INSPIRING POSSIBILITY THINKING

Africa CEO Impact & Sustainability Meeting 2025 Report (Handbook)

Published by 67CEOS Foundation, September 2025

16
Speakers

100+
Delegates

250+
Impactful Insights

www.67CEOS.org

Participating Organisations

United Nations	IFRS Sustainability	small business development Department: Small Business Development REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA	Telkom	NEWZROOM AFRIKA
DZANA INVESTMENTS	SESAME WORKSHOP	CLICKS GROUP LIMITED	JOZI MY JOZI	Madam Waste
	AUDA-NEPAD AFRICAN UNION DEVELOPMENT AGENCY	GEP Gauteng Enterprise Propeller	WORLDWIDE INSTITUTE OF LEADERSHIP & DEVELOPMENT	B20 SOUTH AFRICA 2025
		AFREXIMBANK		

Table of Contents

Executive Summary

Africa CEO Impact & Sustainability Meeting 2025
Published by 67CEOS Foundation, September 2025

Over a concentrated virtual convening from 15–17 July 2025, Africa's business leaders and policy makers came together to convert rhetoric about sustainability into practical, accountable actions. The conference delivered an uncompromising programme, one-hour keynote presentations from leading CEOs, policy makers and sector specialists across the continent. Together they set out a clear, shared agenda for measurable corporate impact, from robust sustainability disclosure to re-imagined infrastructure finance, circular economy solutions, inclusive entrepreneurship and education technology. All aligned to **Agenda 2063**, the SDGs and Africa's growing role on the global stage.

Under the stewardship of the Executive Convener, Sam Apata and Programme Directors, Mahlodi Kgatle and Rehema Isa, the Meeting fused strategic thinking with operational realism. The debate moved rapidly from ambition to implementation, with every speaker offering practicable recommendations for boards, C-suites, policymakers and researchers.

The following pages distil some of the conference's consequential points and capture the essence of a few keynotes. Where speakers' remarks are highlighted for brevity, they are presented as succinct quotations to preserve the tone and intent of each address.

Opening & Global Context

Nelson Muffuh, United Nations Resident Coordinator in South Africa (pre-recorded), set the global development frame: "Sustainable development requires partnerships that leave no one behind."
Dr Ndidi Nnoli-Edozien (ISSB / IFRS) argued that standards are the scaffolding of credibility: "Sustainability disclosure standards matter because they turn intention into verifiable evidence for investors and citizens alike." Her central point: African corporates must embed standardised disclosure systems now to attract long-term capital and to demonstrate progress against Agenda 2063.

SMEs, Jobs and Inclusive Growth

Hon. Stella Tembisa Ndabeni, Minister of Small Business Development, well represented by Dr Aaron Ramodumo, the Deputy Director-General for Sector, Policy and Research, made the case for targeted public-private interventions: "Revitalising SMEs means implementing policies that focus on training, financing, infrastructure development, and innovation to create resilient, inclusive, and climate-adaptive enterprises." Richard Manzini (GEP) reinforced this with operational direction: "Inclusive entrepreneurship programmes must be designed for scale and local market realities." Across these addresses, the consensus was unmistakable, policy frameworks, blended finance instruments and corporate procurement strategies must favour MSMEs to close the employment gap.

Finance, Infrastructure and Resilience

Mxolisi Mgojo (B20 / BUSA) made a call for strategic partnerships: "African business resilience depends on deeper intra-African trade, diversified markets and smarter industrial collaboration." His recommendations outlined a practical blueprint for mobilising capital behind resilient, green infrastructure.

Narrative, Place-making and Urban Futures

Thabile Ngwato (Rapid Innovation Group) urged a recalibration of Africa's story: "Building Brand Africa requires storytelling that honours complexity and opportunity, and that drives investment." Bea Swanepoel (Jozi My Jozi) brought this home with an urban focus: "Smart city strategies must centre people, equitable mobility, affordable housing, and data-driven service delivery." Their argument: perception shapes capital flows, and place-making unlocks economic value.

Health, Education and Human Capital

Oluranti Doherty (Afreximbank) set out the financing case for health resilience: "Export development finance can catalyse local pharmaceutical capacity and strengthen regional health security." Mari Payne (Sesame Workshop International) offered a child-centred view: "EdTech must be accessible, culturally relevant and designed for diverse learning environments." Both emphasised that human capital investment is a strategic imperative for sustainable competitiveness.

Circular Economy, Energy & Environment

Dr Gamuchirai Mutezo (Madam Waste) delivered a practical manifesto for circularity: "Designing waste out of systems creates both environmental and economic opportunity." (paraphrase) The energy and emissions debate – from carbon accounting to micro-grids – was captured by speakers who insisted that corporate transition plans must be measurable, financeable and aligned to local contexts.

Innovation, Creative Economies & Governance

Prof Mazwe Majola closed the governance loop with a focus on ethics: "Ethical leadership is non-negotiable – it underpins trust, investor confidence and social licence to operate."

Corporate Philanthropy & Partnerships

Alef Meulenberg (Rhiza / Fundraising for Impact) emphasises partnership mechanics: "Sustained impact is possible when companies design collaborations that share risk, benefit and accountability."

Practical Outcomes and Next Steps

Collectively, speakers committed to practical next steps: accelerate ESG reporting adoption, scale SME procurement targets, mobilise blended finance for green infrastructure, invest in indigenous manufacturing for health and energy resilience, and mainstream circular economy practices across corporate supply chains. The Meeting produced a clear ask of corporate Africa – convert pledges into measurable programmes, disclose progress transparently, and partner systematically with youth-led innovation and MSMEs.

Looking Ahead – Africa CEO Impact & Sustainability Meeting 2026

Building on the momentum of 2025, the Foundation announces the 2026 theme: **"Unlocking Sustainable Finance and Impact Investing for Africa."** The 2026 Meeting will be a two-day physical gathering in Johannesburg in Q1 2026, featuring keynote addresses, panel debates, an exhibition floor, sustainable deal-making forums, an SMME demo track and the Impact & Sustainability Excellence Awards gala. Presidents, ministers, business leaders, ambassadors and global delegates are invited to participate; corporate partners across the continent are encouraged to engage early as sponsors and collaborators.

Acknowledgements

The 67CEOS Foundation extends its deepest gratitude to every keynote presenter, moderator, partner and delegate whose intellect, candour and commitment made this Meeting a substantive contribution to the continent's sustainability agenda. The 67CEOS Foundation Executive Convener, **Sam Apata** and Head of Communications, **Mahlodi Kgatle** offer heartfelt gratitude to public and private sector leaders, delegates from across Africa and the diaspora, and collaborators for their partnership. We now call on these stakeholders to translate the Meeting's ideas into durable partnerships and measurable action as we prepare to reconvene in person in 2026.

Nelson Muffuh, *United Nations Resident Coordinator in South Africa*

United Nations Message of Support at the Africa CEO Impact & Sustainability Meeting 2025

The message delivered at a high-level gathering of CEOs, industry leaders, and development stakeholders focused on Africa's sustainable and inclusive future. Nelson Muffuh, Resident Coordinator of the United Nations in South Africa, emphasises the critical role of the private sector in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and advancing Africa's development agenda. Central to the message is the call for a shift from viewing development finance as charity to recognising it as strategic investment, particularly in young people, women, and green initiatives.

Youth represent Africa's demographic dividend, and empowering them can unlock vast economic potential. Similarly, women's empowerment is essential for inclusive growth

The address highlights recent international efforts, including the Financing for Development (FfD4) meeting in Seville, Spain and the launch of a platform for action, which underscore the need for mobilising domestic resources, scaling blended finance, and unlocking private capital.

South Africa is showcased as a model for aligning global priorities with local action, especially through its National Development Plan and the African Union's Agenda 2063. Nelson advocates for a whole-of-society approach and public-private partnerships in key sectors such as energy, food systems, education, digitisation, and climate action.

The ultimate goal is to localise the SDGs and generate tangible improvements in communities by fostering skills development, digital inclusion, and improved public services. The United Nations pledges itself as a committed partner to help translate commitments into meaningful impact for Africa and beyond.

Highlights

- The private sector is vital for achieving Africa's Sustainable Development Goals.
- Financing development is transitioning from charity to strategic investment.
- Emphasis on investing in youth, women, and green initiatives for sustainable growth.
- South Africa exemplifies aligning global agendas with local action through its development plan.
- Public-private partnerships are critical across energy, food, education, digitisation, and climate sectors.
- Africa must develop continental solutions rooted in national realities to address global challenges.
- The UN commits to being a partner in turning promises into real-world progress.

Key Insights

Private Sector as a Development Catalyst: The address underscores that the private sector is no longer just a profit-driven entity but a crucial player in systemic change. Businesses are called upon to engage beyond corporate social responsibility and charity, focusing on investments that yield long-term developmental benefits. This shift is vital for mobilising the scale of resources needed to meet the SDGs in Africa.

Innovative Financing as the Engine of Development: The recent global meetings highlighted in the speech reflect a growing consensus that traditional financing models are insufficient for Africa's development needs. Mobilising domestic resources, scaling blended finance (combining public and private funds), and unlocking private capital are presented as strategic imperatives. This innovative financing approach can accelerate progress by leveraging multiple funding sources for greater impact.

Investing in People and the Planet: Targeting investments towards youth, women, and green initiatives aligns with the core pillars of sustainable development. Youth represent Africa's demographic dividend, and empowering them can unlock vast economic potential. Similarly, women's empowerment is essential for inclusive growth, while green investments address climate resilience and sustainable resource use, ensuring long-term viability.

South Africa as a Model of Alignment: South Africa's National Development Plan and its engagement with global agendas demonstrate the importance of synchronising international commitments with local realities. This alignment allows for targeted interventions that respect national contexts and make the SDGs achievable and relevant at the grassroots level. Other African countries can draw lessons from this model to enhance their development strategies.

Continental Solutions for Global Challenges: The call for African-led continental solutions rooted in national and regional realities emphasises the importance of self-determination and context-specific strategies. Africa's challenges, whether in energy, food security, or climate, require solutions that are not imported but developed from within, harnessing local knowledge and resources to ensure sustainability and effectiveness.

Public-Private Collaboration as a Strategic Approach: The speech highlights sectors such as energy, food systems, education, digitisation, and climate action where public and private sectors must collaborate. This partnership approach leverages the strengths of both sectors—public sector's regulatory and policy frameworks, and private sector's innovation and capital—to drive scalable, sustainable outcomes.

UN's Role as a Strategic Partner: The United Nations positions itself as a "partner of choice" to support African countries and businesses in translating commitments into concrete actions. This partnership approach is crucial for ensuring accountability, providing technical support, and fostering collaboration across stakeholders to achieve measurable impact on the continent.

The overall message is one of hope and a pragmatic call to action, urging all stakeholders to work collectively and purposefully towards a sustainable and inclusive Africa that benefits everyone, particularly the most vulnerable and future generations.

"As long as poverty, injustice, and gross inequality persist in our world, none of us can truly rest." Nelson Mandela

Dr. Ndidi Nnoli-Edozien, *Member (Africa Rep), International Sustainability Standards Board (ISSB) (IFRS)*

Keynote: Why Sustainability Disclosure Standards Matter

Dr Ndidi introduces the ISSB as a board under the IFRS Foundation, which has been a global authority on accounting standards for over two decades. The IFRS Foundation has recently expanded its mandate to include sustainability-related financial disclosures, aiming to streamline the currently fragmented landscape of over 600 sustainability disclosure standards worldwide.

Dr Ndidi highlights Africa's leadership role in adopting these standards, starting with Nigeria's pioneering commitment at COP27 in Egypt. Several other African countries, including Kenya, Ghana, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Tanzania, Uganda, and Rwanda, have followed suit, making ISSB standards mandatory. South Africa is carefully observing the process through a regulatory impact assessment and market consultations, reflecting a cautious but engaged stance.

She explains the core purpose of the ISSB standards: to create a global baseline of sustainability disclosures integrated with financial statements. This transparency helps investors make informed decisions, boosts private sector development, and attracts capital to Africa. Dr Ndidi shares a practical example from her tenure at Dangote, Africa's largest business, illustrating how inconsistent reporting standards can distort the true picture of companies' environmental impact.

The presentation also portrays recent collaborative efforts, including a regulatory roundtable with 23 African countries and a global forum held in Beijing, which connected investors and companies from different regions, fostering investment opportunities. She emphasises the critical role of sustainability disclosures in unlocking capital flows necessary for Africa's economic transformation, especially in manufacturing and value addition, beyond raw material extraction.

The ISSB standards focus on four key areas: governance, strategy, risk management, and metrics and targets. Dr Ndidi stresses that sustainability must be embedded at the core of a company's strategy and governance, not treated as an ancillary function. She highlights the importance of including smaller enterprises (SMMEs) in the conversation, as they form an integral part of the value chain and stakeholder ecosystem, despite the standards primarily targeting large entities.

Finally, Dr Ndidi calls on all stakeholders, particularly small businesses, to actively engage with the standard-setting process by providing feedback on exposure drafts. She emphasises that sustainability disclosures are not just a regulatory burden but are linked directly to key risks and opportunities affecting business viability and investor value. The discussion closes with a Q&A addressing South Africa's position, the role of the African Union, and how these standards contribute to achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and climate targets.

Highlights

- Africa is leading the global sustainability disclosure movement, with countries like Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana, and Rwanda adopting ISSB standards.
- ISSB aims to create a unified global baseline for sustainability-related financial disclosures to improve transparency and comparability.
- Disparate sustainability reporting standards can distort true environmental impact, as illustrated by the Dangote logistics emissions example.
- Collaborative forums and roundtables are fostering investment opportunities by connecting African countries, global investors, and businesses.
- Sustainability disclosures are critical for unlocking capital flows that can boost manufacturing and value addition in Africa.
- ISSB standards focus on governance, strategy, risk management, and metrics & targets, integrating sustainability into core business operations.
- Small businesses and SMMEs are vital stakeholders and should actively participate in shaping sustainability standards.

Key Insights

Global Baseline for Sustainability Disclosures: Before ISSB, the sustainability reporting landscape was fragmented with over 600 different standards worldwide, creating confusion and lack of comparability. The ISSB's mission to establish a global baseline is crucial for investors seeking consistent, reliable, and comparable data to assess sustainability risks and opportunities across companies and regions. This standardisation enhances transparency, accountability, and capital allocation efficiency.

Africa's Leadership and Commitment: Africa, led by Nigeria, has been a first mover in adopting ISSB standards, signaling the continent's proactive stance on sustainability and financial transparency. This leadership helps position Africa as a credible partner in global capital markets, attracting investment crucial for sustainable development. The mandatory adoption in several African countries demonstrates political will and regulatory progress.

Integration with Financial Reporting: The ISSB standards are designed to integrate sustainability disclosures into financial statements, reflecting how environmental, social, and governance (ESG) factors impact financial performance. This integration is essential for investors who need to understand not just the financial health but also the sustainability risks that could affect cash flows, access to finance, and cost of capital.

The integration of sustainability into financial reporting, the inclusion of smaller enterprises, and alignment with global sustainability goals form the foundation for a sustainable and inclusive economic future for the continent.

Sustainability as a Driver for Economic Development: Disclosures are not merely compliance exercises but tools to unlock capital needed for transforming Africa's economies, particularly by supporting manufacturing and value addition rather than mere extraction. This aligns with broader developmental goals of job creation, industrial growth, and economic diversification.

Four Pillars of ISSB Standards: Governance, strategy, risk management, and metrics & targets form the framework of sustainability disclosures. Embedding sustainability into governance and strategic decision-making ensures that risks and opportunities are managed holistically. Effective risk management includes identifying, assessing, monitoring, and mitigating sustainability-related risks, while clear metrics and targets enable performance measurement and accountability.

Inclusion of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMMEs): Although ISSB focuses on large entities, small businesses are integral to the value and supply chains. Their sustainability practices and disclosures indirectly affect the larger entities' reporting and investor decision-making. Encouraging SMMEs to engage in the standard-setting process and disclosure practices ensures a more comprehensive and realistic sustainability ecosystem.

Link to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Climate Targets: Sustainability disclosures help measure progress toward SDGs and climate commitments such as net zero by 2050. The ISSB standards provide a structured way to report on sustainability impacts, enabling comparability and accountability, which have been challenges in tracking SDG achievement. This connection underscores that ESG reporting is a strategic enabler for global and regional sustainability agendas.

South Africa's Cautious but Engaged Approach: South Africa, with its strong integrated reporting tradition, is carefully assessing the ISSB standards through extensive market consultations before adoption. This reflects the country's desire to ensure alignment with local contexts and stakeholder interests, illustrating how countries tailor global standards to their unique economic and regulatory environments.

Interoperability with Other Reporting Frameworks: The ISSB is working closely with international bodies such as the European Union to ensure that sustainability disclosures are interoperable across different jurisdictions. This is vital for Africa's trade and investment relations, enabling African companies to meet global investor expectations and regulatory demands seamlessly.

Call to Action for Participation: Dr Ndidi emphasises the importance of active engagement by all stakeholders, especially smaller businesses, in the standard-setting process. Providing feedback on exposure drafts and sharing perspectives ensures that the standards reflect diverse realities and needs, making them more effective and inclusive. This democratisation of standards-setting is critical for their legitimacy and success.

Sustainability Disclosures as a Business Imperative: The presentation dispels the myth that sustainability reporting is a "nice to have" or extra burden. Instead, it is framed as a fundamental aspect of managing real business risks, such as climate variability affecting agriculture or supply chain disruptions. Proper disclosure enables better risk anticipation and management, protecting businesses and investors alike.

Harnessing Africa's Unique Assets: The keynote touches on valuing Africa's natural capital, including rare minerals like cobalt and vast natural resources. Proper valuation and disclosure of these assets within sustainability frameworks can attract responsible investment and support sustainable exploitation that benefits local economies and environments.

Cross-Continental Collaboration: The engagement of African regulators, exchanges, governments, and international investors in dialogue and capacity-building illustrates the multi-stakeholder approach necessary for effective sustainability disclosure implementation. This collaboration fosters knowledge sharing, harmonisation, and confidence-building.

Final Thoughts

Dr Ndidi Nnoli-Edozien's presentation underscores that sustainability disclosures are essential tools for Africa's economic transformation and global integration. By leading the adoption of ISSB standards, African countries are positioning themselves as proactive players in global capital markets, enhancing transparency and investment attractiveness.

The integration of sustainability into financial reporting, the inclusion of smaller enterprises, and alignment with global sustainability goals form the foundation for a sustainable and inclusive economic future for the continent. Active participation from all stakeholders is vital to shape these emerging standards to reflect Africa's unique realities and opportunities.

Dr Aaron Ramodum, *Deputy Director-General for Sector, Policy and Research, Department of Small Business Development*

Keynote: Revitalising Africa's Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)

Dr. Ramodumo delivers a comprehensive presentation on Revitalising Africa's Small, Medium, and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs). He critically examined prevailing neoliberal and neoclassical economic theories that advocate minimal state intervention and free markets, arguing that these perspectives overlook the structural barriers African entrepreneurs face. Dr. Ramodumo emphasised that opportunities for business success are not simply objective or universally accessible but are shaped by social constructs, expectations, and systemic impediments such as lack of finance, limited market access, and regulatory challenges.

The presentation proposed an interventionist approach where government and private sector collaboration are essential to empower SMMEs, particularly aiming at formalising informal businesses that constitute a large portion of Africa's economy. Dr. Ramodumo highlighted the critical role of SMMEs in employment creation, especially among youth and women, and underscored the need for sustainable development aligned with Africa's Agenda 2063 and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). He called for policies to focus on training, financing, infrastructure development, and innovation to create resilient, inclusive, and climate-adaptive enterprises.

He stressed the urgency of breaking the socio-economic divide and promoting inclusive growth through deliberate interventions. Examples from Limpopo and other rural areas illustrated the challenges faced by small business owners, such as digital exclusion and lack of access to markets. The presentation also noted the importance of leveraging regional and continental frameworks, including partnerships with the African Union and the African Continental Free Trade Area, to create innovation funds and scale SME platforms continent-wide.

Dr. Ramodumo positioned SMMEs not just as economic actors but as drivers of social transformation, poverty reduction, and sustainable development in Africa. He urged CEOs, policymakers, financiers, and entrepreneurs to collaborate in shaping an Africa that is inclusive, innovative, climate resilient, and thriving.

Highlights

- Critique of neoliberal and neoclassical economic theories on entrepreneurship and opportunity.
- Statistics on informality and employment in African SMMEs, emphasising the need for formalisation.
- Alignment of SMME revitalisation with Africa's Agenda 2063 and Sustainable Development Goals.
- Focus on youth and women entrepreneurship as key drivers for job creation and economic inclusion.
- Importance of public-private partnerships and the National Integrated Small Enterprise Development (NIST) framework.
- Infrastructure development examples supporting rural female entrepreneurs' market access.
- Call for continental SME innovation fund and scaling regional SME platforms for sustainable impact.

Key Insights

Challenging Established Economic Theories: Dr. Ramodumo critically addresses the neoliberal and neoclassical assumption that opportunities are objective and equally accessible. His analysis highlights that these theories ignore social and structural barriers, such as lack of access to finance, markets, and regulatory hurdles, which are especially pertinent in African contexts. This insight underlines the necessity for tailored economic models that incorporate state intervention and social realities rather than relying solely on free-market ideologies.

Given increasing climate-related disasters in Africa, integrating environmental considerations into small business development is essential.

Opportunities as Social Constructs: The speaker emphasises that opportunities are not simply "discovered" but socially constructed based on individual expectations and perceptions. This cognitive and social dimension of entrepreneurship challenges the traditional "discovery" or "creation" theories of opportunity, suggesting that fostering entrepreneurial mindsets and supportive ecosystems is crucial to enabling SMMEs to thrive.

High Informality and Its Consequences: Approximately 50% of African SMMEs operate informally, which undermines tax revenue crucial for public services like education and healthcare. This structural challenge limits government capacity to reinvest in the economy, creating a vicious cycle of underdevelopment. Formalisation efforts are vital not only for individual business growth but also for national economic sustainability.

Youth and Women Entrepreneurs as Catalysts for Change: With unemployment rates reaching over 30% in South Africa and even higher when expanded definitions are considered, empowering youth and women through targeted entrepreneurship programs is identified as a key strategy to reduce unemployment and foster inclusive economic growth. The presentation stresses that these groups often dominate informal economies yet lack access to training, finance, and markets, making their empowerment essential to broader socio-economic progress.

Collaborative Frameworks and Partnerships: The National Integrated Small Enterprise Development (NIST) framework serves as a blueprint guiding government efforts to train, finance, and support SMMEs. Moreover, public-private partnerships and memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with various institutions enhance resource mobilisation and implementation capacity. This multi-stakeholder approach is critical to overcoming resource constraints and ensuring sustainability of interventions.

Sustainability and Climate Resilience: The presentation connects SMME development with environmental sustainability, emphasising the need for green technologies and climate-resilient business models. Given increasing climate-related disasters in Africa, integrating environmental considerations into small business development is essential to protect livelihoods and ensure long-term economic viability.

Regional Integration and Continental Cooperation: Dr. Ramodumo advocates for the creation of a continental small and medium enterprise innovation fund in partnership with the African Union and the African Continental Free Trade Area. Such initiatives would facilitate cross-border trade, innovation, and financial inclusion, enabling African SMMEs to scale and compete globally. This insight recognises that Africa's economic transformation requires collaborative regional strategies beyond national borders.

Final Thoughts

The presentation by Dr. Ramodumo offers a nuanced and pragmatic roadmap for revitalising Africa's SMMEs, balancing economic theory with on-the-ground realities, and emphasising the transformative potential of small businesses for inclusive growth, poverty reduction, and sustainable development across the continent.

About DigitalSkills.org.za

This is an initiative of ZA Creative and Projects (PTY) LTD, born from decades of digital expertise and a commitment to inclusion. We are on a mission to bridge the digital divide in South Africa and across the continent, empowering young people and adults with the skills needed for tomorrow's jobs. Our programs align with national and global goals: The National Digital and Future Skills Strategy of South Africa (2021-2025).

This strategy aims to enhance the quality of life, education, and economic growth by equipping individuals with essential 21st-century skills intertwined with digital competencies." In practice, this means running hands-on workshops, webinars, hackathons and summits that reach urban, township and rural communities alike.

Mission

Our mission is to partner with businesses, communities and governments to upskill African learners for the future of work. We deliver accessible, high-impact training (in-person and online) that bridges the digital divide. By collaborating with corporate and development partners, we bring world-class content to learners. Join us on a mission to **empower 2 million people every year in Africa** with holistic digital skills training. All our programs aim to be inclusive, future-ready and responsive to labor-market needs, so that graduates not only earn certificates but also real confidence and employability.

Partner with Us

Investing in digital training fills partners' talent pipeline. Providing youth with digital skills enhances employment prospects, fills the talent pipeline and contributes to the country's economic growth. In other words, companies that upskill future workers help ensure a steady supply of job-ready candidates for technical roles. Read more ***here***.

Contacts

Call: +27 72 437 4110
Visit: digitalskills.org.za

Lunga Siyo, *CEO, Telkom* Consumer and Small Business

Making Every Day A Sustainability Day

Keynote: Bridging the digital divide - A call to action for an inclusive digital future

Lunga addresses the persistent digital divide in Africa and underscores the critical need for investment in technology, infrastructure, and digital literacy to foster inclusive economic growth. He emphasises how access to the internet and digital tools can transform lives, especially for young people in rural areas, by expanding their horizons, enabling new skills like coding, and allowing them to start businesses remotely. Despite progress, only about 27% of Sub-Saharan Africa has mobile internet access, with significant disparities between urban and rural areas and between genders.

Lunga highlights the importance of public-private partnerships to build infrastructure, reduce data costs, and create affordable devices. He also stresses the potential of e-commerce and digital services to connect African entrepreneurs to global markets, fostering economic participation beyond traditional limitations. Investment in data centres and broadband infrastructure is crucial to improve internet speeds, reduce costs, and retain local data. Africa's growing youth population represents a demographic dividend, but realising its potential depends on digital inclusion, skills development, and supportive policies. Collaboration among governments, private sector, donors, and tech companies is essential to narrow the digital divide and enable Africa to move from being just consumers of technology to producers and innovators on the global stage.

Highlights

- Digital access in Africa remains uneven, especially between urban and rural areas.
- Internet access empowers youth in rural areas to dream bigger and develop new digital skills.
- Only 27% of Sub-Saharan Africa currently has mobile internet penetration, with gender disparities.
- Public-private partnerships are key to building affordable, widespread digital infrastructure.
- Investing in broadband and data centres can reduce costs and improve connectivity speeds.
- E-commerce and digital services offer vast opportunities for cross-border trade and economic inclusion.
- Africa's young population is a major asset, but requires skills training and digital literacy programs.

Key Insights

Digital Inclusion as an Economic Catalyst: Lunga vividly illustrates how internet access can break cycles of poverty by expanding young people's perspectives. Access to platforms like TikTok or YouTube allows rural youth to envision opportunities beyond their immediate environment, inspiring entrepreneurial ventures such as coding or website development. This digital empowerment can catalyse local economies by enabling remote business services, reducing unemployment, and stimulating innovation from within underserved communities. The digital divide thus directly correlates with economic inequality and limiting access perpetuates poverty traps.

Current Connectivity Gap and Its Impact: With only about 27% mobile internet penetration in Sub-Saharan Africa, the majority of the population remains disconnected. This gap disproportionately affects rural populations and women, who have significantly lower internet access than men. The lack of connectivity limits educational opportunities, restricts access to jobs and career growth, and ultimately constrains broader socioeconomic development. Addressing this gap is not just a technology challenge but a social imperative to ensure equitable growth.

Lunga calls for increased investment in Tier 4 data centres within Africa to localise data hosting and processing.

The Vital Role of Infrastructure and Public-Private Collaboration: Building robust digital infrastructure—fibre networks, data centres, and reliable power supply—is foundational to bridging the gap. Lunga highlights the necessity of joint efforts between governments and private sector players to subsidise infrastructure expansion in unprofitable rural areas. Examples from Europe, India, and Brazil show that government-backed infrastructure companies operated by private entities can efficiently roll out connectivity at affordable prices. Without such collaboration, commercial viability remains a barrier to universal access.

Reducing Data Costs and Device Affordability: High costs of data and smartphones remain significant barriers for digital inclusion. Lunga discusses initiatives such as affordable mobile data pricing and government removal of import duties on smartphones as steps toward making digital access financially attainable. Zero-rating essential platforms like government services or educational content can further enhance the value proposition for low-income users. These efforts are critical to ensure that connectivity translates into meaningful use rather than being limited by cost.

E-Commerce and Cross-Border Digital Trade as Growth Engines: Digital infrastructure enables entrepreneurs to transcend geographic limitations, opening markets far beyond local communities. The African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) supports this vision by facilitating cross-border commerce. Lunga envisions a future where small businesses in Johannesburg sell products internationally and rural artisans access global customers, dramatically increasing economic participation. The development of logistics infrastructure—roads, rail, air—is equally important to support physical goods trade alongside digital services.

Youth Population as a Demographic Dividend: Africa's rapidly growing and youthful population represents a potent advantage if equipped with the right digital skills. Lunga stresses the importance of coding and other tech-related education that do not necessarily require formal degrees but can be acquired through focused training programs. Empowering youth with these skills will not only enhance employability but also fuel innovation, enabling Africa to produce its own technological solutions rather than solely consuming external products.

Data Sovereignty and Local Hosting: Currently, much of the internet traffic for African users is routed and hosted outside the continent, which raises issues of latency, cost, and data security. Lunga calls for increased investment in Tier 4 data centres within Africa to localise data hosting and processing. This will reduce latency, improve user experience, protect sensitive data, and foster the development of local digital economies. Encouraging global platforms like Facebook and TikTok to host local data is a step towards digital sovereignty and security.

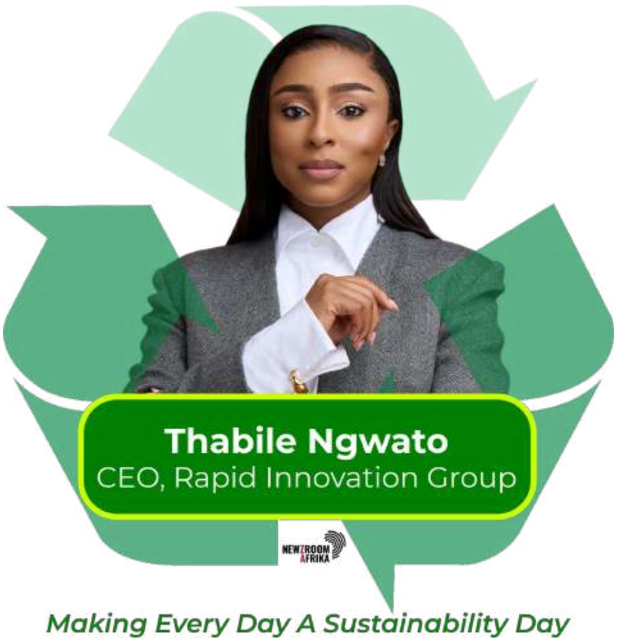
Final Thoughts

Lunga Siyo paints a comprehensive picture of how digital connectivity is both a challenge and a tremendous opportunity for Africa. Bridging the digital divide requires coordinated efforts involving infrastructure investment, affordable access, digital literacy, and enabling regulatory environments.

The continent's youth and entrepreneurial spirit can drive inclusive growth if supported by technologies and policies that empower them. Ultimately, Africa must transition from being passive consumers of global technology to active innovators and producers, leveraging digital tools to transform societies and economies across the continent.

Agenda 2063 Aspiration 1: A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development.

Thabile Ngwato, *CEO, Rapid Innovation Group (Newzroom Afrika)*



Keynote: Building Brand Africa Through Strategic Storytelling

In her keynote address on building Brand Africa through strategic storytelling, Thabile Ngwato, CEO of Rapid Innovation Group and co-founder of Newzroom Afrika, emphasises the critical role storytelling plays in shaping perceptions and narratives about Africa. She outlines the historical misrepresentation of Africa through incomplete and often negative narratives and stresses the necessity for Africans to take ownership of their stories to authentically showcase the continent's diversity, culture, and innovation on a global stage.

Thabile highlights Africa's unique value proposition, its rich diversity across 54 countries with varied languages, cultures, economies, and histories, and underscores the importance of weaving this multiplicity into a unified continental narrative. Storytelling is not just about marketing but about identity-building, nation-building, and reclaiming Africa's image with dignity and pride.

She shares practical insights from her experience with Newzroom Afrika, a news and current affairs channel launched in 2019, which focuses on human-centric stories that reflect everyday African lives and experiences. Strategic storytelling requires collaboration among multiple stakeholders, including media, governments, corporates, and creatives, to amplify authentic African voices and foster unity.

Thabile discusses the evolving media landscape, noting the rise of citizen journalism and the growing demand for fact-checked, in-depth analysis over breaking news. She highlights the challenges such as fragmentation, stereotypes, language barriers, and funding constraints, but remains optimistic about the power of collective effort and innovation to overcome these.

The conversation also touches on the balance between providing news that audiences want and content that is socially necessary but not always popular, stressing the importance of audience insights and responsible journalism. South African media's role in the broader African context is examined, with an emphasis on expanding coverage beyond national borders to truly represent the continent's complexity.

Thabile reflects on the concept of a unified Brand Africa, calling for a collective vision and messaging that conveys Africa as a continent of opportunity, complexity, and brilliance, moving beyond outdated stereotypes. She concludes by urging stakeholders to ask themselves foundational questions about their storytelling goals and the impact they wish to create, advocating for intentional, strategic communication that builds a powerful, authentic African identity.

Highlights

- Africa's narrative has been historically incomplete; owning our stories is essential to authentic representation.
- Strategic storytelling creates emotional connections and builds Brand Africa's identity globally.
- Collaboration between media, government, corporates, and creatives is vital to amplify African voices.
- Newzroom Afrika's human-centric approach highlights everyday African experiences with credible, fact-checked journalism.
- Audience insights and multi-channel strategies help balance audience preferences with socially necessary content.
- Africa's diversity is its unique selling point, offering rich opportunities across tourism, culture, innovation, and more.
- The key question in storytelling: "What do we want to say, and how do we want to be perceived?"

Key Insights

Narrative Ownership as Identity Building: For decades, Africa's image has been shaped by external narratives that often focus on negatives or incomplete stories. Thabile stresses that Africans must reclaim narrative ownership to build a dignified and authentic identity. This is critical not only for correcting misconceptions but also for fostering pride and unity within the continent. Storytelling is thus a strategic tool for both internal cohesion and external perception management.

The call-to-action is clear: all stakeholders must ask themselves what story they want to tell and how they want Africa to be seen.

Strategic Storytelling Drives Emotional Connection and Brand Equity: Stories that resonate emotionally help position African brands, cultures, and people as relatable and human. Unlike generic marketing, strategic storytelling aligns storytelling with Africa's DNA, its diverse cultures and authentic experiences, creating a brand that transcends clichés and stereotypes. This emotional engagement can drive global interest, investment, and tourism.

Collaboration is Essential to Amplify African Stories: The media ecosystem must embrace partnerships, between traditional media houses, digital platforms, citizen journalists, corporates, and governments, to maximise reach and impact. MultiChoice Group and Newzroom Afrika are highlighted as examples that successfully collaborate to showcase talent and stories continent-wide. Collaboration also transcends borders, essential for showcasing Africa's multiplicity and fostering continental unity.

Evolving Media Landscape Requires Fact-Checking and In-Depth Analysis: The influx of citizen journalism and social media has democratised news but also increased misinformation. Trusted platforms like Newzroom Afrika differentiate themselves by prioritising accuracy over speed ("better to be right than first") and providing rich, context-driven analysis that helps audiences make sense of complex issues. Trustworthiness is built through rigorous fact-checking and human-centric storytelling.

Audience Insights Enable Balancing Popularity and Responsibility: Newzroom Afrika's investment in audience insight teams allows it to understand what viewers want and where they consume content. This data-driven approach helps balance delivering engaging content with the imperative to educate and empower audiences, especially the youth. It also informs content creation for different platforms and demographics, ensuring relevance and impact.

Africa's Diverse Cultural Wealth as a Competitive Advantage: Africa's 54 countries represent a mosaic of languages, economies, and cultures. While diversity sometimes causes fragmentation, it should be leveraged as a unique selling point in global storytelling. From film and fashion to technology and tourism, Africa's cultural wealth offers authentic content and economic opportunities that can reposition the continent as a place of innovation and creativity.

Foundation Question for Effective Storytelling: What Do We Want to Say? One of the most profound insights from Thabile is the importance of pausing to define the core message before communicating. This foundational question drives clarity, consistency, and strategic alignment in storytelling efforts. Without this, messages risk being scattered or ineffective. It also frames storytelling as an intentional act of identity and impact creation rather than mere content production.

Final Thoughts

Thabile's keynote provides a comprehensive, insightful roadmap for building Brand Africa through strategic storytelling. It highlights the urgency of Africans taking control of their narratives and presenting a nuanced, dignified image of the continent. By leveraging collaboration, audience insights, credible journalism, and the continent's inherent diversity, Africa can reshape global perceptions and foster internal unity.

The call-to-action is clear: all stakeholders must ask themselves what story they want to tell and how they want Africa to be seen, ensuring that storytelling becomes a powerful vehicle for transformation, empowerment, and sustainable growth.

> ***"Sometimes it falls upon a generation to be great, you can be that generation." Nelson Mandela***

Nkateko Khoza, *Director, Hoyohoyo Hotels and Resorts*

Making Every Day A Sustainability Day

Keynote: Tourism and Economic Sustainability

In this insightful discussion, Khoza delves into the pivotal role tourism plays in driving sustainable economic and community development in key African markets, particularly South Africa. She highlights tourism's significant contribution to GDP, job creation, and foreign exchange, underscoring its multiplier effects across sectors such as retail, agriculture, transport, and construction. Khoza emphasises the importance of leveraging Africa's abundant natural and cultural resources responsibly to foster economic sustainability while preserving cultural heritage and promoting inclusion, especially for youth and women.

She also discusses the critical role of government policies, public-private partnerships, and digital innovation in sustaining and growing the tourism industry.

Khoza candidly addresses challenges like over-dependence on international tourists, environmental degradation, social inequality, crime, and the risks of gentrification, advocating for responsible development that balances economic growth with environmental stewardship and community upliftment. The conversation closes with a reflection on sustainability as a legacy for future generations, reinforcing that tourism must be inclusive, resilient, and collaborative to benefit not only the present but also posterity.

Highlights

- Tourism contributes approximately 8% to South Africa's GDP and supports over 1.5 million direct jobs.
- Sustainable tourism promotes economic growth while preserving cultural heritage and natural ecosystems.
- Public-private partnerships are crucial for infrastructure development and advancing tourism sectors.
- Digital innovation enhances tourism marketing, safety, and discovery of hidden gems.
- Tourism drives youth and women empowerment through targeted inclusion programs and skills development.
- Challenges include environmental degradation, crime, social inequality, and gentrification effects.
- Responsible tourism requires balancing economic benefits with environmental protection and community well-being for future generations.

Key Insights

Tourism as a Multiplier Industry: Tourism's influence extends beyond hospitality, stimulating retail, agriculture, transport, and construction sectors. This interconnectedness magnifies its contribution to national economic growth and diversification, making it a vital engine for sustainable development in Africa. By supporting ancillary industries, tourism creates a ripple effect, enhancing employment and income generation in multiple areas simultaneously.

Cultural Preservation as a Pillar of Sustainability: Khoza stresses that maintaining and showcasing indigenous cultures, such as the Shangaan culture in South Africa, is essential for sustainable tourism. Cultural tourism not only enriches visitor experiences but also strengthens community identity and pride. This preservation helps safeguard intangible heritage and supports artisans and craft industries, thereby linking social sustainability with economic benefits.

Cultural tourism not only enriches visitor experiences but also strengthens community identity and pride.

Inclusion of Youth and Women: The tourism sector provides unique opportunities to empower marginalised groups, particularly youth and women, through training, internships, and entrepreneurship programs. By prioritising these groups, tourism becomes a catalyst for reducing unemployment and fostering equitable economic participation, which is vital for long-term social stability and growth.

Public-Private Partnerships Driving Infrastructure Development: Effective collaboration between government entities and private investors leads to improved infrastructure such as airports, roads, and hospitality facilities. These partnerships enable the creation of enabling environments that attract tourists and facilitate sustainable growth, while also ensuring community needs and environmental concerns are addressed.

Digital Innovation Enhancing Tourism: The use of social media, mobile apps, and other digital tools is transforming how tourism destinations are marketed and managed. Digital platforms help uncover lesser-known attractions, provide real-time safety information, and streamline visitor experiences, making tourism more accessible, safe, and engaging. This innovation is crucial post-COVID for industry recovery and resilience.

Addressing Challenges of Crime and Environmental Degradation: Tourism's growth is threatened by safety concerns and environmental risks such as wildlife poaching, pollution, and habitat destruction. Khoza advocates for a responsible approach that involves community vigilance, adherence to park regulations, and environmental impact assessments to mitigate these threats, ensuring that tourism growth does not come at the expense of security or ecological balance.

Navigating Gentrification and Social Equity: The phenomenon of gentrification linked to tourism development can displace low-income communities and limit access to local amenities. The discussion highlights the importance of municipal oversight and community-inclusive planning to prevent displacement and ensure that tourism benefits are equitably shared, preserving social cohesion and cultural authenticity.

Final Thoughts

The conversation provides a comprehensive understanding of how tourism in Africa, especially South Africa, can be a powerful tool for sustainable development when managed thoughtfully. It underscores the need for holistic strategies that integrate economic, social, and environmental dimensions, ensuring the sector's resilience and legacy for future generations.

Agenda 2063 Aspiration 5: An Africa with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, shared values and ethics.

Richard Manzini, *Senior Investment Manager and Acting COO at the Gauteng Enterprise Propeller (GEP)*

Keynote: Creating Opportunities Through Inclusive Entrepreneurship

The presentation by Manzini, offers a comprehensive exploration of inclusive entrepreneurship as a cornerstone for building sustainable economies, particularly within South Africa. GEP's mandate focuses on supporting micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), especially those unbanked or underserved by traditional financial institutions. Manzini emphasises that entrepreneurship is not a solitary journey; rather, it requires resilience, strategic understanding of markets, stakeholders, financial discipline, and continuous learning.

He presents inclusive entrepreneurship as a multi-faceted process that involves access to funding, market, networks, and business development support, aligning directly with Sustainable Development Goals such as no poverty, gender equality, and reduced inequalities. Manzini challenges the prevailing notion that all businesses must scale exponentially, emphasising the legitimacy and importance of sustainable SMEs that provide steady income and employment over decades.

The talk highlights the critical importance of systems and processes – financial management, stakeholder communication, legal contracts, and cash flow monitoring – which underpin business sustainability. Manzini shares insights on the necessity of mentoring, disciplined financial behaviour, understanding funders' mandates, and the importance of perseverance in securing funding. He stresses that building a business capable of long-term survival can take decades and requires adaptability, forward-thinking, and leveraging relationships.

Throughout the presentation, Manzini advocates for a realistic, context-specific approach to entrepreneurship that prioritises solving local problems with scalable and impactful solutions. He stresses the value of support structures, including access to funding, mentorship, and networks that link SMEs to larger markets and buyers, to foster sustainable growth. The closing discussion underscores that successful entrepreneurship hinges on continuous decision-making, financial literacy, and the ability to learn from larger corporate systems and adapt accordingly.

Highlights

- Inclusive entrepreneurship is key to sustainable economic development and aligns with global Sustainable Development Goals.
- Entrepreneurship is not a solo journey; resilience and stakeholder engagement are critical for success.
- Access to funding for micro and small businesses requires discipline, proper documentation, and understanding of funders' mandates.
- Sustainable businesses focus on cash flow and financial systems, not just rapid profit or scale.
- Building strong networks and relationships is essential for business survival and growth.
- Business sustainability often takes decades; success is measured by longevity and steady impact, not just big exits.
- Mentorship and continuous learning from larger corporate practices improve SME viability.

Mentorship is crucial for guiding entrepreneurs to build capabilities and avoid common pitfalls such as poor contract management or over-leveraging.

Key Insights

Inclusive Entrepreneurship as a Development Pillar: Manzini frames inclusive entrepreneurship as a critical pillar for addressing socio-economic challenges such as poverty, gender inequality, and unemployment. By focusing on the inclusion of women, youth, and informal traders, GEP aims to unlock economic potential in marginalised communities, thus contributing to broader national development goals. This inclusive approach acknowledges the systemic barriers in accessing capital and markets and seeks to dismantle them through tailored support.

Entrepreneurship Requires Resilience and Systems Thinking: The journey of entrepreneurship is described as a process of learning how to crawl, walk, and run. Manzini emphasises that resilience alone is insufficient without a structured approach to understanding markets, stakeholders, compliance, and financial management. Developing consistent routines such as monthly financial reviews, stakeholder communication, and strategic planning build the robustness necessary to survive market fluctuations and operational challenges.

Financial Discipline is Paramount: A recurring theme is the necessity for entrepreneurs to separate personal and business finances, maintain accurate management accounts, and demonstrate transparent cash flow. This discipline not only increases the likelihood of securing funding but is a fundamental indicator of business health. Manzini explicitly highlights that funders look for predictable, sustainable cash flows rather than short-term profitability, aligning with how banks assess risk.

Sustainability Over Growth: Contrary to popular narratives that glorify rapid scaling and billion-dollar valuations, Manzini asserts that many successful businesses are those that maintain steady, manageable profits over long periods. He shares anecdotal evidence of businesses in townships that have thrived for 15+ years with modest but consistent profits, emphasising that entrepreneurship can be about stable livelihoods and community impact rather than exponential growth. This perspective helps redefine success in entrepreneurship for a wide range of business owners.

Value of Networks and Stakeholder Engagement: The backend systems of a business, including supplier relationships, employee culture, and customer trust, are identified as crucial for sustainability. Manzini stresses that entrepreneurs must actively cultivate these networks and communicate openly with all stakeholders to build trust and ensure business continuity. This relational approach contrasts with a purely transactional view of business and encourages a community-centric model of enterprise.

Strategic Decision-Making and Forward Planning: Successful entrepreneurs are those who think ahead, continuously assessing the impact of their decisions over weeks, months, and years. Manzini encourages entrepreneurs to adopt a mindset of forward-looking analysis, akin to how large corporations monitor quarterly and annual performance to make timely adjustments. This strategic approach helps businesses anticipate market shifts and adapt proactively rather than reactively.

Understanding Funding Ecosystems and Mandates: Manzini underscores the importance of entrepreneurs understanding the specific mandates of funding institutions before applying for support. He notes that many funding applications fail due to incomplete documentation or misalignment with funders' criteria. This insight encourages entrepreneurs to be deliberate and informed in their funding pursuits, improving their chances of securing appropriate capital and building long-term relationships with financial partners.

Mentorship and Learning from Larger Businesses: The presentation highlights that many SMEs can improve their sustainability by adopting best practices from larger firms, particularly in financial management and operational systems. Mentorship is crucial for guiding entrepreneurs to build these capabilities and avoid common pitfalls such as poor contract management or over-leveraging. This transfer of knowledge supports a more professionalized SME sector capable of competing effectively in the economy.

The Reality of Business Challenges and Failures: Manzini candidly addresses that not all entrepreneurs succeed and that failures often result from poor decision-making, mismanagement, or unrealistic expectations. He stresses the need for entrepreneurs to be resilient, persistent, and willing to learn from rejection and setbacks. This realistic framing prepares entrepreneurs for the difficulties ahead and encourages a mindset of continuous improvement rather than discouragement.

Bridging the Gap Between Informal and Formal Economies: GEP's work is pivotal in formalising businesses that start informally by providing not only funding but also business development services that help entrepreneurs comply with regulations, manage finances, and access new markets. This bridging role helps integrate marginalised entrepreneurs into the mainstream economy, promoting inclusive growth and reducing inequalities.

Localised Solutions Over Imported Ideas: Manzini cautions against copying business models or solutions designed for first-world contexts without adaptation. Instead, he urges entrepreneurs to solve problems that are specific, observable, and prevalent within their immediate communities. This localised innovation is more likely to attract support and create meaningful impact because it addresses real needs in a tangible way.

Importance of Cash Flow Over Profitability: The discussion clarifies that cash flow management is more critical than profitability in the early stages of business. Manzini references companies like Uber and Airbnb that are not profitable yet maintain positive cash flows, enabling operational

sustainability and ongoing funding. Entrepreneurs are encouraged to focus on maintaining positive cash flow to survive and grow.

Building Buffer Mechanisms for Financial Stability: To survive common challenges like delayed payments and market fluctuations, entrepreneurs should create financial buffers through standby overdraft facilities or cash reserves. This advice is practical and encourages financial prudence to mitigate risk and protect employee salaries and operational continuity during downturns.

Long-Term Vision and Leveraging Debt: Manzini encourages entrepreneurs to embrace leverage—using other people's money—to grow their businesses responsibly. He highlights that no major listed company is without debt and that financial literacy includes understanding how to manage debt to build sustainable enterprises. This perspective reframes borrowing as a strategic tool rather than a liability.

Role of GEP as a Bridge to Commercial Banking: GEP positions itself as a stepping stone for businesses to graduate from micro and small enterprise stages to being bankable by commercial institutions. This value chain approach ensures entrepreneurs receive support suited to their current stage and can scale up their financing as they mature, promoting a structured growth trajectory.

Persistence in Funding Pursuit: The narrative that successful entrepreneurs often face multiple rejections before securing funding reinforces the importance of persistence. Manzini's experience shows that resilience involves refining pitches, learning funders' expectations, and continuously improving business plans to align with funding criteria.

Alignment of Business Plans with Impact and Community Benefits: Entrepreneurs should articulate how their business contributes to employment, economic growth, and community development. Demonstrating this broader impact strengthens funding applications and aligns business objectives with developmental priorities, enhancing credibility and support.

Human Element in Funding Processes: Manzini reminds entrepreneurs that funding decisions are made by humans who may react differently, sometimes negatively, but this should not deter entrepreneurs from continuing to seek support. Managing emotional responses and maintaining focus on the long-term vision is essential for navigating the funding landscape.

Final Thoughts

Manzini's presentation is a deeply insightful, pragmatic, and authentic guide to inclusive entrepreneurship in South Africa. It offers realistic perspectives on the challenges and opportunities facing SMEs, emphasising the importance of resilience, financial discipline, local problem-solving, and strategic stakeholder engagement.

The focus on sustainability rather than rapid growth, coupled with actionable advice on managing cash flow, funding applications, and business systems, makes this a vital resource for current and aspiring entrepreneurs. Ultimately, inclusive entrepreneurship is framed not just as a business endeavour but as a socio-economic imperative crucial for sustainable development and equitable economic transformation.

Mari Payne, *Deputy Managing Director of Sesame Workshop South Africa (known for Takalani Sesame)*

Keynote: Education Technology - Bridging Africa's Learning Gap

Marie presents a comprehensive overview of how education technology (EdTech) is transforming early learning in Africa, with a focus on South Africa. Marking the 25th anniversary of Takalani Sesame, she highlights the critical role of digital tools and AI-powered learning in advancing Sustainable Development Goal 4 (quality education) and Africa's Agenda 2063, which aims to foster well-educated citizens through a science and technology-driven skills revolution.

Payne discusses the diverse and complex educational landscape across Africa, emphasising the need for adaptable, localised EdTech solutions that address varied cultural, linguistic, and infrastructural contexts. She outlines how EdTech can overcome traditional barriers such as overcrowded classrooms, insufficient resources, outdated curricula, and geographical challenges, thus enabling inclusive education for underserved populations.

EdTech's benefits include immersive, personalised learning that adapts to each child's developmental needs, use of multimedia and gamification, and support for children with learning difficulties or disabilities. Payne shares examples like a WhatsApp chatbot that guides parents in early childhood development and animated video content used in ECD centres. She also underscores the cost-effectiveness and scalability of digital tools compared to traditional face-to-face training and printed materials.

Challenges such as digital infrastructure, connectivity, teacher training, cultural acceptance, screen time concerns, and language barriers are carefully considered. Payne stresses the critical role of teachers and the importance of pre-service and in-service training to effectively integrate technology into classrooms.

Looking ahead, Payne highlights emerging trends like AI and virtual reality in education, while stressing the importance of online safety, mental health, and ethical considerations. She advocates for strengthened public-private partnerships, evidence-based research, policy development, and knowledge sharing to sustainably advance EdTech across the continent.

Through audience engagement, Payne reinforces the complementary role of digital tools and human interaction, especially in early childhood development, sharing impactful stories where play-based learning helped children and families overcome adversity in under-resourced communities. The session closes on a hopeful note, emphasising collaboration across sectors as key to bridging learning gaps and enhancing education in Africa.

Highlights

- Takalani Sesame celebrates 25 years of transforming early learning in South Africa.
- EdTech and AI are pivotal in realising SDG 4: quality education for all in Africa.
- Personalised learning journeys powered by digital platforms tailor education to individual needs.
- Gamification and multimedia make learning engaging, interactive, and developmentally appropriate.

SOLVING EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES SHORTAGE.

TAKE ACTION! DONATE:
BOOKS, TOYS, TABLETS, CALCULATORS, SHOES, STATIONERY, CASH etc.

backtoschool.org.za

An initiative of ZA Creative & Projects (PTY) Ltd
Reg No.: 2024/367087/07 Tax: 9307897257

- EdTech bridges access gaps for remote, underserved, and disabled learners across Africa.
- Public-private partnerships are essential for scaling cost-effective, sustainable education solutions.
- Teacher training and ongoing professional development are critical for effective EdTech integration.

Ongoing professional development ensures teachers stay current with rapid technological advancements, maximising EdTech's educational benefits.

Key Insights

Diversity and Localisation are Crucial: Africa's educational landscape is highly diverse, influenced by cultural, linguistic, and infrastructural factors. EdTech solutions must be adaptable and localised to be effective, rejecting the "one-size-fits-all" approach. This flexibility allows education to resonate with local realities and enhances learner engagement and outcomes.

AI and Personalised Learning Revolutionise Education: AI-powered platforms enable individualised learning paths by continuously assessing each learner's progress and tailoring content accordingly. This ensures learners receive targeted support, helping close developmental gaps and fostering better educational outcomes, especially in early childhood settings where early intervention is critical.

Addressing Traditional Challenges with Technology: Overcrowded classrooms, insufficient resources, and outdated curricula hinder quality education. EdTech provides scalable, cost-effective solutions that extend beyond physical classrooms, offering digital content and tools that supplement traditional teaching and help overcome geographical and infrastructural barriers.

Importance of Human Interaction in Early Learning: Despite the advantages of EdTech, human interaction remains irreplaceable, particularly for young children's social-emotional development. Technology should complement, not replace, play-based, interpersonal learning experiences which are foundational to early childhood development, emotional well-being, and resilience building.

Smartphone Penetration Enables Broad Access: High smartphone and WhatsApp penetration in African countries like South Africa provide a practical platform for delivering educational content. These accessible devices, often with offline capabilities, enable learning even in low-connectivity environments, making EdTech a viable solution for remote and under-resourced areas.

Collaboration Drives Success and Sustainability: Effective EdTech implementation hinges on partnerships between government, private sector, mobile operators, and educational institutions. These collaborations enable zero-rated or reduced-cost data access, shared resources, policy support, and capacity building, creating a more sustainable and equitable educational ecosystem.

Research and Evidence-Based Approaches Strengthen Impact: Continuous research and monitoring are essential to design, test, and refine EdTech programs. Measuring impact ensures that interventions effectively support learners' development and inform future improvements, while sharing learnings facilitates replication and adaptation across different African contexts.

Child Safety and Digital Well-being: As more children access digital learning tools, safeguarding their online safety, mental health, and well-being becomes paramount. Policies, parental guidance, and educator training need to address risks such as exposure to harmful content or excessive screen time, ensuring technology usage is safe and beneficial.

Engaging Learning Through Multimedia and Play: Incorporating animation, storytelling, and gamified elements into EdTech content supports engagement and motivation, especially for young learners. Such interactive approaches help children grasp complex topics, develop 21st-century skills like creativity and problem-solving, and enjoy learning in a playful, stimulating manner.

Teacher Training is a Cornerstone for EdTech Integration: Both pre-service and in-service teacher training programs must equip educators with the skills and confidence to effectively use technology in classrooms. Ongoing professional development ensures teachers stay current with rapid technological advancements, maximising EdTech's educational benefits.

Scalability and Cost-Effectiveness Are Vital: Given limited philanthropic funding and resource constraints, digital education solutions offer scalable models that can reach more learners at a lower cost than traditional methods. This economic efficiency is critical for broadening access to quality education across Africa's diverse and often underfunded education systems.

Potential of Emerging Technologies: Virtual reality and AI hold exciting potential to create immersive, experiential learning environments that transcend physical and geographical limits. However, ethical considerations, infrastructure readiness, and safety protocols must evolve alongside these technologies to ensure responsible adoption.

Play-Based Interventions Build Resilience: Real-world examples from community engagement programs demonstrate how play-based learning facilitated by social workers can help children and families in under-resourced contexts overcome trauma and build nurturing relationships, highlighting the holistic benefits of early childhood education beyond academics.

Celebrating Legacy and Inspiring Future Innovation: Takalani Sesame's 25-year milestone underscores the enduring impact of educational media in Africa. It also inspires continued innovation in EdTech, ensuring that new digital tools honour foundational educational principles while embracing emerging technologies to meet future learning needs.

Final Thoughts

Marie Payne's presentation offers a rich, nuanced perspective on the transformative role of education technology in Africa's early learning landscape. While EdTech presents immense opportunities to overcome long-standing educational barriers and personalise learning, it must be implemented thoughtfully, respecting cultural contexts, safeguarding child well-being, and complementing human interaction.

The future of education in Africa lies in collaborative, evidence-based, and inclusive approaches that leverage technology's potential while honouring the critical role of teachers and communities.

Bridget Makhura, *Chief People Officer at Clicks Group*

Making Every Day A Sustainability Day

Keynote: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the Workplace

Bridget delivered an insightful presentation on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) within the South African and broader African context, addressing the challenges and importance of fostering inclusive workplaces. She emphasised that DEI is often perceived as conflicting with performance, but many organisations, including Clicks, are proving otherwise. Clicks Group, a major South African health and beauty retailer with a diverse portfolio including Clicks stores, UPD distribution, The Body Shop, and The Baby Shop, has embedded DEI into its core business strategy and sustainability framework. Their sustainability strategy spans four pillars: building accessible healthcare, empowering motivated people, ethical product sourcing, and minimising environmental impact.

Makhura highlighted that diversity and inclusion initiatives at Clicks start at the highest leadership levels, with women making up 44% of the board and 62% of the workforce. The company actively supports female entrepreneurs and invests in female-owned businesses. A flagship community initiative, "Girls on the Go," provides sanitary pads and dignity packs to young girls nationwide to reduce absenteeism caused by lack of access to menstrual products, thereby promoting education and future workforce inclusion. This program recently expanded to university students in partnership with WITS, allowing students to discreetly access sanitary products via a club card system.

Clicks is also innovating in sustainability by integrating electric vehicles into their delivery system, which is managed in-house to reduce carbon emissions and empower owner-drivers, addressing social and environmental goals simultaneously. The conversation extended to workforce development across generations, with Bridget sharing examples of career progression from entry-level positions to senior leadership, underscoring the company's commitment to skills transfer and creating meaningful career pathways.

The discussion also touched on the company's efforts to engage Small, Medium, and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs) in their supply and service chains, encouraging new partnerships and inclusive growth. Bridget concluded by reinforcing that successful DEI efforts require leadership buy-in and time, and that Clicks is committed to using its influence to drive sustainable social impact both inside and outside the organisation.

Highlights

- Clicks Group integrates diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) as a core part of their sustainability and business strategy.
- Women represent 44% of the board and 62% of the workforce, with female leadership at the CEO level.
- "Girls on the Go" initiative, we've empowered education and dignity by contributing over 769,000 sanitary pads in the past two years, with more than R2 million invested in 2025 alone to support girls' education and dignity.
- Clicks uses electric vehicles and an owner-driver model to reduce carbon emissions and promote socio-economic empowerment.

- The company actively supports female-owned SMEs and invests in inclusive business practices across its value chain.
- Clicks fosters career progression from entry-level roles to senior management, emphasising skills transfer and mentorship.

Clicks' transition to electric vehicles for delivery and the owner-driver scheme exemplifies how environmental sustainability and social empowerment can be pursued simultaneously.

Key Insights

DEI as a Sustainability Imperative: The Clicks Group's approach demonstrates that diversity, equity, and inclusion are not just HR initiatives but integral to sustainable business practices. By linking DEI to innovation and belonging, Clicks positions itself to drive long-term social and economic impact. This aligns with global sustainability development goals and highlights the necessity of inclusive business models for equitable growth.

Leadership Commitment Drives Change: With nearly half the board composed of women and a female CEO, Clicks shows that authentic diversity efforts require leadership buy-in. This top-down commitment fosters a culture where diversity is valued and inclusion is operationalised, dispelling myths that diversity compromises performance.

Addressing Menstrual Health Barriers: The "Girls on the Go" program tackles a critical but often overlooked barrier to female education, access to menstrual hygiene products. By distributing over 385,000 dignity packs annually, Clicks improves school attendance while promoting dignity and empowerment, with long-term benefits for workforce participation and social equity.

Sustainability Through Innovation: Clicks' transition to electric vehicles for delivery and the owner-driver scheme exemplifies how environmental sustainability and social empowerment can be pursued simultaneously. This strategy reduces the company's carbon footprint while creating income opportunities, demonstrating a holistic approach to ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) goals.

Inclusive Workforce Development: Clicks invests heavily in training programs such as the pharmacy assistant qualification, enabling employees to advance from entry-level to leadership roles. This focus on career development, mentorship, and skills transfer is crucial for building a resilient, diverse talent pipeline that reflects South Africa's demographic realities and generational transitions.

Supporting Female Entrepreneurs and SMEs: The deliberate focus on investing in female-owned businesses and providing more franchises to women reflects Clicks' commitment to inclusive economic empowerment beyond its internal workforce. This strategy helps to strengthen local economies and promotes gender equity in business ownership.

Expanding Social Impact to Higher Education: Students on the Go programme, originally a Wits University pilot, enables students to use a ClubCard or vending machines to discreetly access sanitary products, addressing a critical gap for disadvantaged female students. In its second year, the initiative has expanded to four additional universities, helping to reduce absenteeism, restore dignity, and reinforce Clicks' commitment to community impact. This programme complements the Group's broader investment in higher education through its own learning academies and the New Clicks Foundation Bursary Fund, which provides obligation-free support to 100 bursars each year.

Final Thoughts

Bridget Makhura's presentation offers a comprehensive look at how Clicks Group is embedding diversity, equity, inclusion, and sustainability into its business model. Through leadership commitment, community engagement, innovative environmental practices, and inclusive workforce development, Clicks is setting a benchmark for socially responsible corporate behaviour in South Africa and across Africa.

The company's initiatives demonstrate that sustainable business success is intertwined with creating equitable opportunities and fostering inclusive ecosystems inside and outside the organisation.

Agenda 2063 Aspiration 6: An Africa, whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially its women and youth, and caring for children.

Bea Swanepoel, *CEO of Jozi My Jozi*

Keynote: Smart Cities and Urban Development

Bea leads a passionate and visionary discussion on smart cities and urban regeneration, focusing primarily on Johannesburg as a pilot for broader African urban renewal. She describes Jozi My Jozi not merely as an organisation, but as a movement rooted in collaboration across public and private sectors, academia, and communities, aiming to restore hope, pride, and sustainable development in the city. Bea emphasises practical initiatives such as installing solar street lights, improving safety through technology and community engagement, supporting early childhood education, addressing homelessness with innovative tech-enabled solutions, and fostering local entrepreneurship and job creation. Their approach integrate smart city concepts tailored to Johannesburg's unique context, promoting sustainability, resilience, and active citizenry.

The movement serves as a "super connector" linking projects with funding and partners to create measurable social impact aligned with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. Bea's vision extends beyond Johannesburg, encouraging adaptation of the model across South Africa and Africa, with each city adopting a unique identity that resonates locally.

The dialogue underscores the importance of collaboration, innovation, and local ownership. The conversation concludes with encouragement for small businesses, citizens, and organisations to actively engage in city-building efforts, emphasising that sustainable urban transformation begins with individual and collective responsibility.

Highlights

- Jozi My Jozi is a movement focused on revitalising Johannesburg through smart city concepts and community involvement.
- Installation of over 7,000 solar-powered streetlights to improve safety, sustainability, and job creation.
- Collaboration between public sector, private companies, academic institutions, and local communities is central to success.
- Innovative projects like "Trash to Art" combine environmental cleanup with cultural expression.

- Education initiatives target early childhood development and technology access for youth to prepare for future job markets.
- Community spaces such as upgraded parks foster social cohesion and reduce crime.
- The model aims to be scalable and adaptable for replication across other African cities with culturally relevant branding.

Jozi My Jozi's integration of arts, culture, and sports as community-building tools aligns with global urban regeneration best practices. These elements serve to humanise public spaces, enhance social cohesion, and create environments where diverse populations can interact safely and positively.

Key Insights

Urban Regeneration Requires Holistic, Multi-Sector Collaboration: Bea demonstrates that transforming a city like Johannesburg cannot rely solely on government efforts or private sector investments alone. The organisation's model positions itself as a "super connector," bridging diverse stakeholders—including corporate partners, government entities, academic researchers, NGOs, and residents—to collaboratively address complex urban challenges. This inclusive approach aligns with global sustainable development frameworks and ensures that solutions are contextually relevant and sustainable.

Sustainable Infrastructure as a Foundation for Safety and Growth: The emphasis on solar street lighting addresses multiple urban issues simultaneously: it improves public safety by lighting up high-risk areas, reduces energy consumption and carbon emissions, and stimulates local economic development through job creation in light assembly and maintenance. This integrated approach to infrastructure reflects a smart city ethos where technology supports social and environmental goals.

Community Engagement is Crucial for Ownership and Long-Term Impact: By framing Johannesburg as "Jozi My Jozi" (a term of endearment), the movement fosters emotional connection and pride among residents, encouraging them to take ownership of their city's safety and cleanliness. Projects that empower residents—such as reclaiming public parks and forming community sports teams—build social capital and resilience, which are essential for sustaining urban improvements beyond initial interventions.

Investing in Early Childhood Education and Youth Development is Key to Addressing Future Challenges: Bea mentions that Jozi My Jozi's focus on early childhood development (ECD) centres and after-school technology hubs highlights a strategic commitment to equipping the next generation with the skills necessary to thrive in a rapidly evolving job market dominated by AI and the Fourth Industrial Revolution. This ensures inclusivity by targeting underserved communities and providing pathways out of poverty through education and entrepreneurship.

Smart City Technologies Enhance Urban Management and Safety: The rollout of CCTV cameras integrated with AI for facial and number plate recognition exemplifies how technology can be leveraged to proactively manage public safety. Decentralised control centres staffed by a mix of public and private security personnel enable rapid response and increase trust in urban governance systems. Adopting traffic lights and securing their infrastructure further improves urban mobility and safety.

Addressing Homelessness with Compassion and Technology: Jozi My Jozi's approach to homelessness recognises individuals rather than treating the homeless as a monolithic group. The initiative to develop a tech-based "responsible giving" platform aims to channel public donations away from enabling substance abuse and instead toward sustainable solutions such as shelter and rehabilitation services. This data-driven method offers a blueprint for urban social support that balances empathy with accountability.

Scalability and Localisation are Essential for Continental Impact: While Johannesburg is the pilot city, the model's ultimate goal is to inspire similar urban transformations across Africa. Recognising that each city has unique cultural identities, Jozi My Jozi emphasises the importance of developing localised branding and strategies that resonate with residents' sense of place and history. This adaptive approach increases community buy-in and the likelihood of successful replication.

Additional Analysis

Bea notes that Jozi My Jozi's methodology of "story doing" rather than mere storytelling is a powerful paradigm that challenges traditional urban development models dependent on promises and delayed action. By implementing visible, tangible projects—such as the Mandela Bridge lighting upgrade and Ellis Park cleanup—the organisation builds credibility and momentum. This bottom-up approach engenders trust and encourages broader participation, which is vital in contexts where citizens have become disillusioned by unfulfilled government commitments.

Another notable aspect is the strategic engagement with small, medium, and micro enterprises (SMMEs). By supporting entrepreneurs and providing them exposure and growth opportunities, Jozi My Jozi not only stimulates local economic activity but also fosters social inclusion. Strengthening the informal economy and supporting small businesses is critical in African urban contexts where formal employment opportunities are limited.

Jozi My Jozi's integration of arts, culture, and sports as community-building tools aligns with global urban regeneration best practices. These elements serve to humanise public spaces, enhance social cohesion, and create environments where diverse populations can interact safely and positively. Moreover, leveraging creative industries and cultural heritage can attract tourism and investment, further supporting economic revitalisation.

The organisation's focus on environmental sustainability, from solar lighting to waste recycling, demonstrates a forward-thinking approach that aligns urban development with climate resilience. This is particularly important in African cities facing the dual pressures of rapid urbanisation and climate change.

Bea's presentation shows that Jozi My Jozi embodies a comprehensive, community-centred, and technologically savvy approach to urban regeneration that is both practical and visionary. It recognises that a city's transformation demands not just infrastructure upgrades but also social healing, economic empowerment, and a shared sense of responsibility. The model offers valuable lessons for cities across Africa and beyond seeking to become smart, sustainable, and inclusive in the 21st century.

Final Thoughts

Finally, Jozi My Jozi's transparent reliance on private sector funding and the role of corporate social investment (CSI) highlights the potential for public-private partnerships (PPPs) to drive social good. By acting as a neutral intermediary, the organisation maximises impact and helps overcome typical fragmentation and inefficiencies in urban development funding.

Dr Gamuchirai Mutezo, *Founder of Madam Waste Urban and Energy Planners*

Keynote: The Circular Economy: Redefining Africa's Future

Dr. Mutezo,, delivers an insightful keynote on pioneering the circular economy in South Africa and redefining Africa's sustainable future. Emphasising the shift from wasteful linear models to regenerative circular systems, she aligns her work with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 12 (responsible consumption) and 13 (climate action). Dr. Mutezo explains the role of an energy planner through practical demonstration projects showcasing decentralised circular economy technologies such as composting and biogas generation. These initiatives embody the principle of designing waste out of the system by promoting separation at source and creating economic opportunities within waste value chains.

She highlights the biological and technical cycles in the circular economy, referencing the Ellen MacArthur Foundation's butterfly diagram, and stresses the importance of intentional behaviour at individual, institutional, and corporate levels. The demonstration site at the Agricultural Research Council in Irene serves as a practical model where organic waste like livestock manure and agro-processed materials are converted into energy and compost, illustrating entrepreneurial potential in circular waste management.

Dr. Mutezo advocates for mindset shifts through education, community engagement, and industry collaboration. She encourages individuals and businesses to see waste as a resource, not a liability, and to proactively partake in waste separation and repurposing activities. Addressing questions from participants, she underscores the importance of industry associations, policy frameworks supporting innovation, and funding mechanisms tailored for circular economy businesses. The conversation extends to opportunities in recycling metals, textiles, and construction waste, and collaboration with educational institutions to build capacity in creating educational resources from recycled materials.

The session is a call to action for intentional, entrepreneurial, and systemic engagement with circular economy principles to create sustainable urban and energy futures in Africa.

Highlights

- Dr. Gamuchirai Mutezo pioneers South Africa's circular economy through practical, decentralised demonstration projects.
- Circular economy aligns with SDGs 12 (responsible consumption) and 13 (climate action), promoting regenerative design.
- The Ellen MacArthur Foundation's butterfly diagram illustrates biological and technical cycles critical to circularity.
- Emphasis on the "gospel of separation at source" to maximise waste value and reduce landfill dependency.
- Demonstration site converts livestock manure and organic waste into biogas and compost, showcasing business potential.
- Collaboration with industry associations and education sectors is vital for scaling circular economy adoption.
- Funding and policy innovation are essential to support circular economy businesses beyond the green sector.

Key Insights

Circular Economy as a Systemic Shift: Dr. Mutezo frames the circular economy not as a novel idea but as a systemic, regenerative approach that replaces the traditional linear "take-make-dispose" model. This paradigm shift is essential for sustainable development in Africa, especially in urban and energy planning contexts. The integration with SDGs illustrates its global and local relevance.

Biological vs. Technical Cycles: Using the butterfly diagram, she clarifies the dual nature of circular economy operations—biological cycles (organic waste, composting, biogas) and technical cycles (mining, textiles, metals, construction). Recognising these cycles helps stakeholders identify where they fit in the circular economy value chain and tailor interventions accordingly.

Dr. Mutezo highlights the need for greater interaction between waste processors and corporate entities generating significant waste streams, especially metals, to enhance recycling and repurposing.

Separation at Source as a Keystone Practice: The "gospel of separation at source" is critical in unlocking the value of waste materials. By separating waste at the household or institutional level, contamination is minimised, enabling higher quality recycling and reuse. This practice empowers communities and businesses to contribute actively to circularity.

Demonstration Sites as Learning and Innovation Hubs: The project at the Agricultural Research Council serves as a living laboratory combining practical education, technology testing, and entrepreneurship training. Demonstration sites demystify circular technologies and inspire decision-makers by showing tangible benefits, bridging the gap between theory and practice.

Entrepreneurship within Circular Economy: Circular economy activities can be economically viable and sustainable businesses. Dr. Mutezo stresses the importance of running demonstration projects as businesses, highlighting that circularity can generate income, create jobs, and support livelihoods, especially for youth and marginalised groups.

Collaborative Networks and Industry Associations: Effective circular economy implementation requires collaboration across sectors and industries. Industry associations like ORASA for organic waste and others for plastics and metals create platforms for coordination, resource sharing, and market development, which are crucial for scaling impact.

Education and Mindset Change Beyond Formal Systems: Education about circular economy principles should extend beyond classrooms into homes and communities. Encouraging DIY projects, family conversations, and exposure to circular entrepreneurs nurtures a culture of sustainability. Continuous engagement and curiosity are vital for long-term societal transformation.

Policy and Funding as Catalysts: While innovation is underway within government departments and research institutions, more targeted policy frameworks and funding instruments are needed to accelerate circular economy business growth. Engaging financial institutions beyond the environmental sector is necessary to attract diverse investment.

Waste as a Resource, Not a Burden: Reframing waste as a valuable resource unlocks a wealth of economic and environmental opportunities. This mindset shift motivates individuals, businesses, and governments to invest in waste management solutions, reducing environmental harm while creating value.

Contextualising Circular Economy in African Urban Settings: The discussion underscores the unique challenges and opportunities of implementing circular economy models in African cities, where informal waste reclaimers play a vital role, and urban agriculture intersects with waste management. Tailoring solutions to local realities ensures relevance and effectiveness.

Engagement with Corporate Sector for Material Flows: Dr. Mutezo highlights the need for greater interaction between waste processors and corporate entities generating significant waste streams, especially metals, to enhance recycling and repurposing. Industry-specific platforms facilitate these connections and unlock supply chains for recycled materials.

Creative Reuse and Upcycling as Economic Drivers: The example of artisans using construction and demolition waste or textiles to create art and furniture illustrates how circular economy principles can foster innovation and entrepreneurship in unexpected sectors, broadening the economic base and cultural appreciation for sustainability.

Scaling Through Intentionality and Consistency: The circular economy requires ongoing, intentional efforts, akin to "watering your garden," to grow and sustain. This includes personal lifestyle changes, institutional commitments, policy evolution, and market development, emphasising that circularity is a long-term journey rather than a one-off initiative.

Final Thoughts

Dr. Gamuchirai Mutezo's keynote powerfully conveys the transformative potential of the circular economy for Africa's sustainable development. By combining theory, demonstration, entrepreneurship, and community engagement, she provides a holistic blueprint for turning waste into wealth and aligning economic growth with environmental stewardship. Her insights call for individual responsibility, collaborative networks, innovative policies, and inclusive education to realise a regenerative future where circularity is embedded in the fabric of urban and energy planning.

This approach not only addresses urgent climate and resource challenges but also opens new pathways for economic empowerment and social impact across the continent.

Alef Meulenberg, *Founder of Rhiza and Fundraising for Impact*

Keynote: Corporate Impact Through Partnerships and Collaboration

Alef delivered a keynote presentation on corporate impact through partnerships and collaboration at the Africa CEO Impact and Sustainability Meeting 2025. Drawing on his extensive experience in development and social entrepreneurship, He emphasised the critical role of authentic collaboration between corporates, governments, and civil society to create sustainable social impact. He highlighted the strengths and challenges within South Africa's impact ecosystem, including the importance of long-term thinking, overcoming siloed approaches, and improving ease of doing business for nonprofits and social enterprises.

Alef shared local and international examples of successful partnerships, including initiatives in early childhood development and robotics education, illustrating how cross-sector collaboration can drive systemic change. He concluded with a compelling parable—the River Babies, which challenges organisations to move beyond symptom treatment and address root causes of social issues through genuine partnership and systemic thinking. He also spoke about the importance of strong governance, authentic relationships with funders, and strategic fundraising aligned with an organisation's bold vision. His keynote underscored the need for humility, authenticity, and long-term commitment to achieve meaningful corporate social impact.

Highlights

- Alef Meulenberg's keynote focused on corporate impact through authentic partnerships and collaboration.
- Emphasis on overcoming siloed work in the social sector to enable synergy and shared impact.
- Importance of long-term thinking in impact measurement, recognising that success often takes time.
- Exemplified partnerships in early childhood development and innovative robotics education programs.
- South Africa's ease of doing business ranking has worsened, complicating nonprofit and social enterprise operations.
- The "River Babies" parable highlights the need to address root causes rather than only symptoms.
- Strong governance, authentic funder relationships, and bold visions are critical for effective fundraising and impact.

Key Insights

Long-term impact requires patience and visionary thinking: Alef's story of a young woman's non-linear path from IT trainee to successful lawyer and entrepreneur illustrates the pitfalls of short-term impact assessments. Many social programs plant seeds that take years to bear fruit; funders and organisations must adopt patience and look beyond immediate outcomes to understand true social impact. This insight challenges the prevalent short-term, results-driven mindset in many development programs and funding models.

Breaking down silos is essential for scalable social change: Alef identifies sectoral and organisational silos as a major barrier to effective collaboration. Fear of losing funding and lack of humility often prevent organisations from partnering. However, recognising complementary strengths and sharing resources can create synergy, making impact greater than the sum of individual efforts. This calls for a cultural shift within the development and corporate social responsibility (CSR) sectors toward openness, trust, and joint value creation.

Governance and organisational readiness are as important as fundraising: Alef stresses that strong governance, including an independent and well-composed board, is critical to securing and maintaining funding. Funders conduct due diligence that can uncover governance weaknesses or reputational risks, potentially leading to lost opportunities. Nonprofits and social enterprises must invest in governance, compliance, and transparent reporting to build credibility and trust with funders and partners.

Aligning corporate ESG initiatives with core business values ensures purpose-driven impact: Alef warns against "tick-box" approaches to environmental, social, and governance (ESG) efforts where companies engage in CSR merely to meet regulatory or reporting requirements. True impact emerges when ESG is integrated with a company's mission and culture, making social responsibility part of business strategy rather than a grudging obligation. This alignment fosters authentic commitment and sustainable collaboration with social partners.

Ease of doing business reforms can unlock social enterprise potential: Alef highlights how complex regulatory frameworks in South Africa hinder social enterprises' ability to operate effectively. For example, the restrictions on nonprofit organisations trading and owning for-profit entities create confusing structures that deter investment and partnership. Simplified legal frameworks, such as a dedicated social enterprise entity, and increased VAT thresholds would empower small businesses and nonprofits to scale impact more efficiently.

The parable of the River Babies serves as a metaphor for how many organisations focus primarily on rescuing victims rather than preventing systemic problems upstream.

Impactful partnerships require more than funding, they require authentic relationships: Alef points out that successful fundraising and collaboration hinge on building genuine, ongoing relationships with funders and partners, beyond transactional interactions. Site visits, understanding funders' motivations, and transparent communication help deepen trust and unlock sustained support. This relational approach contrasts sharply with sporadic reporting and proposal submissions typical in many nonprofit-funder dynamics.

Addressing root causes vs. symptoms is a fundamental challenge for social impact: The parable of the River Babies serves as a metaphor for how many organisations focus primarily on rescuing victims rather than preventing systemic problems upstream. Alef challenges attendees to consider whether their efforts truly tackle root causes such as inequality, access, and economic exclusion, or whether they merely create temporary relief. This requires boldness, humility, and collaboration to redesign systemic solutions rather than perpetuate fragmented interventions.

Additional Context

Alef's own background, with a master's degree in philosophy and economics, and experience founding multiple social impact organisations, lends a multidimensional perspective to the discussion. His Ashoka fellowship illustrate his global and innovative approach to social entrepreneurship. The examples he shares, from early childhood development programs that enhance economic outcomes decades later, to international robotics education fostering bilateral learning, demonstrate how partnerships can be both locally grounded and globally connected.

His advice to organisations seeking funding, to present bold, inspiring visions rather than repetitive programmatic asks, addresses a common pitfall in nonprofit fundraising. Alef's encouragement to "shoot for the stars" reflects a mindset shift necessary for ambitious social impact.

Alef's candid discussion about challenges in the South African context, including government incentives like the Employee Tax Incentive and Presidential Youth Employment, alongside bureaucratic hurdles, provides a realistic appraisal of the environment in which partnerships must operate. His call for systemic reforms to legal structures and tax thresholds underlines the importance of enabling environments for social innovation.

Final Thoughts

Alef Meulenberg's keynote provides a rich, nuanced exploration of corporate impact through partnerships and collaboration. It balances optimism about existing strengths in civil society and corporate commitment with a critical eye on systemic challenges and opportunities for reform. The presentation reinforces that sustainable social impact demands authenticity, humility, governance rigour, long-term vision, and a willingness to engage deeply with partners and systemic issues.

Alef's River Babies parable encapsulates the essential call for collective, upstream solutions rather than isolated, downstream fixes, offering a powerful framework for anyone involved in impact-driven work.

Dr Ildephonse Musafiri, *Advisor, Agriculture and Food Systems, NEPAD*

Making Every Day A Sustainability Day

Keynote: Climate Action and Environmental Responsibility

Dr Musafiri, speaking on behalf of the African Union Development Agency (AUDA-NEPAD), delivered a comprehensive presentation on Africa's climate action and environmental responsibility within the framework of Africa Agenda 2063. He outlined the agency's mission to implement the African Union's vision for a prosperous, integrated, peaceful, and sustainable continent by 2063, emphasising the critical role of climate resilience and environmental sustainability embedded in this vision. Despite Africa contributing less than 4% of global greenhouse gas emissions, it bears the brunt of climate change impacts, including droughts, floods, cyclones, and food insecurity, which threaten development gains and economic stability.

Dr. Musafiri highlighted the stark vulnerability of African countries to climate risks, contrasting it with developed nations' advanced early warning systems and mitigation infrastructure. He underscored the urgent need for adaptation finance, pointing out that Africa currently receives only 20% of global climate finance despite requiring over $50 billion annually to effectively adapt to climate change until 2050. The African Union Development Agency actively leads programs on green recovery, climate-smart agriculture, sustainable infrastructure, water governance, and carbon market development to tackle these challenges.

He also elaborated on the significant role of the private sector and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in driving jobs and sustainable economic growth aligned with Agenda 2063's aspirations. Businesses can engage across agricultural value chains, green innovations like recycling and circular economy models, and environmental social governance (ESG) accountability to create climate-smart enterprises and generate green jobs. Dr. Musafiri called for embedding climate action in corporate strategies and governance frameworks to ensure sustainable development.

The discussion further emphasised the need to amplify and popularise Africa Agenda 2063 among citizens and civil societies to foster greater awareness and participation. Civil society organisations are vital partners in advocacy, training, and grassroots mobilisation to advance climate action and sustainable development goals. Dr. Musafiri concluded with a call to collective responsibility, invoking Nelson Mandela's inspiring words on the power of individual and collective action to create change, stressing that climate action is a shared duty that requires immediate, inclusive, and sustained effort.

Raising awareness and popularising Africa Agenda 2063 are necessary to galvanise collective action at all levels.

Highlights

- Africa contributes less than 4% of global emissions but suffers the most from climate change impacts.
- Africa requires $50 billion annually for climate adaptation but receives only 20% of global climate finance.
- The African Union Development Agency leads climate resilience programs including green recovery and carbon market development.
- Climate-smart agriculture offers extensive business opportunities for youth, women, and entrepreneurs across value chains.
- Circular economy and recycling emerge as key green jobs and profitable business models for sustainable growth.
- Civil society and private sector partnerships are critical to amplify Africa Agenda 2063 and drive climate action.
- Embedding Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) accountability in business strategies is essential for sustainable development.

Key Insights

Disproportionate Climate Vulnerability: Africa's minimal contribution to greenhouse gas emissions juxtaposed with its extreme vulnerability highlights a critical injustice in global climate responsibility. This disparity necessitates urgent international support, increased adaptation finance, and homegrown resilience measures to protect millions from worsening droughts, floods, and food insecurity. Without addressing this imbalance, Africa risks losing significant development gains and worsening poverty.

Climate Finance Gap and Economic Impact: The annual $50 billion adaptation finance requirement reflects the massive scale of investment needed to build climate resilience in Africa. Currently, only a fraction of global climate funds reaches African countries, underscoring systemic inequities in funding allocation. The economic cost of inaction is immense, with climate impacts eroding up to 4% of Africa's GDP annually. This financial gap threatens to stall Africa's progress toward Agenda 2063's socio-economic goals.

AUDA-NEPAD's Strategic Role in Climate Implementation: Serving as the African Union's implementation arm, AUDA-NEPAD's multi-faceted programs, including the Continental Green Recovery Action Plan, climate smart agriculture initiatives, and carbon market development, demonstrate a holistic approach to climate adaptation. By integrating climate resilience with economic growth, the agency ensures that environmental sustainability is not an add-on but a core component of Africa's development trajectory.

Agriculture as a Catalyst for Green Jobs and Climate Resilience: Agriculture remains the backbone of Africa's economy and a key sector for climate action. The value chain, from input supply and production to post-harvest processing and trade, offers numerous entry points for small and medium enterprises to innovate and adopt climate-smart practices. This sector's potential to generate green jobs, especially for youth and women, positions it as a vital lever for economic inclusion and sustainable development.

Circular Economy and Green Innovation as Emerging Opportunities: The promotion of recycling and circular economy models reflects a shift toward sustainable business practices that reduce waste, enhance resource efficiency, and create environmentally friendly jobs. These innovations provide profitable business avenues while addressing climate mitigation and adaptation. Encouraging private sector investment in these areas is critical for diversifying economies and reducing environmental harm.

Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) Accountability as a Business Imperative: Dr. Musafiri's emphasis on embedding ESG principles into corporate strategies underscores the evolving role of businesses beyond profit-making to being responsible global citizens. By integrating environmental stewardship, social equity, and transparent governance, companies can drive sustainable outcomes and attract significant institutional investment. This approach aligns private sector incentives with Africa's climate and development goals, fostering long-term resilience.

Partnerships with Civil Society and Private Sector are Vital for Scaling Impact: The discussion highlighted civil society's unique position to advocate, educate, and mobilise communities at the grassroots level, complementing AUDA-NEPAD's continental mandate. Partnerships with business and industry are equally crucial for resource mobilisation, innovation, and job creation. A collaborative ecosystem involving governments, civil society, and private sector is essential to mainstream climate action and achieve the aspirations of Agenda 2063.

Final Thoughts

Dr. Musafiri's presentation illuminates the complex challenges and opportunities Africa faces in responding to climate change within the broader framework of sustainable development envisioned in Agenda 2063. The continent's unique vulnerability demands urgent, inclusive, and well-funded climate adaptation and mitigation efforts. AUDA-NEPAD's leadership in coordinating programs across agriculture, green infrastructure, carbon markets, and advocacy exemplifies a proactive and integrated response.

Critical to success is the active engagement of the private sector, civil society, and local communities to foster innovation, accountability, and resilience. Embedding ESG principles into corporate governance and promoting green jobs through circular economy and climate-smart agriculture are promising pathways. Moreover, raising awareness and popularising Africa Agenda 2063 are necessary to galvanise collective action at all levels.

Ultimately, the call to action is clear: climate action is a shared responsibility, and with the right leadership, investment, and partnerships, Africa can transform its climate vulnerabilities into opportunities for sustainable prosperity, echoing the inspiring words of Nelson Mandela that "it always seems impossible until it is done."

Agenda 2063
Aspiration 2: An integrated continent, politically united and based on the ideals of Pan-Africanism and the vision of Africa's Renaissance.

The Content Creation and Digital Innovation Awards (CCDI Awards) 2026, under the theme ***"Harnessing Creativity and Innovation for Africa's Inclusive Growth"***, underscores the continent's transition into a knowledge-driven and digitally enabled economy. Africa's creative and innovation industries are not just cultural exports; they are now major economic engines. The continent's digital economy is projected to reach **$180 billion by 2026 (5.2% of GDP)**, while the creative sector is already employing over 5 million people across music, film, gaming, and digital content.

In Nigeria alone, the creative industry contributes over 3% to GDP, with Nollywood ranking as the second-largest film industry in the world by output. Kenya and South Africa lead in fintech innovation, collectively attracting over **$3 billion in startup funding in 2022**, much of it directed toward digital platforms improving financial access and youth entrepreneurship. CCDI Awards positions itself at the heart of this transformation, celebrating innovators and creators who are redefining Africa's global narrative while driving inclusive growth.

For corporates and governments, CCDI Awards is more than recognition, it is a platform for strategic alignment with Africa's development agenda. By supporting creativity and innovation, stakeholders can advance multiple UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), industry, innovation and infrastructure (SDG 9), and responsible production (SDG 12). With over **70% of Africa's population under 30** and increasingly driving cultural and digital economies, investment in creativity and innovation has become both a business imperative and a policy priority.

For enquiry about corporate partnership and sponsorship, email: **partner@ccdiawards.com**

Professor Mazwe Majola, *Founder and CEO of the Worldwide Institute of Leadership and Development*

Keynote: Ethical Leadership in Corporate Governance

Professor Majola, delivers a compelling keynote on the critical importance of ethical values-based leadership in Africa's evolving global corporate landscape. Emphasising that leadership is a combination of competence (the "sword") and character (the "shield"), he argues that while competence is essential for performance and career progression, character and ethics ultimately determine a leader's long-term success and legacy. Ethical leadership is inseparable from corporate governance, as ethical leaders set the moral tone, promote accountability, and foster trust, elements foundational to sustainable, transparent, and responsible organisations.

Professor Majola defines ethical leadership as doing the right thing even when it is unpopular or difficult, guided by principles such as integrity, fairness, accountability, and transparency. He underscores that ethical leaders prioritise the common good over short-term profits, embracing long-term, intergenerational sustainability that benefits society, the environment, and all stakeholders.
The professor also explores why doing the right thing remains challenging, highlighting courage and conviction as essential leadership qualities, exemplified by South African Mkhwanazi General Nhlanhla Mkhwanazi's courageous stance against corruption. He critiques political leadership's short-termism and self-serving tendencies, which undermine ethical governance. To cultivate character, Professor Majola stresses the importance of role models, associations, family upbringing, education, and religious or moral frameworks, asserting that character can be learned and reinforced through environment and example.

The discussion touches on how ethical leadership fosters trust, loyalty, and stability within organisations, improves relationships with customers and communities, mitigates risks, and enhances governance compliance. Ethical leaders are consistent, accountable, transparent, and willing to admit mistakes and make amends. The session closes with an appreciation of the ongoing need to prioritise ethical leadership as a cornerstone of sustainable development and good governance in Africa.

Highlights

- Ethical leadership is as critical as competence in sustaining leadership success.
- Competence is the sword; character is the shield, both are essential in leadership.
- Ethical leadership and corporate governance are interdependent pillars for sustainability.
- Ethical leaders prioritise long-term societal and environmental well-being over short-term profits.
- Courage and conviction are vital to overcoming challenges in doing the right thing.
- Trust and accountability form the foundation of effective leadership and governance.
  Character can be cultivated through role models, associations, family, education, and moral teachings.

Key Insights

Competence Alone Is Insufficient Without Character: Professor Majola highlights that leaders can be highly competent but still fail if their character is compromised. Competence ensures performance and career progression, but character determines whether a leader remains trusted and respected. This duality serves as a powerful metaphor: competence is the sword that allows a leader to act effectively, while character is the shield protecting them from ethical failure and reputational damage. This insight reminds organisations to invest equally in ethical development and technical skills.

Ethical leadership is not only about individual morality but also about creating structures and cultures that enable transparency, accountability, and long-term responsibility.

Ethical Leadership Provides the Moral Compass in Corporate Governance: Ethical leadership sets the cultural tone for organisations, influencing decision-making, transparency, and accountability. Without ethical leaders, governance structures lack direction and integrity, which can result in corruption or mismanagement. Corporate governance provides the framework to enforce ethical standards, but without leaders committed to ethics, such frameworks become ineffective. This interdependence is crucial for building trustworthy organisations that can withstand challenges and maintain stakeholder confidence.

Long-Term, Intergenerational Thinking Is Key to Sustainable Leadership: Ethical leaders think beyond immediate gains, focusing on how their actions will impact future generations. This perspective aligns with sustainability goals, emphasising stewardship of environmental, social, and economic capitals. Leaders who internalise long-term responsibility contribute to building institutions and societies that children and grandchildren can inherit with pride. This insight urges leaders to shift from short-termism and self-interest toward legacy-driven leadership.

Courage and Conviction Are Essential Traits for Ethical Leadership: Doing the right thing is often difficult because it may be unpopular or risky. Professor Majola praises the example of Lieutenant General Nhlanhla Mkhwanazi, whose courage to expose corruption exemplifies the bravery needed to uphold ethics. Courage allows leaders to withstand pressure and threats, while conviction ensures they remain anchored to their values. These qualities are vital in contexts where political or organisational systems incentivise short-term gains or self-serving behaviour.

Structural and Cultural Challenges in Political Leadership Undermine Ethical Governance: The professor critiques political systems where leaders are elected for fixed terms and often prioritise personal or party interests over public good. The party-based electoral system in South Africa, for example, limits voters' ability to choose individual leaders, which can result in leadership that lacks accountability. This systemic challenge highlights why fostering ethical leadership requires both individual commitment and institutional reforms to encourage accountability and reduce corruption.

Ethical Character Can Be Learned and Reinforced Through Environment and Role Models: Contrary to the popular belief that character is innate, Professor Majola argues that ethical behaviour is contagious and can be cultivated. Exposure to ethical leaders, supportive family environments, education, religious teachings, and professional role models helps individuals develop integrity and moral courage. This insight provides hope for leadership development programs, emphasising mentorship, ethical training, and creating cultures that reward principled behaviour.

Ethical Leadership Drives Organisational Benefits Beyond Compliance: Organisations led by ethical leaders experience increased employee loyalty, better morale, stronger customer relationships, improved community respect, and enhanced risk management. Ethical leadership creates a sense of belonging and trust, which translates into operational stability and market competitiveness. This insight reinforces the business case for ethics, showing that leadership integrity is not just a moral imperative but a strategic advantage.

Final Thoughts

Professor Mazwe Majola's keynote is a profound exploration of the indispensable role ethical leadership plays in corporate governance and sustainability in Africa. His framing of leadership as a balance between competence and character, combined with his call for courage and conviction, offers a blueprint for leaders who aspire to create lasting positive impact.

The session underscores that ethical leadership is not only about individual morality but also about creating structures and cultures that enable transparency, accountability, and long-term responsibility. By fostering ethical values in leadership, African organisations and nations can build stronger institutions, restore public trust, attract talent, and drive sustainable development that benefits current and future generations.

"I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear." Nelson Mandela

Mxolisi Mgojo, *Co-chair of B20 South Africa and president of Business Unity South Africa (BUSA)*

Making Every Day A Sustainability Day

Keynote: Scaling Strategic Partnerships: African Business Resilience in a Shifting Global Landscape

Mr. Mxolisi Mgojo, delivered a compelling address at the Africa CEO Impact and Sustainability Meeting 2025, focusing on "Scaling Strategic Partnerships: African Business Resilience in a Shifting Global Landscape" to build business resilience amid a shifting global landscape. BUSA, as South Africa's apex business federation, leads the B20 for the first time on the African continent, marking a historic moment where Africa assumes a global leadership role. Mr. Mgojo emphasised Africa's vast potential, its human capital, renewable energy resources, critical minerals, biodiversity, and innovation, which are global assets requiring inclusive, equitable, and long-term partnerships to unlock their full value.

Under South Africa's G20 presidency, B20 South Africa operates as a dialogue platform for the global business community, focusing on inclusive growth and global equity. The organisation has convened over 1,000 business leaders from the G20 and African economies to craft policy recommendations through eight interconnected task forces covering key economic and social sectors, including finance, trade, energy transition, employment, digital transformation, industrial innovation, food systems, and compliance. Youth employment, gender equity, and digital inclusion are central crosscutting themes.

Mr. Mgojo outlined five priority areas for driving impact: mobilising capital for infrastructure, advancing scalable public-private partnerships, building climate-resilient economies, unlocking Africa's critical minerals value chains, and empowering digital and skills transformation. He stressed that recommendations must translate into measurable outcomes, urging African CEOs to actively engage in advocacy and implementation.

He highlighted Africa's growing trade with BRICS+ countries, a 70% increase since 2017, positioning Africa as a key player in emerging global economic blocs. Despite progress, Africa faces challenges such as infrastructure financing gaps and corruption losses estimated at $120 billion annually, which undermine growth potential. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) offers transformative opportunities to boost intra-African trade by 52%, but faster, more decisive implementation is critical.

Mr. Mgojo called on African business leaders to embrace regional integration, invest in green and digital innovation, collaborate across borders, and participate in the B20 process to shape global economic policy. He underscored the urgent need for collective courage, positioning Africa not as a passive resource supplier but as a hub for value-added production and innovation. He concluded with a Zulu proverb, emphasising building the path forward with collaboration and inclusive growth as the destination.

In the Q&A session, Mr. Mgojo addressed the role of AfCFTA, emphasising the need for political will, infrastructure development, and regulatory harmonisation. He stressed the importance of supporting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) through improved finance access, digital infrastructure, and skills development. He acknowledged the challenges of implementation and advocated for accountability through defined KPIs and tracking mechanisms to ensure continuity across successive B20 presidencies, including ongoing engagement with the U.S. and U.K. to maintain momentum. He also highlighted the emerging trend of blended financing, involving private sector participation due to shrinking traditional development aid.

Overall, Mr. Mgojo's address was a clarion call for African leaders, businesses, and policymakers to move beyond rhetoric to decisive action, leveraging Africa's assets and strategic partnerships to drive inclusive, sustainable growth that benefits current and future generations.

Highlights

- Africa leads the B20 for the first time, offering global leadership from the continent.
- Inclusive growth and collaboration are central to Africa's economic transformation agenda.
- Africa's trade with BRICS+ countries has grown by 70% since 2017, signalling stronger emerging market partnerships.
- Eight interconnected task forces address critical sectors, embedding youth, gender, and digital inclusion as core themes.
- The African Continental Free Trade Area could boost intra-African trade by 52%, but requires faster implementation.
- Infrastructure financing gaps and $120 billion annual losses to corruption remain major challenges.
- Emphasis on measurable KPIs and tracking mechanisms to ensure policy implementation and continuity across B20 presidencies.

Key Insights

Africa's Strategic Moment as a Global Economic Player: This is a historic period where Africa transitions from a peripheral participant to a co-author in shaping the global economic agenda. South Africa's leadership of the B20 under the G20 presidency symbolises this shift, offering a platform to advocate for inclusive growth that benefits both Africa and the world. This structural repositioning underscores Africa's expanding geopolitical and economic influence, particularly as multipolarity reshapes global governance.

The Power of Inclusive and Long-Term Partnerships: Mr. Mgojo stresses that Africa's vast resources, human capital, minerals, energy, and innovation, are global assets that require partnerships rooted in inclusion and equity. This means moving away from extractive, short-term deals toward collaborations that embed gender equity, youth empowerment, and digital access as foundational pillars rather than afterthoughts. Such partnerships are essential for sustainable economic transformation that leaves no one behind.

CEOs are encouraged to leverage AfCFTA to access new markets, invest in sustainable innovation, and drive cross-border collaboration, positioning African businesses as key agents of change rather than passive beneficiaries.

Integrated Task Force Approach to Complex Challenges: The B20 South Africa's eight task forces represent an innovative, holistic framework addressing interconnected challenges from climate resilience to trade and skills development. By breaking silos, these task forces produce comprehensive, business-led policy recommendations that reflect the complexity of Africa's development needs. This approach enhances the potential for impactful solutions rather than disjointed efforts.

Role of African CEOs and Business Leaders in Advocacy and Implementation: The call-to-action for African business leaders to actively participate in B20 processes and regional integration efforts highlights the critical role of private sector leadership. CEOs are encouraged to leverage AfCFTA to access new markets, invest in sustainable innovation, and drive cross-border collaboration, positioning African businesses as key agents of change rather than passive beneficiaries.

Innovations in Financing: Blended Finance and Private Sector Engagement: Traditional sources of development finance are shrinking due to geopolitical and fiscal pressures. This reality has accelerated the adoption of blended financing models that integrate private sector capital with developmental funding. Mr. Mgojo's emphasis on crowding in private investment reflects a pragmatic response to funding gaps, presenting an opportunity to mobilise the vast resources of African and global private investors for infrastructure and industrial projects.

Accountability and Measurable Impact through KPIs: Recognising the historical challenge of policy recommendations not translating into action, B20 South Africa is pioneering mechanisms to define clear metrics, KPIs, and tracking systems that span multiple B20 cycles. This institutionalises accountability and ensures continuity beyond annual presidencies, which is crucial for sustained progress on complex, long-term initiatives like AfCFTA implementation and climate transitions.

Addressing Structural Barriers for SMEs and Digital Inclusion: Small businesses, which form the backbone of Africa's economy, face amplified challenges such as customs inefficiencies, corruption, and lack of access to formal finance. Mr. Mgojo highlights the importance of digital infrastructure and innovative financial technologies that can make informal trade more visible and bankable, unlocking financing and market access for SMEs. This focus on digital transformation is vital for future-proofing African economies and creating inclusive economic participation.

Final Thoughts

Mr. Mxolisi Mgojo's address serves as both an inspiring vision and a practical roadmap for Africa's economic future. By emphasising inclusive partnerships, integrated policy frameworks, private sector leadership, and measurable implementation, he outlines a pathway for Africa to assert itself as a resilient, innovative, and equitable global economic force.

The historic leadership of South Africa in the B20 and the continental opportunities presented by AfCFTA and critical mineral wealth provide a unique momentum. However, realising this potential requires urgent, collective action, political will, and a shift from talk to relevant actions and tangible impact, especially for Africa's youth, women, and SMEs, who are key to the continent's sustainable development and global competitiveness.

Agenda 2063 Aspiration 7: Africa as a strong, united, resilient and influential global player and partner.

Oluranti Doherty, *Managing Director for Export Development at Afreximbank*

Keynote: Reshaping Africa's Health Systems for Resilience

The presentation delivered by Doherty, focuses on reshaping Africa's health systems to build resilience and health sovereignty across the continent. Doherty highlights the fragility of African healthcare systems, which was starkly exposed during the COVID-19 pandemic, underscoring the urgent need for African-led solutions aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 3 (good health and well-being) and Agenda 2063's aspiration for healthy and well-nourished citizens. The keynote centres on Afreximbank's strategic initiatives to transform healthcare, particularly through the African Medical Center of Excellence (AMCE) in Abuja, Nigeria, and the newly established Africa Life Sciences Foundation, both designed to reduce medical tourism outflows, stem brain drain, foster medical research, and strengthen health infrastructure in Africa.

Doherty elaborates on the challenges facing Africa's healthcare sector, such as inadequate infrastructure, lack of qualified professionals, high infectious disease rates, rising non-communicable diseases, and significant capital flight through medical tourism, estimated at $7 billion annually. The AMCE Abuja, launched in June 2025 in partnership with King's College Hospital London, serves as a pilot facility focused on non-communicable diseases, equipped with world-class technology, and expected to create thousands of jobs and treat hundreds of thousands of patients within five years. The bank plans to replicate this model across Central, East, and Southern Africa to stimulate intra-African healthcare trade.

Furthermore, Doherty discusses the role of export development financing in preparing and financing bankable health projects, supporting public-private partnerships, and advancing pharmaceutical manufacturing to reduce Africa's dependence on imports. She highlights Afreximbank's proactive response during the COVID-19 pandemic by facilitating vaccine procurement and its ongoing efforts to develop a $2 billion pharmaceutical manufacturing financing program. Regarding small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), Afreximbank runs targeted programs to build capacity, improve market access, and provide financing specifically for healthcare-related SMEs, ensuring funds are monitored and scaled effectively.

The Africa Life Sciences Foundation, seeded with $75 million and targeting $650 million in the medium term, aims to propel African-led research on diseases disproportionately affecting people of African descent, such as sickle cell anaemia, and focus on vulnerable populations and mental health challenges unique to the continent. Doherty closes with a call for collaboration among governments, private sectors, and development partners to create resilient, equitable, and sustainable health systems that support Africa's prosperity and well-being.

Highlights

- Urgent call for African-led solutions to strengthen health sovereignty and resilience across the continent.
- Launch of the African Medical Center of Excellence in Abuja, a world-class facility tackling non-communicable diseases.
- Africa loses approximately $7 billion annually due to outbound medical tourism, highlighting systemic healthcare gaps.
- Establishment of the Africa Life Sciences Foundation to fund research on diseases affecting Africans disproportionately.
- Emphasis on public-private partnerships and export development financing to support sustainable healthcare projects.
- Strategic push to boost local pharmaceutical manufacturing and reduce dependency on global supply chains.
- Afreximbank's multifaceted support for healthcare SMEs, combining capacity building, market access, and innovative financing.

Key Insights

Health Sovereignty as a Foundation for Prosperity: Doherty defines health sovereignty as the right of African nations to govern their own healthcare policies and infrastructure. This is critical because reliance on foreign aid and medical imports undermines autonomy and responsiveness to local needs. African health sovereignty is foundational to achieving the continent's sustainable development and economic growth goals, reinforcing the interconnectedness of health and prosperity.

The Cost of Medical Tourism and Brain Drain: The annual outflow of $7 billion due to medical tourism drains foreign exchange reserves and highlights the lack of confidence in local health systems. This financial haemorrhage also represents a missed opportunity for domestic economic growth and job creation. Addressing this issue requires not only infrastructure investments but also building trust in African healthcare capabilities.

African Medical Center of Excellence as a Game-Changer: AMCE Abuja serves as a proof of concept that world-class medical facilities can be developed and operated within Africa. Its focus on non-communicable diseases reflects shifting health burdens on the continent. The advanced medical equipment and comprehensive care offered will reduce outbound medical tourism, create thousands of jobs, stimulate local economies, and elevate the standard of care.

Role of Multilateral Development Banks in Healthcare Financing: Afreximbank's role extends beyond traditional financing to include project preparation funding, senior debt, and equity investments in health infrastructure and pharmaceutical manufacturing. This multi-layered approach de-risks projects and attracts private sector participation, demonstrating how development banks can catalyse sustainable healthcare investments.

Promoting Pharmaceutical Sovereignty: The pandemic exposed Africa's dependency on imported vaccines and therapeutics, which threatens health security. Afreximbank's $2 billion program to finance pharmaceutical manufacturing aims to strengthen local supply chains, ensuring readiness for future health crises and supporting economic diversification through value-added manufacturing.

Supporting Healthcare SMEs through Capacity Building and Financing: Recognising that financing alone is insufficient, Afreximbank integrates capacity building, market access, and advocacy within its Export SME Development Program. This holistic approach addresses systemic barriers faced by SMEs, enabling them to scale, access regional and global markets, and contribute to health sector growth sustainably.

Targeted Research on African Health Priorities: The Africa Life Sciences Foundation is a strategic innovation to reposition Africa at the forefront of health research focused on diseases disproportionately affecting its populations. By investing in locally driven research and innovation, Africa can develop tailored treatments, reduce brain drain, and create a knowledge economy that aligns with cultural and epidemiological realities.

Public-Private Collaboration for Enabling Environments: Doherty underscores the importance of clear roles between governments and private sectors. Governments must create enabling policies, regulatory frameworks, and infrastructure support, while private investors bring capital and operational expertise. This synergy is vital for scaling healthcare projects and local pharmaceutical production sustainably.

Afreximbank's initiatives, including the African Medical Center of Excellence and the Africa Life Sciences Foundation, are critical pillars to achieving health sovereignty, reducing dependency on external actors, and fostering sustainable economic development.

Pan-African Approach to Healthcare Development: The phased rollout of Medical Centre of Excellence across West, Central, East, and Southern Africa aims to foster intra-African medical tourism and trade. This regional integration strengthens solidarity, optimises resource allocation, and enhances healthcare access continent-wide, supporting Agenda 2063's vision of a prosperous and self-reliant Africa.

Healthcare as a Human Right and Economic Imperative: The presentation closes on the powerful reminder that health is not a luxury but a fundamental human right. A healthy population is essential for economic growth, especially given Africa's rapidly growing youth demographic. Investing in resilient health systems today is an investment in Africa's future workforce, productivity, and social stability.

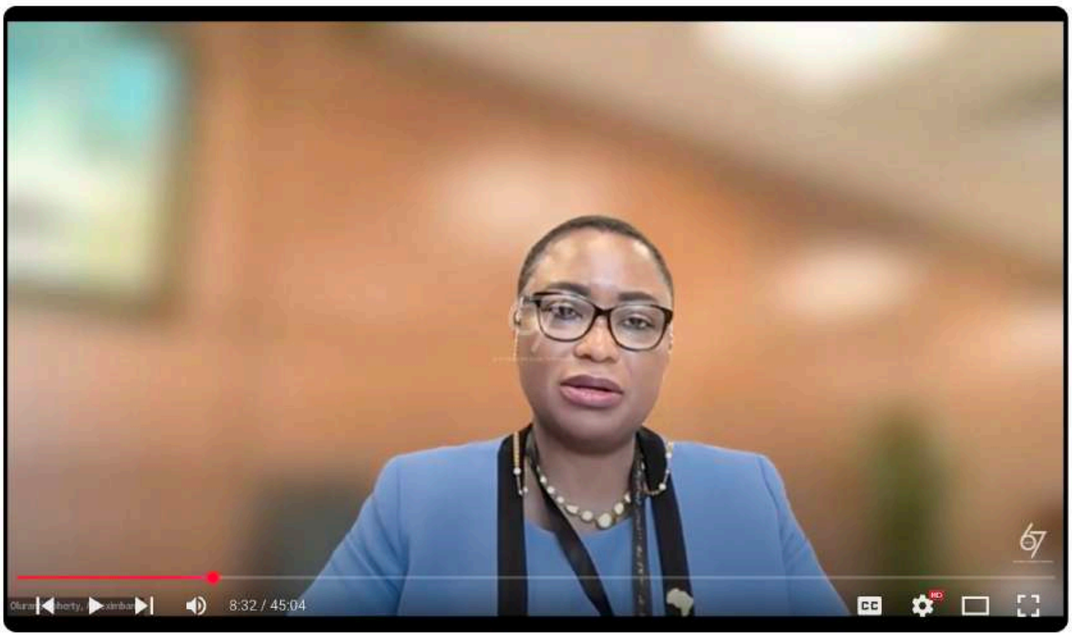
Final Thoughts

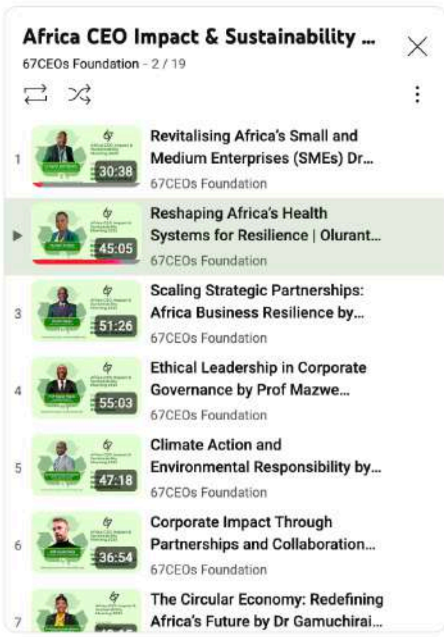
Oluranti Doherty's presentation highlights a comprehensive and visionary approach to transforming Africa's healthcare landscape through strategic investments, regional collaboration, and African-led innovation. Afreximbank's initiatives, including the African Medical Center of Excellence and the Africa Life Sciences Foundation, are critical pillars to achieving health sovereignty, reducing dependency on external actors, and fostering sustainable economic development.

The call-to-action for governments, private sector players, and development partners emphasises that collective effort and partnership are essential to build resilient, equitable, and world-class health systems that will underpin Africa's prosperity in the decades to come.

Watch all the keynotes on 67CEOS Foundation YouTube Channel:

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLEpn5_nYeqeU-H98Yh5l8YJXV-e8G5HSe





Reshaping Africa's Health Systems for Resilience | Oluranti Doherty, Afreximbank | 67CEOs Foundation

ABOUT 67CEOs Foundation

A global network of business leaders advancing Entrepreneurship Development, Socio-economic Impacts and Sustainability Actions in Africa.

67CEOS Foundation is a global network of forward-thinking business leaders committed to advancing entrepreneurship development, driving socio-economic impact, and championing sustainability actions across Africa. Founded on the fundamental principle that Africa's future lies in the hands of its entrepreneurs anchored on the mantra – **INSPIRING POSSIBILITY THINKING**. We mobilise executive leadership, business expertise, and strategic partnerships to create thriving ecosystems where entrepreneurs can innovate profitably, grow sustainably, and lead change actively.

Our work bridges continents and sectors—connecting corporate executives, industry experts, policymakers, and social impact leaders—to support startup entrepreneurs, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and grassroots ventures. Through curated programmes in mentorship, capacity building, thought leadership, and impact investment, we help shape the next generation of African business leaders who are equipped to compete globally while solving local challenges in a profitable and sustainable manner.

By aligning our initiatives with the African Union Agenda 2063 and United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), we promote inclusive economic growth, education, job creation, and environmental resilience. We are not only shaping entrepreneurs—we are shaping the future of the Africa We Want.

Since 2017, over 10,000 startup entrepreneurs and MSMEs have actively benefited from our masterclasses, entrepreneurial mentorship programmes and grant funding. We work with public sectors, corporate sponsors, incubator centres, academic partners, grant-makers, and mission investors to strengthen the continent's economic and entrepreneurial ecosystem.

We design and promote strategic workshop programmes to increase economic inclusion and expand financial and human capital for young people.

Our Focus

- Mentorship
- Entrepreneurship
- Education
- Impact Investment
- Sustainability Action

Our Vision

To be the leading global catalyst for entrepreneurial development and sustainability-driven socio-economic transformation across Africa.

Our Mission

To empower African entrepreneurs by fostering executive mentorship and leadership exchange with global CEOs. Advancing inclusive economic participation for youth and women through corporate partnership, all with the goal of building resilient communities and shaping a thriving Africa led by visionary business leaders.

67CEOS Foundation Impacts From 2017 Till Date

10,000
Registered and participating small business owners.

200
Over 200 participating business executives and seasoned entrepreneurs.

5
Global Entrepreneurship Week hosted.

15
Pitching competitions successfully completed.

5m
Over five million rand raised from 2017 - 2021 from corporate SA and supporting CEOs.

R3m
We have awarded more than 3 million rand as cash grant to small business owners.

7
Corporate and public partnerships.

5000
Jobs sustained by supported SMMEs

40
Winners of small business development grant funding.

10
Fireside chat with CEOs.

R100m
In annual turnover by network of supported SMMEs

25
Masterclass sessions.

67CEOS FOUNDATION IMPACTS SUMMARY (2018 - 2024)

Year In Review	Initiative	Outcomes and Impacts	Partner
2018-2020	67CEOS GEW (Masterclasses and funding competition)	In 2018, Exxaro Resources committed **R4,770,000** to 67CEOs Foundation programmes for 3 years. 80% of the fund was disbursed as SMME cash grant and procurement from youth and women owned small businesses. During the 3 years programme, close to 2000 SMMEs were trained and supported predominantly in Gauteng, Limpopo and Mpumalanga. The Foundation's programmes during this years were: Mandela Day Entrepreneurship programme, Global Entrepreneurship Week and Host Community Economic Development Programme.	Exxaro Resources
June/July 2020	Mega Pitch Fest	During the hard lockdown, we launched an online campaign where SMMEs recoded a 60sec video pitch and tagged @67CEOs. 10 winners were selected from 20 submissions, each were awarded **R5,000** cash and **R5,000** worth of digital marketing including website services.	Self-funded
August 2020	Mentorship	The CEO of Bigen Group, Dr. Snowy Khoza donated **R134,000** to sponsor the mentorship of 2 startup entrepreneurs (male and female black youth) for 6 months as part of the foundation's development programmes. The entrepreneurs graduated in January 2021 and they are operational till date.	Bigen Group
February 2021	#67CEOsChallenge	In our efforts to continue to provide relief to SMME owners in South Africa, we launched #67CEOsChallenge campaign in January 2021. Business leaders and corporate citizens were invited to donate **R67,000**, Bidvest did. We activated a social media campaign, selected one winner and awarded them R50,000 cash. They bought equipment and now have a walk-in store in Pretoria.	Bidvest Group
July/August 2021	67CEOs Foundation Special Relief Intervention For Looted Small Businesses	During the condemnable civil unrest and looting in KZN and Gauteng provinces of South Africa, a lot of small businesses were directly affected. Many of them lost everything. We reach out to corporate partners, Nedbank Group through their Foundation championed the cause. We provided **R420,000** as relief fund to 10 affected small businesses to rebuild store, purchase damaged/stolen equipment, restock looted inventories and/or pay staff salaries in order to avoid layoffs.	Nedbank
2022 - 2023	67CEOS Just Transition Initiative	The virtual summit keynote speaker was Dr Kgosientso Ramokgopa, Minister of Electricity and Energy, other speakers were industry experts that understand past development, present actions and future directions of just transition in South Africa and beyond. They shared how the roadblocks to inclusive just transition can be overcome, the role of government to design all-inclusive and evidence based policies, responsibility of corporate organisations as major stakeholders and where opportunities are for SMMEs.	Self-funded
July 2024	#67PitchAthon - Grow Your Business Grant Programme (Mandela Months Initiative)	The virtual pitching sessions lasted for 66 days. 80 South African SMMEs applied, 40 successfully pitched over 9 weeks and benefited from digital access to market. 40 SMMEs pitched their business model, they have a combined turnover of R50 million and have created and continues to sustain full-time job totalling 172. The businesses operate across different industries, such as: Agriculture, Renewable Energy, Construction, Tech, Mining, Manufacturing, Hospitality etc. The 67 Day PitchAthon programme ended successfully with an in-person event in Pretoria on Mandela Day. We workshop-ed over 50 young South Africans, they received training on Business Model Canvas for Venture Creation.	Self-funded

The Team

Zanele Apata
Head of Corporate Affairs and Marketing

Sam Apata
Executive Convener

Mahlodi Kgatle
Head of Communications

How To Support
- Mentor small business owners
- Facilitate workshops
- Fundraise for the Foundation
- Sponsor programmes, campaigns and events
- Make quarterly or yearly donations

67CEOS Foundation NPC: 2018/343943/08
Tax Reference number: 9359304194

Email: partner@67ceos.org
Website: www.67ceos.org
Socials: @67CEOS

To make donations
67CEOS FOUNDATION NPC
First National Bank (FNB)
Acc: 63098967715
Branch: 255355
SWift: FIRNZAJJ

INSPIRING POSSIBILITY THINKING