead to get everyone vaccinated in the world and to educate against vaccination hesitancy wherever it exists. This pandemic is not over by any stretch of imagination, but we have

found a way to navigate while the healthcare industry finds the silver bullet to end this nightmare. Some events have been defining moments in the last two years that will have a major impact on the future. I will not talk about innovation or disruption in conventional industries but rather things that I can only dream about after speaking to the younger generation. Blockchain technology and cryptocurrencies seem to be here to stay bringing about a quantum change in processes that will bring global standardization at a scale that we cannot even imagine today. The crypto market capitalization stands at \$3 trillion as I write this article. I can see a global identity card at some stage in the future; this is not an original thought, and a Brazilian group has already started the Global Identity Organization; can one even imagine the transparency and uniformity this will bring in dealing with each other across the world. The

age of internet via satellite is back with a vengeance and with current and future compression technologies, the speed of communications will continue to get faster and faster. Radio spectrum utilization will become a larger part of the next 100 years and my limited understanding of using frequencies was limited to devices and technologies using Super Low, Ultra Low, Low, Medium, High and Ultra High frequencies; these ranged from 30Hz to 3000MHz. The future now is in applications from 300MHz to 3000GHz going from Super High to Tremendously High frequencies. Without getting any more technical, the applications using these frequencies are going to change our world in biometrics, medicine and so many other areas of human interface. Then is the future of space; an area that is wide open and can only be limited by the imagination of my generation.

Generational change in thinking about investments and asset classes is going through structural change. My father always advised us about the value of land, gold and fixed deposits in government securities; it was progressive thinking from my grandfather's generation in the 1910 and 1920 period where cash and gold were kept under the proverbial mattress. People didn't travel much, and banking was primitive. Local banking transactions across cities was a challenge and cheque credits could take weeks. Foreign transactions and remittances were few and far between and this was just a few decades ago. There were no credit cards and the only secure mode of foreign exchange for a long time were travelers' cheques. The capital markets came about in 1602 with the Dutch East India Company being the first traded stock and despite the New York Stock Exchange being officially launched in 1817, the real market growth really came about in the last century but the era of trillion-dollar companies has just started. And so has the era of cryptocurrencies. No surprise with generational change when my son told me that fixed deposits, gold and all conventional safe havens including the US Dollar are of the past and that along with his peers they see a distinct shift towards the world of digital assets. So, while my generation is happy with electronic wallets on our cell phone, this segment is going to radically change; we saw sectional real estate ownership and now we must embrace sectional currency. Bonds are for The Boomers, stocks for Generation X and crypto for the Millennials.

We were impressed with the concept of millionaires and then billionaires; the threshold of net worth of \$100 billion by individuals has been surpassed by 10 individuals in 2021; nine are from the USA and one from

France. The tech sector has produced more unicorns than any other and at a mind-boggling speed. What are we to expect in the future and if the future wealth generation, including in Africa, will come from the technology space, then we need to believe in the rapid transmutation of our species? I use the word mutation now as this evolution is not the physical dimension but the radical change in mindset of the future generations. Crypto currencies are the bullock carts of future generations; extrapolate this into the next 100 years and I do not believe there will be space in the graph for the compounding exponential growth in innovation and disruption.

The only area that will perhaps follow the time-tested path of slow transformation is our political system, particularly in South Africa. In 2008, I had a conversation with several senior friends in the African National Congress (ANC). I talked about the evolution of the Congress party in India and the likely similarity in the journey of the Indian National Congress and the ANC. I had a similar conversation at a private equity conference in Stellenbosch in Cape Town the same year. There was general disbelief that a political system like the ANC could ever be unseated. A decade later, the Congress in India was almost annihilated in the 2019 elections when the party failed to secure 10% in parliament. It took 72 years of dynasty politics for the party to be completely routed through implosion. Although India is a complex country and much larger, the two countries share a similar history of struggle and consequent freedom.

For a country to be a true democracy, it must have multiple parties to provide checks and balances. The political landscape in India changed to a few national parties and strong state-level parties; an important factor today are the alliances and coalitions in states that provide a national consensus for the ruling party in parliament. After the Congress party lost national

consensus in 1977 (30 years after India's independence from British rule), there was a long era of coalition governments, the most successful of which was the Bharatiya Janata Party-led alliance from 1999 to 2004. Sadly, the Congress is today the sinking ship of Indian politics. There is no better lesson in political history than this to learn from.

The ANC has had a run for 27 years, but the recent municipal elections have shown that the party is gradually losing its shine. The reasons are self-explanatory, and the proverbial writing is on the wall. The cracks have formed, and the implosion is slowly but surely progressing. The people of South Africa are not happy with the governance of the state and will continue to voice their dissatisfaction through the

ballot. There is a lot of confusion in people's minds about loyalty to the past or embracing what is right. The lower voter turnout evidences the fact that people would rather not vote against the ANC and give their leaders a chance to correct the course for progress. In the meantime, the era of coalitions has arrived and so has the emergence of new political parties that will provide the governance needed to take this great nation forward.

The new political parties are all led by former members of the ANC who have chosen to move away from the status quo and bring accountability to the existing government. Some of these parties have outstanding leaders who have the potential to provide leadership to the country in the not-so-distant future. The worst mistake any leader can make is revel in past glory, live in denial and become complacent about the future.

Covid has taught us many lessons; the most important being humility. It's time to recognize our failings and prepare for a future that redefines purpose and embraces accountability along with the old-fashioned value of integrity that seems to have lost its way. As we move to 2022, with another year that has swiftly passed us by, I wish you all a very happy and prosperous 2022 and pray that you all remain safe. 🙏

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## More Screen Time This Xmas

**S** TREAMING GIANT NETFLIX WILL keep its date with the holidays with a much-anticipated Season 2 sequel to the original hit African series, *How To Ruin Christmas*.

Reprising her role as Beauty Sello is South African actor and radio DJ, Thando Thabethe (pictured), who was also FORBES AFRICA's 30 Under 30 list-maker in 2019.

This year too, the series comes with its share of high jinks but also with a funeral thrown in for good measure.

In an interview with FORBES AFRICA, Thabethe reveals more about the plot, and how it will be different from the first series, which centered around a wedding.

"There's a lot of difference but there's also a lot of the same, I mean, it's still *How To Ruin Christmas*. So still a lot of drama with regards to family," Thabethe says.

"My character is now married. And so she sees a whole different obstacle in this season. The season also [is a] sort of redemption for her. She seems like the one who

is always ruining Christmas. But I think we find that in this season, even though we still blame her, it's not really her fault. I am trying to not say too much," Thabethe laughs about the comedy that has since Season 1 played on key themes such as family, tradition and modernity in the South African context.

"I think the one thing about this show that makes it so different is in as much as it's a comedy, it's sort of rooted in truth and rooted in drama," Thabethe says. "Because people are multifaceted. We are many things that I think this one show [portrays]. We are not slapstick comedy but what this show does is that you can laugh at your own pain and laugh at your own hurt. And I think with the difficult times the whole world is going through right now, [in] this season, we'll hit a nerve. But in a good way." **F**

— For full interview, go to [www.forbesafrica.com](http://www.forbesafrica.com)

# WHAT WAS TRENDING IN AFRICA IN 2021?

Covid-19 still dominated the conversation board this year, but a number of events, protests and coups that rocked Africa also got the world talking and social media aflutter.

## Guinea

*Forbes* reported in September that the special forces unit of the Guinea Armed Forces detained the country's long-serving President Alpha Conde "in an apparent coup". Unrest in the world's third-largest producer of bauxite pushed aluminum prices to the highest level in over a decade.

Prices of the metal in the London Metal Exchange climbed 1.8% to \$2,775.50 per ton — the highest it has been since May 2011. In China, the aluminum futures jumped up nearly 3.5% to around \$3,400 (CNY 21,970) — the highest it has been since 2006 — before leveling off at around 2.3%.



## South Africa #Elections2021

At the beginning of November, millions of South Africans took to their nearest polling stations to cast their votes for the local government elections. Although 26.2 million people had registered for the polls, the elections recorded reportedly the lowest voter turnout since South Africa became a democracy. Reports are that only a little over 12 million cast their ballots.

The Independent Electoral Commission finalized the outcome of the vote on November 4, with the number of hung councils more than double the number of the 2016 local government elections. A hung council refers to when no party has won the majority of the seats therefore making the parties with the most votes or seats the key decision-makers also known as a coalition municipality.



## Sudan's military coup

At the end of October, *Al Jazeera* reported that security forces in Sudan have arrested Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok and several other members of the country's civilian leadership. The military coup led to thousands protesting the arrests as well as the World Bank suspending aid to the country. The day after the coup, the military allowed Hamdok and his wife to return to their home in the Sudanese capital of Khartoum, after he was detained in a top military leader's house, according to *Forbes*.



## Civil unrest in Eswatini

A series of ongoing protests gripped the landlocked southern African kingdom of Eswatini in recent months. *Al Jazeera* reported on October 22 that authorities in Eswatini banned protests following the latest wave of pro-democracy demonstrations in the kingdom. The unrest also reportedly escalated as nurses refused to treat police officers. The country also suspended Facebook access and shut down schools indefinitely as months of pro-democracy protests came to a head. Deaths and injuries were also reported.



## Worldwide social media outages

Tens of thousands of Facebook users worldwide experienced outages in the beginning of October, as also users of the tech giant's other major social media platforms, Instagram, WhatsApp and Messenger.

## #PrayForEthiopia

*BBC News* reported in November that Tigray's rebel forces now "have the upper hand in the war that erupted a year ago in northern Ethiopia". What started the war in November 2020 was a military conflict. *CNN* reported the conflict broke out due to Tigray People's Liberation Front's unilateral decision to elect a regional administration against Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's wishes. "Our operation aims to end the impunity that has prevailed for far too long and hold accountable individuals and groups under the laws of the land," Abiy said on Twitter. This reportedly has resulted in heavy casualties and thousands of civilians fleeing the region.



## Riots and looting scar South Africa

Just a day after addressing the nation about strengthened Covid-19 lockdown restrictions on July 12, South African president Cyril Ramaphosa was back on TV screens again "with a heavy heart", this time on the government's response to the public violence and unrest ravaging parts of the country. The vandalism, looting, riots, "political protests" and "anarchy" over that dark period led to the army being called in to "protect property and safeguard social and economic infrastructure", as the president stated in his address. The protests, sparked by the arrest of South Africa's former president Jacob Zuma for contempt of court, began in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), Zuma's homestead, where he was incarcerated at the Estcourt Correctional Centre. The civil unrest saw multiple businesses, buildings and properties destroyed during the week of destruction. The protests continued in Gauteng, South Africa's economic hub, in places such as Soweto, Jeppestown and Alexandra.



## CAPE TOWN AUTHOR'S BOOKER 'FOR AFRICA'

Damon Galgut's novel, *The Promise*, was awarded the prestigious Booker Prize for 2021 in November. Galgut was shortlisted in September but this was not the first time he had been considered for the prize: his previous novels *The Good Doctor*, and *In a Strange Room*, also landed him on the shortlist.

"The original idea came from a conversation with a friend, who's the last surviving member of his family," Galgut said, according to The Booker Prize. "I'd like to accept this on behalf of all the stories told and untold, the writers heard and unheard, from the remarkable continent I'm part of. Please keep listening to us, there's a lot more to come," Galgut said in his acceptance speech.



## GLOBAL ECONOMIC SLUMP

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) is lowering its global growth projection for 2021 slightly to 5.9% while keeping it unchanged for 2022 at 4.9%. In the IMF's *World Economic Outlook* released in October, this modest headline revision masks large downgrades for some countries.

"The global recovery continues, but momentum has weakened, hobbled by the pandemic...The divergences in growth prospects across countries, however, persist and remains a major concern," said Gita Gopinath, Economic Counsellor and Director of the Research Department at the IMF.

"One of the major risks remains that there could be new variants of the virus that could further slow back the recovery. We're seeing major supply disruptions around the world that are also feeding inflationary pressures, which are quite high and financial risk taking also is increasing, which poses an additional risk to the outlook," explained Gopinath.



## EGYPTIAN FEMALE FOOTBALL TEAM LEAP AHEAD

Wadi Degla, the Egyptian women's football team, made history by winning the first-ever group match in the inaugural Women's African Champions League after beating Malians AS Mande 3-1 in Cairo.

According to *BBC News*, the Egyptians "made the perfect start on home soil when Hayam Abdelhazef was brought down inside the box by Salimata Kone inside the opening 50 seconds".

The Women's African Champions League was created in 2020 by the Confederation of African Football (CAF). The tournament involved eight teams from November 5 and ended on November 19.

"There are many hidden talents in Africa and this will be a bigger platform to showcase the talent," Enez Mango of Kenyan side Vihiga Queens told *BBC Sport Africa*.

## SOUTH AFRICA'S OSCAR SUBMISSION

*Barakat*, directed by Amy Jephta, is South Africa's official submission for Best International Feature at the 94th Academy Awards in 2022. The film follows Muslim widow Aisha Davids as she tries to bring together her fractured family over Eid-al-Fitr to break the news about her new romance. South African Film and Television Award (SAFTA) nominee Vinette Ebrahim stars as the ageing matriarch. *Barakat* is told in Afrikaaps, the widely spoken Cape dialect of the Afrikaans language. The first Afrikaaps dictionary is currently in development, after being announced earlier this year.



## THE \$237.5 MILLION BOEING SETTLEMENT

US plane manufacturer Boeing's board of directors agreed in November to pay the company millions of dollars and impose new safety measures. According to *Forbes*, this will close out a lawsuit brought by Boeing shareholders following the fatal Boeing 737 Max crash in Indonesia in October 2018 and the crash of the same aircraft in Ethiopia in March 2019. Both accidents, which saw 346 fatalities, were blamed on a faulty addition to the flight control system that hinged on a single sensor, causing the planes to pitch downward. As part of the settlement, members of Boeing's board of directors agreed to pay \$237.5 million directly to the company — a sum that will come from the directors' insurers, according to *Forbes*.

## ACT ON ESG OR LOSE

A report conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) found that environmental, social and governance (ESG) factors increasingly drive investment strategies. In the *PwC 2021 Global Investor ESG Survey*, research found that ESG has now become a make-or-break consideration for leading investors globally.

- Almost half of investors surveyed, 49%, express willingness to divest from companies that aren't taking sufficient action on ESG issues.
- More than half, 59%, also say lack of action

on ESG issues makes it likely they would vote against an executive pay agreement, while fully a third say they have already taken this action.

- A large majority, 79%, say the way a company manages ESG risks and opportunities is an important factor in their investment decision making.
- The vast majority, 81%, said they would accept no more than one percentage point less in investment returns for pursuit of ESG goals; nearly half, (49%), were unwilling to accept any reduction in returns.



– Compiled by Chanel Retief

# Financing Mental Health: NEW TECH TOOL TO TREAT DEPRESSION

**S**OUTH AFRICAN RESEARCHERS ARE NOW developing an innovative, validated online tool to help people recognize and seek treatment for depression and mental health issues.

PhD candidate Tasneem Hassem of the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, along with co-founder Professor Sumaya Laher, have been awarded almost \$7,000 in seed funding to further develop and commercialize the tool, aimed at allowing users to more easily recognize and obtain treatment for depression, particularly within the South African context, where low mental health awareness and access to mental health services can still be a challenge.

“Unfortunately, low awareness of the symptoms of depression means that many people do not know when they are depressed. During our research and through interviews with stakeholders, we determined that an online screening tool would help raise awareness of depression, reduce the stigma and facilitate quality conversations between people and health professionals” says Hassem to FORBES AFRICA.

According to a recent report in *The Lancet* which assessed the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on mental health in 204 countries, anxiety and depressive disorders increased by some 25% across the countries sampled, with South Africa seeing one of the highest rates of increase worldwide.

“The emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic has created an environment where many determinants of poor mental health are exacerbated,” the study continued.

This is confirmed in the South African context by the South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG), a mental health services and advocacy organization.

“We know that the mental health impact during Covid has been immense – we’ve seen that at SADAG,” says Cassey Chambers, SADAG’s operations coordinator, to FORBES AFRICA.

“Just from January this year, we received over 466,000 calls to our helplines. One in every five calls is a suicide-related issue. And that’s still a conservative figure. Our call volumes from pre-Covid [to this year] has increased by 160%. Covid has definitely impacted mental health, it’s definitely added to more depression, more anxiety, added to people’s mental health issues... Covid has definitely increased the mental health impact.”

Ensuring mental health tools are relevant to the context and location in which they will be used is a crucial part of ethical and successful interventions, which was a critical



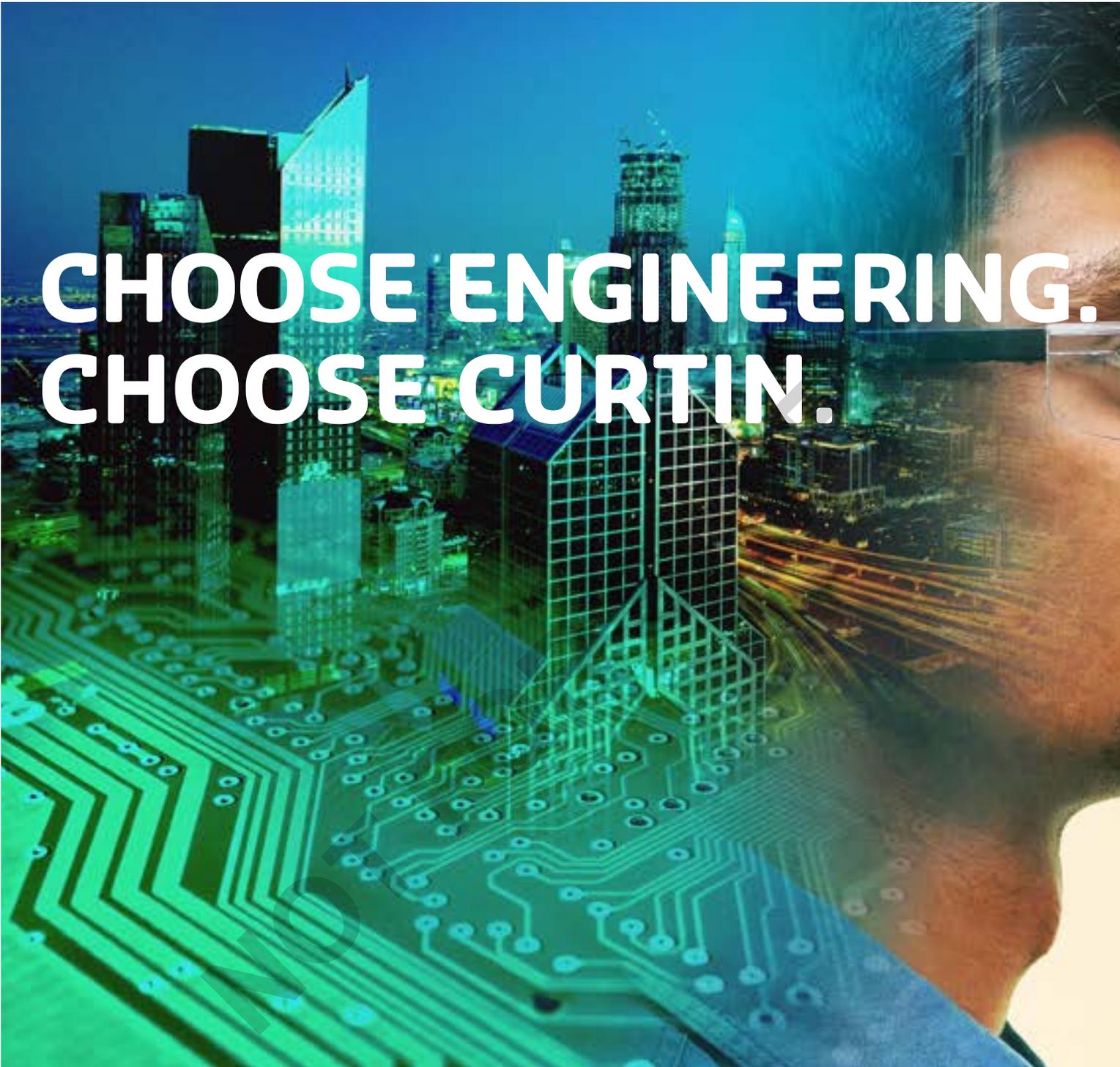
focus of Hassem’s research and piloting of the app, with the guidance of healthcare professionals.

The tool’s development funding comes through the University of the Witwatersrand’s Prospector course which aims to foster and develop promising entrepreneurial ideas in research – with Hassem’s proposal securing funding over seven other proposals, with the project being of possibly high value in South Africa, where mental health resources are extremely limited, with some four mental health spaces per 100,000 members of the population, and just 0.97 psychologists for the same number.

“What is exciting in this instance is that the tool developed by Ms Hassem and Prof Laher has significant potential to support our communities in an illness that is prevalent, yet difficult to diagnose and treat not least because of the unfortunate stigma associated with it. Innovation must meet the real needs of our citizens, and it’s not just about profits,” comments Ela Romanowska, Director of Innovation Support at Wits Enterprise, which supports the initiative.

“Our tool is specifically adapted to capture the unique depression symptoms experienced by South African individuals. The user receives instant, downloadable feedback that provides resources for seeking treatment or care and can be used in the comfort of one’s home, on any smartphone, tablet, laptop or computer,” explains Hassem.

– Yeshiel Panchia



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# Another Life-Saver

A vaccine that has taken almost three decades to produce is finally ready to give hope to thousands affected by malaria.

BY PAULA SLIER AND SASHA STAR

**N**O ONE COULD HAVE PREDICTED THAT THE last 18 months would have been defined by a virus that caused the world to quite literally shut down.

As the infection rate rose by the hour, talk turned to vaccines and scientists raced to create an agent that would provide the global population with a chance of survival. With the number of fatalities increasing, it seemed as though the immunity-boosting serum could not come quick enough.

It took less than a year for the Covid-19 vaccine to be developed, with more than half of the world's citizens having already received at least one dose. Now, a completely different vaccine, which has taken almost three decades to produce, is finally ready to give hope to hundreds of thousands of people affected by another deadly illness.

For the very first time, the World Health Organization (WHO) has endorsed a vaccine to fight malaria — a disease that claims the lives of 400,000 people annually.

“We’ve reached a point where [the death rate] has plateaued for the last six years, but we have not seen progress in Africa against malaria with 260,000 children still dying every year. It’s just unacceptable,” says Dr Mary Hamel, the team lead for the WHO’s Malaria Vaccine Implementation Program.

A pilot initiative in Ghana, Malawi and Kenya that began in 2019 showed that RTS,S/AS01, under the brand name Mosquirix, has the ability to reduce the risk of severe malaria by up to 40%.

The GlaxoSmithKline-manufactured drug does so by targeting the malaria parasite during the brief time that it exposes itself to the body’s immune system.

“Trying to develop a vaccine for a parasite is a lot more complex than for a virus,” explains Dr Jaishree Raman who heads the Antimalarial Resistance Monitoring Unit at South Africa’s National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD).

“Malaria parasites either hide in a red blood cell or in liver cells, so there’s a very short period in which a vaccine can attack it”

The effects of malaria are not pleasant. Fever, vomiting and fatigue are common, while the worst cases result in fatalities. The majority of children who grow up in high-risk areas will contract malaria once a month until they build up enough partial immunity



Dr Mary Hamel

“

**We have not seen progress in Africa against malaria with 260,000 children still dying every year.**

to be infected by the disease without displaying symptoms.

Gavi, The Vaccine Alliance, is set to meet in December to discuss the roll-out of the jabs in low-income countries. These countries will then be expected to apply for funding to introduce the vaccine as part of their healthcare system to ensure that children receive the required four doses between the ages of five- and 17-months.

“When I initially went to Kenya as a young doctor in 1995,” Hamel recalls, “the first thing I was asked by the village elders is, ‘when are we going to get a vaccine?’ People trust vaccines, people know they save lives. And everyone has felt the pain of malaria. Everyone, including me, knows somebody close to them who has lost a child from malaria.”

While the introduction of a vaccine after so many years is a clear sign of progress, Raman has warned that regular preventative protocols like bed nets still need to be followed.

“This is not the silver bullet, it’s just an additional tool. And if people start feeling sick, they need to get treatment as soon as possible”

Living through a pandemic for the past year-and-a-half has been traumatic for a number of reasons, but one good thing has come from it, in Hamel’s opinion.

“I think we’ve learned from Covid and the Covid vaccine that if the international community comes together, we can make things happen. We can make sure that supply is increased, and that people are reached with a life-saving intervention.”

Photo supplied

## FIVE MINUTES WITH...

AIMEE KELLEN,  
REGIONAL MARKETING MANAGER AFRICA  
& MIDDLE EAST FOR MOËT HENNESSY

**This year, Moët & Chandon celebrated Champagne Day with a glamorous Grand 'Toast to Today', please tell us more.**

Isn't it humbling to imagine that Moët & Chandon has been associated with celebration for nearly three centuries? Moët & Chandon has always had the power to unite people in celebration. This year, a coordinated Moët & Chandon experience brought together guests across 10 cities throughout Africa, Israel and Dubai, culminating in a Grand Toast to Today at 17:43 on Friday 22 October, a celebration in true Moët & Chandon style.

**The concept of a Moët & Chandon Grand 'Toast to Today' seems especially relevant to our time. Could you elaborate?**

Events of the recent past have highlighted the importance of acknowledging our daily triumphs, meaningful moments, successes, family and friends – as often as possible. Too often we are so focused on life's major milestones that moments we should be acknowledging every day can just pass us by. This experience served as a powerful reminder to celebrate what we have, whilst sharing the magic of champagne using the hashtag #ToastWithMoët.

**And this collective Grand Toast took place at the same time throughout Africa and the Middle East on Champagne Day. Why at 17:43?**

We hope that this year's Moët & Chandon Champagne Day experiences spoke to Moët & Chandon's generosity, grandeur and savoir-fête (which means the art of knowing how to celebrate). So we created a collective moment of celebration, asking guests across all 10 cities, from Lagos to Nairobi to Tel Aviv and Johannesburg to join a Grand 'Toast to Today'. 17:43 was chosen in homage to the year this iconic Maison was founded. In recognition of the idea of 'Toasting to Today', we created a customised 'Wall of Toasts'. Guests enjoyed recalling a personal moment they felt thankful for on their notecard (sealing it with a red wax seal) and adding it to the wall. A



reminder to all in attendance of the importance of acknowledging personal moments of joy or success daily and allowing for a true sense of unity with others throughout Africa and the Middle East.

**Moët & Chandon originates from Epernay in the heart of the Champagne region - there is a real sense of history and tradition associated with champagne.**

Yes indeed, Moët & Chandon is the Maison that contributed to introducing champagne to the world by offering a range of wines for every occasion. Moët & Chandon reflects the diversity of the three main grape varieties of the champagne region: the body of Pinot Noir, the suppleness of Meunier, and the finesse of Chardonnay. The Maison, globally revered for its savoir-faire, its historical know-how and state-of-the-art technology – shares the magic of champagne with the world through unforgettable effervescent experiences, attended worldwide by iconic Friends of the House.

**What is the golden thread that united the Moët & Chandon experiences globally?**

At the heart of festive celebration is one champagne, Moët & Chandon Impérial, the very symbol of the House's renowned savoir-fête. Effervescence is a distinctive feature of the delicate blend that Benoît Gouez, Cellar Master of Moët & Chandon, creates. And it's the effervescence of his champagnes that forms the golden thread of Moët & Chandon celebrations around the world.

**What's next on the festive calendar?**

Moët & Chandon once again brings its legendary savoir-fête to the world – a new chapter in the House's long history of generosity. Moët & Chandon will flow in over 20 cities this festive season including Sydney, Hong Kong, London, Milan, Madrid, Amsterdam, Moscow, New York, Paris and Mexico City. In South Africa, a Moët & Chandon Golden Tree was revealed Johannesburg, lovingly referred to as the City of Gold. The Moët & Chandon Golden Tree is set to become an iconic festive symbol, finding its home in Sandton's Nelson Mandela Square until the 3rd of January 2022.



# WHY INVESTMENT IN RWANDA

## Rwanda is ...



... low risk

Safe and secure – 5<sup>th</sup> safest country to walk at night globally  
Stable – lowest debt ratio in region; stable credit ratings  
High level of governance - #1 govt. transparency in Africa



... fast  
growing

2<sup>nd</sup> fastest growing economy in Africa;  
Most improved nation in human development globally



... business  
friendly and  
modern

2<sup>nd</sup> for doing business in Africa; 6hr business registration  
Growing bilingual and educated workforce (~47,000 grad./yr)  
Modern: 95% network coverage; 4th in global gender equality



... a regional  
platform

Access to African & Global markets through robust free trade  
agreements  
Preferential access to immediate proximity market of 60m+  
Strong African hub potential; highly connected African airline  
2<sup>nd</sup> MICE Ranking in Africa, +19 ranks in 4 years.



... home to  
rich natural  
advantages

Rich raw material availability; 17+ agri-inputs  
Highest gorilla population in Virunga Massif; 1.2m tourists

# INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES

## FINANCIAL SERVICES

Rwanda has established a conducive environment for Private Equity Funds, Sovereign Funds, DFI's & Investment Banks

Kigali International Financial Centre (KIFC) is a globally recognized financial centre facilitating international investment and cross-border transactions in Africa.

KIFC has been ranked 5<sup>th</sup> in Africa and 1<sup>st</sup> in Sub-Saharan Africa on the Global Financial Centre's Index. This positions Rwanda as a preferred financial jurisdiction for investments into Africa by providing an attractive and safe destination for investors with a legal and regulatory framework fully compliant with international best practices.

KIFC's value proposition centres around: compliance and transparency; pan-African connectivity; and ease of operations.

## REAL ESTATE

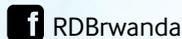
- **Housing:** There is a high demand for affordable houses. Over 186,000 units are required to address the housing needs of the middle class
- **Hospitality:** untapped opportunities in the Kivu Belt touristic destination comprising Luxury Resorts & Golf Courses and Ecolodges as well as ferries on the lake Kivu to facilitate business and domestic tourism
- **Kigali Innovation City (KIC):** Participate in the development of the KIC aimed at providing World Class infrastructure, products and services in the ICT and innovation space.
- **Others:** Development of warehousing facilities, Construction of commercial complexes, office buildings and shopping malls.

## PROOF OF CONCEPT DESTINATION

We offer a platform for a diverse set of innovators that choose Rwanda to test, launch and grow their innovations



For more information, visit us at Rwanda Development Board, KG 220 St, Kigali or visit our social media links below



# The Economy That Never Sleeps

WHERE THERE IS A TOWNSHIP, THERE ARE HOPES, DREAMS AND FORTUNES TO BE MADE. WHERE THERE IS A TOWNSHIP, COME RAIN OR SHINE, COVID OR CIVIL UNREST, AN ENTIRE COMMUNITY OF SMALL AND MEDIUM BUSINESSES WILL BAND TOGETHER AND EMERGE FROM THE ASHES, RESOLUTELY, RESILIENTLY. WHERE THERE IS A TOWNSHIP, HARD WORK WILL INEVITABLY PREVAIL OVER HARDSHIP. PRESENTING THE SOUTH AFRICAN ECONOMY'S BEATING, PULSATING HEART THAT NEVER STOPS. **BY CHANEL RETIEF**



**A**T EXACTLY 10AM ON JULY 12, A COLD MONDAY winter's morning in Johannesburg, Ntombi Tyesi answered a frantic call from her security services company alerting her about alarms going off at her restaurant in the sprawling township of Soweto.

As owner of The People's Republic, a small pub and grill eatery in the heart of Soweto, located in front of the normally-bustling Maponya Mall, Tyesi was shocked.

South Africa was on strict lockdown with Covid-19 numbers rising adamantly and a deadly Delta variant on the prowl, and her restaurant had been shut, just like most retail establishments forced to comply with government regulations.

Confused, she requested the security company to go on site to assess what may have triggered the alarms.

"They called me and told me that they were running for their lives," Tyesi recalls the horror of the day in an interview with FORBES AFRICA. "They said the [people] were throwing bricks and stones at the pub and now, because they were trying to get through, [they were hurling them] at their car as well."

Shaking with trepidation, Tyesi took the 15-minute drive from home in Pineville to The People's Republic, a magnet for food-lovers not so long ago, now filled with strangers blatantly stealing from her.

"They took everything! They did not even hesitate when they saw

me. Have you ever watched as people just come into your place and take all your stuff? That is exactly what I had to do – watch as people took my furniture, my equipment, my stock, everything!"

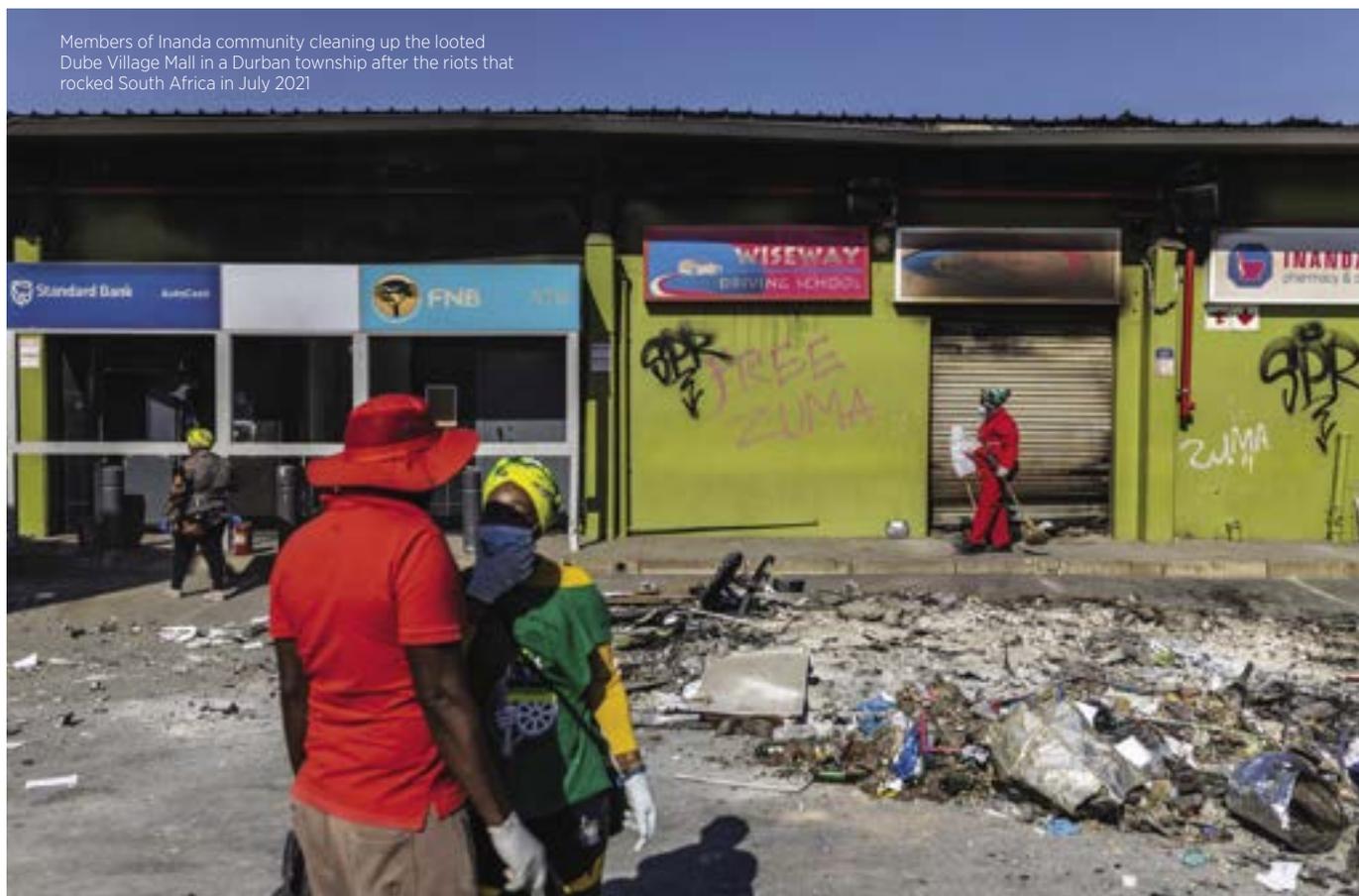
Elsewhere in the country, thousands of similar heart-breaking scenarios unfolded, as civil unrest and anarchy gripped the nation eventually leading to over 200 dead, many more beaten and broken, coupled with the arbitrary looting of businesses and rampant destruction of properties across the country. Over 3,000 people were arrested during this turbulent period in South African history.

Tyesi was but one example from a large contingent of small and medium businesses that took the biggest hit, especially in the townships in two of South Africa's most pertinent provinces and economies; KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) and Gauteng.

The unrest was precipitated by a series of factors set off by the incarceration in KZN of the country's former president, Jacob Zuma, on July 7. Zuma loyalists demanded his release from prison immediately. As the riots and protests grew, so did the vehemence of the "opportunistic criminals", as President Cyril Ramaphosa put it in his nationwide address, and crucially, also the poor and desperate who used the chance to loot from shops and establishments in an economy already hurt by the Covid-19 pandemic and reeking of unemployment.

"This will have lasting effects on our ability to consolidate some of the progress we were already witnessing in our economic recovery,"

Members of Inanda community cleaning up the looted Dube Village Mall in a Durban township after the riots that rocked South Africa in July 2021



Ramaphosa said in a televised address on July 12 about the unrest, barely 24 hours after placing the country on an adjusted level 4 of the lockdown.

The attack on Tyesi's beloved business, which she launched only months ago in December 2020, became more and more violent despite her screaming: "I am the owner of this place! I am the black woman that owns this place!" Her cries were drowned by the din of destruction. One of her loyal customers, a taxi driver, was witness and tried to intervene.

"He had a gun and he fired some shots in the air to try and scare them off," Tyesi says. "That made things worse because they started to throw stuff at him."

“

**Because those are the ones really that were excluded in many business opportunities in our past. And we have a conscious view, that we prioritize those designated groups that have to be actually involved in the mainstreaming of the economy. So the center really for intervention is financial inclusion.**

– SEFA CEO, Mxolisi Matshamba

Distressed and desperate, Tyesi went to Kliptown police station and that proved even more futile as the officer there told her: "The whole of Soweto is in chaos, we can't assist you right now. Just stay away from there or you will be in danger."

"I felt so helpless because the police failed me, the security failed me. I do feel like the government and the President could have prematurely handled it; maybe even dispatched soldiers earlier," she rues now.

Five months on, what has been the fate of these small entrepreneurs in the townships who have had to pick up the pieces of their existence? How have they resurrected their livelihoods affected by the double whammy of the pandemic and the civil unrest, only as recently as this year?

The township is South Africa's pulsating, beating heart, home to informal businesses that hold an entire nation together with their invaluable value chains. They are a crucial – and often untapped and overlooked – market segment contributing to the nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

According to a report in 2019 by Statistics SA, the informal economy continues to grow with modern industrial

development and is a key source of employment, goods and services for the lower-income groups.

"The informal sector's contribution to the GDP of South Africa was estimated at 6% in 2017; while the *Quarterly Labour Force Survey* shows that 18.3% of employed persons were in the informal sector and 30% in informal employment during Q3: 2019," the report read.

The *2021 South African Township Marketing Report* further found that spaza shops – southern African slang for a small informal shop or corner store in a township – contribute 5.2% to South Africa's GDP, employing 2.6 million people.

If there was an economic divide that existed in the informal sector before, Covid-19 only exacerbated that further. And then the devastating July unrest set back all impending recovery plans.

Dr Thami Mazwai, chairman of Mtiya Dynamics, which specializes in enterprise and supplier development, says that is a lot riding on the country's current recovery plan in mitigating the issues it's faced with.

"Well, I mean, the bulk of the people stay in the townships, the rural areas, and the informal settlements..." Mazwai says to FORBES AFRICA. "When you talk of economic development, the concept of mutual exclusivity does not exist. Because the issues, in the long run, are just going to get integrated because we just have one economy."

Before the unrest, South Africa's Small Enterprise Finance Agency (SEFA) had already approved loans to the value of R1.4 billion (\$90 million) in the 2019/2020 financial year, providing financial assistance to more than 74,000 small businesses.

The figures are contained in SEFA's *Annual Report of 2019/2020*, which also notes that this loan book activity is a 99% increase on the previous financial year (R703 million/\$45 million) and saw more than 87,000 jobs being facilitated.

"Currently, the core for us is to bridge that gap of addressing a market failure; it's to drive vigorously that element of financial inclusion because we prioritize the main businesses that are predominantly or mainly owned by black or previously-disadvantaged individuals," SEFA CEO, Mxolisi Matshamba, says to FORBES AFRICA.

"Because those are the ones really that were excluded in many business opportunities in our past. And we have a conscious view, that we prioritize those designated groups that have to be actually involved in the mainstreaming of the economy. So the center really for intervention is financial inclusion."

During the lockdown and the riots that rocked the country, Matshamba says SEFA was "extremely busy" trying to support the recovery of small businesses.

"We had to come up with interventions to support SMMEs (small medium and micro enterprises) that were negatively affected by the lockdown. And remember, this was the first time for almost everybody who experienced this situation," Matshamba adds. "And then also, during the looting that took place, we were very busy because we had to quickly provide financial support, particularly working capital for those entities affected by Covid-19"

According to SEFA's report, having to provide capital for the

informal sector and microenterprises has always been a challenge, prior to the pandemic and the unrest. This is largely because these business owners do not necessarily operate on “commercial principles”. Rarely would one find such businesses registered with the Companies and Intellectual Property Commission (CIPC), South African Revenue Service (SARS) or Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF).

“In most cases, these businesses operate without any form of documentation and neither have dedicated bank accounts nor financial records. Funding decisions to informal and microenterprises are mainly based on past relationships with financing intermediaries or character assessment outcomes,” the report reads.

### BIRTH OF THE TOWNSHIP ECONOMY

There seems to be many prevailing misconceptions with doing business in the informal sector, making it hard to find people willingly venturing in full steam into its economy. But a large number of these stigmas and misconceptions are “surface-level”, says Bulelani Balabala.

Balabala has been an entrepreneur for over 15 years now and is the founder of Township Entrepreneurs Alliance (TEA) in South Africa, a platform for entrepreneurs in the informal sector to access information, mentorship and business support. TEA’s headquarters are in Thembisa, a large township situated in the East Rand of the Gauteng



“

**I think for me, some of the surface-level misconceptions are that the township is inferior; the township is cheap...**

– Bulelani Balabala, founder of Township Entrepreneurs Alliance



### FINANCIAL INCLUSION IS KEY

Financial inclusion plays a formidable role in poverty alleviation and the economic mainstreaming of entrepreneurs in the townships.

Matt Brownell, VP Commercial at Yoco, a popular point-of-sale payments provider for small businesses processing more than \$1 billion in card payments per year, tells FORBES AFRICA that the informal sector is an important part of the economy.

“However, due to the lack of accessibility to payment solutions, and the red tape surrounding product structures such as complicated application forms, lengthy processes, and the requirement to have a bank account, many entrepreneurs in the informal sector are excluded from earning opportunities via card payments.

“Payments are the blood of the economy and a big part of how we enable people to thrive... By providing easy access to affordable products and payment solutions, Yoco is able to bridge this gap which allows merchants, anywhere, to get affordable financial tools, thereby increasing growth and profitability prospects for them and the economy,” he says.

province. However, TEA helps businesses in townships across the country.

Balabala explains to FORBES AFRICA where the perceived misconceptions about the informal sector stem from.

“I think for me, some of the surface-level misconceptions are that the township is inferior; the township is cheap. And I think over and above that, obviously, your disposition as an employer, trying to employ someone and having them work. And it’s happened to me many times, having a professional who has worked in Sandton, Rosebank or Hyde Park, you’re telling them to come work in Thembisa and they won’t,” Balabala says.

Are these misconceptions around safety, security, reliability and more a notion from post-1994? Mazwai explains it better. According to him, before democracy in 1994, the existing players, large enterprises and businesses made substantial profits.

“They could not attend to the townships because of apartheid. And they could not enter the rural areas, because of apartheid, it was not their homeland.”

But when 1994 came, the economy opened, and companies made super-profits, explains Mazwai.

In the wake of democracy, the time was linked with specific

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**I remember asking myself what the hell was going on. I even broke down and I did not take it very well.**

– Andile Sesanti, Founder of Sesanti King



strategies to inculcate new players in the townships.

“And those new strategies and methodologies also bring in new people. And it became very exciting, and so on. [But] we did not do this right and now we’re still not doing it,” Mazwai says. “We are instead asking the existing players to expand into the townships and rural areas, it’s not going to benefit the country or reduce the unemployment, it’s just not going to work to the extent that we want; 34% unemployment is no chicken feed.”

Mazwai’s conversation on big corporations and enterprises easily correlates with Balabala’s understanding of the informal settlement’s economic history.

“I think I still go back to when the malls were allowed by the associations to come into the townships. I think for me that was the worst thing that could have been done. And it wasn’t regulated in the right way.”

Balabala opines that township economies have always had resources and revenue streams but the government failed in how regulations were meant to work. “I guess to a degree, we also as a people are failing ourselves. But I think the real power now as a people is an understanding of an intrinsic fact that we can’t wait for the government to come and bring us the solution.

“Because historically, government and government departments and institutions have not availed assistance to these entrepreneurs,” Balabala adds.

Trying his best to be self-sustained is Andile Sesanti, the founder of Sesanti King, a health brand based in Soweto. Sesanti King retails indigenous herbs and vegetable smoothies, which he calls “drinking yoghurts”, for the health-conscious.

Sesanti King’s office and operational space was based in Orlando, a

commercial area in Soweto. On that fateful morning of July 12, Sesanti did not think the rioters would find their way to Orlando but the moment nearby Bara was hit, he knew the worst was yet to come.

“Bara and Orlando are about a street apart,” Sesanti tells FORBES AFRICA. “When I saw that they are in Bara, we decided to go look on the ground and see what was happening. When I got there, I had found that our place had been looted.”

Sesanti says tables, process machines, kettles and other equipment, valued to the tune of R15,000 (\$960), which took him three months to make, were stolen.

“I remember asking myself what the hell was going on. I even broke down and did not take it very well.”

Sesanti had applied for some of the government-approved grants for riot-hit businesses but says there was little or no communication regarding the recovery funds to help him rebuild his business.

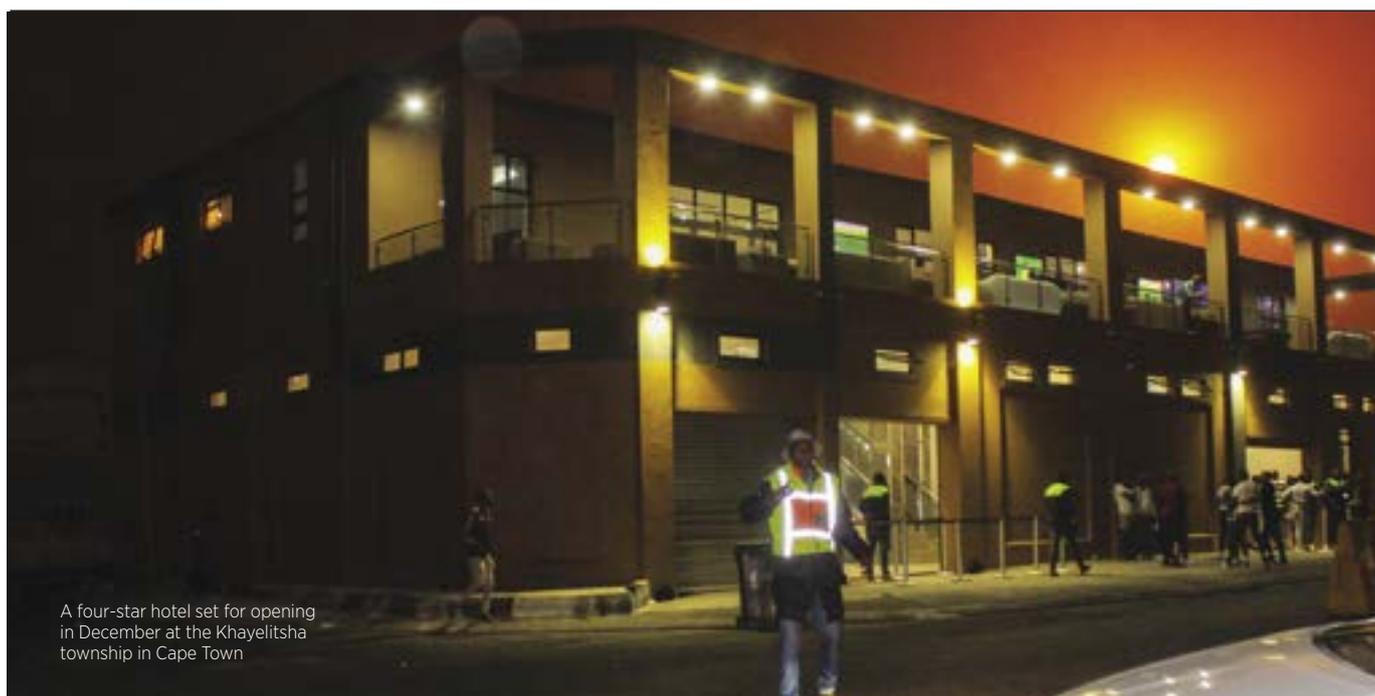
Instead, the health entrepreneur ventured into leveraging off the commercial value of the township and found the funding himself. Sesanti moved his business to the famed Vilakazi Street also in Soweto, home to two international icons.

Thankfully, the domestic and international visitors trickling into Vilakazi Street helped alleviate his concerns.

On every tourist’s to-do list when visiting Johannesburg, Vilakazi is the only street in the world to have produced two Nobel Prize winners – the late former president Nelson Mandela as well as anti-apartheid human rights activist Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

Vilakazi Street is also where 13-year-old Hector Pieterse was shot dead, during the student uprising of June 16, 1976, which is now commemorated every year in South Africa as Youth Day.

Although the township economy has a place on the commercial



A four-star hotel set for opening in December at the Khayelitsha township in Cape Town

map thanks to iconic hubs like Vilakazi Street, Sesanti is realistic about the overall prospects.

“The township has different businesses from micro to small to medium,” Sesanti says. “So, I think the township economy needs serious intervention because I think not enough is being done. And in Vilakazi, you might say that the township economy here is growing, because we see cars here every weekend. But it’s just not fair to just say it’s growing. We just need to look at other deeper dynamics, because there are people like me and others that see a decline. But you find



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**Within township businesses, people think you would receive substandard service as opposed to businesses in more developed and affluent areas...**

– Annette Skaap, hotelier

that because in a bird’s eye view, people just see Soweto and think it’s flourishing but that’s actually not the case?”

It’s not easy to start a business in the informal settlement, Sesanti reiterates.

“Starting any business can be quite daunting,” agrees entrepreneur Annette Skaap.

Skaap is the woman behind “the first four-star luxury hotel in Khayelitsha”, another one of South Africa’s large townships, located in Cape Town. This has to be a first in a South African township, says Skaap, about the hotel.

After 10 years in the aviation industry as a flight attendant for national carrier, SA Express, Skaap decided to pursue her aspirations in business and turn hotelier. Born in the Kwa-Langa township and raised in Khayelitsha, the entrepreneur says that building the hotel was not just about opening a luxurious place in a township but also about building trust when it comes to townships and breaking down stereotypes.

“Besides, it is challenging trying to start a business,” Skaap explains, “There are other factors that can make it difficult. Whether it’s the location itself, finance, security, one thing or the other, there’s always something, you know, the challenges we faced were raising the capital to build and complete this project. The lockdown derailed the building process.”

The hotel is finally scheduled to open in December 2021.

Skaap hopes to change several narratives associated with being a business owner in the township or being an investor or consumer in the township economy. Some of the stigmas she encountered starting a business in a township ranged from the levels of service offerings to the crime.

“Within township businesses, people think you would receive substandard service as opposed to businesses in more developed and affluent areas,” Skaap says. “And just to add, things such as crime, obviously, we cannot look away from the fact that crime is a serious



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**When you have expos about digital technology, people will be interested only when the expo or the event is in their area. If we are to address this digital divide, this gender divide, we must bring this stuff to the people.**

– Kelebogile Molopyane, CEO of Africa Beyond 4IR

problem, however, crime is everywhere in South Africa.”

This is not the first business Skaap has built along with her husband, Ace Mabheka, known to the community as ‘Kwa Ace’. The couple have built their enterprises “through the support of the people in Khayelitsha” in turn providing job opportunities.

“Over the years, we have developed a relationship with the community, the councilors, the Khayelitsha Development Forum and other bodies,” Skaap says. “Since the inception of the business, there were concerns of safety for the neighboring residents and tourists in the early years. Through ongoing engagement with the community, my husband has had to concede to the community’s needs and wants in exchange for their support and buy-in. One of the agreements is that we should create opportunities for members of the Khayelitsha community.”

### CHANGING THE STATUS QUO

There are multiple government interventions in place to support aspiring business owners in the informal sector grow their markets. In July 2020, former minister of Small Business Development, Khumbudzo Ntshavheni, indicated in her budget speech to the National Council of Provinces that township and rural entrepreneurship programs would be prioritized.

“When we tabled our maiden budget vote, it was part of delivering on the undertakings of the State President to resuscitate the township economies,” Ntshavheni stated in her address.

Organizations like SEFA also have a clear mandate to be the leading catalyst for the development of sustainable SMMEs and

cooperatives through the provision of funding. SEFA states that its corporate plan contributes to the Department of Small Business Development’s medium-term strategic framework objectives and is guided by the legislation, policies and strategies.

“We work very closely with the Department of Small Business Development because we get our funding mainly from the department. And we also manage some of the funds that the department actually deploys into the economy,” Matshamba tells FORBES AFRICA.

“You will note that those townships were built in these areas that are not really convenient for people to even go into town, or for work and other business activities. And now we’re seeing an emergence of big retailers moving into the township. And as these retailers move in, our people are actually excluded from participating in those businesses.”

According to both Balabala and Sesanti, entrepreneurs are either unaware of government initiatives and programs or most of the time, with little or no documentation, they don’t meet the prerequisites to even apply for them.

“I think especially with the riots, you see how important the township economy is, we even saw this with Covid,” says Ropah Musvaire, CEO and co-founder of Kweza Technologies, a platform that promotes technology benefiting township retailers such as spaza shops.

Small businesses in the township economy need to maintain the self-sufficient nature of their operations, according to advocate Pieter Holl, CEO of the Innovation Hub. Although the “elephant

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**Those small spaza shops and tuck-shops were sustaining people in the township economy.**

– Ropah Musvaire, CEO, Kweza Technologies

in the room” is funding, there is only so much support that entities like the government, SEFA and The Innovation Hub can offer.

“There should be change management and a mindset. We need to disrupt the monopoly kind of industries,” Holl says. “If I say monopoly, you know, it is your

dominant white type of companies that need to be disrupted.”

The Innovation Hub is a Gauteng innovation agency that is an owned subsidiary of the Gauteng Growth and Development Agency. Its program eKasiLabs is part of the Gauteng government’s Township Economy Revitalization Strategy.

“The potential in the township is huge. Currently, we have almost 600 companies that we support at The Innovation Hub. And to be honest with you, 85% or I’m inclined to say, 90% of them are township-based entrepreneurs and a large number of those are women-owned companies. And we are obviously focusing on the youth as well. So, the potential is huge.”

## RIPE FOR OPPORTUNITIES?

Businesses in the informal sector are trying to be resilient, even in the wake of the pandemonium of the pandemic and the protests. Through all the mayhem, the people who live and work in the townships need it to thrive, for the sustenance of their families and communities.

“So you’ll notice that once Covid actually hit and really at the peak of the pandemic, those small spaza shops and tuck-shops were sustaining people in the township economy,” Musvaire explains. “People couldn’t travel and so this is where they were getting their basic food and commodities from. And these are businesses that have always existed. They’re supporting the livelihoods of families.”

“I did not know what kind of impact I had when my business was running,” Tyesi says. “I support my own family and spend a lot of money supporting them. I wish I could show you my bank statements, you would be shocked! But also, with my staff, I help them get by as well because they also have families.”

According to the International Labour Organization, globally, 61% of the employed population earn their living in the informal economy.

Balabala says that the big problem is governments think townships only want money but the message is bigger than that.

“Yes, we want money as entrepreneurs, but we don’t want yours. As much as we want you to regulate the space, we want you to actually govern because you’ve got broad-based black economic empowerment (BEE). You’ve got enterprise supply, development and billions are allocated through BEE by large corporates or blue-chip companies for enterprise supply and development,” Balabala says. “But this money never lands in the hands of these entrepreneurs in townships. And just by simply regulating that space better and managing that space you would find that your turnover rate would be much better, because you can’t have R5 billion (\$320 million) and the sort of output of entrepreneurial growth doesn’t match that scale, even by 10%.”

There is also a thrust to digitize the township space or help those in the technology sector in the townships grow.

Kelebogile Molopyane, CEO of Africa Beyond 4IR, says that this brings to bear another concomitant issue; that people in informal settlements think it can’t be digitized.

“We tend to think when you are talking digital divide, when I go to rural areas such as Diepsloot or Alexandra, the people will say ‘what is digital technology, I have to think about getting water,’” Molopyane says. “But what we saw was when you have expos about digital technology, such people will be interested only when the expo or the event is in their area. If we are to address this digital divide, this gender divide, we must bring this stuff to the people.”

“For me, it’s the reason why it’s ‘township entrepreneurs’ and not just ‘entrepreneurs’, because of the historic disposition. And we can’t speak against that,” Balabala says. “So just purely



## BANKING ON THE STOKVEL COMMUNITY

To many South Africans, stokvels are an age-old tradition. A stokvel, according to the National Stokvel Association of South Africa, is a type of credit union where people enter into an agreement to contribute a fixed amount of money to a common pool weekly, fortnightly or monthly.

In 2020, *The Conversation* reported that there is an estimated R49.5 billion (\$3.2 billion) in member savings and this concept has about 11.6 million participants.

Finmark Trust stated in its 2018 report that the majority of members who join these stokvel schemes no longer stress about basic things like

food and what also makes a difference is in easing debt for unexpected events like funerals. As this economic industry is mostly found in the township areas, Mduzuzi J.K. Bophela and Njabulo Khumalo wrote in their 2019 academic study *The role of stokvels in South Africa: a case of economic transformation of a municipality* that: “Developing the stokvel industry could be key to poverty alleviation, reduction of unemployment and broadening equitable access to the ownership of the economy and capital accumulation; thus, improving the livelihoods and raising the standard of living.”

These invitation-only clubs are a mechanism of informal social security where members share common goals.

[based on] the infrastructure disadvantage and also the disposition of local governance and being able to access resources, it puts [these] entrepreneurs at a disadvantage from the get-go.

“For, countries like India and China where at an elementary level, kids are taught coding but, in this country, you can only access it at university level. So, for me, the township is important up until we address all the historic dispositions and we level up the playing field, then we’ll be happy and say it’s entrepreneurship across the board.”

If 2021 has taught business anything, it’s that you can pandemic-proof it as much as you want but that will not stop any civil unrest from shattering the windows and breaking the walls of your property as well as the deep-seated hopes of your being.

Like Tyesi, who watched her business valued at R2.1 million (\$134,000) get “flushed down a toilet” in a matter of minutes, there are countless, nameless others hopeful the township will rise again from the embers, against the odds, kicking, screaming and surviving.

“My hope is to come back bigger and better than I was before!” says Tyesi, echoing the hopes and dreams of millions wanting a better future for themselves and in turn, their country. **F**

# African Of

NANA AKUFO-ADDO, GHANA'S PRESIDENT, HAS REPOSITIONED THE COUNTRY IN THE GLOBAL MARKETPLACE AS ONE RELIANT ON ITS OWN RESOURCES AND STRENGTHS. HE IS REDEFINING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND IT'S RESONATING ACROSS AFRICA. IN AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH FORBES AFRICA, HE DWELLS ON THE NEW FOCUS OF THE WEST AFRICAN NATION THAT HAS IN RECENT YEARS CONSISTENTLY BEEN ONE OF THE WORLD'S FASTEST-GROWING ECONOMIES.

# The Year

BY PEACE HYDE

**I**N 2019, WHEN GHANA'S PRESIDENT NANA Akufo-Addo shared his vision for the national transformation agenda through the Ghana Beyond Aid (GBA) charter, the mandate for his New Patriotic Party (NPP) government was simple – move away from the traditional view of a Ghana dependent on aid to grow the economy and focus on its core competitive advantages.

Much before that, at a joint press conference with French President Emmanuel Macron in 2017 in Ghana's capital Accra where a local journalist asked whether France was going to extend its support to other countries in Africa that were non-French colonies, the Ghanaian president, serving his first term, had interjected with: "We can no longer continue to make policy for ourselves in our continent on the basis of whatever support that the western world can give

us. It will not work, it has not worked and it will not work." A visibly uncomfortable Macron could all but muster a somewhat embarrassed smile at the audience.

But the video of this speech went viral and the remark won Akufo-Addo praise on social media. The president followed by tasking his government to implement the GBA strategy document and charter for a more prosperous Ghana.

After years of negative growth and economic challenges, Akufo-Addo had a new vision for Ghana when he assumed office in 2017, and that was for the country to look within, to its own capabilities. Central to his thinking of growing Ghana's economy was offering free senior high school education to children who would otherwise not receive it. Since its implementation, a total of 1.6 million students have reportedly benefited from the program.

"We do want, and we shall work, to take Ghana to where she deserves to be, a prosperous and dynamic member of the



world community which is neither a victim nor a pawn of the world order,” Akufo-Addo said in a speech at the 75th anniversary celebrations of North Rhine-Westphalia, a top industrial region in Germany. During the visit, the president expressed his determination for Ghana to wholeheartedly participate in the global marketplace not only as a supplier of raw materials but as a leading exporter of manufactured goods.

The messages were clear and consistent.

Endowed with natural resources and human capital, Ghana wanted to take accountability for its own growth and economic development without relying solely on aid from former colonial masters.

The country had not been without its share of crises and difficulties.

On the economic front, its over-reliance on gold and cocoa exports meant that there was little in the way of diversification with inflation peaking at 17.46%.

After the president won the 2016 elections and came to power in 2017, new oil fields were found with production starting in 2017 and jumping to 60 million barrels which resulted in a boost in oil export revenues, pushing the country’s economic growth above 6% for each of the three years to 2019, according to *Reuters*.

During that period, inflation receded to less than 10% for the first time in six years in 2018, according to figures from Ghana’s ministry of finance.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) projected a GDP growth rate of 8.8% in 2019 for Ghana as the fastest-growing economy in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). A March 2018 article in *The New York Times* said: “Now, as oil prices rise again and the country’s oil production rapidly expands, Ghana is on track to make a remarkable claim for a country mired in poverty not long ago. It is likely to have one of the world’s fastest-growing economies this year, according to the World Bank, the African Development Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the Brookings Institution.”

A May 2019 article in the World Economic Forum concurred: “Just three decades ago, Ghana was in crisis; impoverished and suffering famine, it was on the verge of economic collapse. Fast-forward to the present day, the West African nation has staged a remarkable comeback and is predicted to be the world’s fastest-growing economy in 2019.”

The economic growth was not just buoyed by the discovery of oil but also what many economic pundits considered to be sound fiscal policies wrapped in a peaceful democracy. The world noticed.

Companies such as Google, which in its bid to position itself as an ‘AI first’ company with already established centers in strategic cities such as Tokyo, Zurich and Paris, made the decision to open its first Artificial Intelligence center in Africa in Accra in 2019.

Exxon Mobil in 2018 moved to sign a deep-water oil exploration deal with Ghana after the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea drew a new ocean boundary favoring Ghana over the Ivory Coast

in 2017, according to a *Reuters* report.

In 2020, automobile major Volkswagen expanded its footprint in SSA with the opening of a vehicle assembly facility in Accra, making Ghana its fifth vehicle assembly location in SSA (after South Africa, Kenya, Nigeria and Rwanda).

And in April 2021, social media giant Twitter sent shock waves across the bigger economic hubs in Africa when it chose Ghana as its regional headquarters.

What has also been loudly clear has been Akufo-Addo’s deliberate strategy to involve the diaspora in the country’s economic growth. In September 2018, the president launched a year-long initiative to commemorate “the 400th anniversary of the first-recorded forced arrival of enslaved African people to the United States” and dubbed it the Year of the Return, Ghana 2019.

The President called for not just Ghanaians but people of African descent, including African-Americans, to return to Africa, or more specifically Ghana, in what was to be a reconnection with their roots. New visitors arriving to the shores of Ghana were welcomed to a shiny, newly-refurbished airport which was adjudged winner of best airport by passenger volume on the continent according to Airports Council International. In what is perhaps the president’s biggest PR campaign and by far the country’s loudest communication drive, it was estimated that the Year of the Return campaign resulted in an additional 237,000 visitors to Ghana accounting for a 45% increase compared to the previous year and thereby injecting \$1.9 billion into the Ghanaian economy, according to figures from the Ghana Tourism Authority.

The country also made strides in the international bond market, raising \$3 billion on the international debt market using a four-year zero-coupon bond tranche.

“This historic bond issuance is a strong signal that investors have confidence in our plan for debt sustainability, economic recovery and growth,” said Ghana’s finance minister Ken Ofori-Atta, as reported in *Reuters*.

And where investors have confidence, foreign direct investments (FDI) follow. According to the Ghana Investment Promotion Centre (GIPC), despite the pandemic, total investment inflows reached \$2,796.49 million in 2020, with a total FDI value of \$2,650.97 million accounting for a 139.06% increase over 2019. This means some 279 projects were registered within the year amounting to an estimate of 27,110 jobs being generated from those projects.

Another plus? The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) agreement which came into effect from January 2021. Ghana was selected amongst its peers as the trading bloc’s Secretariat.

The AfCFTA is estimated to create a single continental market for goods and services covering a market of 1.2 billion people and accounting for a combined GDP of \$3 trillion.

“As a champion for democracy, Ghana is a supporter of free

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## Nana Akufo-Addo has been adjudged the ‘2021 African of the Year’. Previous winners of the coveted award include Rwandan President Paul Kagame (2018), President of the African Development Bank Akinwumi Adesina (2019) and World Trade Organization Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala (2020).

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speech, online freedom, and the Open Internet, of which Twitter is also an advocate. Furthermore, Ghana’s recent appointment to host the Secretariat of the African Continental Free Trade Area aligns with our overarching goal to establish a presence in the region that will support our efforts to improve and tailor our service across Africa,” says Uche Adegbite, Director, Product Management at Twitter on the company’s ‘Twitter’s presence in Africa’ blog post.

These milestones, in a historic pandemic period, could have played a part in the re-election of the 77-year-old statesman for a second term as Ghana’s president, from January 2021.

With a long lineage of political luminaries as ancestors, it was perhaps in Akufo-Addo’s destiny to lead the country.

Prior to assuming office as president, he practised as a human rights lawyer in France and England. His father, Edward Akufo-Addo, who was a lawyer, was the nation’s president in the late 1960s and one of the founding fathers of Ghana.

“Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, an indefatigable visionary, has not only inspired his country but the continent of Africa to rise up and shine. He has, through his aspirations and efforts, transformed Ghana into a modern economy. His influence has reached beyond Ghana to the continent, pleading the case of a Ghana Beyond Aid thereby infusing a great dose of confidence to transform the continent. This is positively changing the narrative and bringing real hope of a brighter future to Africa’s youth. *Primus inter pares* [first among equals],” says Yofi Grant, CEO of GIPC, to FORBES AFRICA.

When the Covid-19 pandemic hit, the country revised its 7% growth projections to about 1%, but it did not slip into recession.

The Ghana Stock Exchange (GSE) recorded an impressive 36.13% in dollar terms for investors in the first half of 2021, with a market capitalization of GHC61.3 billion (\$10 billion).

“Ghana has been consistently one of the fastest-growing economies in the world for each of the last four years, notwithstanding the decline of GDP growth to 0.9% in 2020 as a result of Covid-19,” says Dr Mahamudu Bawumia, Vice President of Ghana, to FORBES AFRICA.

Bawumia lists key indicators such as the reduction of lending rates from 32% in 2016 to 21% in 2020, increasing gross international reserves from \$6.1 billion in 2016 to \$8.6 billion in 2020, the upgrade of Ghana’s first credit rating in 10 years from B- in 2016 to B with a stable outlook, and the implementation of the ‘one district, one warehouse’ as well as the ‘one district, one factory’ initiatives.

Another area of focus is Ghana’s growing youth population.

There is a push to create an enabling environment for technology startups and for small and medium entrepreneurs to thrive.

According to a World Bank report, *Ghana Digital Economy Diagnostic*, the Ghanaian government is spearheading the adoption of digital

financial services (DFS) through the National Financial Inclusion and Development Strategy 2017-2023, which makes the government accountable to measures to achieving universal access to DFS as well as creating an Africa-wide payments infrastructure by 2030.

To find out more, FORBES AFRICA sat down for a face-to-face interview with President Akufo-Addo in early November in Accra to dwell on his government’s economic policies and reforms in a challenging global environment and about the country’s new business focus:

**Q. CONGRATULATIONS ON BEING NAMED ‘AFRICAN OF THE YEAR’, WHICH EACH YEAR RECOGNIZES EXEMPLARY INDIVIDUALS ACROSS THE AFRICAN CONTINENT. WHAT DOES THIS RECOGNITION MEAN TO YOU AT A TIME WHEN NOT JUST GHANA BUT THE WORLD IS FACING UNPRECEDENTED CHALLENGES?**

**A:** First of all, I’m overwhelmed, I have to thank you very much for recognizing the work we are doing here in Ghana. Your magazine is a global brand and everybody knows about it. It means the world is looking at the work we are doing here in Ghana and we are encouraged by it. We are a relatively small country and operating in one of the most challenging regions of the world as you know with major problems, security threats and going through the difficulties that have been imposed on our economy by the Covid pandemic. So, to put all that together and yet make the effort to grow our country as a genuine democracy and as a country serious about economic growth and development, I think that is what those who are responsible for this decision have seen and I am very encouraged that the work we are doing so far has received this attention and acknowledgement. It’s an inspiration for us and an encouragement for us to continue on the path we have set for ourselves.

**Q: GHANA IS NOW THE TRADE CAPITAL OF AFRICA UNDER THE AFCFTA, HOW DO YOU WANT TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THIS OPPORTUNITY?**

**A:** The question itself, to some extent, is the answer. This project – building a common market – has been on the table for a very long time and has been talked about over and over again. But suddenly, we brought it to being and it is a very important first step. But look at what it means; it means we are now talking about the possibility of trade with each other. Yes, the rules are still being made as we are going along but trading has begun. We began on January 1 [2021] with the open market. A considerable amount of the rules and regulations to be able to function and make it equitable for all nations are now in place. And the implications are enormous.

Suddenly, traders, producers, manufacturers and exporters have a market of 1.2 billion people as a target. The projections are that the market will grow to a market of 2.5 billion people in 30 years’ time so we are talking about a major trading bloc which functions effectively.



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**We are a relatively small country and operating in one of the most challenging regions of the world as you know with major problems, security threats and going through the difficulties that have been imposed on our economy by the Covid pandemic.**

So, what we have been trying to do in Ghana apart from struggling to have the [AfCFTA] Secretariat here with its obvious implications is also to prepare our business communities and institutions to be able to maximize the opportunities that this focus gives us. I think it is a tremendous opportunity to strengthen our manufacturing sector, improve the productivity of our agriculture and take great advantage of the digital revolution which is the fourth industrial revolution that all of us are talking about and which is now an important driving force in the making of policy and implementation of policy in Ghana.

So, yes, it presents an enormous opportunity for us; 16% of the collective GDP of the 54 states in Africa is derived from intra-Africa trade. It is the lowest of any regional trading group in the world. Compare it to the European Union for instance which has 27 nations with 75% of the collective GDP generated from intra-European trading and Asia accounts for 56% of the internal trading of the community.

We have not been focusing on trading amongst each other as a continent for trade and investment. But the market now exists for us. Our first priority is how to expand trade with our neighbors, within the continent and we see that as a more secure route to bring in prosperity to the continent. So, it is a major step forward and I am particularly happy that Ghana has been honored by her peers to be the secretariat for this.

**Q. YOU MADE A POWERFUL SPEECH WITH FRENCH PRESIDENT EMMANUEL MACRON: “WE CAN NO LONGER CONTINUE TO MAKE POLICY FOR OURSELVES IN OUR CONTINENT ON THE BASIS OF WHATEVER SUPPORT THAT THE WESTERN WORLD CAN GIVE US. IT WILL NOT WORK, IT HAS NOT WORKED AND IT WILL NOT WORK.” THAT SPEECH WENT VIRAL, WHY DID YOU TAKE THAT STANCE AT THE TIME?**

**A:** I am not quite sure timing had anything to do with it but much more the conviction. We have seen ourselves becoming increasingly dependent on foreign donors to support our budget and support the development of our infrastructure and it has become something like the central theme in the economic management of the continent.

But it hasn't done a great deal for us in terms of transforming the life of our people and bringing prosperity. You don't have to be that much of a profound analyst to see for yourself.

So, what does it do? It calls for a new paradigm. It calls for a new analysis of how we can be able to get out of where we are and move forward and I think that the first thing is the intellectual, the mindset and the vision that you have and how you work the vision.

There has to be a broad consensus that the path of depending on French, American or British tax payers will not resolve our problem. Then, secondly, 30% of the world's remaining minerals are on our soil.

A huge percentage of the amount of arable land and water, all of these basic pillars of economic development are found here and they are here in abundance.

If that is the case, shouldn't that be our focus?

How can we strengthen our capacity to exploit these things directly ourselves as a way of addressing the issue of poverty? If you put those two together, for me, it justifies the statement I made. The fact that it went viral indicates that perhaps it was a statement that people have been waiting for, for a long time. It is a very central figure of how I have been trying to carry out my obligation as the President of Ghana.

We are not talking about Ghana turning its back on the world or calling for Africa to isolate itself from global trade; far from it, the statement is clear. No man is an island and it is true of nations but

the emphasis is the change of focus and the way we look at problems. If you accept the validity of the statement I made to the French president, it changes a lot of things and especially the dynamics of how we go about our development.

We have coined a phrase out of it calling it 'Ghana Beyond Aid' as a central feature of our public policy, not just in the management of our economy, but generally the way Ghana is positioning itself in the world today.

**Q: AFTER CONSECUTIVE YEARS OF ECONOMIC GAINS THAT MADE GHANA ONE OF THE FASTEST-GROWING ECONOMIES IN THE WORLD, COVID HIT THE WORLD AND AFRICA, AND YOU WERE FAST TO RESPOND WITH MEASURES TO ALLEVIATE THE EFFECTS OF THE PANDEMIC ON THE PEOPLE AND THE ECONOMY. COULD YOU UNDERLINE THOSE HIGHLIGHTS AND WHAT IS NOW NEEDED TO BRING GHANA BACK TO ITS FULL ECONOMIC POTENTIAL AS THE 'BLACK STAR OF AFRICA'?**

**A:** I was in fact in Switzerland and woke up in the morning, and turned on the TV to hear the news and that was the first time there was this worldwide alarm about what had happened in China. And it struck me immediately when I heard it that we would have to act extremely quickly if this thing was to be contained. Already, at the time, we had statements being made by Bill and Melinda Gates who went on record to say we would be dying in the millions and there would be dead bodies on the streets of Africa.

For one, there is a lot of contact between China and Ghana. We have a significant population of citizens who are there and then we have a lot of our trading community where China is our first source of services. So, the [dealings] of people going in and out of Ghana was very highly developed and clearly if that was the source of the problem, then it is something that could impact us very negatively and so I thought this is going to be a big problem.

I have been very fortunate to have people around me who acted quickly and came up with a task force and we created a series of measures that were put in place to contain it and that appears to have worked. We have some thousand-plus deaths which is unfortunate but I think in relative terms, if we look at the data to others, both on the continent and outside, ours has been relatively mild.

But in the process, we had all these disruptions that we all know about, which has had a major impact on our economy and instead of growing at 7%, which is the average we have been growing at since 2017 up to 2020, suddenly, we had to scale it down to less than 1% growth.

The comforting thing is that we managed, unlike many of our neighbors, to stay out of recession. We didn't go into negative growth and this is largely because the fundamentals that we had put in place during the period of rapid growth was sufficiently robust to withstand all the effects of the pandemic.

The Ghana Cares program has been about trying to reset the economy, trying to find the sources necessary to revive all the key sectors and then also to focus on the new sectors. We want to accelerate the enhancement of agricultural productivity, and hasten the industrial development of our country as well as the digital revolution and these programs which amounts to the 100 billion Obaatan Pa program that has been put in place

addressing these fundamental concerns. We see that as a way of having the economy come back and returning to the high growth rates we had before the pandemic.

**Q: GHANA BEYOND AID IS ONE OF YOUR MAIN GOALS; DO EXPLAIN THE VISION BEHIND IT AND THE ROLE OF GHANA'S YOUTH IN THIS PROCESS.**

**A:** We have some 65% of our population below the age of 35 and everything you are doing must address this majority as your principle concern. That is what the people of Ghana are today, young, looking at the country, repositioning the country and there cannot be more positive energy in a population than the energy of young people. The creativity and sense of innovation are key. So yes, the Ghana Beyond Aid has the young people of Ghana at the center of what we are trying to do and the conditions we are trying to create to enable them to have a sense of hope.

We all know the horrendous stories of our people crossing the Sahara in a senseless way... So, to create a political, economic and social project and say that if we work together and look at our resources, both human and material, we can put them together in a way that gives hope to all of our people so that they can make a good life for themselves here in Ghana and be part of a global community of prosperity and a sense of dignity. This is an agenda about the young people of our continent.

**Q: ON THE HEALTHCARE SIDE, YOUR AIM IS TO VACCINATE 20 MILLION GHANAIS; WILL THIS BE ACHIEVED WITHIN THE DIFFICULT AFRICAN CONTEXT REGARDING VACCINE AVAILABILITY?**

**A:** Access to vaccines has been growing. I think by the end of this year, projections are that we would have received some 15 million vaccines. That 20 million target we may not reach this year but we believe by the end of the first quarter next year, we would have attained.

And the significance of it is that in a population of 30 million people, if we are able to vaccinate 20 million, it means we are vaccinating the entire adult population of Ghana and that in itself gives us all the immunity we need so as a target, it is a really important target. We are also taking some long-term decisions.

We have been dependent on other people to provide us with vaccines and that is an intolerable position.

The pandemic is affecting your population and you are not in a position to assist your population because you are having to beg other people to give you what they have, is not a situation that we can live with. We should have learned our lessons from the Ebola crisis but out of this crisis, we have to recognize the need to have our own domestic capabilities to produce our own vaccine.

That is one of the important decisions we have taken. We are in the process of creating a national vaccine institute led by very capable and world-class Ghanaian scientists and we are hoping that by next year it will be up and running so we can find strong capabilities to find vaccines for our people. 

# NASA technology innovation to protect businesses from further damage against COVID-19

**T**he end of October 2021 marked an important and exciting milestone for the restaurant and hospitality industry with Bottega Restaurant in Johannesburg being the first restaurant in South Africa to have an Airocide® unit installed. Only recently made available to Africa via 3Sixty Biopharmaceutical, Airocide® uses NASA technology to create clean, clear air that is free from airborne pathogens like viruses and bacteria. This innovation in air purification that uses NASA optimised photocatalytic oxidation ("PCO") technology, has been clinically proven to kill 99.9% of SARS-CoV-2 within minutes!

This first-ever South African installation in a restaurant comes on the back of a collaboration established with the Restaurant Association of South Africa (RASA) in early October where emphasis was placed on identifying COVID-19 preventative tools like Airocide® ahead of the predicted fourth wave. The exciting introduction of the US originated Airocide® units have been made available to South Africa and the continent through one of the largest black owned pharmaceutical companies in South Africa, 3Sixty Biopharmaceuticals, landing the global partnership and exclusive distribution rights from Airocide® SteriLumen, a US based air





Walter Mbatha, CEO of 3Sixty Biopharmaceuticals, is a pharmacist by profession with more than 13 years of pharmaceutical experience both locally and internationally



3Sixty Biopharmaceuticals CEO, Walter Mbatha with Franca Cardillo-Millar from Bottega Restaurant in Johannesburg

purification and infection control technology company.

“With the very real possibility of a fourth wave and increased restrictions being imposed on South Africans over the summer holiday and festive season period, the launch of Airocide® into the South African market couldn’t have come at a better time. For the tourism and hospitality industry to provide their patrons and guests with peace of mind that their establishments have been fitted with technology that’s been lab tested and clinically proven to kill 99.9% of SARS-CoV-2 within minutes – it could be the difference between the life or death of many businesses. The impact of this technology will not only benefit hotels, restaurants, wine tasting venues and other indoor tourist and holiday hotspots but it will also be hugely beneficial for hospitals, offices, schools, universities and other indoor spaces where

people need to convene. We believe it’s vital to work with organisations like RASA and other industry bodies to give struggling industries a fighting chance ahead of an impending fourth wave and we are looking forward to demonstrating the effectiveness of this cutting-edge air purification solution in creating safe, clean and clear air quality for Bottega Restaurant in Johannesburg,” explains Walter Mbatha, CEO of 3Sixty Biopharmaceuticals.

Airocide is clinically proven to eliminate airborne pathogenic and non-pathogenic microorganisms, odours, allergens, and harmful VOCs in a variety of applications and industries including healthcare, hospitality, medical cannabis cultivation, food preservation (perishables), wineries, commercial real estate, schools, dental offices and homes. Airocide® utilises NASA optimized photocatalytic oxidation (“PCO”) technology that results in any contaminants in the air being drawn from the room into the Airocide® unit and channelled into the reaction chamber. UVC activates the proprietary photocatalyst embedded in the reaction chamber, beginning the photocatalytic process. Through this airborne pathogen killing technology, millions of hydroxyl radicals converge, combining with the carbon atoms in pathogens such as airborne bacteria, mould, fungi, mycotoxins, viruses and allergens, as well as VOCs, converting the organic material into a harmless vapor and clean, clear air.

“While the introduction of Airocide® to Africa is particularly exciting news in our efforts as a continent to combat COVID-19, the reaction we have had from experts in South Africa about the potential of this type of technology to add value to multiple industries has been extremely positive. The industries that will see maximum benefit includes the hospitality industry, healthcare, corporates, wine, cannabis, manufacturing, agriculture and flowers. The Airocide® units are available in different sizes to cater for personal home use, businesses, schools, food and flower storage facilities and industrial sized spaces depending on what the end-users space requirements are. The Airocide® units are also low maintenance in comparison to other air purification systems, requiring only the annual replacement of their lamps,” adds Mbatha.

Airocide® units can be purchased via [Takealot.com](https://takealot.com) or you can connect with Airocide via social media platforms on:

-  Airocide Africa (@airocideafrica)
-  @airocideafrica
-  @airocideafrica
-  Airocide Africa



# SOLE SURVIVORS

Tapping into Rwanda's waste-to-wealth economy, Ysolde Shimwe and Kevine Kagirimpundu have come a long way in their eco-friendly shoes. They repurpose used tyres to make soles and have survived the pandemic with their sustainable offerings opening yet another new store this year.

WORDS AND PHOTOS BY RIDHIMA SHUKLA

**I**N A CLATTERING FACTORY IN Gahanga, minutes from Kigali, the capital city of Rwanda, stands a black and grey block of concrete, distinct from its beige cohorts and the large swathes of yellow mud around it.

The sound effects surrounding this unsuspecting installation include the cacophony of churning machines, the resolute tearing of sheets and the grinding of scissors in sync, and this is all accompanied by the strong smell of ethanol hanging in the air.

These are the sights and sounds that greet you as you enter the manufacturing center of Rwanda's home-grown, eco-friendly footwear brand Uzuri K&Y.

Over 40 people, in colorful masks, sit across from each other on tables as per the new norms of social distancing in the workplace.

Each table is a team of trained experts connected by a chain of processes needed to complete the production lines for Uzuri K&Y. The final result – comfortable, cruelty-free footwear – line the right end of the facility,

stacked neatly on dark brown wooden shelves.

The two 29-year-old founders of Uzuri K&Y, Kevine Kagirimpundu and Ysolde Shimwe, are nearby, beaming with pride. Their personalities match the myriad colors around them.

Shimwe speaks about her eco-friendly ware: “We use repurposed rubber for the sole and biodegradable fabrics painted with natural dyes, and synthetic vegetable leather for other parts of the shoe as well as natural adhesives to put it all together – you can say we are part of the circular economy.”

Sustainable green trends are undeniably fashionable and the young entrepreneur-duo clearly have a deeper emotional investment in their products.

As Shimwe adds: “We care for our people and our planet. We want to sell a Rwandan product with love.”

The duo started Uzuri in 2012, and their vision fit right in with Rwanda’s aim of becoming a waste emissions-free country by 2050.

Kagirimpundu shares that as students, they would pass by landfill areas situated close to residential neighborhoods and wonder how they could become a part of the solution to rid these sites of waste.

Currently, a large chunk of Rwanda’s Greenhouse

Gas Emissions come from the densely-populated nation’s urban landfills and inspired by that same thought, Uzuri’s footwear uses the repurposed rubber from otherwise polluting and non-biodegradable tyres.

The young entrepreneurs were still at university in 2012, studying creative design and

contemplating their future in the limited job market for designers in Rwanda, when they had the epiphany.

“We were in university and we used to wonder where we would find jobs after school. We had a passion for design and fashion. We decided to create something by Rwandans for fashion-lovers everywhere,” says Shimwe.

Ideas and ambition are often a great combination for entrepreneurial success. However, youth and a lack of experience often lead to more failures and lessons than instant success.

“It wasn’t just shoes in the beginning, we wanted to make everything: bags, clothes and accessories. We knew very little about investment management and

## “ Our little venture paid us in lessons.”



“  
**We decided to create  
something by Rwandans for  
fashion-lovers everywhere.**  
– Ysolde Shimwe

technology,” adds Kagirimpundu.

Working with local tailors out of their homes and with just one sewing machine, the two young women started by manufacturing colorful bags and other accessories to sell on Facebook.

The open source social media platform not only allowed them to gain visibility but also gauge customer reaction.

“We learned to improve the quality and function of our products through customer feedback. Our little venture paid us in lessons.”

In 2014, Uzuri received mentorship from a Swiss entrepreneurship program based in Rwanda that helped the brand streamline its purpose and guide the duo’s approach to business and sales.

“They advised us to stick to one thing, one product! It was very difficult for us to choose because we were fond of them all,” says Shimwe.

The amateur entrepreneurs made their choice and haven’t looked back. With a range of trendy, functional footwear, Uzuri was rebranded under the waste-to-wealth model of business.

“The biggest challenge was finding skilled labor.

So without capital or experience in shoe design, we approached a local cobbler, Francios, who owned a street shop in the city center to work with us as our lead shoe-maker,” says Kagirimpundu.

With this, the duo embarked on a journey to shift consumer behavior in a country not yet familiar with sustainable fashion and with a general mistrust of local products.

“In our culture, rubber sandals are often considered cheap quality footwear, unfashionable. We wanted to break away from that and substitute it with the idea of sustainability,” offers Shimwe.

“We did not have money for a website. We used to deliver door-to-door on moto-taxis,” says Kagirimpundu.

Delivering door-to-door was the easy part for customers often returned the shoes for alterations, asking for a better fit or a more comfortable style.

“Sometimes they would not buy them even after alterations. We did not make much money but we gained insight into the minds of our target audience,” the two concur now.

The real-time feedback allowed the Uzuri founders and their shoemakers to better the design quality while engaging in a personalized brand-building exercise with their customers.

Small grants won at entrepreneurial competitions allowed the two founders to keep their business afloat. And, in 2015, after much trial and error, Uzuri graduated from a Facebook store to a real brick-and-mortar shop at Kigali’s international airport.

“It is a restricted area, but we pitched our brand as one made by Rwandans with pride to the authorities and they allotted us a space of 15sqm.”

After selling over 2,000 pairs of sandals at the airport store, the two opened their first shop in 2016, in one of the most developed commercial zones of the city, at Kigali Heights in Kimihurura.

For the next three years, Uzuri’s footwear with ethnic African prints appealed to the expatriate and tourist community. Their customer-base kept growing but Rwandans were still weary of stepping out in the locally-made Uzuri sandals.

“We changed our marketing approach and brought back focus on our local audience by involving Rwandan models for all our advertising needs and we advertised in Kinyarwanda,” say the two.



“

**We did not have money for a website. We used to deliver door-to-door on moto-taxis.**

– Kevine Kagirimpundu

As Uzuri slowly got endorsed by Rwandans, its popularity kept pace with the expatriate community and the wealthy tourists looking to go back home with a piece of Rwanda.

“2019 was a great year for us. We were selling fast. We had to expand our store by breaking a wall and into the adjacent store, to fit in all the customers and the shoes,” says Kagirimpundu.

To match the demand, the businesswomen scaled up manufacturing and opened another store in the city center for reaching out to their local clientele living far from the posh neighborhoods in the east of the city.

“But, then the pandemic hit and our 80% expatriate and tourist clientele came to a halt, people did not want to spend on shoes.”

At a time when Rwanda’s retail market consisted mainly of repurposed and imported fashion goods, Uzuri was attempting to shift consumer behavior with sustainable fashion.

The 2018 ban on the import of used clothing and footwear by the Rwandan government and the onset of the pandemic disrupting cross-border trade actually catalyzed Uzuri’s sales.



Creatives hard at work at Uzuri's factory in Gahanga

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**While we expected our sales to flat-line, Rwanda's fashion-lovers came to our rescue by capturing 80% of our pandemic sales.**

“While we expected our sales to flat-line, Rwanda's fashion-lovers came to our rescue by capturing 80% of our pandemic sales.”

As Rwanda's citizens receive their Covid-19 vaccinations and businesses gain momentum, the buying power of the residents is picking up steadily and the duo have launched another store this year.

However, the impact of the pandemic can be seen in the decisions of the young entrepreneurs. They have recently closed their airport store, as it no longer drives the same level of profits, what with travel down.

“Our other stores need our attention and we can look at re-opening the airport store when tourism goes back to normal,” they say.

Starting out with a few shelves in a local shop to renting big stores in the best commercial zones in Kigali,

Kagirimpundu and Shimwe have come a long way.

“Design is all about problem-solving and we have applied our education to solve the problems in our business,” says Kagirimpundu.

With the pandemic forcing people to work from home, the duo have also now launched a new line of home slippers.

They saw an opportunity and took the chance.

The company has sold over 44,000 pairs of footwear so far; last year, their revenue totaled \$300,000.

A combination of local talent and innovation in footwear, Uzuri's model did not command the same market share for years, as it does today.

What next?

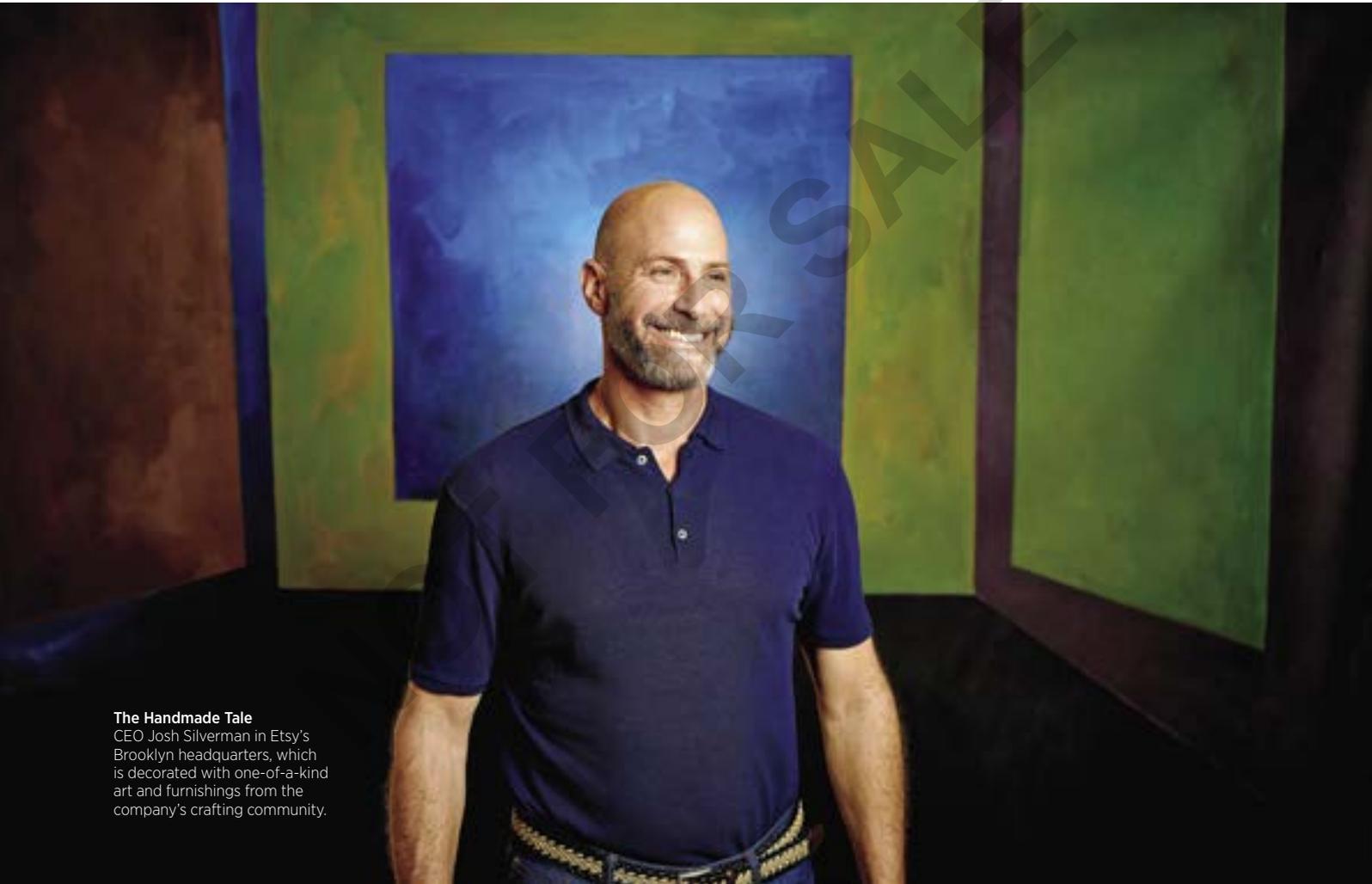
The two smile and agree: “We have invested every penny back into the business and our employees. We want to empower our community and those who work with us.”

Over the course of eight years growing their business, the Uzuri founders have become proponents of the win-win philosophy of sustainable innovation and branding. The company is now looking to expand into Kenya, South Africa and Tanzania, to continue selling “from Rwanda with love”. 

# The Anti-Amazon

Josh Silverman is using cutting-edge technology and an army of 5 million artisan-entrepreneurs to transform ETSY from a hippie flea market into a Wall Street hero—without losing its soul.

BY STEVEN BERTONI



## The Handmade Tale

CEO Josh Silverman in Etsy's Brooklyn headquarters, which is decorated with one-of-a-kind art and furnishings from the company's crafting community.

**O**N APRIL 2, 2020, DURING THE CHAOTIC early days of the pandemic, Etsy CEO Josh Silverman awoke to a sales shock.

Every four hours, the company's data-junkie boss received an update on the volume of personalized pillows, hand-sewn stuffed animals, vintage Victorian lockets and millions of other one-off items sold through the digital

marketplace. Silverman had been rushing to cut Etsy's marketing spending to prepare for a Covid-induced slump. But the latest report showed a surge.

The source: face masks. The press was reporting that the federal Centers for Disease Control was soon to recommend face coverings for all Americans. With inventory already difficult for first responders to find, civilians were flocking to Etsy's ragtag



## The world's supply chains had locked up. You couldn't get face masks. Yet Etsy's supply chain was just two hands making.

community of hobbyists for their pandemic protection.

“Until that day, if you searched Etsy for ‘mask’ you’d see Halloween costumes or face cream,” says Silverman, sitting cross-legged on a handmade modern wingback chair in Etsy’s still-deserted Brooklyn headquarters. “We had an emergency meeting to decide whether to double down on masks.”

The team was split. Some saw the face mask market as a fad. To others, it offered a chance for Etsy to show off the power and flexibility of its decentralized, nearly 3 million-strong seller community. “This was our Dunkirk, where we could mobilize cottage industry to come to the rescue,” says Silverman, who is 52.

“The world’s supply chains had locked up. You couldn’t get face masks. Yet Etsy’s supply chain was just two hands making.”

Etsy rallied its sellers, emailing them info on mask materials and designs. Programmers retooled the site toward selling the PPE; the marketing team peppered the web and social media with ads. Within a day, an army of 10,000 independent crafters were hawking masks on Etsy. Within two weeks, 100,000 sellers were.

By the end of 2020, Etsy had moved more than \$740 million worth of masks — accounting for 7% of its \$10.3 billion in gross sales (the value of everything sold on the site; Etsy takes a cut of each sale). It turned out to be perfectly positioned for the pandemic: Sellers had more time to craft furniture, art and toys, and quarantined customers were looking to buy it all. Etsy’s annual revenue increased 111%, to \$1.7 billion; net income was up 264%.

“Home suddenly became your office, playground and day-care center,” says Jefferies analyst John Colantuoni. “That drove demand for unique and handmade products.”

Since Covid’s March 2020 lows, Etsy shares are up some 600%, torching the Nasdaq (up 115%), eBay (175%), Walmart (35%) and Amazon (100%). The 16-year-old company is worth just shy of \$30 billion. Active buyers and sellers on Etsy have doubled to 90 million and 5 million, respectively. As with most digital retailers, growth has slowed in the second half of 2021 as the economy has reopened, but analysts are betting Etsy will hit a 30% sales increase in 2021.

Let Amazon, Walmart and Target battle to deliver mass-produced items as cheaply and quickly as possible. Etsy has empowered an eclectic (and mostly female) community of crafters with the same cutting-edge AI, data science and marketing tools that the retail giants use.

In doing so, Etsy, member of *Forbes’* Just 100 list of the top corporate citizens, has provided millions of moonlighters with crucial income — and purpose — in a time of unprecedented layoffs, lockdowns and

dislocations.

Says Silverman, “Our mission is to keep commerce human.”

Etsy has always been the crunchy kid at the country club.

Founded by Brooklyn artisan Rob Kalin, it churned through CEOs before going public in 2015 as a Certified B Corporation beholden to strict environmental and community standards. Wall Street hated its do-gooder stance — and red ink. In 2016, Etsy’s net losses grew 45%, to \$54 million.

The next year, investors Black-And-White Capital, TPG and Dragoneer bought up shares, hoping to force Etsy to sell itself. Etsy pushed back. The board scrambled for a CEO to balance its mission-based employees and its money-obsessed investors. Silverman, who had joined the board in 2016, seemed a good fit.

Raised in Ann Arbor, Michigan, Silverman got a BA in public policy at Brown in 1991, worked for progressive New Jersey Senator Bill Bradley and later earned a Stanford MBA. In 1998 he cofounded Evite, the online invitation manager, before spending five years leading eBay marketplaces abroad.

He turned around a struggling Skype in 2008 and later ran American Express’s credit-card business from 2011 to 2015.

## Etsy’s annual revenue increased 111%, to \$1.7 billion; net income was up 264%.

With a maniacal focus on upping Etsy’s gross sales, he quickly slashed staff, departed most international regions and cut projects that wouldn’t create at least \$10 million in gross sales. That included Etsy Studios, a craft supply website that 150 people, about 15% of Etsy’s total staff, had spent 18 months building. “It was as painful as it sounds, a real gut punch,” Silverman says. “We encouraged people who were motivated and believed to stay, and those skeptical to leave.”

He improved Etsy’s search tools, scrapped in-house servers for the cloud and invested in customer service. By 2019, Etsy’s market cap had risen 300%, to \$5 billion.

In all, since Silverman took the helm, shares have returned some 1,800%. “Prior to the pandemic, Josh did a great job focusing on the things that moved the needle on gross sales,” says Citi analyst Nicholas Jones. “It positioned Etsy to benefit from the demand surge.”

One challenge: enabling customers to find a one-of-a-kind product on Etsy as easily as they can a commodity on Amazon. To improve search and product recommendations, it’s building AI-powered computer vision tools to identify, tag and create structured data for its millions of unique items.

Notorious for slow deliveries, Etsy is also raising expectations for sellers. Crafters are being pushed to provide transparent timelines and improve customer communication. A new dashboard will show vendors how they rate for customer service and satisfaction. Overachievers will get higher visibility on the site.

“We need to do what our sellers need, not want,” Silverman says. “To serve the sellers, you need to obsess over the buyer experience.” 

# Appetite



## *For* Business

Starting with just \$45, Ghanaian entrepreneur Violet Amoabeng's startup has progressed with skincare products you can eat and the unpalatable realization that the only way to make it in business is to crash, break, stretch and succeed.

BY PEACE HYDE

**I** T WOULD BE HARD TO decide if you would place Violet Amoabeng's products in the beauty cabinet or on the kitchen shelf.

Skin Gourmet, Amoabeng's skincare range, uses natural raw materials that are pure and free of preservatives that you could use on your skin and eat at the same time.

Edible beauty?

"If you cannot eat what you are putting on your skin, then why put it on your face?" asks the Ghanaian entrepreneur who admits to always gravitating towards the unconventional.

"It made more sense because what I wanted to create was something you could either choose to eat or wear, either way it is good for you."

She launched Skin Gourmet Limited with only \$45 five years ago, but it is now a business that generates over \$200,000 annually.

"My dad would not give me the money to do any business because he believed that if you don't do business

the hard way, you will not be able to survive when you hit hard times and no one will help you,” recalls Amoabeng about her journey to becoming a self-made businesswoman.

She had to think differently.

Even as a child, when her classmates were debating careers as doctors, bankers or lawyers, Amoabeng opted for poetry, when she could have easily thought of following in her parents’ footsteps.

Her father, one of Ghana’s most successful bankers, is the founder of UT Bank, and her mother was the Managing Director of the Ghana tourist board where her primary focus was social and human development.

“My dad was more of a dreamer and even though his mind was on profitability he wanted to build something that everyone would benefit from. My dad and my mum were more focused on me being a good person and they were not focused on a specific industry. They just allowed me to dream. It was more important that I would leave a good legacy. It was almost like they are responsible for how their children will affect the world.”

Amoabeng now understands just how powerful that upbringing was. Even after her parents’ divorce when she was still young, she was never separated from this goal of adding value to humanity.

Shuttling between Ghana, Uganda and Canada in her teenage years, she graduated with a marketing and business administration degree from the University of Northern Virginia before completing her masters in accounting and finance as well as in supply chain and logistics.

Her initial work experience was in her father’s bank before securing an internship with the African Development Bank in Tunisia.

“At the time, I wanted to take over my dad’s business. As life would have it, that didn’t work out but I still wanted to help people and I knew business is how to do it, but I didn’t know how it would look like,” says Amoabeng.

Her biggest challenge was acquiring capital to kick-start her business.

“I asked family members to help source ingredients

etc. I would come back from work and the first formulation I made I got these three ugly containers from my mother. I had designed my logo and everything on my computer. So, I would manufacture, package, label, put it on the shelf and every Saturday I would go to the market to sell these products.”

Being from Ghana proved to be advantageous for her fledgling startup.

“I started to really focus on Ghana because even the idea of eating your skincare [ingredients] is something I realized Ghanaians used a long time ago but we have lost [that tradition]. When I go to source my ingredients, these are products that the local communities eat on a daily basis and it’s been done for a long time. Preservatives are not needed because these communities have not had electricity for a long time so they had a way to preserve the products and keep it [to] the highest qualities.”

To get people to try her products, Amoabeng would give them away for free.

Her father’s lesson in business of not expecting “any handouts from anyone” started to pay off.

“My dad also started his company with almost nothing and he knew he had to struggle. In my dad’s mind, it is important to struggle because it is the struggle that makes you strong and

innovative.

“I started with the love of making body butter without doing any research. The entrepreneurial journey has been crazy hard. It will crash you and it breaks you and stretches you but you enjoy it. When you see an obstacle and it’s hard but every time you find a way over it and that is what makes it incredible. With every stage you overcome, you become a little bit greater,” offers Amoabeng as advice to aspiring entrepreneurs.

Amoabeng has managed to transform Skin Gourmet into a successful startup story with an average revenue growth of 80%. What makes this remarkable is the fact that this has been achieved organically with no outside investment or bank loans.

And with that, she has learned her greatest lesson in business.

“I had a limited way of thinking and I had to retrain myself on how to think. Nothing is impossible, everything is possible and if you can’t do it, it is your fault. You never blame anybody for anything that happens to you.” 

“

**What I wanted to create was something you could either choose to eat or wear, either way it is good for you.**

—

# The \$30 Billion Kitty

## Private Equity's Pet Whisperer

Raymond Svider's PetSmart win was enough to attract a \$560 million investment from Blackstone for BC Partners to expand into credit and real estate investing



The standard playbook in private equity is to borrow, buy and cut costs ruthlessly. But a massive windfall from investments in PetSmart and Chewy has taught BC Partners' Raymond Svider that sometimes, doubling down on risks is a better option.

BY ANTOINE GARA

**R**AYMOND SVIDER, chairman of private equity firm BC Partners, remembers the intense pressure he felt in the days leading up to Christmas in 2017. His firm's biggest investment, the brick-and-mortar pet food retailer PetSmart, was flailing. Its antiquated technology needed an overhaul; costs were ballooning. Svider was splitting time between BC's office on Madison Avenue in Manhattan and PetSmart's Phoenix headquarters, where he was acting CEO. PetSmart's bonds were trading just above 60 cents on the dollar.

He arrived in Phoenix to learn from PetSmart's CIO that the highly-leveraged retailer had put in place a companywide hiring freeze to conserve cash, forcing it to rely on pricey contractors.

"I didn't know there was a hiring freeze," recalls Svider, who canceled it on the spot, freeing his CIO to make

Photo by Gabby Jones for Forbes



**You need to be ruthless and very fast to adapt because in any business, the world is changing every day in ways you can't anticipate.**

35 hires. “You need to be nimble and flexible. Sometimes strict rules force people to do the wrong thing because they’re just applying rules.”

At the time, Svider was bucking almost every business and

investing convention. A leveraged buyout artist raised in Paris, with a master’s degree in electrical engineering from one of France’s “*grandes écoles*” and an MBA from the University of Chicago, Svider, now 59, was working double duty — two days a week stewarding the \$40 billion (assets) PE firm, three days at 1,650-store PetSmart, for which BC paid \$8.7 billion in 2014.

Loaded with \$6 billion in debt from the LBO and a further \$800 million dividend Svider had siphoned off, PetSmart was hurtling toward bankruptcy as pet owners moved steadily online. The standard playbook called for ruthless cost cutting to unearth the cash to repay lenders.

Svider doubled down instead.

He found loopholes in PetSmart’s credit agreements, enabling him to borrow even more money, angering creditors, so he could acquire unprofitable online pet food retailer Chewy. To the outside world, it was the 21st-century version of notorious dot-com flameout Pets.com. But Svider knew Chewy’s billionaire founder, Ryan Cohen, was beating every financial target he’d set years earlier when the two first met. Though it wasn’t profitable, Chewy wasn’t burning cash as it grew rapidly. Most importantly, it was beating Amazon in its niche. It was the perfect way to burnish his troubled bet on PetSmart.

Starting with an offer of \$1 billion, Svider wound up paying \$3 billion in cash for Chewy, beating out rival Petco, in April 2017. Skeptics howled, its bonds tumbled and lawsuits flew. But four years and a pandemic-inspired pet boom have turned Svider’s rulebreaking gambit into one of the biggest private equity scores ever.

Chewy, now publicly traded, is worth more than \$31 billion, and its sales have skyrocketed nearly tenfold, to a projected \$9 billion for 2021. PetSmart itself is deleveraging, having refinanced its buyout debt in January. All told, Svider’s investors are sitting on a \$30 billion windfall.

“You need to be ruthless and very fast to adapt because in any business, the world is changing every day in ways you can’t anticipate,” says Svider in his French accent, speaking from the Hamptons mansion where he now works remotely alongside his wife, three children and a pair of cats, Cashmere

and Pearl. “Conviction is really important.”

A self-taught investor, Svider got his start after the go-go 1980s’ leveraged buyout craze. In 1989, he was recruited out of graduate school by legendary dealmakers Bruce Wasserstein and Joe Perella. Three years later, he moved to the Paris office of Baring Capital Investors, a small buyout arm attached to London-based Barings Bank.

In 1995, a rogue trader at Barings, Nick Leeson, lost over \$1 billion, rendering the 300-year-old bank insolvent. Barings was bought by competitor ING for pennies on the dollar. It turned out to be a stroke of luck for Svider, who had been working alongside the division’s cofounder. Baring Capital was spun off and renamed BC Partners.

In the early 2000s, Svider moved to London to cut telecom deals as markets were deregulated, and in 2007, when BC Partners expanded into North America, Svider took the helm.

The firm’s first major deal in the U.S. that year was a \$16 billion takeover of indebted satellite operator Intelsat, which promptly became troubled and would file for bankruptcy protection in 2020. Svider’s hits, though, have far exceeded his misses.

Nothing characterizes his wins more than a willingness to take bold bets. One standout is GFL Environmental, a Toronto-based waste management rollup founded by Canadian entrepreneur Patrick Divogi. In 2018, BC Partners recapitalized the company at a \$2 billion value, building a 40% stake and looking to expand it in the U.S. with acquisitions.

When the coronavirus crisis hit, GFL was working on an IPO; Svider recommended to Divogi that they forge ahead despite the market’s tumult. GFL priced its IPO at \$19, below a pre-pandemic range of \$20 to \$21 — one of just five listings in March 2020. Being public, Svider believed, would help GFL capitalize on the coming market dislocation. After an early tumble to \$13, GFL’s stock has nearly tripled as it acquired assets from Houston’s Waste Management and other competitors. BC Partners’ GFL holdings are now worth nearly \$5 billion, almost three times its initial investment. “Raymond has a unique ability to cut through the BS and focus on the big picture,” Divogi says.

Despite private equity’s long-standing habit of realizing profits as quickly as possible, Svider seems to have little interest in selling Chewy, despite the fact that since mid-August, shares have fallen from \$96 to \$75, wiping out about \$7 billion in gains as pandemic pet spending slowed. BC Partners has a 76% position in the stock that’s now worth nearly \$25 billion.

There may be one more winning move left in Svider’s pet sector gambit: the IPO of PetSmart, which could fetch a \$10 billion valuation. The once troubled retailer’s revenue rose 17% in the second quarter to \$2.3 billion, and in the first half it generated \$342 million in free cash flow. PetSmart’s formerly distressed bonds now trade above par.

Svider insists the pet market — including a new focus on health care — remains underappreciated. Is he looking to consolidate his gains with a quick exit? Not necessarily, he says: “We don’t feel that we’re in a particular rush.”



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“The only positive thing of the pandemic is that it has brought together different actors in society, ones that wouldn’t normally work together, figuring out it is possible to work together and is something I am hugely proud of.” **Jonathan Broomberg, CEO of Vitality Health International**



“The next few years will be a revolution,” says Emma Knox on the power of collaboration: during COVID-19, as the **Health Workstream Lead for B4SA**, she spearheaded partnerships to procure 2 billion rand (133 million USD) of PPE and medical equipment, bringing together major donors in the Solidarity Fund. Many companies like **RMB, PWC, Deloitte, AB Inbev** and **Discovery**, who offered volunteers and other resources, were proof that for Health Stewards in 2021 and beyond, collaboration is the name of the game. But if collaboration between governments, agencies, associations, and businesses—even competitors—is the way forward, *will there ever be the same coordinated effort for healthcare as there is for Climate Change, as demonstrated in the recent COP26 Climate Change Conference?*



## COME TOGETHER, RIGHT NOW—OVERSEAS

### One recent sign toward global coordination is Merck granting a royalty-free license for its groundbreaking COVID-19 pill to the United Nations-backed nonprofit Medicines Patent Pool.

It's a novel idea in drug development: instead of a system built to benefit shareholders, a new "open-source" platform could borrow best practices from software like Linux and Firefox and potentially energize the race to end COVID-19. Merck's initiative subsidizes access for 105 countries, mostly in Africa and Asia, and **Stephen Saad** of **Aspen** believes his company could market the drug for about \$20 per dose—less than 3% of the \$712 that the U.S. has agreed to pay.



And Merck is hardly alone. "**Abbott's** new Pandemic Defense Coalition is dedicated to the early detection of, and rapid response to, future pandemic threats," says **Bassem Bibi**, the company's VP for **Rapid Diagnostics**. The worldwide program's goal is to extend the continuum of the patient journey through a partnership with **Axios** and patient-assistance programs, expanding on viral surveillance and discovery over the last three decades through a network amounting to dozens of partners in strategic geographic locations.

"Country-specific evidence is so much more powerful when driving for change in policy—especially for under prioritized diseases," Bibi says. "Local evidence on the burden of disease is critical to shaping healthcare policies and looking to improving outcomes to enable universal coverage."

Bibi points to a flagship example in Rwanda, where more than 80% of the population is rural. He envisions a future where no Rwandan should have to walk more than 30 minutes to access quality primary healthcare. "The Ministry of Health, in collaboration with a local NGO (**Society for Family Health Rwanda**) and Abbott, built eight second-generation health posts that bring primary care to local communities. As a result of this initiative, more people have gone to the new health posts for general check-ups, antenatal care, wound care, family planning and counseling and other basic

services that previously they might have had to walk three hours to access!"

**Ursula Myles**, GM of **Takeda**, offers a similar instinct for multinationalism that goes far beyond her firm freeing up capacity for the production of the COVID-19 vaccine with **Moderna** and with **J&J**. "We partner with a number of organizations in Africa, such as the **International Cancer Alliance**, looking to raise awareness on non-communicable diseases," says Myles. "Our efforts around NCD are a global issue. Hypertension is underdiagnosed and often not adequately managed, and it's unfortunate that it happens across the country and continent. There are challenges in every market, from lack of information, to what they eat, to cultural barriers." Takeda's consortium reaches every country on the continent, but Myles highlights one of the biggest, **Blueprints for Innovative Healthcare Access** in Kenya, as well as expansions throughout Tanzania and Ghana that focus not only on the disease itself, but on education of healthcare professionals and on earlier diagnosis.



"We have one strategy, one concept for the group, but each local region's implementation differs," says **Dr. Ronnie van der Merwe**, CEO at **Mediclinic**. "In Switzerland, we partner with **Migros**, the country's biggest wholesaler, across many service lines. Together we established **MedBase**, a series of primary care and consultation clinics offering radiology and lab services; Mediclinic runs the radiology and lab services, and Migros runs the consultations."



**Barnaby McKay**, MD for **Astellas**, knows first hand about international collaboration: having been appointed to South Africa from his previous role in the Middle East, he was based in Dubai for the first five months. "I was used to routinely communicating with people in Algeria, Morocco, Lebanon, etc.," McKay explains. "But to take on a local affiliate role from a distance when all our stakeholders are in one country—except me—was a new experience."



"We would have never managed to create vaccines as quickly as we did without collaboration and partnerships within the sector," says **Rhulani Nhlani**, CM for **Pfizer** and **President of IPASA**. "All I can say is that the Pfizer BioNTech vaccine resulted from collaboration, as was the AstraZeneca partnership with Oxford University. There are many more examples to prove my point."





For over 130 years MSD has been inventing for life, bringing forward medicines and vaccines for many of the world's most challenging diseases in pursuit of our mission to save and improve lives.

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That is why, since 2013, in partnership with GAVI, the Vaccine Alliance, we have been supporting national efforts across sub-Saharan Africa to vaccinate girls between the ages of 9 to 13 years old against the Human papillomavirus (HPV) - one of the leading causes of cervical cancer.

Today, with programmes in over 14 countries across the continent and growing, we continue to make a meaningful contribution towards the World Health Organization's Cervical Cancer Elimination Strategy which aims to have 90% of girls vaccinated against HPV by 2030.

# THINK GLOBAL, ACT LOCAL



*"We donated approximately 13 million rand to various organizations in the country," says Shelley Horner, CEO of Novartis South Africa.*



But beyond relieving some of the hardest-hit households with PPE or food parcels, "we're partnering on an ongoing basis with the **Clicks Helping Hand Trust**," adds Horner, "through which we have donated over 9,000 reusable sanitary pads for low-income families in the greater Gauteng area, benefitting around 6,000 girls during the pandemic."

Other than philanthropic contributions, Novartis developed strategic partnerships to enhance access, and "very successfully created a digital environment for our field force through technology, launching new drugs virtually in the country using Zoom, webinars, MS Teams or other platforms," Horner says. *"We upskilled our field force and our CRA's, who engaged directly with patients and healthcare professionals. Our clinical trials were never once at risk during the pandemic, thanks to those partnerships."*



*"We can't do it on our own,"* agrees **Zwelethu Bashman, MD of MSD for South Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa**. "We partner with community-based organizations as well as nurse-run institutions within the communities, and we take things a step further by upskilling with technology and social media," Bashman explains, citing the example of a recent HPV campaign where a single doctor reached 16,000 participants.

*"We must make a greater effort to engage with the end customers,"* Bashman insists, "to share information and education and not always leave our health up to Dr. Google!"



**Abofele Khoele** faced a unique challenge as MD for **Origanon**: not only was the company spun off from MSD in the middle of the pandemic, Khoele helmed the women's health specialist totally remotely. *"Collaboration is vital, and as a 2021 startup we leverage technology in our conti-*

*nent where infrastructure does not always allow us to access remote areas,"* Khoele says. "We are very focused on e-health and fem-tech and we believe these two will transform the future of healthcare delivery in Africa."

*"At a local level, it's paramount to care for my team,"* says **Bertrand Chane-Sam of Sandoz**. "It is through them that we are able to deliver our products and ensure business continuity," Chane-Sam adds, including recent partnerships to fill gaps in vaccine-manufacturing capacity. "Our CEO, Richard Saynor, has also committed to freezing prices of certain vital medicines since the beginning of 2020."



Globally, **Clinigen's** strategy is to approach specific patients and provide access to medication that isn't available in a given market. "Our business is to reach out to small biotech companies and partner with them," says **MD Carel Bouwer**. "We do the distribution and supply chain, give them medical support, quality support and pharmacovigilance support," Bouwer explains. "We ensure the development of the product and that it reaches the customers; we have agreements to provide the medications and access to those treatments, approaching both new products and old products with new registrations."



*"We started out with a very simple vision: to bridge Western science and African need,"* says **Skhumbuzo Ngozwana, CEO of Kiara Health**. "We partnered with the people who developed ventilators, and we have two partnerships with locally developed products. We want to meet the need with quality and the demand with healthcare products in aid of the health of South Africans," says Ngozwana, and adds "ultimately we see ourselves as a player that can play a small but meaningful role in advancing the agenda of localization and local innovation."



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# STRONGER TOGETHER



*"It is always harder to win on our own,"* admits **Mia Louw of Guerbet South Africa**. *"Being a small team we are very agile and work with a collaborative mindset, which is one of the building blocks of our DNA."*

*"We are a family-owned company, and teamwork prevails over individual work—we need all parts to collaborate and not work as a silo."*

Because the imaging industry is relatively small and highly competitive, Louw says that collaboration can sometimes be challenging—but it does exist, as evidenced with Guerbet's relationships with Philips and Siemens, installing TT and MRIs. She hopes that policymakers can be persuaded to invest toward disease prevention and access to medicine. "These are fundamen-

tal issues," Louw says. "A strong case should be made in terms of the promotion of health as a basic human right and as a means to contribute to poverty alleviation and economic stability."

"95% of our people are back," says **Anthony Diack, MD of DSV Healthcare**, with some relief: *"I think people are more innovative when working together; solutions are easier to come by in face to face situations."*



Three quarters of Diack's 1450-person workforce are in warehouse operations or are driving staff and didn't have the luxury of working from home, yet only 16% of his staff were in the office. "This has to some extent tested our managers, as managing remotely means a different mindset," Diack adds. "Initially, it was quite difficult, and even if our people have learned the necessary skillset, in the long term I want everybody back!"

## HEALTH PARTNERSHIPS

**106** number of health partnerships in South Africa

## TYPES OF HEALTH PARTNERSHIPS IN AFRICA

**145** increase availability of treatment

**170** address health system infrastructure of which...

**149** prevent the spread of diseases

**144** ...focus on training a health workforce

**87** develop new treatments for diseases

## TOP 5 DISEASE AREAS IN AFRICA



- 47** Neglected tropical diseases (NTDs)
- 34** Vaccine preventable diseases
- 127** Infectious diseases
- 105** Women & children's health
- 88** Non-communicable diseases (NCDs)

Source: IFPMA



## Better Health, Brighter Future

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## QUICK TIPS: ALL TOGETHER NOW

Executives share their wisdom on going “Back to the Future”—how combining human and machine resources will get us working better together in a post-pandemic world.

**Ursula Myles, GM of Takeda:** *“An important lesson learnt internally was to stay connected, to pivot to become more digital savvy, have information available, and keep all lines of communication open. Embracing digital platforms and various ways of communications was key for business continuity but to also make sure that our people, patients and customers continued to feel supported.”*



**Shelley Horner Country President NOVARTIS SA:** *“The world has changed, we have to be flexible, agile, resilient and learn to be digital savvy and to engage with a virtual ecosystem. Novartis has a company culture with three important legs, i) being inspired, ii) being curious and iii) being unbossed. The integration of technology will go hand in hand with the culture we offer, culture that has grown in importance due to the hybrid artificial digital environment we all have had to adapt to. The culture gives us a sense of belonging.”*



**Eyong Ebai, General Manager of Sub-Saharan Africa GE Healthcare:** *“The ability to bring in human or technical resources or components equipment from overseas cannot be taken for granted, and some formal local expertise is necessary to survive. The pandemic taught a lot of companies that localization strategy is critical for long term success. Another lesson was in resilience — and the ability for teams to work together as a family to overcome tremendous obstacles. I am out there with my teams, looking for solutions collectively. And despite being very stressful, being in a challenging situation was my element, having to change, pivot and adjust to doing things differently.”*



**Ivan and Lynette Saltzman, Dis-Chem:** *“It’s about rolling up your*



*sleeves and doing the best you can in a changing environment! The situation is changing constantly, so basically you have to navigate it as it comes—the making and breaking of rules, and deal with all that must be dealt with when it comes to South African business, the Department of Health, and the Director General of Health.”*

**Sandra Orta, GM for Roche Diagnostics:** *“We had to act very quickly and all together – no one alone could handle the pandemic – and we need everyone: the government, the private sector, suppliers, etc., not competing but each of us bringing our best in aid of the country. From March 1st to April 14th, we gained regulatory approval for our PCR test, with other suppliers getting support soon after. We couldn’t have done it alone. We needed a lab to validate the tests, SAHPRA, and a solid supply chain. It was not easy to get products in, and what we got was never enough, as resources went to other countries as well. Collaboration was fundamental.”*



**Jonathan Broomberg, CEO of Vitality Health International:** *“We did a huge amount of ground work in communication, on vaccination, on modeling, and on data collection. There has been an emerging trend around the relevance and utilization of health data pools: the emergence of Big Data insights and related digital engagement has been accelerated by Covid.”*



**Dr. Ryan Noach, CEO of Discovery Health:** *“Early in the pandemic, using our rich internal data sources complemented with national and international data, we developed measures and dashboards to closely track the COVID-19 evolution. The dashboard is now released daily. It has become visible and traveled all over South Africa in both healthcare and non-healthcare*



*organizations. The dashboard is extensive, measuring all the elements of Covid-19 with information per province, per region; we look at new infections, hospital admissions, severe illness and mortality. We are constantly iterating and building on this, as we now enter the phase of measuring and managing vaccination. We are closely tracking the non-Covid related healthcare utilization, because Covid-19 has effectively squeezed out other parts of the healthcare system. Aside from the usual measures of productivity and health of our people, we have all these added complexities of tracking epidemic diseases which we do now on a day-to-day basis.”*

**If you had to create a Master in Pandemic Administration which skills would you consider mandatory?**



*“Empathy, adaptability and communication. 2020 and 2021 have been years of learning for us all, years where we had to change our business models and adapt to working virtually. From 2020 onwards, our customers and stakeholders have different expectations and a different understanding of what is possible. Going forward, I see a hybrid model with a combination of virtual and face-to-face interactions becoming the norm,”* says **Rhulani Nhlani, CM for Pfizer**

*“Critical thinking and agility. Critical thinking allows to dissect problems and gives a person the ability to take a step back and think through problems considering both the positive and negative impact in an ecosystem and track that impact to see if the potential outcome is aligned with what the solution aims at. Secondly, agility: we have gone too far developing a new muscle and we are in a far better place than we were 18 months ago,”* shares **Zwelethu Bashman from MSD South Africa**

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# A Billion For A Billion

The future of the world is linked to the future of Africa and this tech giant is investing in it to enable startup successes.

BY PAULA SLIER AND SASHA STAR

**G**OOGLE ANNOUNCED IN EARLY OCTOBER THAT it would be investing \$1 billion into Africa over the next five years. This is to focus on improving connectivity and enable startups to flourish. The move is hardly the first but a reaffirmation of its commitment in Africa which it has been a part of for 14 years.

“If you look at sub-Saharan Africa, it’s home to 1.1 billion people, most of them very, very young. But only about 300 million people use the Internet on a regular basis,” reveals Google’s sub-Saharan Africa Managing Director, Nitin Gajria. “So there’s about 800 million people that have never experienced its power. Our goal with this billion-dollar investment is really to play some role in hopefully building a vibrant Internet ecosystem on the continent.”

In Gajria’s view, a key aspect of the ecosystem is emerging startups and the impact they can make. “I believe that no-one is better placed to solve some of Africa’s most profound challenges than young startup founders, young developers and the startup community in general.”

One of the startups that Google has taken under its digital wing is Food For Mzansi. The initiative, which recently turned three, focuses on South Africa’s agriculture sector, offering a platform for farmers to “grow” their communities by sharing their stories, news, opinions, career opportunities, and even recipes.

“We wanted to create a citizen journalist network — to upskill people and train them in basically everything from media ethics, to how to get stories and tell stories,” explains co-founder Kobus Louwrens.

The tech company facilitated the Sinelizwi remote training program that equipped 62 journalists with the skills and mentorship required to find sources and develop stories.

Although it began as an in-person workshop in the rural Eastern Cape province, like many projects, it was forced online by the Covid-19 pandemic and was thereafter conducted over WhatsApp.

“We are still fairly young in terms of our state of development and Google coming aboard with support and funding definitely fast-tracked that for us,” Louwrens shares.

“There was a vast information exchange and our team received a lot of experience in regards to structuring a much more sustainable project than I think would have been possible without the input from those experts.”

Gidi Mobile is another startup that Google has identified as



Tunji Adegbesan, Founder of Gidi Mobile

improving the lives of those on the continent.

The Nigerian startup enables low-income students to access online learning through its app, allowing them to attend classes on a variety of subjects and test their understanding through game-like modules.

“In the West, education has traditionally been the thing that has helped people grow and lift them up. The problem we have in the developing world is that the people who have the greatest need to be lifted up are precisely the people who cannot afford quality education,” states founder Tunji Adegbesan who has been teaching teenagers since he was one himself.

Gidi now has access to expertise and has helped to create STEM content that relies on gaming technology, rather than conventional learning. By participating in tournaments and quests, users find themselves engaging with the subject matter and actually having fun doing so.

While a wealth of exciting ideas are springing forth from Africa’s depths, real challenges still stand in the way of ensuring that all citizens can benefit from them.

“There remain challenges with connectivity — whether it’s the cost of a smartphone, network coverage, data speeds, data costs — these are all real, tangible, meaningful challenges that the lay person on the street faces,” Gajria admits.

Google is laying the Equiano subsea cable along the west coast of Africa.

As Gajria states, “Anyone who is looking at Africa has to realize the potential and opportunity that exists. I can’t help but believe that the future of the world is inextricably linked to the future of the continent.” **P**

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# ‘I Haven’t Seen A Day Of Peace In My Life’

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Faced with an uncertain present, women and girls in Afghanistan hope the new Taliban regime will ease the restrictions on them and that the international community will intervene. For now, their only option is to stay strong and reconcile their dreams with the current reality.

BY PAULA SLIER WITH ADDITIONAL REPORTING BY SASHA STAR



Afghan women on a street in Ghazni City in the province of Ghazni, on November 13, 2021

**I**N A CRUMBLING ONE-ROOM APARTMENT IN Kabul's Old City, two 20-something sisters and their 45-year-old mother are smoking cannabis laced with heroin. They don't look up as we enter awkwardly, following our translator to sit on the far end of the carpet.

I count eight children, the youngest of whom is just three years old. Much to the amusement of the smoking women, one of their daughters, a 12-year-old, takes a few puffs of a discarded joint to show us that she too knows how to smoke.

The Chindawol neighborhood was once home to educated and elite Afghans. But over the years since the Soviets invaded Afghanistan in late December 1979, its streets and alleyways have been swarmed by mostly illiterate and low-skilled people.

There is no central sewage system and the putrid smell of waste drips from tired buildings. Outside, donkeys gnaw on bits of trash lying in the streets and snotty-nosed children dip buckets into dirty water that runs down the sandy pavements. They use the filthy liquid to wash parked cars in a bid to earn a few pennies. Not one traffic light works in the country's capital city, Kabul.

The older woman whose lined face resembles that of an 80-year-old, opens a sack of rice riddled with mice droppings that a neighbor gave them. The wide-eyed children stare. The translator explains they haven't eaten for four days. As I wrap up the interview, the 12-year-old whispers in a choked voice that her mother tried to sell her. Raw with pain, she spits out the words. She recalls how her mother took her to the bazaar and after the daughter understood what was happening, she started screaming. It drew the attention of an old man who scolded her mother,

**In a barefaced attempt to survive, a growing number of families are choosing to sell their children.**

gave her a few dollars and sent them home. Now as long as the girl spends her days going from house-to-house begging, her mother has promised not to sell her. She then stretches out her palm to me...

Sadly, this story is not that uncommon.

Since the capture of Afghanistan in August by the Taliban, a fundamentalist political and military movement, the situation in the country has reportedly deteriorated by



“

**I've had a lot of personal losses over the past 40 years of war, but I've never been as hopeless and helpless as I am right now.**

– Naheed Samadi Bahram

the day. According to the United Nations, the new regime doesn't have the funds to provide food and other basic essentials to the population.

The result is that more than half – a record 22.8 million people – will go hungry. In a barefaced attempt to survive, a growing number of families are choosing to sell their children. The mother of the 12-year-old had hoped to receive \$300 for her daughter.

This is the second time the Taliban is in power in Afghanistan. The group first seized control in 1996 from the retreating Soviet army. They were ousted five years later with the arrival of American and NATO troops. History, many fear, is about to repeat itself.

Locals remember only too clearly the repression they faced under the Taliban then. Women were not allowed to work, study or appear in public without fully covering their body and accompanied by male escorts. Those who violated the organization's strict interpretation of Islamic law were imprisoned, publicly flogged and even executed.

Naheed Samadi Bahram was born in Soviet-occupied



“

**I think that at the end of the day they are pragmatic and they will see the need to allow women into parts of society and parts of public life. But I also think that they will keep a tight grip on things and that is disturbing and unfortunate and violates human rights.**

– Devon Cone, senior advocate at Refugees International

Afghanistan. When she was 10 years old, an explosion in Kabul killed her mother. She and her family fled to neighboring Pakistan where, by the age of 18, she was teaching English to Afghan women in Peshawar.

Today, she heads the New York office of the non-profit Women for Afghan Women, the largest women's rights organization in the world catering to Afghan citizens. If anyone understands the life of a refugee, it is her.

“I haven't seen a day of peace in my life,” reflects Samadi Bahram. “I've had a lot of personal losses over the past 40 years of war, but I've never been as hopeless and helpless as I am right now. And it's not just me. I've talked with many Afghans and they all feel the same way. People haven't been able to access their money in the bank. Girls are not being allowed to go to school. The boys who attend, don't even study for an hour because the majority of teachers are female and they're not allowed to teach. All female doctors, engineers, attorneys and judges have to stay at home. It's really heart-breaking. And it's

also heart-breaking that the world is quiet. There is a humanitarian crisis in the country and nobody is talking about it.”

Samadi Bahram fears she'll risk the safety of her staff in Afghanistan if she says too much. Despite desperately trying to get them out of the country before the Taliban's deadline for evacuations expired, she failed.

“We tried very hard and there were a few times that we had planes at the airport waiting for them. Our staff were outside the airport gates in buses. But nobody opened the gates for them. One time our staff waited on the buses for about 27 hours.”

Now the Taliban is back and despite branding itself as the “new Taliban”, its interim cabinet is comprised entirely of men. The entity decreed that all working women and female students must stay at home until it's deemed “safe” for them to venture out. Claiming it's only a temporary measure, the group still has to set out a timeline for when the situation will change.

As a result of the law, thousands of Afghan women have gone into hiding for fear of retribution. Despite announcing amnesty for all former government workers, one of the first things that the Taliban did was to open prisons across the country.

Female judges are now amongst those receiving daily death threats from the men they once incarcerated. The irony of them being stuck at home while the criminals they put away roam free is not lost.

What does the future hold for Afghan women, at least 80% of whom don't even have identification documents. After all, it wasn't until 2020 that the government approved a law allowing Afghan women to list their names on their children's birth certificates.

“It's very difficult for women to get out of Afghanistan. Air travel is virtually impossible for most of them and right now land travel is not consistent. Different provinces are being run by different Taliban leaders and restrictions are being implemented in different ways,” says Devon Cone, senior advocate at Refugees International, an independent humanitarian organization advocating for better support for displaced and stateless people. Cone authored a report issued in October in which she suggested that while the international community needs to understand the Taliban's restrictions on women, frontline staff need to be female if they are actually to reach Afghan women.

“Let's say a woman wants to get an ID or a passport. You think she's going to approach a Taliban office, especially if she's trying to escape an abusive family? It's just not feasible...”

“I do think, though, that as time goes on and the dust settles, the Taliban will recognize that if you only allow a woman to see a female doctor but you don’t allow women to work, then women are not going to get healthcare and they are going to suffer. And if you don’t allow women to go to school, they will not be educated to be those doctors in the future.”

While Cone envisions the humanitarian situation getting worse, she thinks that the Taliban might ease their restrictions on women to allow the society to function.

“There’s a domino effect with all these decisions that the Taliban are making. I think that at the end of the day they are pragmatic and they will see the need to allow women into parts of society and parts of public life. But I also think that they will keep a tight grip on things and that is disturbing and unfortunate and violates human rights.”

No one should be too surprised by the Taliban’s return to power. Even after the group’s ousting in 2001, its supporters, especially those in rural areas, never budged. The American strategy to strengthen Afghan security forces, built and trained over two decades at a cost of \$83 million, failed miserably.

The former head of a local radio station who has gone into hiding and asked for his name not to be used, said the solution would have been for the United States to send less troops to Afghanistan and let them police the borders to prevent supplies reaching the Taliban especially from Pakistan and Iran. All the money directed to security would have been better spent helping villagers build up their own defense systems.

I remember once visiting an American air-force base where the foreign pilot was boasting about training Afghan colleagues and how much their efforts were appreciated by the local population. Later, two Afghan pilots confessed they couldn’t wait for the Americans to leave.

But some of that American influence lingers. An estimated 11 million Afghan females are under the age of 25 and grew up believing they could create a future for themselves on their own terms.

“They will need to figure out how much they should push back against the Taliban and how much they need to submit to some of the restrictions. Reconciling their hopes and dreams with the current reality is their biggest challenge,” points out Cone.

One of those young women is Shabnam Mobarez, the captain of the Afghanistan women’s national football team. She learned to play football with boys in the streets without her parents knowing and, after her family emigrated to



**“It just seems like it’s going to turn into darkness...  
– Shabnam Mobarez, captain of the Afghanistan women’s national football team**

Denmark, was invited to play for the national side. But she declined, choosing instead to represent her native country.

The Afghan squad was formed in 2007 and gave Mobarez and her friends a sense of power. But the tables have turned and the 26-year-old now feels powerless to reassure her teammates that everything will be alright.

After the Taliban took over, Mobarez urged the world football governing body, FIFA, to intervene and save those players who had gone into hiding for fear that they would be killed. Many were eventually evacuated to Australia.

“It just breaks my heart that they were fighting through so many small battles; now it’s almost like the game is over. As I see it right now there is a very small amount of light and it seems like it’s always going out. It just seems like it’s going to turn into darkness for the women of Afghanistan. They will be forced to cover up themselves from top to toe in black. That’s my image for the Afghan woman – dark and black.”

Mobarez admits to feeling a sense of guilt that she was able to leave Afghanistan all those years ago, but she still draws strength from the courageous women left behind.

“I think the women in Afghanistan are made of stone and they really stand up for themselves. They realize that if they don’t, they won’t be able to dream or give an image of a strong woman to their daughters. That’s bravery for me. That’s even braver than a soldier in war.”<sup>1</sup>



Opibus' fleet of electric motorcycles  
outside its Nairobi plant

# Electric Dreams: East Africa On The Move

Electric Vehicles (EV) are fast becoming a mainstay of daily commutes around the world. From battery-powered vehicles to electric public buses, we are on the precipice of a revolution in the automotive industry. Africa is not excluded in this new movement with burgeoning sectors looking to change the way African cities move – and breathe! FORBES AFRICA looks at how the EV market is moving in East Africa.

BY MARIE SHABAYA

**I**N THE QUIET TOWN OF RUIRU, IN KIAMBU COUNTY, 15 miles east of Nairobi, a quiet revolution is underway. Fika Mobility, a startup within Kenya's budding electric vehicle sector, has been assembling electric motorcycles there for almost two years now. These early prototypes are currently in use around the town and parts of Nairobi, where *boda boda*, commuter and freight motorbike riders, are seeing massive changes to their bottomline due to the energy efficiency of the electric bikes.

“If you look at what *boda* riders take home, they actually work 12-15 hour days... it's very competitive and they take very little home. I only began to appreciate this when I started our research, two years ago. We realized that one of the reasons for that was increasing fuel prices and... huge maintenance costs for the engine. Going with an EV [motorcycle] they are immediately saving upwards of 40% of petrol and even more on maintenance,” says Rishi Kohli, CEO and one of the founders of Fika Mobility.

Born out of a passion to make an impact in all his ventures, as has been the theme of Kohli's entrepreneurial career, Fika Mobility is on the road to doing just that. His bikes are renewable end-to-end, with solar-powered charging stations taking advantage of Kenya's sunlight hours. They cost approximately \$1,200, equivalent in price to local fuel-powered alternatives and are inclusive of a battery pack which can be swapped, for even more efficiency for the fast-moving *boda* business, at one of their branded charging stations.

As this global sector develops, Africa is still lagging behind but the movement is promising.

Countless countries within the continent rely on used car imports, most of which are at least seven years or older. The age of these vehicles has contributed to rising air pollution in Africa's cities.

This is costly both for health and economic growth with a recent United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) estimating that cities, across the continent, are losing an estimated 2.7% of GDP,

Photos supplied



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**From there, we started working with governments on what kind of policies we need to encourage cleaner, more efficient vehicles including electric mobility.**

– Jane Akumu, Programme Officer at UNEP’s Sustainability Mobility Unity

annually, due to rising fuel emissions. At the same time, worsening air pollution has caused over 176,000 deaths per year, according to a 2012 report from the World Health Organization.

Another concern is policy development within the sector. According to Jane Akumu, Programme Officer at UNEP’s Sustainability Mobility Unity, there are efforts underway to aid the transition to better fuel economy across the region.

“We’ve been supporting the sub-region since 2010 mainly from one of the projects that we have as part of the Global Fuel Economy initiative to support countries to incentivize the import of more efficient vehicles. We support countries like Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda... to look at what kind of vehicles were being imported into that region... many of them were very old, some of them over 20 years old being imported into the region. From there we started working with governments on what kind of policies we need to encourage cleaner, more efficient vehicles including electric mobility.”

This included a collaboration with Kenya’s industrial standards bureau, KEBS, to spell out some early policy standards for the importation of some of these vehicles as well as those manufactured within the country. This movement also included the licensing of local manufacturers within the EV sector to convert fuel buses, traditionally used in the tourism industry, to electric power.

One of the two companies certified to do this in early 2020 was Opibus, a Swedish-owned EV company based in the heart of Nairobi’s industrial district.

Founded in 2017, the company has a bold vision for African commuters, placing themselves in the heart of the market just as it was taking off. With a goal to make EVs more accessible to mass market consumers, Opibus has a vision to lower costs and simplify deployment for these vehicles, across Africa. However, for now, their impact is mostly felt in East Africa.

“We have a test production line, which is the first iteration of [our] production lines... we have conversion systems which we are

implementing now in public transport and commercial vehicles, we go for them because of their high initial impact which motivates the high initial costs [of conversion]. We take old vehicles and take out the engine and the fuel tank and replace it with a large battery and control system at the front and replace batteries where the fuel tank was. This gives older used vehicles a new cleaner, efficient and cost-effective life,” says Albin Wilson, Chief Marketing Officer at Opibus.

The company, like Fika Mobility, also seized on the growing opportunity for electric motorbikes in the East African market, using their expertise in conversion technology to add to their product line. Hot off the heels of the start of COP26, Opibus announced the closure of a funding round that raised \$75 million, the largest investment seen in sub-Saharan Africa’s still growing EV sector, to date. Some of that fund will bolster production of their motorcycle range which might set them on the road to being a leader within that market segment.

“We’ve launched a total of 170 [motorbikes], in pilots, and we’re looking to supplement [production] with the new funding we’ve recently raised,” he says.

However, as it currently stands, despite ongoing upward mobility for the sector, policy bottlenecks, both at the port and within the market, may hinder future growth. This is the view Alexander Koerner, Programme Officer at UNEP Sustainability Unit, takes.

“There are areas of regulation that need to be updated in order to incentivize this market. These markets need to be ready to receive these vehicles. There are very simple things, for example, the paperwork you need to fill when you import a vehicle that needs to be adapted to electric vehicles. Depending on how the countries are taxing these vehicles, there needs to be a tax base like a customs value for EV, based on realistic values from the origin country. These need to be based on their country of origin... to determine the value [of tax],” he explains.

Outside of customs regulations, he also notes other aspects that would allow for an enabling policy environment. At the higher-level, this means policymakers ruling on the types of EVs that they would want on their country’s roads, infrastructure and regulation on charging, and matching these to the standards in the country of origin for imported vehicles.

However, the onus isn’t just on policymakers alone to make this work. Returning to Kohli, and his vision for electric motorbikes in Kenya, he reveals that private sector players also must have a say in how the sector should be regulated as it grows.

“This whole thing has to come [together] as a circle. There has to be alignment from everybody; us, as operators, private and public sector [as well]... and I think we will make traction and [change] will come,” he says.

On that note, East Africa’s EV sector looks to be growing from boom to boom, regardless of policy barriers and the strained economic environment that the Covid-19 pandemic has ushered in. Looking forward, if all things stay constant, it might even shape up to be the new darling of investors across the continent and the world for years to come. **P**

# The Future In Motion

The six-month Expo 2020 bringing together 192 countries to Dubai that opened on October 1 is exploring opportunities for partnerships between Africa and the Middle East. Get a load of barista bots that make coffee and tell jokes, do calligraphy or tai-chi, and ones that bring Beethoven's work to life through performance.

BY NAFISA AKABOR

**A** **S EXPO 2020 DUBAI ENTHRALS** the world with the theme *Connecting Minds and Creating the Future* through three main districts: sustainability, mobility, and opportunity, in the glistening Middle Eastern city in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), how is Africa a part?

The African Union (AU) took to the stage in October when the event opened focusing on Disaster Risk and Reduction to promote its implementation of Agenda 2063, the continent's master plan to transform into a global powerhouse of the future.

Dr Levi Uche Madueke, the AU's Expo Commissioner General, said at the official event that the engagement will throw light on health, infrastructure and industrialization, ICT, gender, security and governance, trade and investment, agriculture, and more.

Madueke added that it offers the opportunity to showcase the continent's commitment to sustainable development aligning with the AU agenda, as well as explore potential partnerships required for the continent's economic transformation.

"Our message is simple: Africa is ready and open for business. We are going to utilize this platform to tell the African story to the world the way it really is and project the Africa we want through the marketing of our Agenda 2063 and what it entails."

He added that the AU wants to position Africa as a place for secure investment, with a view to fulfilling the mandate of its agenda, and the possibility of even hosting an edition of the World Expo.

Meanwhile, South Africa is being showcased under the 'Think South Africa, Think Opportunity' theme, focused on job creation and economic growth, led by the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition, along with government



**For the first time in the 170-year history of World Expos, every African nation is participating, each with its own pavilion, while the African Union is also hosting its own stage at Expo 2020.**

stakeholders, private and business sectors, and educational institutions.

South Africa is in the Opportunity District. According to the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS), startup businesses representing fintech, creatives, health, agro-processing, the circular economy, green energy and other sectors are traveling to the expo to connect with global investors to unlock business opportunities.

The expo will showcase a range of new technologies.

Expect to see bots serving food to guests, barista bots making coffee and telling jokes, doing calligraphy or tai-chi, and ones that bring Beethoven’s work to life.

There will also be patrol-bots with facial recognition and real-time thermo cameras to safeguard areas and remind guests to observe social distancing.

The Mobility District is centered around autonomous vehicles, space exploration, the merging of physical and virtual worlds, and a 330m long mobility track in action.

A new tech that launched at the expo is by e-hailing service Hala that predicts how many taxis are needed and dispatches them automatically to the site, to “optimally balance supply and demand”. The result is visitors being able to book a taxi via an app with no waiting times.

The pavilion also features smart cities brought together through

AI, big data, robotics, machine learning and autonomous transport.

Singapore, a city that ranked number one globally on the Institute for Management Development’s Smart City Index

2020, is showcasing a 1,550m<sup>2</sup> sustainable ‘city in nature’ with a self-sufficient ecosystem to achieve net-zero energy over six months at the expo, using solar panels, the management of energy and desalination of saline groundwater.

Commissioner-General of the Singapore pavilion, Larry Ng, said at the event that the Covid-19 pandemic has shown how quickly it can change the way people live, work and play.

“In the face of critical challenges and disruptions facing the world today, it’s important for nations to come together and find a way forward to build cities that sensitively adapt to tomorrow’s challenges.”

Apart from tech, the future of travel is being showcased by the UAE’s national carrier Emirates, offering visitors an immersive onboard experience including virtual reality and multi-sensory installations. It features tech for its next-gen aircraft, robotic arms, the advances made for engine propulsions and thrust to reduce emissions, and the science of flight.

The future is truly being set in motion in this dusty emirate. **F**

Photos by GIUSEPPE CACACE/AFP via Getty Images

# OUT OF

Is the metaverse the future of the internet? It's already here with Big Tech banking on it, and it just might unlock untold economic opportunities for Africa.

BY TIANA CLINE

# THIS WORLD

**“IT FEELS LIKE SCI-FI WHEN WE TALK ABOUT** it. If you think about the internet that we look at, the metaverse is going to be an internet that we are inside of,” says Derya Matras, Facebook’s Vice President for Africa, the Middle East and Turkey.

“Over the last few years, we’ve been observing social communication getting more and more immersive. I remember being in high school and dreaming of having a phone that I could take with me everywhere so I could talk to my best friend. Even being able to talk to my parents over video felt like sci-fi twenty years ago. It’s important that we observe where the technology is moving already.”

Matras explains that the metaverse will be made up of a set of digital experiences that seamlessly interconnect. A deeper and wider virtual reality (VR) that is far more than social media and video games. This is one of the reasons Facebook changed its company name to Meta at the end of October 2021.

“Facebook is primarily known as a social media company but we actually define ourselves as a tech company that has the mission of connecting people and businesses. As social technology evolves, we will also,” she says. “Obviously, the metaverse is not there yet and it’s going to take a good ten years to build it all together as an industry.”



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**The metaverse is going to give a lot of opportunities to Africa but the connectivity has to be there.**

— Derya Matras

Matras believes that the metaverse has the potential to unlock huge economic opportunities for Africa. As a company, Facebook has already made some significant investments into bringing more affordable broadband to the continent. They’re in the process of building 2Africa, the longest undersea cable in the world which will effectively connect three continents – Africa, Europe and

Asia (with plans of going live in 2023).

“The metaverse is going to give a lot of opportunities to Africa but the connectivity has to be there. And it is the responsibility of tech players like Facebook and telecom operators and governments to build that collectively,” says Matras. While Facebook, as a social media platform, isn’t going anywhere, what excites Matras the most about the metaverse is its educational implications.

Immersive learning through the use of VR is a field that Louise Claassen, an executive fellow at Henley Business School Africa, is already working on. (And outside of the business school, she also spends a lot of time in AltspaceVR, a social VR platform acquired by Microsoft in 2017.)

“For decades, people have been immersed into the virtual reality space but as individuals. What is happening now is increasingly, we’re seeing multi-user VR environments,” she explains. While independent VR social spaces have been in existence for a number of years – many of which already have vibrant, thriving communities – people are now looking into these environments as business tools and in the med-tech space. Research out of the University of Maryland, for example, showed that VR not only increases memory retention, but when used as a learning tool could

potentially treat memory-related disorders like Alzheimer’s.

“One of the qualities we have in virtual reality is embodiment, that sense of being present in a different environment. Your body is responding to where your mind believes that you are. There are all sorts of very interesting opportunities that this convergence into the metaverse present,” says Claassen. At Henley, Claassen works with VR by creating rich immersive experiences for her students and in particular, global case studies that transport them to different places to understand different economies: “From a business school perspective, we believe that it’s important for leaders to have well-developed cultural intelligence and they can only do that if they travel. While physically visiting and being immersed in different contexts still has tremendous merit, what virtual reality does is it democratizes that process so more students can go to more locations more frequently.”

What the metaverse can bring to education (and many other sectors) is that immersive experience at the click of a button. A digital twin where data is not only visualized, but augmented.

“When we can see each other move in a three-dimensional space, we decode that information in a very different way and that’s very powerful,” says Claassen, “it give us a much more dynamic experience of the world which is pretty much what the metaverse offers, on scale.” 

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Increasingly,  
we’re seeing  
multi-user VR  
environments.

– Louise Claassen

Photos supplied

## NFTs: ‘This Is Only The Beginning’



Zhulik the Meebit

In an internet-enabled virtual world, there needs to be a way to own digital items. Non-fungible tokens (NFTs) are already proving this is possible. Locally, the debut collection from artist Norman Catherine fetched \$53,000 at Africarare, the first South African VR metaverse. In November 2021, Nigeria’s contemporary art fair

partnered with Superrare to showcase digital works by African artists such as Linda Dounia and Rendani Nemakhavhani.

Collecting NFTs is becoming increasingly popular but what if you could use something you’ve bought online? Created by Larva Labs, Meebits are one of the first NFT collections to be created as 3D avatars. Avatars are an important part of the metaverse because they’re what will ultimately represent a person, digitally. Microsoft, for example, is adding 3D virtual avatars to Mesh, their new collaborative platform which will enable mixed realities within Teams, as part of their metaverse strategy.

When the collection of (approximately 20,000 different) Meebits launched in May, it sold out in six hours. And to date, the most expensive Meebit has been sold for \$222.9K.

“Meebits are algorithmically generated 3D characters linked to NFTs on the Ethereum blockchain. They are rendered in voxels (or pixels with volume) similar to characters from popular games such as Minecraft or Roblox. You can use these NFT characters as metaverse avatars, or in games, and virtual reality,” explains Zhulik the Meebit. “If you purchase a Meebit, you get the 3D model. You can then take the 3D model and animate the avatar in real time using VR equipment such as a headset and controllers or a full body suit.” Because Meebits have utility as a 3D avatar, they can be used in various ways which has only added to their growing popularity. “For the first time, we have true digital ownership and I believe we are going to see an even bigger wave of creativity and innovation in intellectual property. The exciting thing about NFTs is that this is only the beginning.”



# The Community Platform



Patients are screened and register to receive their Covid-19 vaccinations aboard the Transvaco train in East London, October 8

In vast and varied rural South Africa, Covid-19 vaccines are making their way to the people by rail. The Transvaco train is a moving vaccine station delivering virus protection to communities beyond.

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY YESHIEL PANCHIA

**O**N THE N6 highway in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa, towards the coastal city of East London, the flat dry expanse of the highveld begins to give way to rolling hills along the shoreline.

The second largest province in the country at over 65,000 square miles, it's of a size that you can't easily cover on four wheels.

Across an occasional bridge, far on the horizon, locomotives shimmer, chugging along into the rural landscapes, carrying goods and logistical services into some of South Africa's remotest parts.

One such trainset, christened Transvaco, is a health innovation on rails.

At the time that FORBES AFRICA visited in October, it was parked in the East London central train station and providing a unique service – vaccination against Covid-19 to people who can't otherwise access them.

“The Transvaco initiative allows us to offer vaccines to patients in rural areas who do not have easy access to

healthcare facilities, like the hospitals or clinics,” says Dr Paballo Mokwana, Transvaco's manager, to FORBES AFRICA. “We run on the railway lines, which makes it easier for patients to come through to us as opposed to going to a normal hospital.”

Mokwana, a physician who originally specialized in dentistry, has a passion for public health and has worked in the space for over a decade. Small in stature, but with a commanding presence, her friendly demeanor and professionalism can be seen reflected in her interactions with staff and patients.

Privatized healthcare in South Africa is of a high standard but inaccessible to most residents, and doctors like Mokwana strongly believe in making the widest impact they can – this is particularly the case when it comes to access to rural healthcare.

Access to healthcare in South Africa is reportedly challenging in general, but particular obstacles in both infrastructure and distance make this worse for rural citizens, reported to be around 47% of the population (as per



Rendzo Marima, chief pharmacist of the Transvaco train, retrieves vaccines from the specialized freezer on the train in East London on October 8



A nurse prepares to administer a Covid-19 vaccine on the train

Stats SA, 2013). Income inequality has a clear correlation between distance to healthcare facilities, with the country's poorest living farthest from public health infrastructure. Any historian will tell you that much of this geographical policy is a legacy of apartheid and the homeland system, which left many communities across the country segregated along racial lines in far-flung parts of the country.

This has clear medical consequences according to reports – provinces with high rural populations such as the Eastern Cape

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**The Transvaco initiative is a great initiative – the idea of using it to vaccinate and encourage commuters to take the job is a great one.**

– Zukiswa Vuka of #UniteBehind

tend to have higher levels of infant mortality and lower levels of immunization in particular.

However, while healthcare infrastructure in rural areas is clearly a challenge both in terms of development and access, South Africa's railway infrastructure is the most-developed on the continent.

Historically driven by an urge to foster easier trade with South Africa's neighbors, and then to link all of the British territories in Africa, much of the existing railway infrastructure is managed by Transnet, a publicly-owned company responsible for the management of rail, port and pipelines in the country.

Despite extensive cable theft in recent years which has damaged some of the country's railways, rail remains a fundamental means of accessing rural South Africa, with thousands of citizens – some 10% of the population – making use of the public railway infrastructure every day.

“One must obviously take into consideration the existing problems faced by the Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa (PRASA), but the Transvaco initiative is a great initiative – the idea of using it to vaccinate and encourage commuters to take the job is a great one,” says Zukiswa Vuka of #UniteBehind, a civil society coalition that mobilizes around many issues including public transport.

Railway-based healthcare is a novel idea, but not for South Africa, which has run a similar initiative from Transnet previously with two other trains, christened Phelophepa I and Phelophepa II. Commissioned in 1994 and still operating to this day, the Phelophepa trains render primary healthcare initiatives which include general medical consultations, dental, optical, mental health and pharmacy services to rural South Africans by rail.

Transvaco was born with this awareness in mind. Transnet Engineering CEO Ralph Mills and Transnet CEO Portia Derby were visiting the Phelophepa trains late last year, discussing the practicalities of vaccine distribution in a country as vast and varied as South Africa, and the question of the rural distribution of vaccines came up. Derby was

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**We took the concept of a health train and made it smaller, with 10 coaches, a light train that could be hauled by 18-tonne locomotives anywhere in the country. The primary difference were the two ultra-low vaccine freezers which had to be imported.**

– Transnet Engineering CEO Ralph Mills

immediately supportive of the suggestion – tasking Mills with the practicalities of the development of a vaccine-focused trainset.

“Portia [Derby] asked me if we could build a vaccination trainset – I said ‘yes we could’ immediately...,” says Mills.

As it turns out, it wasn’t that difficult.

“Transnet has done a project like this before,” says Mokwana. “We have what we call the Phelophepa healthcare trains, which offer healthcare services also on the railway lines, traveling to rural areas that do not have access to healthcare facilities, they offer dental services and normal healthcare services and eye care. So when Transvaco came about, it built and designed off a pre-existing model that has been tried and tested for over 27 years. And hence when the need came to assist the government in vaccinating people, this model was used.”

These two trains serve around 360,000 persons annually, and when the Covid-19 pandemic hit, it was a natural progression to consider a similar initiative once the vaccines became available. It was from this that Transvaco was born.

“The Transnet train, Transvaco, is an innovation to take the vaccination to people in transport nodes and it will encourage a lot of people to vaccinate,” Gauteng Premier David Makhura said during the launch of the train earlier this year.

The trainset was manufactured over



Dr Paballo Mokwana, train manager of the Transvaco vaccination train, in East London

## Breaking Stereotypes On The Move

Dr Paballo Mokwana is currently Transvaco’s train manager. Mokwana studied medicine at the University of Pretoria, and completed her community service in 2013. After performing locum work for a year and a half, she joined the Phelophepa family and has not left since. “It’s the first real job I had, and it’s all I’ve done,” she says.

Two out of the three Transnet health trainsets are female-run, which is not unusual according to Mokwana. “We’ve broken all of the norms when it comes to that. In the medical sector, it was for

a very long time male-dominated, on the trains, it’s a 50/50 split... nursing has been typically female, we’re seeing those barriers being broken [on the health trains].”

Committed to public health, Mokwana speaks on the impact of working on the Phelophepa and Transvaco trains on both herself and the patients they serve. “For me, it’s joy and fulfilment in helping someone who can’t afford or access high-end medical attention, seeing somebody deserving of something access it... we know we’ve really made a difference and impacted someone’s life, and for me, that’s fulfilling!”

less than nine months, after a trial period of vaccinations through the Phelophepa trains was a success. At a cost of \$1.5 million, the Transvaco trainset makes use of some existing carriage systems which helped to reduce costs and keep construction time to a minimum.

However, vaccine administration required some specialized differences – specifically with regard to the storage of the vaccines, which includes two ultra-low temperature refrigeration systems that allow for the holding of both the single dose Johnson & Johnson vaccine and the two-shot Pfizer vaccine.

Transvaco offers all patients the choice as to which vaccine they receive, something not common at other public health vaccination sites in the country, with the reasoning that since the train is only in each location for two weeks at a time, patients may not be able to easily get their second vaccination shot easily elsewhere.

“It’s not unique in terms of equipment,” says Mills. “We took the concept of a health train and made it smaller, with 10 coaches, a light train that could be hauled by 18-tonne locomotives anywhere in the country. The primary difference were the two ultra-low vaccine freezers which had to be imported.”

Working on the Transvaco train offers a different experience of vaccination to both patients and staff in comparison to standard public healthcare.

Veteran nurse Bongani Nxumalo, who has worked in state healthcare in pediatrics

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**At Rovos Rail, we are pro-vaccination. The more people in rural areas want to be vaccinated and have access, it's a good thing, because otherwise you might have to travel for a long time to get access to vaccination in a city clinic.**

– Brenda Vos, Communications Manager of Rovos Rail, which offers luxury excursions in Africa

and labor wards as well as NGOs across the country, has found it to be a personally rewarding experience working on a platform that makes contact with South Africans across the country. “It’s quite different [from state healthcare] because we’re moving from station to station, province to province – we are experiencing people with different visions of life... with their own perspectives. It’s made us grow as medical staff learning how to manage and deal with patients, especially when it comes to vaccinations,” says Nxumalo to FORBES AFRICA.

Mokwana holds similar sentiments; appreciating the diversity of patients that the Transvaco train services and the importance

of managing this when it comes to vaccine administration; “Interacting with so many different people you get to appreciate and understand how important healthcare services are, especially when people do not have easy access to it. We are able to reach a large number of people who wouldn’t ordinarily be able to access the vaccination drive.”

“At Rovos Rail, we are pro-vaccination,” says Brenda Vos, Communications Manager at Rovos Rail, a bespoke rail-tour operator which provides luxury excursions in Africa. “The more people in rural areas want to be vaccinated and have access, it’s a good thing, because otherwise you might have to travel for a long time to get access to vaccination in a city

clinic.”

Even Mills was surprised. As part of an internal marketing initiative to promote vaccination within Transnet, Mills received his first dose of the vaccine on Transvaco – and due to the experience, so did his entire family. “It’s really the best risk-reduction element we have,” he says. “Vaccination is the only thing that will really make a difference, otherwise we’ll always be swinging between these waves.” This plays a particularly important role when it comes to vaccine hesitancy, which is something the staff of Transvaco have had experience managing. Meta analyses of Covid-19 vaccine hesitancy in South Africa indicate that by and large, South Africans understand the value



A nurse administers a Covid-19 vaccine on the Transvaco vaccination train in East London on October 8



A maintenance worker services the Transvaco vaccination train in East London, South Africa

and need to become vaccinated against Covid-19; however, also emergent in these results is that urbanicity – that is, the degree to which an area is urbanized – is an influencing factor in vaccine acceptance (Cooper et al, 2021).

Hand in hand with the rise of Covid-19 vaccine hesitancy is of course the massive rise of vaccine misinformation, which is something many of the Transvaco visitors have been exposed to.

“Some people have said that maybe we are being sent by the government to kill them [with the vaccine]. There are those who will just tell you, ‘I don’t trust the vaccine’,” says Nxumalo, clearly frustrated. “We are a people who love to go off on social media, and people create their own stories. I tell them, ‘do your research, you can’t rely on something that you’ve just been told by someone on social media.’”

Though the train’s unique access to rural areas by means of railway infrastructure is certainly one of its advantages, the one aspect that seems to draw people in to visit Transvaco for their vaccinations, besides sheer curiosity, is the welcoming nature of the staff. “I only came here because I know the people are friendly, and it would be empty compared to the clinics,” says Lena, who hopped on to the train to receive the Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

From East London and having easy access to vaccination at local clinics, Lena decided on Transvaco because of the staff’s reputation for both friendliness and efficiency, something not always associated with public healthcare in South Africa – this despite her own fear and hesitation at getting her first shot. “I’m a bit nervous – but it’s mainly because I’m scared of needles.”

This reputation for friendliness has also seen a disproportionate number of foreign nationals making use of the Transvaco sites.

### **The hum of the trainset’s diesel generator reverberates in the background, a constant reminder of the electricity crisis still gripping the country.**

“One of the experiences that stands out for me is with foreign nationals. They are more receptive to the train,” attests Mokwana.

As the numbers of people coming in and out of the station due to Transvaco increases, ancillary benefits can be seen in the traders and vendors crowding around the outside of the station, with their wares on small tables under umbrellas – snacks, cold drinks and cigarettes are on offer.

These informal traders, battered by Covid-19 and the ensuing lockdowns, have taken advantage of the increased traffic around the station.

“They tell them after the shot you must have something to drink and rest,” one trader says. “They are buying cold drinks from me every day, but today the train is going.” As FORBES AFRICA prepared to depart from the site on a Friday afternoon after spending two days with the staff and documenting their operations, it is clear that the Transvaco initiative does still confront the normative challenges facing public health and vaccination in South Africa.

The hum of the trainset’s diesel generator reverberates in the background, a constant reminder of the electricity crisis still gripping the country that Transvaco must guard against, particularly to protect its precious vaccine stock – this as Mokwana speaks candidly of the occasional delays transiting between sites as the train is held up due to cable theft.

Despite this, as the sun begins to set on the Eastern Cape, new arrivals still trickle in to get their vaccination shots on the eve of the weekend when traditionally numbers wane, and one can’t help but think that the Transvaco train is one of the innovative approaches to combating the pandemic. **F**

A man and a woman are standing in a field of red paper airplanes. The man is wearing a light blue shirt and dark pants, and the woman is wearing a patterned top. They are surrounded by many red paper airplanes, some of which are flying in the air. The background is a dark, textured wall.

# The Together Man In Regional Cinema

At the cornerstone of contemporary Swahili cinema, Tanzanian filmmaker Amil Shivji is adamant about telling stories of contrast and community and promoting local talent.

BY INAARA GANGJI

**F**OR TWO YEARS, TANZANIAN FILMMAKER AMIL Shivji made the white, windswept beaches of Zanzibar his home. The island was the location for his film *Tug of War* (*Vuta N'Kuvute*), a “coming-of-age political love story set in 1950s Zanzibar” that he co-wrote, co-produced and directed.

He used local talent and resources for this film that won him accolades – the film was selected for the Toronto Film Festival in September.

But that has been the focus of Shivji’s work all along; telling stories of the working class and the communities he grew up with, at the cornerstones, called *kijiwani* in Swahili, where the most interesting stories are, where people of all backgrounds and classes cross paths,





**I think the future of filmmaking is very, very exciting in this region right now, because like I mentioned, Swahili cinema has not been given the justice that it deserves... our language is everything. Language carries our history, our present and our future.**

and where the personal meets the public.

Growing up in a lower middle-class neighborhood, Shivji always felt the stories of the marginalized were not told enough.

For this, he makes a film a year from his production platform, Kijiweni Productions.

“We just make sure that we keep telling stories in Swahili, with local cast and crew,” says Shivji, who is part of a new wave of filmmakers from the region.

“It’s been quite exciting to see [this new wave] grow significantly. But obviously, when I say significantly, it’s still a handful. But this wave has been very important because it’s not an easier route to take.

and at the Zanzibar International Film Festival and FESPACO, a film festival in Burkina Faso.

“There’s always a sense of togetherness [in working class communities]. There’s always a sense of love, community and solidarity, whether political, social or economic,” Shivji stresses again.

“It goes against all your business principles – competition and survival of the fittest. So, I think growing up seeing that being taught in schools and then seeing something else in the streets; the dire contrast has always pushed me towards stories of contradiction. And it always ends up in a place that’s pushing people together. So, I think for me that’s always been something that’s just pulled me towards a story and then you know, just pulling from the stories that exist around you.”

But the most important thing for Shivji is for his stories to hark back to the past. For *Tug of War*, he wanted the colonial oppression to seem contemporary as state oppression, which according to him, was the case in Tanzania at the time of the film being written and filmed.

“I felt like it was a film that was urgent, to be told right now and at least from what I’ve heard from the feedback we’ve got so far, the film feels quite now, and that for me is very, very important.”

He also wants the stories to feel like they belong to the communities they are made in, by gaining their trust. Yet, the filmmaker laments

that despite the best intentions, it’s still an uphill task to produce films in Tanzania with a local crew and cast.

“We just don’t have enough people. We’re fighting the same fights,” he rues.

For example, festival circuits are being given preference over local screenings.

Shivji is however hopeful his efforts will bear fruit one day.

“I think the future of filmmaking is very, very exciting in this region right now, because, like I mentioned, Swahili cinema has not been given the justice that it deserves... our language is everything. Language carries our history, our present and our future.”

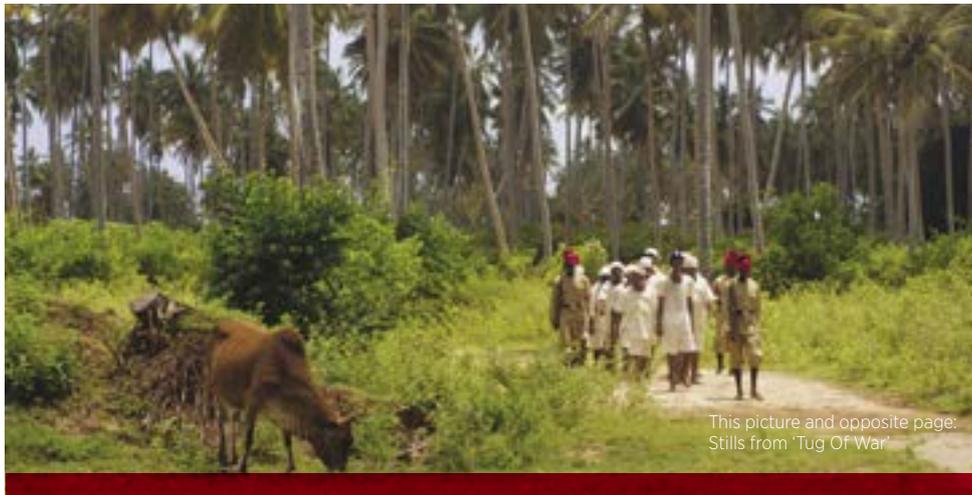
True to his cultural mission, his production house has been doing more than just cinema.

“We have this three-tier approach – it’s production, training, mentorship and exhibition,” says Shivji.

There are workshops held in Swahili to build capacity in the local creatives to seek opportunities, and set up an infrastructure for sustainable storytelling in Tanzania.

In his role as a lecturer at the University Of Dar es Salaam, Shivji does the same.

“So, I think we’ve done a lot in the past couple of years. And the biggest challenge is really to keep pushing to just maintain some sense of sanity during the entire process.”



This picture and opposite page: Stills from 'Tug Of War'

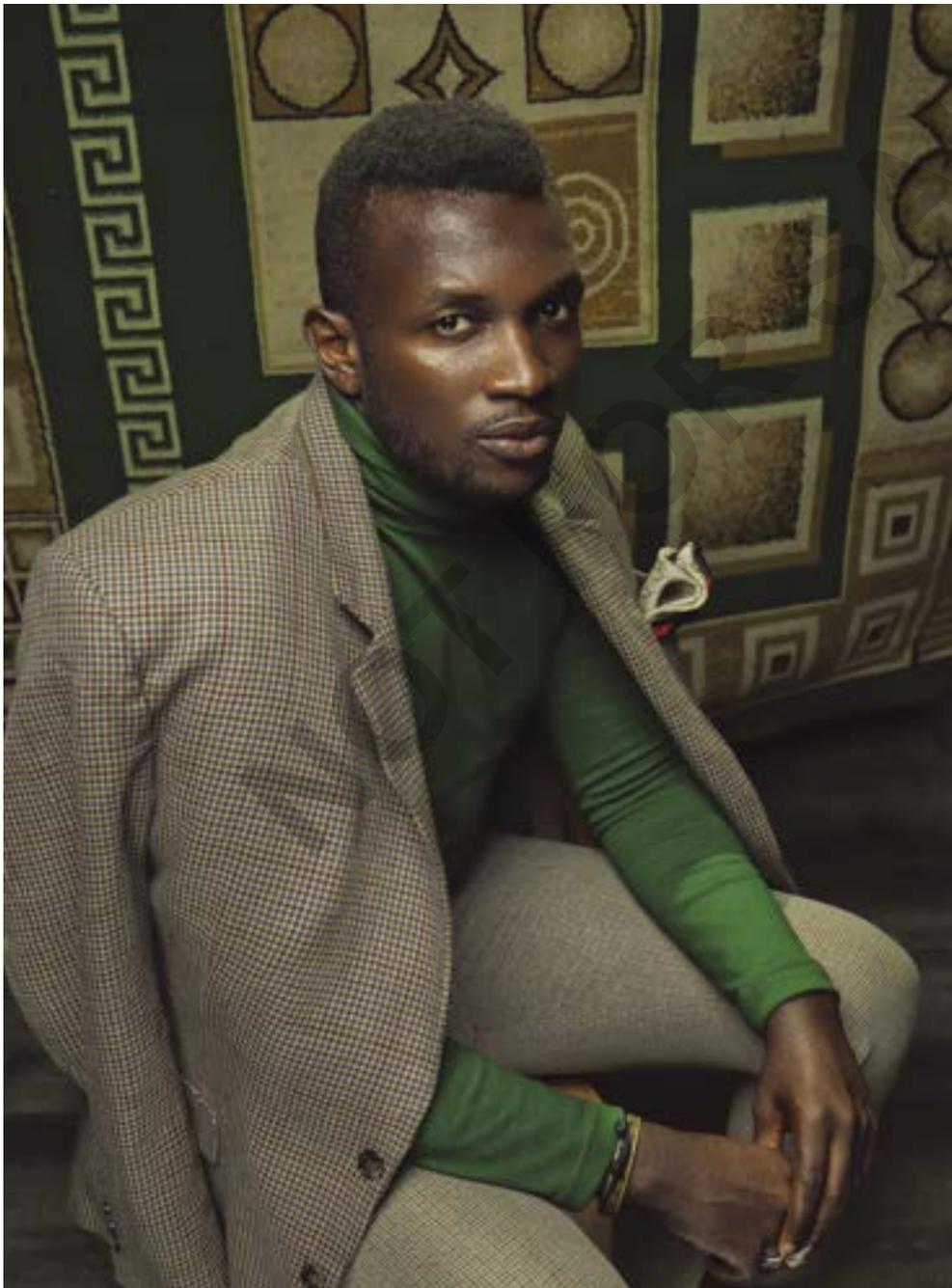
It’s really putting a lot on the line. You spend a couple of years raising the kind of finance you need with the risk of not making the film.”

It’s hard work without the necessary infrastructure to work off, but filmmakers like Shivji have been adamant to press on.

His repertoire includes more stories of class struggle, perseverance and human dignity; films such as *T-Junction*, which explores the struggle of the informal workers on the streets, and *Samaki Mchangani*, which challenges the notion of ‘Africa Rising’. His work has earned him the People’s Choice Award in Zanzibar and Best Director and Best Short Film in Africa. His films have screened in Los Angeles, Seattle, Washington, Toronto, Singapore and picked up awards in Tanga, Tanzania,

# THE NOLLYWOOD

## Actor Living His Truth



Life has a way of imitating art. For Ifan Ifeanyi Michael, it has been the other way round. The Nigerian celebrity stylist, actor and filmmaker has come a long way from the destitute 10-year-old he once was.

BY PEACE HYDE

**I** **FAN IFEANYI** Michael starts narrating his life story on a Zoom call from Lagos, Nigeria. A call girl, sexual abuse... and it unravels in ways that could put to shame movie scripts. But that's how this Nigerian actor, director and brand consultant traversed seemingly impossible odds to become the success he is today.

A **FORBES AFRICA** 30 Under 30 list-maker in 2021 and recipient of the African Magic Viewers' Choice Awards, Michael, at this interview, talks about what

shaped his life, and is overwhelmed with emotions reliving some of the most traumatic episodes from his childhood.

He just cannot shake them off.

“I was sexually abused by a barber because I needed a place to stay and I did not want to be thrown out on the streets. But still, I was kicked out of the house at 1AM in the morning,” Michael says starkly.

Today, he is a living testament that tough times don't last, but tough people do. He left his home in Port Harcourt in Nigeria at the age of 10 to pursue his dream of becoming a filmmaker in Lagos.

“I came to Lagos to meet a marketer to sell my story to him. When I got to Lagos, his phone was switched off and I couldn't reach him... I didn't think I was going to be duped. I was excited to showcase my work,” says Michael.

He was left stranded, but made his way to a popular hotel in Lagos frequented by the film fraternity, hoping to find someone who would believe in his script and help him actualize his dream.

“It was just survival for me. I had nowhere to go. Am I going back to my parents' two-room where there was seven of us, or who am I going to call?”

He vividly remembers some of the older passengers on the bus to Lagos, who asked where his parents were even as he prayed fervently that they would not take him back home.

Once in Lagos, there was no turning back for young Michael. He had to make things work. He bumped into a lady who was working as a call girl who luckily took him in and provided him a temporary place to stay.

“In the morning, she would bring us in to sleep and in the afternoon, we left so she could get ready for her clients. She felt sorry for me because I was very young. There were times I was not even eating,” recalls Michael.

During the day, he would go to every audition in town to land roles as an extra to make ends meet. He believed the only way to fulfill his dream of becoming a filmmaker was to have more grit and tenacity than the other dreamers who wanted to make it in Nollywood.

“The money was really bad at that time but it was good for food and daily expenses. I used to move all over the place to audition for different roles until I got my first break. I reached out to the producer of the movie and told him how passionate I was. He told me he had someone else for the role. So, I looked for his address and traveled all the way to find him and I told him and he was so surprised.

“I didn't even have a way to go back home so he let me sleep in his place and that morning he gave me the script for *The Evangelist* and that was my biggest break in acting,” says Michael.

The hustle didn't stop there. Michael also began doing public relations for upcoming music artists by taking their CDs to the local marketplace to create awareness about

them. The PR hustle landed him a lucrative gig with a new hotel that gave him the capital he needed to finally realize his ambition of becoming a filmmaker. *Lotana*, his first feature film, tells the story of a young man who discovers he has to offset a huge debt to a loan shark owed by his father before his sudden death.

Michael admits he has no educational background, but managed to carve out a niche in the Nigerian entertainment industry with nothing but determination.

And he has many roles.

As a fashion stylist, he has worked with some of the top celebrities in Lagos. He is also the founder of a publicity management company dedicated to the media and entertainment industry.

“The dream even at that time has always been to live my truth in terms of bringing my vision to life. I know I wanted to be an actor and filmmaker and tell stories and let my story influence people as well. I see things and approach situations differently so it has been a major motivation. Everything that I went through I just knew I was unstoppable,” says Michael.

*Lotana* was released in 2016 and went on to win 10 awards out of 13 nominations at the Golden Movie Awards in Ghana. In 2020 too, he won big for his film *Foreigner's God*. With his eyes firmly set on his next feature film, he is one of the inspirational young film talents in Nollywood.

The show must go on. 🎬

“

**It was just survival for me. I had nowhere to go. Am I going back to my parents' two-room where there was seven of us, or who am I going to call?**

”

## MELODY MOLALE

- Digital creator and luxury lifestyle enthusiast, South Africa

Port of LNG Emerald jewel dress - ZAR33,000 / \$2,161; Thomas Sabo Orange Stone Drop Earrings with Star - ZAR4,950 / \$324; Thomas Sabo Large Stone cocktail ring - ZAR3,725 / \$244; Rose gold watch: Bulova Ladies Diamond (Bella Luna) - ZAR5,840 / \$382

## FEZILE MAKHANYA

- Actor/Presenter, South Africa

Port of LNG Emerald Double Breast Suit - ZAR28,000 / \$1,834; Port of LNG Black Pleated Belt - ZAR10,000 / \$655; Port of LNG White Shirt - ZAR3,000 / \$196; Port of LNG Bow Tie - ZAR500 / \$33; Europa Art Karl Desert-Green - ZAR3,290 / \$215

# PAST FORWARD

## African Luxury Redefined

*Jeunes créateurs*, a concept that came about in Paris in the 1970s, seems to be upon us again, with the emergence of an almost youthful, colorful and even playful flair in the way designers seem to be creating now. The shift arrives just in time for the festive season as luxe-lovers emerge out of prolonged lockdown and quarantine modes. A handful of African designers are catering to this newfound freedom with elaborate, cutting-edge collections set to stir a fashion frenzy.

**STYLIST:** KEABETSWE MAFORA  
**PHOTOGRAPHY:** KATLEGO MOKUBYANE; NEWKATZ STUDIO  
**ART DIRECTION:** LUCY NKOSI  
**MAKE-UP:** VANESSA UNAMACA; MAKOLEMADE BEAUTY  
**LOCATION:** THE HOUGHTON HOTEL – ROCKSTAR PENTHOUSE



**Fezile Makhanya:** Maxhosa Africa Golf Shirt – ZAR5,740 / \$374; Maxhosa Africa Pants – ZAR8,200 / \$534; Maxhosa Africa Panama – ZAR3,500 / \$228; Thomas Sabo Blue Power Bracelet – ZAR4,950 / \$324; Thomas Sabo Green Power Bracelet – ZAR1,799 / \$118; Europa Art Velvet Loafers – ZAR1,290 / \$84; Brown Watch: GUESS Collection Gents Chronograph (Bella Luna) – ZAR8,999 / \$590

**Melody Molale:** Maxhosa Africa Dress (Atelier) – Price on Request; Rose Gold Watch – Bulova Ladies Diamond (Bella Luna) – ZAR5,840 / \$382; Europa Art (Schutz) – ZAR2,290 / \$150



Thebe Magugu Belted Contrast-Stitch Cotton Wraparound Jacket - **ZAR19,700 / \$1290**; Thebe Magugu Contrast-Stitch Cotton Wide-Leg Trousers - **ZAR8,437 / \$552**; Thomas Sabo Multicolored Wing Earrings - **ZAR6,475 / \$424**; Thomas Sabo Multicolour Parrot Pendant - **ZAR12,450 / \$816**; Plain Necklace - **ZAR1,225 / \$80**; Europa Art (Schutz) - **ZAR1,990 / \$130**



Port of LNG Opulence Dress -ZAR20,000 / \$1,310; Thomas Sabo Multicolor Wing Earrings - ZAR6,475 / \$424; Thomas Sabo Multicolour Parrot Pendant - ZAR 12,450 / \$816; Plain Necklace - ZAR1,225 / \$80; Europa Art (Schutz) -ZAR2,990 / \$196

# FESTIVE FINESSE

Flirty, fun and bold statements are the flavor of the season in ladies fashion, be it on the runway or in the boardroom. Close some big year-end deals in these.

COMPILED BY: KEABETSWE MAFORA



Zaaf collection periana clutch, red - ZAR3,220 / \$210



Jenna Clifford Sanele pendant - ZAR1,580 / \$103



Jenna Clifford Sanele earrings - ZAR2,980/\$194



Chris Aire Angel's gemstones and diamond ring - ZAR18,394 /\$1,200



Christian Dior Lucky fragrance 125ml - ZAR4,180 /\$272



Versace Medusa Aevitas platform pumps pink - ZAR21,885 / \$1,425



Sam Bolero, wheat straw hat - ZAR1,380 /\$88

**STOCKISTS:** Christian Dior, [www.shop-beauty.dior.com](http://www.shop-beauty.dior.com) • Jenna Clifford, [www.jennaclifford.com](http://www.jennaclifford.com) • Chris Aire, [www.chrisaire.com](http://www.chrisaire.com) • Zaaf Collection, [www.zaafcollection.com](http://www.zaafcollection.com) • Versace, [www.versace.com](http://www.versace.com) • Crystal Birch, [www.therealcrystalbirch.com](http://www.therealcrystalbirch.com)



Port of LNG Citrine Unorthodox Suit -  
**ZAR30,000 / \$1,963**; Thomas Sabo Marble  
Obsidian Bead Bracelet - **ZAR3,225 / \$211**;  
Thomas Sabo Two-Tone Beaded Bracelet  
- **ZAR3,725 / \$242**; Brown Watch: GUESS  
Collection Gents Chronograph (Bella Luna)  
- **ZAR8,999 / \$589**

# OUTFIT-WISE

Prints, beads, dipped neck lines and lightweight fabrics are in. The latest and most exclusive fashion finds for men.

COMPILED BY: KEABETSWE MAFORA



Eurosuit blazer -  
ZAR1,875 / \$123  
Eurosuit trouser -  
ZAR1,125 / \$74

Cartier C décor  
sunglasses -  
ZAR15,327 / \$1,003

Maxivive metallic white  
shirt - ZAR1,059 / \$69

Bulova Men's Marine  
Star Collection -  
ZAR13,999 / \$915

Memo Argentina  
EDP 75ml -  
ZAR4,615 / \$302

Thomas Sabo multi-  
colored obsidian center  
energy bead bracelet -  
ZAR1,975 / \$129

Men's Gucci 100 loafer in ivory  
jacquard - ZAR14,527 / \$950

**STOCKISTS:** Skins Cosmetics, [www.skins.co.za](http://www.skins.co.za) • Cartier, [www.int.cartier.com](http://www.int.cartier.com) • Thomas Sabo, [www.thomassabo.co.za](http://www.thomassabo.co.za) • Bella Luna, [www.bellaluna.co.za](http://www.bellaluna.co.za) • Gucci, [www.gucci.com](http://www.gucci.com) • Maxivive, [www.maxivive.com](http://www.maxivive.com) • Eurosuit, [www.eurosuit.co.za](http://www.eurosuit.co.za)

# COCOON COMFORTS

The home has been the focus of our working lives like never before. This is a 24x7 sanctuary that needs its own luxe sights, smells and spaces.

COMPILED BY: KEABETSWE MAFORA



Illusso 1953 343  
- ZAR34,900 /  
\$2,219

Bang & Olufsen  
Beo a9-bronze tone-  
ZAR51756.89 / \$3382

Farrow & Ball Hague  
blue paint no.30  
ZAR101.16 / \$6.61

Weylandts Home  
Quagga crockery range  
- ZAR275 / \$18

Neimil Batho scatter  
cushion - ZAR1,200  
/ \$78

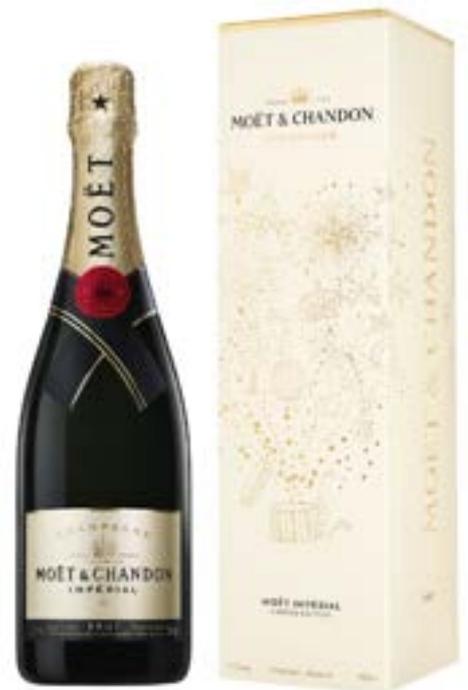
Jo Malone Orange  
Bitters home candle -  
ZAR764.69 / \$50

Morelli Rugs Bian-  
ca 13 - ZAR4,499  
/ \$294

**STOCKISTS:** Bang & Olufsen, [www.bang-olufsen.com](http://www.bang-olufsen.com) • Neimil, [www.neimil.com](http://www.neimil.com) • Weylandts Home, [www.weylandts.co.za](http://www.weylandts.co.za) • Jo Malone, [www.jomalone.co.uk](http://www.jomalone.co.uk) • Farrow & Ball, [www.farrow&ball.co.za](http://www.farrow&ball.co.za) • Morelli Rugs, [www.morellirugs.co.za](http://www.morellirugs.co.za) • Il Lusso Italian Luxury Living, [www.illusso.co.za](http://www.illusso.co.za)

All dollar prices (including on previous pages) are approximate figures as per the exchange rate at the time of going to press.

# Ending The Year With Grape Expectations



## THE CLASSIC FESTIVE ACCESSORY

Trio of Moët Impérial, Impérial Nectar, Impérial Rosé

The annual effervescent gift bottles and boxes by Moët & Chandon look fun, festive and iconic. Moët & Chandon Impérial is also the house's signature champagne, created in 1869 to embody a seductive palate and elegant maturity. It's a stylish timeless classic, made continuously modern with its annual limited-edition incarnations. This season Moët & Chandon offers a fresh, uplifting take on festive gifting, to celebrate togetherness - be it with your family, friends or business partners. 

Available at select  
retailers nationwide.

**N**EVER HAVE WE NEEDED MORE OF A reason to celebrate. As yet another pandemic year draws to a close, and fêtes get underway and family gatherings become more possible after a prolonged period of lockdowns and quarantine, if you are keen to suitably see the year out in style, and toast life, best to do it with some champagne. At parties made up of immediate family and your nearest and dearest, or at a more extravagant soirée to mark the occasion and look back on the year, or even a corporate event honoring the close of a big year-end deal, champagne is both the ultimate festive accessory and the ideal way to lift your spirit. These Moët & Chandon bottles are wrapped in beautiful festive gift boxes.

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# GAME-CHANGER

As coach of the South Sudan women's national football team, South African Shilene Booysen is developing the game and making a difference in the world's youngest country.

BY NICK SAID

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**S**OUTH AFRICAN COACH SHILENE BOOYSEN HAS embarked on a career path of a different kind that has seen her take on the role of coach of the South Sudan women's national football team, hoping to develop the game for girls in one of Africa's poorest countries.

Booyesen is a hugely respected figure in coaching on the continent having helped South Africa to the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup as a highly-valued analyst alongside head coach Desiree Ellis.

Booyesen also worked in the best women's football domestic competition in the world in the same role with National Women's Soccer League side Houston Dash in the United States.

It might seem strange then that she has taken on a role with minnows South Sudan, where she must in essence create a national football team from scratch in the full knowledge that there will be many tough years ahead of big losses and bitter disappointment.

But for Booyesen, this is more than a job, it is a calling, and she is living her dream of passing on her football knowledge to those who need it most, rather than being just another coach on the global professional circuit.

South Sudan gained its independence in 2011, but only played its first women's football international in 2019. They have had a handful of games since then, with Booyesen leaving the comforts of her Banyana Banyana role to lead the team in February this year.

"Desiree and I had been chatting about me taking up a head coaching role, because people just saw me as an analyst," Booyesen tells FORBES AFRICA.

"I wanted to expand my horizons and challenge myself. I started putting out feelers and was alerted to the fact that South Sudan was looking for a head coach.

"At the time I thought it was not entirely what I wanted, I wanted

to be closer to home, but once I saw what they were doing, it became something I really wanted to do."

Booyesen admits it has been a culture shock that took some getting used to, but she quickly adjusted to living in South Sudan.

"My first impression when I got there... I was shocked to be honest. I didn't think South Sudan was as underdeveloped as it is. But once I started meeting the people, it was such a refreshing thing.

"I think we are spoilt, especially in South Africa, with all the luxuries we enjoy. Going to South Sudan has opened my eyes to the challenges people have in life. It is a really poor country. I think 80%-90% of people don't have formal jobs. They sell things on the street.

"It was a culture shock for me to see what was going on there, but once I got to meet the people, I was lost... I fell in love with them.

"I still feel like that, I'm still excited and passionate about doing what I can to help as many people as I can."

**South Sudan gained its independence in 2011, but only played its first women's football international in 2019.**

some of the best in the world. So what was it like trying to pull together a team of players who had barely kicked a ball in organized sport in their lives?

"Coming from an established team like Banyana Banyana and going to a team where you basically have to teach players to pass the ball in the national team... that has been challenging.

"But it gives you an opportunity to build a legacy, not for myself but

Booyesen has worked at a very high level with some of the best players in Africa and, during her time in the US,



for the team. Everything we do is history. Everything we touch is history. Everywhere we go is history?”

Booyesen is aware that results will not come for some time, perhaps years, as she brings the players up to the required level, but says they are moving forward. She did get a rude awakening in her first match in charge against Ethiopia in April.

“We lost it 11-0, but it was not about the scoreline, it was about the fact that someone wanted to invest in women’s football.

“The South Sudan Football Association has decided that their women’s program will take on a huge role in developing football in the country.

“It is very different to what I have done before, where I have worked with high-level professionals. So I’m going the opposite way of what people might think... but this is what I was born to do.

“I love working with these girls, I love seeing the changes in them, the differences in their thinking.

“Just telling them that sleep is important (for a professional athlete), that is the kind of thing they didn’t really understand. Why nutrition is important, why you can’t eat certain things.

“These girls were shocked at what a fitness test is. It was like a normal ‘bleep test’ that is done at Under-15 level in other countries. These were senior players and they battled.

“They had no idea how to push themselves, the type of training that is required. But we are starting to see the progress. Now they are closer to where they need to be.”

Booyesen says she is also learning about what makes each of her players tick and how to get the best out of them.

“We need to instill the culture that we want. If you want a winning culture, you can’t have toxic people in the team.

“Rome wasn’t built in a day and they need to understand this is a process that will take some time. They (her players) must start thinking about football in a different way.

“Every team is ranked higher than us, every team has more experience than us, every team has had time to work hard and get to where they are now. We haven’t had that luxury.”

Booyesen only started playing the game at the age of 25, but would go on to represent South Africa as a goalkeeper.

“I started as a center-back, but I thought, ‘I am a netballer more than anything, so maybe I can be a goalkeeper’.

“Not long after that I was selected for the national squad, but I tore the ligaments in my knee, which was devastating. I played netball, softball, tennis and swam, I had lots of sport that I took too.

“But when I started playing football, I wanted to know more about the game. I did loads of coaching courses, went to many seminars and was passionate about learning the game.”

She had a 25-year career at a mechanical engineering company before becoming a full-time coach, which she says is a fulfillment of her ambition to change people’s lives for the better, in this instance through sport.

“I am the youngest of eight kids. I was also a huge academic, which was more important to me. I went into mechanical engineering, but to be honest, the passion was never that big.

“I started out wanting to be a teacher, then a doctor and ended up being in engineering. But my heart just wants to be with people.” **F**



# Making Every Lap Count

Swimming sensation Tatjana Schoenmaker, South Africa's star at the Tokyo Olympics who won record-breaking gold in the 200m breaststroke, is constantly challenging herself for the next milestone, she says in an exclusive interview with FORBES AFRICA.

BY NICK SAID

**S**OUTH AFRICAN SENSATION TATJANA Schoenmaker dreamed of a career in netball and was at first resistant to professional swimming, but after winning Olympic Gold in the 200m breaststroke in a world record time, has proven the old adage that you should always listen to your parents.

Schoenmaker was one of Africa's stars at the Tokyo Olympics this year as she swept to gold in a record time of 2:18.95, having also claimed silver in the 100m breaststroke as she came within a milli-second of a remarkable double.

It has cemented the 24-year-old's place among South Africa's swimming greats, but if her teenage self had her own way, Schoenmaker would not have been in Tokyo to make her mark in history.

"I did many other sports in primary school.

I liked hockey, netball and athletics, so at that age I think the push for swimming came from my parents' side. They saw I had talent," she tells FORBES AFRICA.

"I was actually against it in the beginning, I was never for it. But when I moved to Tuks Sport High School, and more of my time went into swimming, I started improving. That's when I started to realize that I'm good at it.

"It was certainly not a passion for me, definitely not. I loved netball and my mind



Photo by Roger Sedres/Gallo Images/Getty Images; Photo by Mustafa Yalcin/Anadolu Agency via Getty Images

“

**It is hard, the amount of hours makes it very difficult. A lot of young swimmers show amazing potential early on but then fade because the work you need to put in is grueling.**

—

was so set on the fact I wanted to play that sport and I didn't like swimming.

“But as a 14-year-old, you don't really know what is best for you. That is why the support of my parents was vital. They believed I had talent and Rocco [coach Rocco Meiring] also believed I could do well.

“I had to trust their judgement, even though I argued against it a lot. I thought I knew everything! So that support from my family to push me... they knew once I realized [my talent], it would go well.”

Realizing that talent took many, many hours in the pool, dedication and, in the end, an iron will to succeed. Many others have had similar talent, but not the drive that Schoenmaker has shown once she decided to make a go of swimming.

“I am so grateful to them for pushing me out of my comfort zone and what I thought was best for myself,” she says.

“It is hard, the amount of hours makes it very



**We lost a lot of training due to Covid-19, but because there were so few competitions after the lockdowns, we were able to put in some really intense training and catch up those weeks. It worked out perfectly for me.**

difficult. A lot of young swimmers show amazing potential early on but then fade because the work you need to put in is grueling.

“I am very passionate now about encouraging those young swimmers and telling them they have to push through, because it gets so tough.”

She admits she was fortunate to attend a school where sport is heavily blended with academics to help athletes reach their potential.

“We were able to start school later in the morning to accommodate our swimming. The school would work out how we could get our marks with the time that we had in class. I was very lucky to be part that.”

“I felt like I could strike the balance and manage both, it wasn’t that I felt I was under pressure with my schoolwork.”

As for her lightbulb moment when she realized she could be an Olympian, it shows the importance of role models in sport in terms of allowing children to dream.

“It was in 2012, when I joined the school. That was the year of the London Olympics and I remember watching it in the hostel.

“Chad [Le Clos] beating Michael Phelps was incredible. One, he was a South African, and two, I was doing the same amount of training then as a professional like Chad at the school.

“I went from three times a week to 10 or 11 sessions a week, so I thought, ‘my life has become swimming, so I can do this also’.”

Schoenmaker says she loves routine and even today trains in a similar fashion to how she did back then.

“My training always stays consistent, the type of training changes a little bit, but I like consistency and my programs are basically a lot of the same things.

“It is about eight sessions of swimming and then two or three sessions of gym [a week]. We have double-swim on a Monday, Wednesday and Friday, and single swim with gym on a Tuesday and a Thursday, and then a single swim

on a Saturday. Sunday is completely off.”

She admits too, that like many other athletes, the extra year of training afforded by the postponement of the Tokyo Games due to the Covid-19 pandemic actually helped her medal chances.

“We had six months to go ahead of the Games in 2020. It was the January [2020], before the Covid-19 lockdowns started. I was excited, but ‘scared’ nervous. I thought to myself, ‘if only I had one more year to just really get prepared’.

“And then of course, it happened when the Games were postponed. So the second time round when it came to six months to go [in January 2021], now it was genuine excitement. It worked in my favor, I got that extra year.

“We lost a lot of training due to Covid-19, but because there were so few competitions after the lockdowns, we were able to put in some really intense training and catch up those weeks. It worked out perfectly for me.”

Many athletes speak of a post-Games depression, especially those that achieve their goals of winning gold. After years, and sometimes decades, building up to that moment, they can be left with an empty feeling of ‘what now?’.

That is not a problem for Schoenmaker.

“I have watched the movie with Michael Phelps about post-Games depression [The Weight of Gold]. It is the highest achievement you could ever get – a gold medal and a world record.

“But for me, it is not ‘what now?’. It is ‘when next?’. I want to race again and I want to try and improve myself. There is so much space to grow.

“Whether I swim personal bests, or whether I grow personally or spiritually... I have changed so much when I look back at who I was three years ago at my first major competition. Winning at the Commonwealth Games [in 2018] – the person I was then and who I am now is totally different.

“It is amazing for me that it all still feels like a dream, it doesn’t seem real, and I am so excited to challenge myself in the next galas. What can I do next to better myself in any way, not just my swimming but as a person?”

As for what is next, 2022 will be a big year for the South African with both the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham, England, and the World Championships in Fukuoka, which will be a return to Japan.

“I have the short-course World Championships [in Abu Dhabi] at the end of this year. That is a nice challenge because you have a lot more turns and my turns are probably my weakest part.

“Then next year we have the Commonwealth Games and World Championships, we never usually have those two in the same season. But I am very excited for both,” she says. 

# PARTNERSHIPS POWER PROSPERITY IN THE DIGITAL AGE

By Amnah Ajmal, Executive Vice President,  
Market Development, MEA, Mastercard



Service Providers (PSPs), financial institutions, and social enterprises to help SMEs fulfil their potential and become a part of the value chain.

Innovation, in this case, lies in reimagining connections.

## DIGITAL STRIDES

A street vendor, or a small store selling fruit, for instance, is likely to be connected to a distributor, a cooperative, a wholesaler, or a market aggregator, which, in turn, works with other partners at various levels. As partners, we can work together to address pain points at multiple levels. For example, when we realized that the most urgent need of SMEs in South Africa was to

start selling online using e-commerce without having access to tools or knowledge, our collaboration with Google and Standard Bank resulted in a solution that helps businesses move online, accept digital payments, and attract more customers.

A small business producing the now-ubiquitous face masks cannot gather traction until it finds a way to reach customers. The online solution involves having a dedicated website in a matter of minutes, marketing it using online tools, receiving orders, accepting payments, and finding a delivery partner.

As a regional first, our long-term partnership with Uber is helping to drive digitization across their business operations, leveraging Mastercard's single infrastructure to meet all types of payments needs across Uber Rides, Uber Eats, Uber Pass, and Uber for Business. This now includes cashless payments and advancing financial inclusion across MEA for drivers who rely on gig work.

In Kenya, a partnership with consumer goods company Unilever and KCB Bank helped resolve the need for financing. Called Jaza Duka, Swahili for 'fill up your store', the program connects the dots between the small retailer, which has been procuring and selling little shampoo sachets for years, and the bank. The distributor who sells to the storeowner becomes the data intermediary, making it possible for the storeowner to get credit from the formal rather than the informal system at one-tenth the cost.

In Nigeria, NetPlus became the first African startup to be selected as part of the Mastercard Start Path program and works with Mastercard to introduce a secure e-commerce solution that removes the need for consumers to use cash for online purchases.

Digital transactions have become useful for small farmers to tap into the formal credit system of banks and other financial institutions, even as they are empowered to make and receive real-time payments with vendors and suppliers.

## PLAY TO YOUR STRENGTHS

Innovation is possible when each stakeholder brings their best effort to the table. A mobile device in most hands, for instance, can be the starting point for delivering change.

Digital inclusion can be a powerful driver of financial inclusion and broad-based prosperity.

We find that technology and digital innovation are driving change in consumer behaviour and expectations, making it possible for organizations such as Mastercard to accelerate financial technology innovation and adoption, thereby enhancing financial inclusion.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought to the fore the idea that "no one is safe until everyone is safe". Community-centric action at global, regional, and local levels is central to any solution that is inclusive and pervasive.

**A** stable, growing, connected small business can be the key to financial inclusion for the whole community. As a technology company, Mastercard has leveraged the power of partnerships to deliver inclusion by providing financial, technology, product, and services support to MSMEs across the world.

We have learnt to start at the beginning, so small businesses can start selling online in a secure, seamless manner. The next step is connecting businesses to others in the ecosystem, to help them grow and survive. For a neighbourhood vendor or store, simple solutions such as account-to-account and gateway transfers reduce the risks and costs of cash and open up sales to channels other than the immediate neighbourhood or basket of customers.

Through innovative partnerships, Mastercard is leveraging the power of governments, Mobile Network Operators (MNOs), Payment



BY VANDINI SHARMA

*The writer is a 19-year-old awarded, published Indian writer. Her articles have appeared in 50+ global publications, including the Associated Press, New York Times and Hindustan Times. Her work can be found on [www.liftyou.in](http://www.liftyou.in)*

# Life Lessons From India's Timeless Literary Genius

1877, a 16-year-old Tagore took centerstage at the Hindu Mela, a political and cultural festival in Calcutta. He read aloud his witty satire against the newly-crowned colonial head of India, and revitalized patriotic sentiment within the crowd.

His elder brother Jyoti was the person who tutored him in poetry-writing and musical rhyme. The young poet would work devotedly, but would soon become disillusioned by his abilities and often crossed out paperwork and threw them away. His school mates mocked his feminine sensibilities and poetic aptitude.

However, Tagore went on to defy everyone's apprehensions and achieve great literary fame. His intellectual diversity spanned leadership, globalization, promotion of the scientific spirit, and most famously, Bengali poetry and prose. People globally saw him as the voice of moral awakening for a free nation.

As a young boy, he lost his mother. His adoring sister-in-law followed when he was a little older. His father, who he so revered, also passed on. Tagore's beloved wife was next when she passed away even before he reached middle age. Tagore also lost three of his five children to lethal illnesses.

In those unimaginably dark times, Tagore devoted himself to writing meaningfully for children and spun stories that gave solace to the soul. Spiritual truth flowed through his words in this heart-breaking era of his life, and he formed a deep, unbreakable connection with God.

Tagore created a school for children in Shantiniketan. He spent his days teaching and being around the cheerful laughter of his new young friends. Also known as the 'Bard of Bengal', he once wrote: "Every child comes with the message that God is not yet discouraged of man."

In 1913, when he won the Nobel Prize for literature, Tagore spoke to his award-ceremony audience about a global thread of spiritual

union. He reminded them that when the West grew tired of pursuing perfection through its hard labors, it would find rest in the spiritual East that could rejuvenate one's soul with her enduring peace and wisdom.

Over time, even as many artists questioned him for the source of his creative pioneering, Tagore maintained that his inspiration flowed from a universal source beyond himself. He believed in the ability to discover what one had to say, if one listened well enough.

As the world crumbled under the weight of a World War, a free economy bound by merit-based leadership still seemed far away in Tagore's final days. With a deathless faith in the free will of humankind to propel success, Tagore wrote: "Faith is a bird that believes in the light when the dawn is still dark." Tagore illuminated a global liberated consciousness, even as the world was still on its journey towards merit-based leadership and wealth distribution. Today, this great poet is known throughout the world as India's symbol of a liberated bird of dawn. **P**

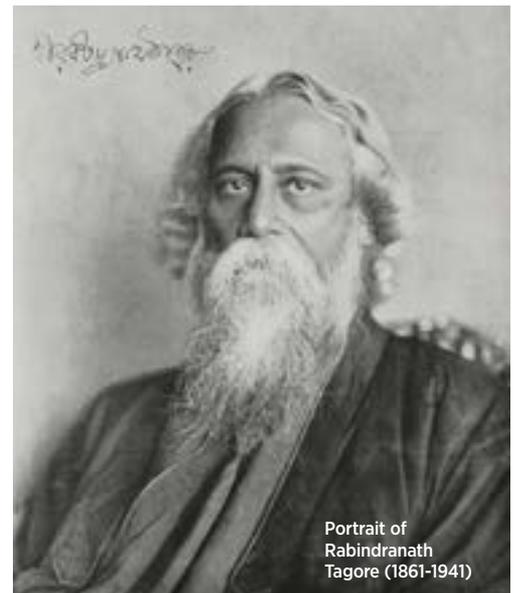
**T**HE INDIAN POET Rabindranath Tagore was the first non-European to win a Nobel Prize in any category. History books also cite that he named Gandhi as 'Mahatma', the lawyer-activist who spent 21 years in South Africa. The deeper Africa connection is in Tagore's poem, *An Ode to Africa*, written in empathic anguish for the ceaseless barbarism both Africa and India endured through colonial rule.

Tagore once wrote a phrase about liberty that ran thus: "We gain freedom when we have paid the full price."

The personal story of the poet is a reflection of this thought.

Tagore's story is distinguished by a moral power that persevered through the great pain of countless personal tragedies. It is the story of a man who saw the extraordinary within the ordinary.

On a January morning in



Portrait of Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941)

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BY TSHILIDZI MARWALA

*The writer is the Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the University of Johannesburg, a member of the Namibia 4IR task force and author of the book 'Leadership Lessons From The Books I Have Read'.*

## COP26 And The Debate Africa Cannot Afford To Defer

place, with the objective to accelerate the goals of the Paris Agreement and the United Nations (UN) Framework Convention on Climate Change. Perhaps the major conversation that will emerge from all of this is how Africa can best be supported and how best can the agenda be advanced to ensure that we do not lose sight of the debilitating impact of climate change for the future.

It is no secret that Africa has been hardest hit by the effects of climate change in spite of the fact that it contributes less than 5% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions. We are feeling the after-shocks of the rest of the world's insufficient activity in relation to sustainable development and climate change.

As the African Development Bank (AfDB) asserts, this is because of the continent's relatively low adaptive capacity, because of financial and technological limitations, and an over-reliance on rain-fed agriculture. This is a difficult pill to swallow when you consider that Africa also has a significant lag in access to electricity. Compounding the impact to Africa is the immense population growth.

According to data from the UN, one in four people on this planet will be from Africa by 2050, growing to one in three by 2100. This rapid growth in population and the resulting urbanization, it is apparent that the continent needs to be made a priority.

The goals of combatting climate change while trying to grow the economy almost seem at odds with each other. In fact, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), estimates that sub-Saharan Africa has lost more than \$520 million in direct economic damages annually as a result of climate change since the beginning of this century.

Not only are our avenues for economic growth adding to the impact of climate change, climate change is also stunting our growth. Our over-reliance on fossil fuels and the growing of the economy has a profound impact on the negative consequences of climate change.

Centered around this damning outlook is the debate around mitigation versus adaptation. The argument for mitigation is that human intervention

is required to reduce emissions and curb the impact of climate change. This would entail shifting away from fossil fuels that place an increased burden on the planet, towards solar or wind power. Adaptation entails making changes in order to live with the impact of climate change. This includes initiatives such as planting more trees and finding ways to live with threats such as wildfires or floods, for instance. Arguably, however, these are not mutually exclusive endeavors and the sweet spot likely exists in a combination of mitigation and adaptation.

Intriguingly, Africa, for all the brunt it has had to bear, has been quick to mitigation and adaptation. According to the 2021 CDC 'Emerging Economies Climate Report', by 2019, African countries were already spending about 5% of their annual GDP to support adaptation and mitigation initiatives, exceeding their contributions to climate change.

In fact, most African states have explored some form of renewable energy. It is expected that African countries will soon have to spend about 15% of GDP to respond to climate crises.

Given these dynamics, it is imperative that COP26 does not serve as an exercise in exclusion. The rest of the world has a lot to learn from Africa and if we have any chance to emerge from our economic quagmire, we need support from outside the continent in addition to rethinking our own reverberating impact on climate change. This is not a debate that can be deferred as we are facing the consequences daily and we are witnessing the negative impact across the globe. What lessons can be learned and how we navigate the future bearing in mind that our choices have the potential to wreak havoc for our countries. This is not a problem that is confined to a country but is a global challenge. Every sector needs to reflect on how best contributions can be made to avert this crisis that is impending. It is not the time for Africa to sleep but for us to awaken to the challenges. As Ugandan climate change activist Vanessa Nakate wrote about the impact of climate change, "In some way, therefore, we are all Africa." 

**T** HIS YEAR HAS brought with it a renewed sense of urgency for climate change. A host of reports released this year have indicated that the prognosis for the planet is rather grim. Last year, temperatures were around 1.02°C warmer. These extreme temperatures and its ramifications are being felt across Africa in addition to other countries. In October, it emerged that Africa's mountain glaciers are melting so quickly that they're likely to vanish within the next 20 years. As Petteri Taalas, the Secretary General of the World Meteorological Organization, wrote: "The rapid shrinking of the last remaining glaciers in eastern Africa, which are expected to melt entirely in the near future, signals the threat of imminent and irreversible change to the Earth system." This is the context against which the COP26 Summit in Glasgow has taken



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# The Jungle Giant

A reflective trip to a hospital deep in the forests of Gabon started by the late Nobel Peace Prize winner and polymath Dr Albert Schweitzer.

BY RAMDAS IYER

**T**RAVELING BY RIVER BOAT ON THE MIGHTY Ogooué River, I was excited to be making a pilgrimage to the legendary hospital built by the 1952 Nobel Peace Prize winner and humanist, Dr Albert Schweitzer. Lambaréné, my destination, was a good nine hours upriver from Port-Gentil, the only coastal port in the forested nation that is Gabon.

Schweitzer was born into an Alsatian family in 1875. Music, musicology, theology, philosophy, medicine, and community welfare are all relevant fields to mention when discussing his personality.

On arriving at the hospital grounds which lie in a lush island in the middle of the river, I was shown to my comfortable room in a block built to receive volunteer doctors from around the world.

From the chicken coop from where the hospital started in 1913, it is now a sprawling campus that treats over 30,000 patients each year. Most of the old facilities which are over a century old have been preserved as part of a museum, including all the original operating rooms and dispensary. The former modest living quarters of the doctor and his wife are also preserved as a shrine. While on a tour of the facility, I came across a small piano in Schweitzer's bedroom pointing to his proficiency also in the field of music. Schweitzer started playing the organ when he was five, and by the age of eight was giving public performances in churches; Schweitzer's favorite composers were Wagner, Franck, and Johann Sebastian Bach. A musicologist as well as performer, a quick search online reveals that Schweitzer wrote a biography of Bach in 1905 in French, published a book on organ building and playing in 1906, and rewrote the Bach book in German in 1908.

In 1905, having already gained three doctorate degrees in theology, music and philosophy and working as an associate professor, he took up studying medicine. In 1913, he obtained his medical degree and went through a further year's training in Paris. Around the same time, he met and married Helene Breslau, a nursing student. At 26, he read about a growing need for medical help in Africa including Gabon. This turned out to be his spiritual calling for Africa and he at first decided to work with missionaries in Gabon. Schweitzer started raising funds for his future hospital and began acquiring supplies to run it. On March 26, 1913, having packed 70 cases with medicine and other essential equipment, he left for Africa with his wife.

Having traveled the length and breadth of Gabon for over six weeks as recently as two years ago, I could not imagine the ordeal the Schweitzers faced in Africa when they first arrived. An European couple braving the equatorial climate, living with a multi-ethnic tribal society speaking over 42 languages and the constant threat of being a German citizen in French territory at the cusp of World War I, must have been daunting. They started their sea journey from Bordeaux to



Port-Gentil, followed by 280km up the Ogooué River to Lambaréné. It is said the arrival of a 'white doctor' was announced by drums, which could be heard deep in the jungle.

Here, Schweitzer started his first hospital from an old henhouse, which was quickly repaired, cleaned and covered with lime. It was the first modern hospital built to care for people in Gabon. Inside the now-preserved compound, I toured the first barrack which was put up as a place for treating outpatients, for surgery, and as a pharmacy. Later, other barracks were built, including some made of bamboo for local patients and their families. At the time, there were 50 beds in the hospital. Breslau helped her husband treat patients both as a nurse and as an anesthesiologist in surgery.

Fate struck within four years of their arrival as they were sent to a French internment camp as German prisoners of war in 1917. Released in 1918, Schweitzer spent time in Europe giving lectures and concerts, preaching in churches, taking medical courses and writing books.

Schweitzer returned to Lambaréné in 1924 where he stayed until his death. While in Europe, he rendered several organ concerts and with the money earned, together with his personal appearance fees and monies donated by his well-wishers from around the world, he expanded the hospital to 70 buildings which by the early 1960s could treat over 500 resident patients. A polymath, Schweitzer, in addition to being a physician and surgeon, led his Christian congregation as pastor and supervised the sprawling village-hospital complex. As his popularity grew, he played host to several visitors from around the world. This is evident from the many commendations he received from the likes of President Roosevelt and Queen Elizabeth that line the museum. He used the prize money he received for the Nobel Peace Prize to start a leprosarium at Lambaréné.

Schweitzer died in Gabon on September 4, 1965. My pilgrimage to this humanist's jungle hospital ended with me kneeling in quiet awe and gratitude in front of his grave. 

Photo by ADN/picture alliance via Getty Images; Photo by Ramdas Iyer

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