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INSIDE

CELEBRATING
LEADING WOMEN
NOMFUNDO JIYANE,
NONCEDO NDLANGAMANDLA,
AND THE WOMEN WORKING
TOGETHER INITIATIVE

STANDARD BANK TALKS
LOWER MAGUDUZA
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The Rise of a
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Empowering Through Desire

EWSC Managing Director **Jabulile Mashwama** Speaks On Her Passion
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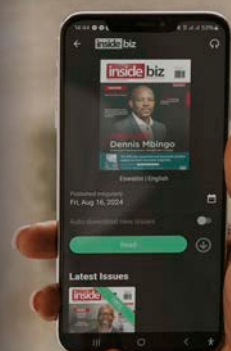


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PUBLIC NOTICE

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Women's Month in Eswatini: Celebrating Tradition, Progress, and Economic Empowerment

March is globally recognized as Women's Month, a time to celebrate the achievements of women, reflect on the progress made toward gender equality, and acknowledge the challenges that remain. Rooted in International Women's Day on March 8, this annual observance highlights the importance of women's rights, equity, and empowerment. Under this year's theme, "For ALL Women and Girls: Rights. Equality. Empowerment," the global movement calls for accelerated action to ensure that women and girls, regardless of background, have access to equal opportunities and a future free from discrimination and barriers.

While Women's Month is observed worldwide, each country brings its own cultural and societal context to the celebration. In Eswatini, the month is not just an extension of the global campaign—it is a powerful blend of tradition, advocacy, and progress, where women's voices and economic contributions take center stage.

Women in Eswatini are a driving force in the economy, contributing across various sectors, from corporate leadership and entrepreneurship to agriculture and finance. Despite facing gender-based challenges, many are breaking barriers and proving that economic empowerment is a key pillar of gender equality.

Jabulile Mashwama, Managing Director of Eswatini Water Services Corporation (EWSC), highlights the importance of gender inclusion in leadership and infrastructure development. Under her leadership, EWSC has introduced initiatives that foster women's participation in the traditionally male-dominated utilities sector. "Across the

corporation, we are seeing women engineers, technical experts, and managers thrive in spaces that were traditionally male-dominated, proving that competence knows no gender. We are particularly proud of our recent introduction of female treatment plant attendants, operators, and technicians," she shares.

Meanwhile, Nomfundo Myeni-Nzuza, Head of Sales & Marketing at Letshego Financial Services Eswatini, underscores the need for women to embrace leadership roles in business and finance. "Resilience, adaptability, and strategic thinking are key. The financial industry is constantly evolving, and women must be confident in their expertise and unafraid to take on leadership opportunities," she says.

Similarly, Zanele Fezile Ndlovu, Head of Legal, Compliance & Company Secretary at Letshego, emphasizes the role of financial inclusion in empowering women. "At Letshego, we are committed to ensuring women have access to financial literacy training and microfinance solutions to improve their livelihoods and achieve financial independence," she explains.

This year's Women's Month saw the introduction of 'Lutsango Day' as a national holiday, marking a significant step toward recognizing and celebrating the contributions of women. This dedicated day acknowledges the strength, resilience, and cultural contributions of women across the Kingdom. Furthermore, events such as the annual Buganu Ceremony serve as a powerful reminder of Eswatini's dedication to gender inclusion, ensuring that women remain at the forefront of national development and economic growth.

The top section of the advertisement features a background image of a financial chart with various colored lines (green, blue, yellow, red) and a magnifying glass focusing on a peak. A green vertical bar on the left contains the Old Mutual logo and the text 'OLDMUTUAL' written vertically.

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Is “Transformation For Growth” Themed Budget Out of Touch With Ordinary emaSwati?

By Phiwa Sikhondze | Photo: Central Bank of Eswatini / CANGO

While the 2025/26 national budget has been praised for its focus on economic growth and financial stability, industry experts have argued that it fails to address the everyday struggles of ordinary emaSwati. The Minister of Finance, Neal Rijkenberg has responded to these assertions, stating that the tabled budget, themed “Transformation for Growth!” is meant to address unemployment and poverty by stimulating the economy.

During the Post-Budget Seminar held at the Central Bank of Eswatini (CBE)

complex on Friday, 7 March 2025, independent economist Thembinkosi Dube delivered a strong critique, stating that the

budget is out of touch with the realities of the general population. He noted that while the government has allocated significant funds to key sectors such as infrastructure and education, the direct benefits to low-income earners, informal traders, and unemployed youth remain unclear.

“If I can put it in Siswati I would say sihlange ngetulu njenge-lihlinzafuku. In other words, where you are and what you are presenting is good. But if you go down, there is a gap. People don’t necessarily feel the financed budget speech.” He pointed to corruption and unemployment as two persistent issues that, despite being acknowledged in the budget, remain largely unresolved in practical terms. “We still see corruption; we still see people struggling with unemployment. I think we need to tackle that with real action, not just policy statements,” he said.

Dube particularly highlighted the country’s youth unemployment crisis, stating that while the budget outlines a plan to



Minister of Finance, Neal Rijkenberg

encourage self-employment and entrepreneurship, systemic barriers make it difficult for young people to succeed. He noted that aspiring entrepreneurs face significant challenges, including high application fees for loans, bureaucratic obstacles, and an unsupportive tax system. "If you approach an organization that offers loans, they require you to pay something before you can access the money. That makes things even more difficult," he explained.

Dube also criticized the Eswatini Revenue Service (ERS) for its approach to tax collection. "Many entrepreneurs are unaware of tax obligations when they start their businesses. But the moment ERS comes knocking, they are suddenly told they owe money, and the penalties escalate quickly," he warned. Dube suggested tax incentives for young business owners to encourage entrepreneurship and economic growth.

Responding to Dube's criticism, Rijkenberg defended the budget, arguing that it is designed to drive employment and economic growth. "Unfortunately, many SMEs today think the first step of business is going to a bank and seeking a loan, which is wrong. The first step is going into business with what you have in your hands, and creating a quality

product or service," he said.

Rijkenberg emphasized that financial institutions are more willing to support businesses that have already demonstrated viability. "If you want to make shoe polish, show me that you're making shoe polish, that you've got a vendor who's selling you shoe polish. Show me the numbers, show me the history. You've done it for six months, now you come to a bank for a loan," he explained.

On corruption, the Minister acknowledged the concerns raised by Dube, stating that more action is needed. We need to try to see more happening in the corruption space. "I think the whole country is saying, let's at least see some action going on here." However, the Minister disagreed with Dube's claims on youth unemployment, arguing that the government's capital expenditure investments are designed to stimulate job creation. Even though it looks like we're spending on capital expenditure, we're doing all of that specifically for employment. I think employment, particularly youth employment, is the one red-hot reason why we're doing most of what we're doing," he said.

On taxation, Rijkenberg pushed back against the notion that

SMEs are overburdened, describing the Eswatini tax system as sensitive to employment. "At the moment, if someone is an SME and makes less than E50,000 per year, they don't pay tax. If it's between E50,000 and E1 million, they pay a presumptive tax of 1.75% on turnover, and they don't need auditors. We've made it very simple, very cheap to pay tax as an SME," he stated. The Minister highlighted initiatives such as Sondzela Sikhulume by Eswatini Revenue Service (ERS) as significant initiatives that the nation should utilize to get information on tax processes.

E. Nathi Dlamini, the CEO of Business Eswatini, raised concerns about Eswatini's ambitious 8.3% GDP growth projection, warning that geopolitical risks could hamper these aspirations. "We all know that the post-budget environment is dramatically shifting across our planet, due in large part to geopolitical and geoeconomic uncertainties. These changes will most likely serve to undermine the minister's growth projections, especially on the financial side of things," he said.

Dlamini also questioned access to affordable credit for SMEs, pointing out that private sector credit extension has slowed down from 8.8% in 2023 to just 2%. He urged the government



The Panel During the Seminar

to put in place measures that ensure SMEs can access financing at lower interest rates.

In response Minister Rijkenberg acknowledged the challenge of balancing SME financing and non-performing loans in the banking sector. There is always that balance. If we open access to credit for SMEs, we must also consider the risk of non-performing loans. It's a tricky balance for banks to get right,". He argued that many small businesses should first focus on building a track record before seeking bank loans. Rijkenberg also stated that the government is working on a new SME agriculture plan, which will help unlock Eswatini's vast underutilized land resources. Regarding the 8.3% GDP growth target, the Minister stated it is possible that they do not meet the target, but said that he believed that they will reach a 5% plus GDP growth this fiscal year.

Ndimphiwe Shabangu, representing the Coordinating Assembly of Non-Governmental Organizations (CANGO), expressed concerns about inflation, rising electricity and water tariffs, and the allocation of education funding. Developments such as electricity and water increases will affect household incomes. We acknowledge that the focus on STEM competencies and critical skills is a good direction for education. However, we believe more investment is needed in higher education and early childhood learning, Shabangu stated.

Rijkenberg acknowledged the need for increased capital investment in schools and highlighted that Japan is building a new high school in every region this year, which won't be reflected in the budget but is a crucial step forward. On the impact of inflation on households, Rijkenberg emphasized the government's focus on raising minimum wages, particularly in the textile sector, where salaries have increased by 12% annually over the past few years. He, however, acknowledged that food inflation in 2024 had a disproportionate impact on

food inflation in 2024 had a disproportionate impact on low-income earners, even though overall inflation was at 4%, hence the government is keeping electricity and water costs below the minimum wage increases.

low-income earners, even though overall inflation was at 4%, hence the government is keeping electricity and water costs below the minimum wage increases.

Additionally, Marwick Khumalo, MP and Chairperson of the Ministry of Finance Portfolio Committee, contributed to the discussion by paying tribute to

the Minister's leadership. He acknowledged Rijkenberg's efforts, especially in securing fiscal stability, though he cautioned that some decisions sometimes overshadow economic sense, potentially leading to costly projects.

Khumalo cited the ongoing challenges surrounding the ICC project, noting that it has been a financial burden on the country without clear long-term benefits. He also criticized the procurement of the two planes for Royal Eswatini National Airways Corporation (RENAC), suggesting that purchasing two airplanes over 15 years old was not a sound financial decision. "These are the political decisions that negatively impact the economy," Khumalo said.

The Minister also responded to Khumalo's points, explaining that decisions around projects like RENAC and the ICC are made with a long-term vision in mind but acknowledged the financial strain these projects create in the short term.

Meanwhile, Marko Kwaramba, the World Bank Country Economist for Eswatini, praised the government's approach to tax revenue, aligning with the national fiscal strategy. "Revenue should not be increased by raising taxes but by being efficient," he said. Kwaramba acknowledged the Eswatini Revenue Service (ERS) for its efficiency and talent in managing the country's tax collection.



Captains of Industry in attendance

Why Maintaining a Debt-to-GDP Ratio Below 45% Is Important in Safeguarding Eswatini's Economic Future

Despite an 11% increase in government expenditure, Eswatini has maintained a 40.5% debt-to-GDP ratio, well below the Southern African Development Community (SADC) threshold of 60%. The Minister of Finance stressed that keeping debt below 45% is crucial in case of future revenue shocks, such as a decline in Southern African Customs Union (SACU) receipts.

"We do need to have headroom to move through that process if SACU ends one day. That's why keeping our debt below 45% is critical, he said. The government plans to take on more loans in 2025, leveraging the country's economic stability and recent upgrades in credit ratings," the Minister stated during his address.

The Central Bank of Eswatini (CBE) Governor, Dr. Phil Mnisi, commended the government's prudent debt management but also raised critical considerations regarding debt servicing and sustainability. "Minister, what is Africa grappling with? Its debt. And you are doing a great job," Dr. Mnisi acknowledged. "You made a strong point that debt should drive capital formation, investment, and growth. But I want you to think about debt servicing. Some countries sit at over 60 % of the debt to GDP ratio, yet their income streams and affordability are much stronger than ours. How are you keeping an eye on debt sustainability?"

Rijkenberg responded by affirming that Eswatini's focus is not on the absolute

debt quantum but on maintaining favorable debt ratios. "Governor, even though big countries have more liquidity, making debt servicing appear easier, it's not about country size—it's about ratios. To us, the most critical ratio is the debt-to-GDP ratio. If we keep it within the right limits, we believe that even in the face of interest rate spikes, we will remain sustainable. Anything is possible, if we would lose SACU receipts our healthy debt-to-GDP ratio would come in handy as we would be able to borrow externally, while still being sustainable," he explained.



CBE Governor, Dr. Phil Mnisi

Financial Investment Options Available to Local Retail Investors

By: Sizwe Dlamini | Photo: Umelusi Group / Freepik

The reality is most of emaSwati are frightened of investing. This fear is caused by several factors, one of them being that they do not know where to start. Technical jargon like traditional asset classes, and retail investors etc, throw a lot of people off. This, unfortunately, leads to many emaSwati ending up investing in bogus schemes, as the Central Bank of Eswatini (CBE) and the Financial Services Regulatory Authority (FSRA) have often lamented.

This article focuses specifically on retail investors, as opposed to institutional investors like pension funds, insurance companies or hedge funds. Retail investors are non-professional market participants or individuals who generally invest small amounts compared to their institutional counterparts. They are in essence the ordinary LiSawti.

So, where and what investment instruments or options are available for the ordinary LiSwati who wants to invest his or her hard-earned money?

Simanga Mdluli, Head of Investments- Unlisted Portfolio at UMELUSI Fund Managers sheds some light, stating that there are five main investment instruments that retail investors can explore in the country. These are;

- Equities/Stocks
- Fixed income (Corporate and Government bonds)
- Cash equivalents (Treasury Bills)
- Unit Trusts (Collective Investment Schemes)
- Alternative investments

Mdluli cautions emaSwati to be very careful when investing. He states that it is important for people to seek the guidance of qualified financial advisers as investing has many nuances that need to be explored and tailored to suit the particular retail investor.

Treasury Bills

These are short-term money market debt instruments considered to have the lowest risk within the domestic market with investment maturities ranging from 91, 182, 273, and 364 days issued by the CBE on behalf of the Government of Eswatini. An interested investor can purchase them via their bank as long as they are authorised Primary Dealers. The seasoned investment analyst notes that T-bills are ideal for retail investors with a low-risk appetite but expect a return that is better than a call account.

Pros

- Offers investors the freedom to receive interest in 3, 6, 9, or even 12 months.
- They are low risk as they are backed by the government, making them a relatively safe investment.



Simanga Mdluli
Head of Investments - Umelusi Group

- They often have fixed returns meaning investors know exactly what they will earn at maturity of the T-bill.

Cons

- Returns on T-bills are typically lower compared to the returns of riskier investment options.
- T-bills have short maturity periods, which may not be ideal for long-term investors seeking exponential growth.

Min. Investment Required - E10 000

Government Bonds

Similar to T-bills, these are risk-free long-term debt instruments (1 year and above) issued by the CBE on behalf of the Government of Eswatini. When bonds are bought, one cannot cash them before maturity, but one can sell them in the secondary market, either to a registered stock broker or a Primary Dealer. They are considered a relatively safe investment (low risk) especially those issued by stable governments.



When an investor purchases a government bond, they are essentially lending money to the government in exchange for periodic interest payments on the principal bond that they have purchased. These interest payments are classified as coupons. Government bonds usually offer a fixed interest rate and a fixed maturity period providing regular interest payments to the investor.

Pros

- Risk of default to investors is minimized as they are government-backed.
- Because they are government-backed securities, they can be and are recognized as collateral by registered financial institutions, ie banks and micro-lenders, etc.
- They have good liquidity as they are easy to buy and sell in the secondary market, providing quick access to funds for the investor.

Cons

- Government bonds have certain drawbacks, including interest rate risk, where the value of the bond may decrease if the bond is sold before maturity (before 3 years), potentially leading to a loss of some of the investor's initial investment.
- Compared to equities, government bonds generally offer lower potential returns, which means they have lower growth potential when compared to equities.

Min. Investment Required – E10 000

Shares/Equities

A stock exchange is a public marketplace where securities/shares of companies and other financial instruments are bought and sold. Locally, the Eswatini Stock Exchange (ESE) offers that platform, which allows companies to raise funds by selling shares to investors. These investors in turn gain partial ownership of the company. Investors can earn interest through dividends or through selling their shares at a higher price if the company performs well. Mdluli states that equities are ideal for investors with a bigger risk appetite than that inherent to T-bills and government bonds.

There are currently nine companies listed on the ESE. These companies

trade their stocks publicly, however, investors cannot directly buy shares on the ESE. They must first approach a licensed stockbroker, open a securities account, and have the stockbroker handle the transactions.

“To avoid risk, it is very beneficial for investors to consult financial advisors who are familiar with the local stock market,” Mdluli advises.

Pros

- Investors can sell or buy at any time when the ESE is open for trading.
- With several companies listed, investors can choose which company to invest in, meaning there are increased options.
- There is no limit to the amount you can invest.

Cons

- Investors in Eswatini buy shares and sit with them for a long time like 10 years, this renders the local stock exchange illiquid meaning that these shares never reach the secondary market as they are being held and not sold by the investors to other investors. This non-movement causes secondary market stagnation, meaning the local stock exchange is not vibrant because stocks are not being traded daily.
- The stock market can be unpredictable, with share prices fluctuating due to factors like economic conditions, company performance, and global trends it is possible to lose part or all of the money one invests.
- The ESE is still developing, it is influenced by both domestic and international events, and investors may experience periods of decline in their share prices.

Min. Investment Required – Depends on the share price and the number of shares the investor would like to buy.

Unit Trusts

A unit trust is a type of collective investment scheme where investors pool their money together into a single fund managed by a professional fund manager. This fund is invested in a diversified portfolio of assets, such as stocks, bonds, money market, or property. Investors receive “units” proportional to their investment, and the



Growth Mindset

value of these units fluctuates based on the performance of the scheme's underlying assets.

Pros

- They offer diversification; by investing in a unit trust, investors gain exposure to a broad range of securities, which in turn helps spread and minimize the investor's potential risk.
- Professional management; Fund managers make investment decisions on behalf of investors, leveraging their expertise to manage the portfolio.
- Unit trusts often have lower minimum investment requirements, making them accessible to a wider range of investors.
- Liquidity; investors can typically buy or redeem units within a very short period of time (1-5 business days) at the current net asset value (NAV), providing flexibility for investors.

Cons

- Management fees. Fund managers charge fees for their services, which can reduce overall returns.
- Investors do not have control as they do not directly influence investment decisions, relying instead on the fund manager's judgment.
- Experience performance fluctuations stemming from market conditions.

Min. Investment Required – Varies from one fund manager to another.

N.B: This is not financial advice, please consult a professional financial advisor before investing in any of the above financial investment instruments. Additional information has been sourced from the Eswatini Stock Exchange and Central Bank of Eswatini's websites.



ESCCOM POWERING THE FUTURE Eswatini's Girls in ICT Initiative Gains Momentum

By: Fezile MKhatshwa

Since its inception in 2022, Eswatini's Girls in ICT Scholarship Programme has been a game-changer for young women aspiring to enter Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields. Designed to support female students from disadvantaged and rural backgrounds, the fully funded scholarship ensures that talented young women can pursue tertiary education in ICT-related careers without financial barriers.

The Eswatini Communications Commission (ESCCOM) spearheads this initiative as part of a broader global movement inspired by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). The programme directly aligns with national development goals and the Commission's mandate under Section 6(i) of the ESCCOM Act, which requires it to promote human resource development within the communications industry.

"The Girls in ICT initiative aims to inspire and increase the representation of girls and women in technology while cultivating crucial digital skills, particularly in STEM fields," Mvilawemphi Dlamini, ESCCOM's Chief Executive (CEO), said.

As Eswatini's representative at the ITU, ESCCOM has worked hard to localize this global movement by ensuring that young women are

given the tools and opportunities to thrive in the digital space. The Girls in ICT initiative is not just about education; it is about empowering young women to become future leaders in ICT and bridging the gender gap in a sector where women remain underrepresented.

Globally, less than 30% of STEM professionals are women, with significantly fewer girls pursuing STEM subjects compared to boys. However, ESCCOM has observed a promising trend locally.

"While girls perform well academically, particularly in foundational education, their representation diminishes as they transition into higher grades and professional fields," Dlamini noted.

This underscores the importance of initiatives like Girls in ICT, which not only provide scholarships but also mentorship, exposure, and career guidance.

The programme funds tuition, accommodation, a monthly stipend, and a book allowance, ensuring that recipients can focus entirely on their studies without financial constraints. Since its launch, four young women have benefited from this opportunity, each paving the way for future generations of female ICT professionals in Eswatini.

This year's International Women's Month theme, 'Accelerate Action for All Women and Girls - Rights, Equality, and Empowerment,' resonates deeply with ESCCOM's

objectives. By addressing systemic barriers, the Commission is actively working to create an inclusive ICT sector where women are empowered to realize their full potential.

Highlighting accomplished women in ICT and fostering strong support networks are key to ensuring sustainability. The 2025 theme for Girls in ICT, 'Bridging ALL Divides for an Inclusive Digital Transformation,' aligns perfectly with ESCCOM's long-term vision.

Beyond scholarships, ESCCOM has used International Girls in ICT Day to introduce high school girls to ICT careers, ensuring early exposure to opportunities in the sector. Parents have expressed gratitude for the programme, noting that it has provided their daughters with life-changing opportunities that would have otherwise been out of reach.

"Our programme is a catalyst for inspiring interest in ICT careers among girls. Though it's still in its infancy, we remain optimistic about its potential to foster a balanced ICT industry in Eswatini," Dlamini added.

As interest in the initiative grows, ESCCOM is committed to expanding its reach and enhancing the quality of ICT education for girls in Eswatini. Through this effort, the Commission is not only championing gender equality in technology but also laying the foundation for a vibrant digital economy that includes women at its core.

Meet the Girls: Stories of Transformation

For these scholarship recipients, the journey into the world of ICT is not just about acquiring technical skills but also about breaking barriers, defying societal norms, and proving that girls belong in tech. Each of them carries a unique story of resilience and aspiration, but together, they represent the future of Eswatini's digital revolution. Here's a glimpse into their inspiring journeys.



Nokwanele

Q: In 2023, ESCCOM announced you as an inaugural recipient of the programme. How did you feel when you were notified about being awarded this scholarship?

A: I was overwhelmed with excitement and honour. It felt like a dream come true. The financial relief allowed me to focus on my studies without constant worry. Being part of a programme that actively supports and empowers girls in ICT is incredibly inspiring.

Q: What stands out the most for you about the Girls in ICT programme?

A: The programme is specifically designed to bridge the gender gap in ICT by offering opportunities to those who might not have the resources to pursue their studies in this field. The full scholarship covers tuition fees, accommodation, a monthly stipend, and a book allowance, which ensures that recipients can focus on their studies without financial burden.



Nomvelo Ngwenya

Q: Last year, you were one of two recipients of the programme's scholarship. How are you finding it so far?

A: Receiving this scholarship was a pivotal moment in my journey. I initially thought it would solve all my problems, but I quickly realized it was just the beginning of a transformative journey. As the saying goes, 'The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step' (Lao Tzu). This scholarship has been that first step, propelling me in ways I never imagined.

Beyond academics, it has helped me develop critical life skills and boosted my confidence. It has encouraged me to step out of my comfort zone and work towards a long-held dream project. Through this journey, I have become more disciplined, self-motivated, and resilient in the face of challenges.

Q: What role has the programme played in your STEM aspirations?

A: Isaac Newton once said, 'If you have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.' This programme has been that giant for me, providing the support and opportunities to explore my full potential. My STEM aspirations revolve around developing innovative electronic solutions to improve everyday life, particularly in embedded systems, IoT, and smart technology. This scholarship has reinforced my passion for innovation and problem-solving, and I'm excited about the possibilities ahead in my engineering career.



Sihlalelwe Siyaya

Q: Describe your journey through this programme.

A: My journey into the STEM world has been both exciting and challenging. Starting my tertiary education last year with ESCCOM's support was a huge turning point. My mother, our sole breadwinner, would have struggled to afford my tuition. This opportunity has opened doors for me.

Despite challenges like protests that forced us to stay home for a month, causing stress and academic pressure, the support from the programme and my determination have helped me grow academically and personally. I'm grateful for the opportunity to deepen my understanding of my field and develop skills that will contribute to STEM advancements.

Q: Can you describe the positive impacts of this programme so far?

A: One of the biggest impacts has been the financial support. I no longer have to worry about tuition, allowing me to fully concentrate on my studies. The programme has also connected me with mentors and intelligent peers in the STEM field, creating a collaborative environment for growth and innovation.

Additionally, ESCCOM has provided more than financial assistance—they check in regularly, ensuring we're settled in well at school. It feels like having an extended family that genuinely cares about our success. The exposure to real-world applications of what I'm studying has been invaluable, and I feel more prepared for the challenges ahead in STEM.

DRIVEN BY THE DESIRE TO DEVELOP OTHERS

By Ntokozo Nkambule & Lindani Maseko | Photos: Craft Space / Eswatini Water Services Corporation

Eswatini Water Services Corporation (EWSC) Managing Director (MD), Jabulile Mashwama's face lights up when talking about human development, empowerment, mentorship, and creating opportunities for others.

This is no smokescreen. Since her appointment in 2018 as the utility's MD, Mashwama has introduced numerous initiatives aimed at developing and improving the professional lives of employees. One of these initiatives includes an Educational Assistance Program that provides financial support for employees pursuing further studies and a Management Development Programme designed to equip managers with the skills needed to lead effectively in a dynamic environment, among other growth initiatives.

Highly spiritual, Mashwama talks to us about leading an organization of EWSC's stature, the challenges, and the wins she has bagged along the way.

You have an impressive career that spans the private sector, government, and politics. Can you take us through your academic and professional career journey?

My career path has been shaped by a combination of academic pursuit, strategic opportunities, and a deep passion for leadership and service. I began my academic journey at the University of Eswatini, (UNESWA) where I earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Mathematics and Chemistry. Recognizing the need to expand my expertise beyond the sciences, I pursued a Program in Human Resource Management at the University of South Africa in 2007, which equipped me with essential skills in people management and organizational leadership.

To further develop my leadership and business acumen, I enrolled at the University

of Pretoria's Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS), where I completed my Master of Business Administration (MBA) in 2014. This experience was instrumental in refining my strategic thinking, financial management, and problem-solving skills, preparing me for high-level leadership



roles in both the corporate and public sectors.

My professional career started in the private sector, where I gained invaluable experience in corporate governance, financial management, and strategic planning. This early exposure helped me develop a strong understanding of business operations and the importance of efficiency and innovation.

My transition into government came with my appointment as Minister of Commerce, Industry, and Trade, followed by my tenure as Minister of Natural Resources and Energy. These roles exposed me to policymaking, regulatory frameworks, and large-scale economic planning, which were crucial in shaping my leadership style.

In 2018, I was honoured to take on the role of Managing Director at EWSC, an opportunity that allowed me to merge my corporate and public-sector experience in a way that drives real impact. My journey has been defined by continuous learning, adaptability, and a commitment to excellence in every role I have undertaken.

You have held senior positions at a relatively young age, where does this drive come from?

I believe my drive comes from a deep-seated commitment to making a meaningful impact in every role I take on. From a young age, I was taught the value of hard work, discipline, and continuous learning. I have always been motivated by the desire to contribute to national development and to create opportunities for others.

Ambition, for me, is not just about personal success but about being in a position where I can influence positive change.

The opportunity to serve in leadership roles early in my career came with significant responsibility, and I embraced the challenges with the mindset that every challenge presents an opportunity for growth. I have always been eager to learn from those around me, and I credit my success to

the mentors, colleagues, and teams I have worked with over the years.

In 2018, you succeeded the late Peter Bhembe as the MD of EWSC. How were you able to navigate that change considering that you were dealing with employees with decades of institutional memory?

Succeeding a leader of Mr. Bhembe's stature was both an honour and a significant responsibility. He was a visionary leader who played a crucial role in shaping EWSC, and I knew that stepping into his shoes meant continuing a legacy of excellence while also bringing in new perspectives and innovations. I was, however, fortunate to have worked with him before assuming the role. He had a high work ethic and was a visionary, which I'll be honest created a bit of fear within me.

The transition was, however, made smoother by the fact that EWSC has a strong leadership team and a solid operational foundation. My approach was to build on what was already working while also identifying areas for growth and transformation. Change can be difficult, but I believe in leading with transparency and collaboration. From the beginning, I gave myself enough time to learn about the organization, engaged closely with the team, listened to their insights, and worked to align our strategic direction with the evolving needs of the organization and the country.

One thing I was clear about was that I would not come here to change everything overnight, because surely for the organization to have survived for so long, something had been done right. Did I face resistance from some employees who had decades of institutional memory within the organization? Yes, and that is expected and quite normal. My role as a leader was to paint a picture of where I wanted the organization to be, and I needed to get the buy-in of all employees.

One of my key priorities was ensuring that our corporate strategy remained relevant and responsive to current and future water service challenges. We have focused on customer experience, digital innovation, and infrastructure expansion to enhance service delivery. I am proud of the progress we have made so far and remain committed to driving sustainable growth for EWSC.

EWSC underwent a culture transformation journey when you took over. What were the results of this initiative?

Through the use of a consultancy firm, we started our culture transformation journey. The first order of business was to define who we were as an organization, accept our current situation at the time, and then paint a picture of who we wanted to be going forward. The findings revealed that our thinking was not liberated, we could not unleash our full potential as an organization. After the humbling results, we committed to liberating ourselves and took significant steps toward achieving our vision.



EWSC MDP Program: Mashwama captured with top students Noncedo Dlamini and Nokwanda Mhlanga

Effective leadership is often about building and nurturing the right team. How do you identify and cultivate talent within the organization, and how do you maintain a motivated and engaged workforce?

I strongly believe that people are the greatest asset of any organization. A successful leader is only as strong as the team they lead, which is why I place a high priority on talent identification, development, and retention. At EWSC, we have created a culture that values continuous learning, innovation, and accountability. Identifying talent starts with looking for individuals who are not only skilled but also share the organization's vision and values. We invest in professional development programs, mentorship initiatives, and leadership training to empower our employees and prepare them for greater responsibilities.

To further support our employees' growth and motivation, we have introduced several key initiatives. Our Rewards and Recognition Program acknowledges outstanding performance and dedication, ensuring that employees feel valued for their

contributions. We also offer an Educational Assistance Program that provides financial support for employees pursuing further studies, reinforcing our belief in continuous learning. Recognizing the importance of strong leadership, we crafted a Management Development Programme designed to equip our managers with the skills needed to lead effectively in a dynamic environment many have graduated with an MDP.

Additionally, we expose employees to regional and international workshops and conferences, allowing them to gain new perspectives, learn best practices, and expand their professional networks. Each time I embark on a work trip, I make it a point to bring along employees for exposure and learning opportunities, ensuring that knowledge and experience are shared across the organization.

Maintaining a motivated workforce requires clear communication, recognition of achievements, and creating an environment where employees feel valued. I believe in an inclusive leadership style that encourages open dialogue, feedback, and collaboration. By giving employees a sense of ownership and purpose, we create a work culture that is dynamic, forward-thinking, and results-driven.

As a leader, you sometimes have to make uncomfortable decisions, such as letting go of certain team members. How do you deal with that?

What I found helpful is being transparent, and honest and explaining the rationale behind a particular decision. It is unfortunate that as leaders we have to make those calls. It is important to clarify that these unfortunate decisions aren't personal but for the good of the organization and sometimes, the person.

As you empower and create opportunities for a team, they yearn for more. How do you

make sure they stay excited?

We have expanded our team's responsibilities and exposure to foster growth and unlock their full potential through job rotations and strategic role enhancements. As part of our recent organizational redesign, we have introduced key positions that align with evolving industry trends and business needs, some of which did not exist before my appointment but have now been rightfully integrated to strengthen our operations.

These roles are entrusted to individuals who have demonstrated outstanding capabilities, a strong work ethic, and a positive attitude.

One of the most rewarding aspects of coaching is seeing people gain clarity, confidence, and direction in their professional journeys.

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In addition, we have strategically rotated and redeployed team members to keep them engaged, challenged, and motivated.

Above all, we actively encourage our leaders and team members to embrace every growth opportunity. While leadership positions are limited, professional development is boundless. By continuously learning, adapting, and excelling in their roles, our people drive the Corporation's success while positioning themselves for future leadership opportunities

You are among the most admired business leaders in Eswatini. What do you think leads to this admiration?

I am truly humbled by such recognition, and I believe that leadership is about service, integrity, and consistency. I strive to lead with a vision that is not only ambitious but also practical and inclusive. People appreciate leaders who are transparent, approachable, and committed to delivering results, and I make a conscious effort to embody these qualities.

One of the key aspects that I believe resonates with people is my emphasis on empowering others. Whether in business, Government, or at EWSC, I have always prioritized mentorship, capacity building, and creating opportunities for young professionals to grow and contribute meaningfully.

Additionally, my leadership style is centred on strategic thinking and execution. People admire results-driven leadership, and I ensure that any vision I set forth is backed by actionable steps and measurable impact. Above all, I maintain a strong ethical foundation and remain focused on the

bigger picture creating long-term value for the communities and institutions we serve.

You are a qualified Executive Coach. Please elaborate on this.

One of my biggest responsibilities is to develop the next leaders. Coaching in its essence enables people to understand qualities within them that they have not identified. I have always been a coach but went about it haphazardly. The only difference is that I have now formalized it, through a qualification from the University of Cape Town. As a qualified Executive Coach, my role is to guide leaders, professionals, and teams in maximizing their potential, improving their performance, and achieving their goals.

Executive coaching involves strategic thinking, leadership development, and personal transformation. It is about helping individuals unlock their strengths, identify areas for improvement, and develop the mindset and skills needed to succeed in complex and high-pressure environments.

One of the most rewarding aspects of coaching is seeing people gain clarity, confidence, and direction in their professional journeys. Whether working with executives, emerging leaders, or teams, I focus on providing insights, tools, and strategies that enable them to overcome challenges and excel in their respective fields.





Mashwama at the AfWASA Congress in Uganda with EWSC employee, Lutfo Dlamini and Joseph Sibandze

At EWSC, I integrate my coaching skills into leadership development, talent management, and organizational growth strategies. By fostering a coaching culture, we create an environment where continuous learning, innovation, and performance excellence are embedded in our operations.

When did the human development bug bite you?

I never planned to be in this space, I believe this was by God's design. Coca-Cola, the company I was working for at the time introduced an Employee Assistance Program in the Safety & Security Department. While developing the Program, I realized that my true passion lies in working with people. By some stroke of luck, the Human Resources Manager position opened up within the company, and the Coca-Cola group management hand-picked me for the position. Since that day, I have never looked back.

This year's International Women's Month theme is "Accelerate Action for All Women and Girls - Rights, Equality and Empowerment" What does this theme mean to you personally, and how do you align it with your role at EWSC?

This year's International Women's Month theme, "Accelerate Action for All Women and Girls - Rights, Equality, and Empowerment," is both a call to action and a reflection of the progress we continue to make in advancing gender equality. Personally, this theme resonates deeply with me because I have always believed in creating opportunities that empower women and drive meaningful change in the workplace and beyond.

At EWSC, we are proud to be at the forefront of this transformation,

with our leadership structure as previously highlighted. It is a testament to our commitment to gender inclusion and the recognition that women bring immense value to decision-making and strategic growth. Across the Corporation, we are also seeing women engineers, technical experts, and managers thrive in spaces that were traditionally male-dominated, breaking barriers and proving that competence knows no gender. We are particularly proud of our recent introduction of female treatment plant attendants, operators and technicians which we are confident will positively influence the level of excellence in those spaces.

We align with this year's theme by creating an inclusive work environment where women have equal access to leadership, mentorship, and

Beyond EWSC, we recognize the broader societal responsibility of accelerating action for women and girls.

career growth opportunities. Our policies promote professional development, and we actively encourage women to take on leadership roles, ensuring that they have the tools and support needed to excel.

Beyond EWSC, we recognize the broader societal responsibility of accelerating action for women and girls. Water and sanitation services play a critical role in improving the lives of women, particularly in rural areas where access to clean water reduces the burden on women and young girls who often bear the responsibility of fetching water. By ensuring reliable and sustainable water services, we contribute to empowering women in communities and enhancing their quality of life.



An IWA Board Member, Mrs Mashwama participates in a panel discussion at an IWA conference

This month serves as a reminder that while progress has been made, there is still much work to do. As a leader, I remain committed to fostering an environment where women's voices are heard, their contributions are valued, and they have the platform to lead, innovate, and inspire future generations.

Under your leadership, EWSC has embraced digital transformation. What has been the driving force behind this shift, and what are some of the key milestones the organization has achieved in this area?

The driving force behind EWSC's digital transformation is the recognition that technology is no longer a luxury but a necessity for improving efficiency, enhancing customer experience, and ensuring sustainable service delivery. As an organization responsible for providing an essential service, we understand that the modern customer demands convenience, transparency, and efficiency, all of which can be significantly improved through digital innovation.

One of our key milestones in this journey has been the introduction of smart metering technology, which enhances transparency in water consumption, improves billing accuracy, and gives customers real-time insights into their water usage. Smart meters are a game changer, allowing for proactive leak detection, remote monitoring, and better resource management, ultimately improving service reliability.

We have also developed the EWSC Mobile App, which allows customers to access services seamlessly, pay bills, report faults, and track consumption from their smartphones. In addition, our Virtual Assistant Temanti has been introduced to provide 24/7 customer



EWSC Celebrates SABPP Accreditation

support, reducing wait times and enhancing customer engagement.

To streamline internal operations, we have digitized many of our corporate processes, including billing systems, procurement, and financial management. This has significantly reduced paperwork, improved operational efficiency, and strengthened transparency in service delivery.

As we continue this digital transformation journey, our focus remains on leveraging technology to enhance customer experience, improve operational efficiency, and build a smarter, more responsive water utility.

As a leader in the public utility sector, what are some of the unique challenges you face in balancing efficiency, sustainability, and service delivery?

Service reliability remains one of the most pressing challenges in the public utility sector, particularly as aging infrastructure, population growth, and urbanization place increasing demands on our water supply systems. Ensuring uninterrupted and efficient service delivery requires continuous investment in infrastructure rehabilitation and expansion projects to meet the growing needs of our customers. At EWSC, we have taken a proactive approach to modernizing our systems, implementing advanced technologies to minimize service disruptions, and improving response times in the event of faults or emergencies.

Another critical challenge is climate change and water scarcity, which pose long-term threats to water security. With changing weather patterns, unpredictable rainfall, and rising water demand, we must continuously diversify and strengthen our water sources to ensure sustainability.

This includes investing in alternative water sources, promoting conservation initiatives, and upgrading infrastructure to reduce water losses. Public awareness and responsible water use are also essential, which is why we actively engage with communities to promote sustainable consumption habits.

Navigating regulatory and compliance requirements adds another layer of complexity to our operations. As a responsible utility provider, we must adhere to strict national and international water quality standards while ensuring that our processes align with evolving regulatory frameworks. We take pride in the fact that EWSC continues to meet ISO accreditation standards, a testament to the high quality and safety of the water we provide. Maintaining this level of excellence requires ongoing investment in new technologies, rigorous testing protocols, and a commitment to operational best practices.

Despite these challenges, we remain steadfast in our mission to deliver high-quality, sustainable, and efficient water services to the people of Eswatini. By embracing innovation, strategic planning, and active stakeholder engagement, we are continuously improving our capacity to meet current and future water demands, ensuring that our customers receive the best possible service.

Being a high-profile leader comes with intense pressure. How do you maintain a work-life balance?

Leadership, especially in a high-demand sector like utilities, comes with enormous responsibilities and pressure. To maintain balance, I prioritize effective time management, delegation, and personal well-being. I make a conscious effort to separate work and

personal time, ensuring that I spend quality time with my family and engage in activities that rejuvenate me. I also find grounding in mentorship and continuous learning surrounding myself with experienced leaders and drawing wisdom from their insights. Staying connected to my core values and maintaining a strong sense of purpose helps me navigate challenges with clarity and resilience.

My Christian faith plays a central role in keeping me grounded. It provides a sense of peace, purpose, and perspective, especially in moments of pressure or uncertainty. I draw strength from prayer and spiritual reflection, which helps me approach leadership with humility and wisdom. Faith reminds me that leadership is about service, integrity, and making a meaningful impact in the lives of others. Additionally, I have recently taken up golf, which has been an enjoyable way to unwind, stay active, and network in a more relaxed setting. The sport requires patience and focus qualities that also translate into leadership making it both a valuable and refreshing pursuit.

Finally, what do you want to be remembered for?

I hope to leave a legacy of empowerment, transformation, and leadership excellence. I want young women to see that gender does not define leadership ability and that they can excel in any field they choose. By breaking barriers and paving the way for more women in executive and technical roles, I aim to create lasting opportunities for the next generation of female leaders.

Above all, I want to be remembered as a leader who championed diversity, created inclusive opportunities and inspired women to lead with confidence, resilience, and impact.

This is the best way to conclude our conversation. Thank you for your time MD.

It has been a pleasure, and I wish we had more time.



MEET & GREET

Great Spots for Coffee & Working Remotely

By: Ayanda Dlamini | Photo: eDish Bistro // Sambane Coffee Shoppe

Coffee shops & small eateries have become a popular choice for remote and hybrid workers seeking a change of scenery. Working from home can feel isolating and monotonous, while traditional office spaces for rental can be costly and restrictive.



Coffee shop styled eateries offer a lively, dynamic environment that boosts productivity and motivation. They provide a comfortable alternative to long hours at home, reducing the dreariness and physical strain from sitting in the same spot. With their unique atmosphere and energetic vibe, coffee shops and cafés offer the perfect setting for focused, enjoyable work.

Here are some of Eswatini's best cafés to try:

Sugar Snap Café

Nestled at Carters Garden Centre in Mbabane (Carters Mall - Mbabane Industrial Site), Sugar Snap Cafe provides a fresh, innovative, and

personalized atmosphere perfect for relaxing, working, holding small meetings, or exploring the nursery.

Open Monday to Friday from 8 am to 5 pm, and Saturday from 8 am to 1 pm, with free Wi-Fi available. The cafe features both an indoor seating area and covered outdoor tables surrounded by plants, providing a peaceful, fresh-air setting. Enjoy their exceptional espressos while you work. Sugar Snap also offers catering services with a range of menu options for your events. Don't miss out—the food is fantastic.



eDish Café

Located in Mbabane, just above Computronics, eDish is a popular spot for business meetings, offering a relaxed atmosphere perfect for both work and socializing. Since its establishment in 2013, eDish has earned a reputation for its delicious coffee, flavorful English and Middle Eastern dishes, and reliable free WiFi for patrons. This makes it an ideal work-friendly environment.

While you work, you can enjoy

stunning views of the hills and mountains surrounding the capital city. eDish is also perfect for a quick bite, with options like chicken salad, couscous salad, falafels, and more. It's a great place to network and connect with like-minded professionals. Plus, don't forget—right below the café is the convenient tech shop, Computronics.

Sambane Coffee Shoppe

Sambane Coffee Shoppe, located in the vibrant Swazi Candles Centre in Malkerns, is a favorite spot for both locals and tourists. Surrounded by arts and craft shops, it offers a cozy atmosphere perfect for enjoying coffee, meeting others, or working outside the office. With a friendly staff and a menu featuring all-day breakfast, it's the ideal place to relax and soak in the ambiance and scenery. The rich aroma of freshly brewed coffee makes it a must-visit destination.





At The Forefront of Driving Eswatini's Economy Through Renewable Energy Financing

By Ntokozo Nkambule & Lindani Maseko

Standard Bank Eswatini recently announced the close of a E567 million deal to fund the Lower Maguduza Hydro Power project, a first for the bank and the country. The bank's Head of Corporate & Investment Banking, Barry Schutzler says the project will play a significant role in ensuring that the country achieves its energy sovereignty ambitions. As it stands, Eswatini imports approximately 80% of its power primarily from South Africa and Mozambique, with 65% of its power specifically from Eskom. But, how is such a deal structured? Schutzler gives an overview and explains why the economy stands to be the biggest winner from the adoption of renewable energy solutions in the country.

Standard Bank Eswatini has committed to enabling an energy-secure Eswatini. Why does the bank feel the need to take the lead in funding renewable energy projects in the country?

Energy underpins economic growth and Eswatini is no exception. Through our brand ethos, Eswatini is our home, we drive her growth, and we are intentional about contributing towards the country's just energy transition, increasing access to energy that can promote prosperity and reduce energy inequality. We believe that access to affordable and reliable energy is fundamental to Eswatini's development.

Can the country reach self-sufficiency through renewable energy?

Certainly. What has been inspiring is seeing the government taking the lead in the renewable energy conversation in the country. Relying on neighbouring South

Africa for our energy needs is dangerous because it affects our ability to attract foreign direct investment. So, investment in renewable energy is not an option for Eswatini, but a must.

Talk us through the Lower Maguduza Hydro Power project, where the bank announced the close of a R567 million deal.

This landmark transaction is Standard Bank's first Hydro Power Project. This is a strategic project for the country that will enhance Eswatini's energy security and reduce its reliance on imported energy. The project is developed by African Clean Energy Developments (Pty)



Ltd (“ACED”) a subsidiary of African Infrastructure Investment Managers (“AIIM”) and ultimately owned by Old Mutual Group. The Ideas Infrastructure Fund II Partnership and Public Service Pensions Fund (“PSPF”) are 50:50 shareholders in this Project.

The project will sell its energy under the 30-year Power Purchase Agreement with the Eswatini Electricity Company. The 13.5MW project will require E1.1 billion in financing. The financing is split between Standard Bank, PSPF, and Old Mutual Group. This cements Standard Bank’s role in financing critical infrastructure in the region. The project is a strategic initiative as we strive to reduce energy dependence. Eswatini imports approximately 80% of its power primarily from South Africa and Mozambique with 65% of its imported power coming from Eskom, making the country heavily reliant on Eskom to meet its energy demand. The hydro-power plant is a key component of Eswatini’s broader strategy to increase local electricity generation capacity by 20%.

The Lower Maguduza plant will not only reduce our over-reliance on imported energy but also support economic growth by creating jobs and fostering local expertise in renewable energy technologies. It is also expected to attract further investments in the renewable energy sector, paving the way for similar projects in the future.

Standard Bank South Africa Limited was appointed Lead Arranger for the transaction, with debt financing provided by Standard Bank Eswatini and PSPF. Standard Bank Eswatini provided a total of E567 million in debt financing, comprising E378 million in term debt and E188 million in

The Lower Maguduza plant will not only reduce our over-reliance on imported energy but also support economic growth by creating jobs and fostering local expertise in renewable energy technologies

ancillary facilities. Standard Bank also performed Facility Agent roles on the project.

Banks normally lend on a 5-7-year tenure for commercial projects, is it the same time frame for the aforementioned deal?

This question has interestingly been raised a lot. The tenure for the Lower Maguduza Hydro Power project is 18 years, 3 years for construction, and 15 years for repayment which is the first time we have done such an arrangement. This demonstrates that as a bank we are truly invested in renewable energy projects. This deal also shows that investment in renewable projects will be long-term in nature.

How long did it take for the Lower Maguduza Hydro Power project to reach financial closure?

It took around 18 months, which was quite lengthy, as most commercial deals take less time. Apart from our own internal processes such a deal also involves a lot of external stakeholders, which is why it took that long.

Are the other energy projects that the bank looks to finance in the short to medium term?

There are a few solar power and biomass energy projects that we believe have potential and are

looking at seriously. One thing about energy projects is that they take a long time to reach fruition and financial closure as they are quite complex.

Are we likely going to see the bank partnering with other stakeholders for future renewable energy projects?

Potentially, because some of the projects are slightly bigger than us. Our area of interest in such projects is being the Lead Arranger. The reality is that renewable energy projects are substantial in size, which means partnerships are likely to be the name of the game going forward.

Apart from providing finance, what other services does Standard Bank Eswatini offer for energy projects?

Standard Bank’s Corporate and Investment Banking division has sector expertise to provide:

- Financial advisory services, including project advisory, procuring authority advisory and M&A advisory
- Project equity placement and corporate equity raising
- Local currency funding on a corporate, structured, or project basis
- Project finance
- Asset and structured finance
- Structured trade and commodity finance
- Export Trade Financing
- Working capital facilities
- Customised vendor financing solutions for construction companies
- Bridging finance facilities
- Price risk management and hedging products
- Foreign exchange, interest rate and fuel hedging
- Acquisition finance facilities
- Equity investments
- Transactional products and services



Are there specific renewable energy projects or sectors (solar, wind, hydro, thermal, biomass.) that the bank sees as high-priority investment areas?

Standard Bank Group has an established track record of financing landmark energy and infrastructure projects and providing strategic funding to governments and private sector players across sub-Saharan Africa. We leverage our exceptional structuring skills, deep sector expertise, experienced Loans Agency teams, and being a part of the largest balance sheet in Africa to invest in local sectors such as agriculture, energy, and infrastructure.

We are committed to funding energy projects that reduce reliance on fossil fuels, connect communities, and lower trade barriers to build a thriving and sustainable economy for Eswatini. There are some solar and biomass projects that we are excited about and we are looking to move forward with financing those in the near future. We will also readily support the development of industries and projects that play a crucial role in advancing our shared hope for a vibrant economy in Eswatini.

Energy projects are complex and require skilled resources and capacity. How does the bank mitigate financial risks associated with renewable energy investments?

We are emboldened by an enabling energy policy environment. This is a good thing for the country – socially, economically, and environmentally. Energy infrastructure projects by nature can be complex. This creates an increasing need for flexible and blended finance solutions grounded in local market knowledge. Investing in the national mandate for energy transformation is a long-term game. Such transactions require extensive work and patience as well as significant collaboration and execution efforts across teams, in both Johannesburg and Eswatini, to deliver efficient funding solutions. Working with various stakeholders such as the Energy Regulator, the Off-taker (EEC), and the Ministry of Finance to ensure that the deal is well structured, bankable and all identifiable risks are well mitigated



is paramount. We also work with our local and Group-based Credit teams to ensure that the financing model is sustainable.

The bank has been transparent in its collaboration with the government, government agencies, and the private sector, what are the benefits of these partnerships?

In Eswatini we are at the forefront of energy financing and continue to support the initiatives by all industry players to drive energy security. Standard Bank remains committed to identifying solutions and enabling business and economic growth by addressing energy concerns, especially enabling power generation. We are proud of the opportunity to partner with the government and to work closely with the Eswatini Energy Regulatory Authority and the Eswatini Electricity Company as well as all key stakeholders in driving green energy efforts in Eswatini. As a Group, we're deeply invested in Eswatini. We're here for the long haul, we're not going anywhere. We're committed to developing Eswatini, by growing its economy, creating jobs, and being an integral part of the community. To do that effectively, we will engage with everyone, and work together towards our nation's prosperity.

Eswatini is our home. As a group, we're deeply invested here. We're here for the long haul. And with the government holding a significant stake in the bank, it's clear we're not going anywhere. We're

committed to developing Eswatini, by growing its economy, creating jobs, and being an integral part of the community. To do that effectively, you have to engage with everyone, bring them on board, and work together.

Is there anything else you would like to share about Standard Bank's role in driving sustainable energy solutions in Eswatini?

We take pride in our commitment to leading energy finance, as the energy industry is a critical pillar for the nation's sustainable development. With our deep expertise, we are at the forefront of driving Eswatini's economic sustainability. By prioritizing energy security, we believe the Kingdom can fuel its growth through diversification of energy sources, energy sovereignty, and a keen focus on renewable energy.

Standard Bank will continue to support transactions that are compliant with our Climate Policy. Our investment in various projects has resulted in a positive social impact. We are committed to playing a role in driving a sustainable and just energy transition for the Kingdom of Eswatini. Working with various industry stakeholders, we can create a future where energy can stimulate economic growth, delivering financial returns and socio-economic progress.

Thank you for your time, Mr Schutzler.

It has been a pleasure.



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Slomoos: From University Dropout to Eswatini's Youngest Self-Made Millionaire

By Sizwe Dlamini | Photo: EyeStudio Multimedia / Inside Biz

Silomo, Lucky (Slomoos) Dlamini is Eswatini's youngest self-made millionaire. Well, that is at least what he tells youth entrepreneurs in public forums when inspiring them to reach for the stars. His story is one of determination, self-reliance dedication, motivation, faith, and a strong belief in God. Dlamini is not short of self-confidence, having dropped out of university, he is undoubtedly among the best business minds of his generation.

Dlamini's entrepreneurial journey makes one ponder the widespread debate of whether entrepreneurs are born or made. In his high school days, Dlamini was already earning income through collaborating with women who sold alcohol, helping them transport empty beer crates to the depot and restock their supplies. Heck, he even paid for his university tuition fees, through entrepreneurial means.

For this highly driven entrepreneur, money is not everything, he talks to us about his passion for supporting and uplifting young entrepreneurs. He also highlights the state of entrepreneurship in the country, noting that the government must enact policies that protect and promote local businesses.

Q: You have an immense passion for business. Tell us about your upbringing, where you grew up, and what shaped you into the person you are today.

A: I come from royal roots, and grew up in the remote area of Dwalile Royal Kraal, past Malutha, under Chief Maveletiveni Dlamini, my great-grandfather, who is the son of King Bhunu and Inkhosikati Lamabitela. I remember going to school without shoes in my early years. I did my early schooling—Grade 1 to Grade 3—at Dwalile Primary School before moving to Mbabane, where I continued my education for Grades 4 and 5. Thereafter, I went

to live at my maternal homestead in South Africa with my grandmother, where I completed Primary and High School, respectively.

Q: When did the entrepreneurial bug bite you?

A: I had a strong entrepreneurial mindset from an early age. I used to look after my grandfather's cattle and cultivated his fields driving his tractor which gave me an understanding of responsibility and managing assets at an early age. With that understanding and through working hard and being reliable I gained my family's trust. This enabled me to drive one of my grandfather's seven Nissan Hardbody

bakkies to school – along the way, I would pick up some of my friends and collaborate with women who sold alcohol, helping them transport empty beer crates to the depot and restock their supplies. This venture earned me a good amount of pocket money, which I used to refuel the car—so my grandfather never questioned me. I did this from 1998 to 2001 without my family knowing.

Back then, petrol was cheap, which made my side hustle even easier. The thrill of making money became addictive, and I continued with business ventures throughout high school. By the time I enrolled in university, I was already financially independent. I even bought my first phone—a Nokia 3310—while in high school and later purchased a Nokia 3330 for my father.

I wasn't the most dedicated student in terms of attending classes, especially when national events took place. I, however, had a cousin who took detailed notes, so I could always catch up when I returned back to school; after a national event.

Despite my love and commitment to national events, I consistently performed well in school and during school holidays worked at home in my father's business as he ran a logistics company. I often say that I grew up around trucks. Working for my father at a relatively early age made me realize that I never wanted to work for anyone,





hence I worked hard to ensure I became my own boss.

In 2004, I enrolled in tertiary to study Information Technology (IT). However, by 2007, I dropped out because I felt uninspired. I knew that my true passion lay in business, and that's when my entrepreneurial journey took off.

Q: Where did you get the courage to drop out of university?

A: Several reasons and factors made me make such a decision. It didn't matter how I was born or how I was raised but what mattered was that at the time I was an adult who could look after myself. The definition of adulthood is responsibility; I had to be responsible for my future.

Before dropping out of university I used to make money by buying computer components and selling them to other students, which was a lucrative business at the time, hence at university, I was financially independent. In fact, I paid for my university tuition, and I never relied on bursaries or scholarships. It is, however, important to clarify that I value formal education which is why I later enrolled for a Bachelor's Degree in Business Management and I am currently looking to pursue a Bachelor of Science in Economics, and will later pursue an MBA.

Q: Could you tell us more about your transition into business and your decision to return to Eswatini?

A: After dropping out of university I opened a tavern in South Africa in 2006 called Jazz Bar. I ran it with my uncle, but by 2008, I felt it wasn't my passion, so I sold the tavern. I wanted to return to Eswatini, and

since I had always attended national events here, the transition felt natural.

Growing up in South Africa taught me to think outside the box. I didn't rely on connections; I had to develop a mindset of thinking for myself. I didn't want to abuse the privilege of my roots. The tough experiences helped me understand that I'm all I have.

Returning to Eswatini was a personal decision—home is where I find peace and clarity. When I face challenges, I go to my home in Dwalile to refresh and get answers. That is my sanctuary. I always tell people: never forget your roots, because your roots will make or break you. My roots and faith have played a huge role in my life, and I believe my roots have been imperative in my prayers being answered.

Q: How did you start Slomoes Corporation, and what challenges did you face during the early stages of the company?

A: Upon my return to Eswatini, I started a business with my brother, Malibongwe Dlamini, under the name Ebandla Technologies Group. We worked together until early 2010. We parted ways because we wanted different things in life; while I was focused on growth, my brother had different priorities.

I decided to focus on my venture, Slomoes Corporation. I started offering computer lab services, supplying and maintaining computers in schools like St. Marks, St. Frances, Ka-Boyce, Saim, Evelyn Baring, and Hereford's High School, among others. I initially used my name, Lucky Dlamini, to build my reputation, but as the business grew, I faced challenges

because clients could not pay me the large amounts of money they owed me. After all, the company was not formally registered.

Frustrated, I found myself without money. Luckily, I met Thulisile Dlamini-Dladla, the President of the Business Federation of Eswatini (BUFE) who advised me to register a formal business. But there was one challenge, I didn't have the money to register my business formally. As fate would have it, my mother gave me E5 000 to purchase some home materials, instead of spending the money on her request, I used the money to register my business, Slomoes Corporation. I didn't tell my mother what I had done and when she found out, I promised her that she would receive interest from the money for the rest of her life - I am glad I fulfilled that promise.

Upon successfully opening my business bank account at FNB Eswatini, I received the amount I was owed by clients. The amount totalled E500,000, but interestingly the bank froze it, deeming it a suspicious transaction. I will forever be grateful to Charles Betham, my FNB business banker who helped me navigate all the bureaucracy, as the money was then released. In retrospect, and in all fairness, this was 2010 so the money was considered a lot back then.

Q: Slomoes Corporation has since evolved from only maintaining and supplying computer equipment to schools. What brought that transition?

A: Even though we were making decent income I knew that we had to grow. Being the inquisitive person I am, I scanned the environment to see where the real opportunities lay. I realized that government contracts and working with big entities is what would transform the company's fortunes.

Everything changed in 2013 when we received a government tender from the Ministry of Education & Training, and shortly after that, we got a major security tender from the United Nations Development Programme Eswatini (UNDP) worth millions. We bought our first company car and began expanding at that time. We got staff uniforms, started advertising, and grew our team. By 2016, we were winning major tenders, including one for the Sincephetelo Motor Accident Vehicle Fund (SMVAF) to manage their security systems. We have also worked with big institutions like the

United Nations, and the Eswatini Electricity Company (EEC), among other well-known entities.

After I bought my first personal car, people started to take note of Slomoos Corporation. They had theories about who I was some people

eagle—always seeing far ahead. I am not afraid of failure because every setback is an opportunity to learn and grow. Success is for those who are willing, and I am always willing to work harder than anyone else to make my dreams a reality. Success is a lonely journey.

*I am not afraid of failure
because every setback is an opportunity
to learn and grow.*

thought Slomeos was an Indian man. I remained focused. I decided to remain anonymous while building a solid business base. Most people don't know who I am, and I prefer it that way. I avoided certain associations to make it clear that I was building a professional business based on hard work, not inherited status.

Q: What makes Slomoos Technology stand out?

A: The answer is simple: we don't wait for tenders. We are proactive. We propose solutions, read newspapers, identify problems, and make a lot of presentations and proposals. That's how we secure work with government ministries, parastatals, and various clients. Another major trait that I have learned is that presentation is extremely important. In 2021, we won a massive tender worth over R25 million in South Africa, North West's Department of Health. The tender board chose us because of our professional presentation.

Q: How have you managed to ensure that Slomoos Corporation continues to grow?

A: Hiring talented young people has been a masterstroke. I consider myself an advocate for the youth. I am highly passionate about mentoring and training young people in business. Working with young people, Slomoos Corporation has been able to develop national security systems. I believe that investment in training gives a company a better chance at success.

Looking back, I realize that faith, passion, consistency, and sacrifice have also been instrumental in our success. I never waste time in pointless conversations. My time is my currency, and I use it to create value. I sacrificed personal vacations, parties, and events to focus on my business, reading, learning, and finding ways to improve.

I have the mindset of a lion—always winning—and the vision of an

Q: What do you make about the state of business in the country?

A: There are positives to be drawn, but there is still a long way to go. Our neighbors are ahead of us. Take Botswana for instance, if a business person wants to establish a company there, the law compels them to hire 60% locals. This works, especially in comparison to Eswatini, where foreign businesses can easily come in, make money, and leave clients with solutions that no one can maintain. These foreign businesses leave without contributing to the local economy. In other countries, like South Africa, it's a requirement to open a local bank account to circulate the money back into the economy. In Eswatini, this does not happen, and it's becoming a serious issue. Investors leave with our money, and government agencies don't protect us.

This mindset of undermining local businesses while favoring foreign ones has caused irreparable damage. It's not right for large companies to come into Eswatini, tender for contracts, and leave with millions while local businesses are left struggling. This is something I continuously challenge. The policies around tenders in Eswatini need to change. I've witnessed instances where tenders were awarded to foreign companies over capable local businesses. This should not be the case. If a foreign company wins a tender, it should be required to invest in the country and contribute to the local economy.

Q: What is your advice for young entrepreneurs?

A: My advice for young entrepreneurs is simple: work hard, create opportunities, and maximize your time. The one common thing that God has given us on earth is time, and what you are and what you'll become depends on how you use your time. Time can either be a blessing or a curse, depending on how you utilize it.

Understanding the seasons and the times in life is crucial. Also, inventory your associations take stock of the relationships or partnerships you are involved in, such as professional associations or social ones, and evaluate their significance or effectiveness in your life. These relationships are vital, as positive relationships will benefit you and help you achieve your business and life goals.

Young aspiring entrepreneurs must also go to university so that they create opportunities, build viable businesses and eventually employ other young people.

They should also research and read relevant books, not novels based on love only. Knowledge is power, and it's essential for growth. For young entrepreneurs, gaining knowledge is one of the most powerful tools you can have. Love novels don't equip you with the practical skills and insights



you need to succeed in business. By reading books that are focused on entrepreneurship, personal development, economics, marketing, finance, and leadership you will be building a foundation that will help you navigate the challenges of running a business. Knowledge is not just power it is currency in the business world.

The more you learn, the better equipped you are to make informed decisions, identify opportunities, and avoid costly mistakes. Reading about successful entrepreneurs, and industry-specific insights will expose you to different strategies and perspectives that can inspire innovation in your ventures. Reading helps you stay ahead of trends, and make better decisions. As an entrepreneur, you must constantly evolve, and this can only be achieved through continuous learning. Invest in your mind, the more you know, the more valuable you become in your industry.

I am an advocate for the youth and am currently working with a few individuals to establish a youth enterprise fund. This initiative is necessary because the existing institutions that are meant to help young people with financing to start businesses have failed.

What should the government do to ensure more business opportunities are availed to young people?

The first thing is to provide business grants. In South Africa, there are grants available to help businesses get started, which is one of the reasons they are more advanced than us. I believe development finance agencies such as FINCORP, the Youth Enterprise Revolving Fund (YERF), and the Industrial Development Company of Eswatini (IDCE) should work to close this gap by supporting the youth in starting businesses and stop operating like banks. These are development organizations and should be focused on encouraging and nurturing young entrepreneurs. The government should also stop providing scholarships to students who have parents or guardians who can afford the tuition fees. Sadly, children from wealthy families are government-sponsored while those who truly need the scholarship languish at home. Furthermore, Courses being offered in local tertiary institutions are outdated, so I implore them to evolve with the times.

How would you define a good leader?

Leadership is the capacity to influence others through inspiration,

generation by passion, motivated by a vision that is birthed from a conviction produced by a purpose. You become a leader by learning.

Q: Who can you highlight as having played a pivotal role in who you are today?

No man is an island. We are who we are because of everyone we have crossed paths with. Even those who have disagreed with us have shaped who we eventually become. I believe family is everything, from my grand-

father, and grandmother, to my father, my brothers, and all extended family members. But I would like to highlight my wife Inkhosikati La Fakudze, my mother, and Bishop as being highly instrumental.

Q: How do you want to be remembered?

A: At this stage in my life, money and personal success no longer bring me happiness. What truly



makes me happy is seeing others succeed, especially the youth of Eswatini. The youth fund we are working on will provide financial support to young people between the ages of 18 and 35, giving them the necessary resources to start their businesses. The goal is not only to provide financial assistance but also to encourage savings and promote discipline among young people.

I want to be remembered as a fighter for the youth, for giving

them the opportunities they deserve to build businesses that will benefit our economy. People may say I'm generous, but I am not, I firmly believe in the value of fair trade. Young people need to work hard, and also need to pray because faith and hard work are aligned to one's purpose.

There's currently a significant lack of employment opportunities in the kingdom, despite the abundance of brilliant young minds. Our education

system also needs to evolve. We should prioritize vocational education in schools, rather than focusing primarily on theoretical education. The current system often forces young people to seek employment in offices, which only increases the youth unemployment rate.

His Majesty King Mswati III has consistently stated that people can make a living through vocational work, sports, and other talents, just like they do in advanced nations.

On a personal level, I want my children to grow up understanding the importance of hard work. I have six children, and I teach them not to feel entitled. I pay them a salary each month

for the tasks they complete around the house, such as cleaning and gardening.

They also enjoy riding four-wheel bikes on the farm. This is my way of instilling the value of hard work in them, and I hope that one day, the rest of the youth in Eswatini will adopt the same mindset.

Thank you very much for your time, energy and honesty Nkhosi.
You are most welcome.

The youth fund we are working on will help young people between the ages of 18 and 35 get the support they need to start their businesses.

EMPOWERING WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

- Insights from Letshego Financial Services Eswatini's Female Executives

By Phesheya Mkhonta | Photos: Craft Space

As the world celebrates International Women's Month, Letshego Financial Services Eswatini stands as a beacon of empowerment, championing women in leadership and financial inclusion. Formerly known as Letshego Financial Services Swaziland, the company has evolved since its inception in 2006, expanding its reach from formally employed individuals to micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSEs) and even the informal sector. With initiatives such as Mobile Money Loans in partnership with MTN Eswatini and the recently launched LetsGoApp, Letshego continues to transform the financial landscape.

In honour of this month, we spoke with two of Letshego's senior female executives—Nomfundo Myeni-Nzuza, Head of Sales & Marketing, and Zanele Fezile Ndlovu, Head of Legal, Compliance & Company Secretary—to discuss their career journeys, challenges they have overcome, and their advice for women aspiring to lead in finance, microfinance, and corporate governance.



Nomfundo Myeni-Nzuza:
Head Sales & Marketing

Q: Can you share with us your career journey and what led you to your current role at Letshego?

A: My career has been shaped by a passion for financial inclusion and customer-centric growth. I started in Banking, where I developed expertise in sales strategy, customer experience, and market expansion. Over the years, I have worked in various leadership roles within the financial sector, focusing on driving sustainable growth and enhancing customer engagement. Joining Letshego was a progressive step for me

because of the company's strong focus on empowering communities through financial solutions. Here, I lead a dynamic team dedicated to expanding our reach, improving customer access, and ensuring our services create a meaningful impact.

Q: As a woman in a senior leadership position, what challenges did you face early in your career, and how did you overcome them?

A: Early in my career, I often found myself in rooms where I was the only African woman, during my tenure in the South African Financial services sector and I had to work twice as hard to have my voice heard. There were also biases around leadership styles—where assertiveness in men was seen as strength, but in women, it was sometimes misinterpreted. I overcame these challenges by building confidence in my expertise, seeking mentorship from strong leaders, and proving my value through results. I also made it a point to support other women in their careers by mentoring and advocating for inclusive workplace policies.

Q: What leadership qualities do you believe are essential for women looking to climb the corporate ladder, particularly in finance and microfinance?

A: Resilience, adaptability, and strategic thinking are key. The financial industry is constantly evolving, so being able to embrace

change and innovation is crucial. Strong communication skills, the ability to build relationships, and a customer-first mindset, also play a significant role. Finally, women must be confident in their expertise and unafraid to take on leadership opportunities when they arise. Having a strong support network—whether through mentors, peers, or professional groups—also makes a big difference.

Q: Could you share any initiatives or programmes within Letshego that specifically empower women either in your workforce or in the communities you serve?

A: Absolutely. At Letshego, we are committed to financial inclusion, and that includes empowering women in both our workforce and the communities we serve. Internally, we are developing leadership programmes that provide training and mentorship for women to help them grow into senior roles. We also support flexible work policies to ensure a balanced work environment. Externally, we have initiatives that provide financial literacy training and microfinance solutions inclusive of women, helping them improve their livelihoods and achieve financial independence.

Q: How do you personally champion gender equality and inclusivity within Letshego and the wider financial industry?

A: I believe leadership comes with the responsibility to uplift others.

I actively mentor young women within our organization, providing guidance on career growth and leadership skills. I also advocate for policies that promote workplace diversity, including equal pay and professional development opportunities for women. Beyond Letshego, I would like to participate in industry forums and initiatives that push for more inclusive financial solutions, ensuring that women—both as employees and customers—have equal access to opportunities.

Q: As we celebrate International Women's Month, what message would you like to send to young women aspiring to become leaders in finance or entrepreneurship?

A: My message is simple: believe in yourself, take bold steps, and never be afraid to ask for opportunities. The financial sector needs more women leaders, and the only way to break barriers is to step up with confidence. Build your knowledge, seek mentorship, and always remember that your perspective and contributions are valuable. Most importantly, lift others as you climb up—true leadership is about paving the way for the next generation.

and corporate governance has been shaped by a deep passion for ethical leadership and regulatory excellence. I began my journey as a practising attorney, where I gained hands-on experience in corporate law, compliance frameworks, and governance best practices. Over the years, I've worked with various organizations to strengthen their legal compliance structures while ensuring alignment with both local and international regulations. My role at Letshego allows me to ensure that we operate within a strong regulatory framework while maintaining transparency and accountability at all levels.

Q: As a woman in a senior leadership position, what challenges did you face early in your career, and how did you overcome them?

A: One of the biggest challenges I faced was breaking into leadership in a field that is traditionally male-dominated. Early in my career, I had to work twice as hard to establish credibility and ensure that my voice was heard in decision-making spaces. I overcame this by focusing on excellence—deepening my legal expertise, staying ahead of regulatory changes, and delivering results that demonstrated my value. I also sought mentorship from leaders who guided me in navigating corporate dynamics.

Q: What leadership qualities do you believe are essential for women looking to climb the corporate ladder, particularly in legal, compliance, and governance?

A: In legal, compliance, and governance, the most critical qualities include integrity, strategic thinking, and strong decision-making skills. These roles require navigating complex regulatory landscapes while ensuring ethical business practices. Women aspiring to leadership in these areas must also be confident in their expertise, have a strong voice in corporate discussions, and develop resilience when faced with challenges. Effective communication is another key trait, as legal and compliance professionals often serve as advisors to senior executives and boards. Lastly, a continuous learning mindset is essential to staying updated

with evolving laws, regulations, and governance trends.

Q: Could you share any initiatives or programmes within Letshego that specifically empower women either in your workforce or in the communities you serve?

A: At Letshego, we are committed to fostering an inclusive work environment where women can thrive. We also promote policies that support work-life balance and equal opportunities for career progression. Externally, our financial literacy and entrepreneurship programmes specifically target women in underserved communities, helping them gain access to capital, build sustainable businesses, and improve their financial independence. These initiatives align with our mission of empowering communities through inclusive financial solutions.

Q: How do you personally champion gender equality and inclusivity within Letshego and the wider financial industry?

A: As a senior leader, I actively advocate for gender diversity and inclusion in corporate governance and compliance. I also play a role in policy discussions, both internally and within industry networks, to promote fair and inclusive workplace practices. Gender equality is not just about policies; it's about creating a culture where women feel empowered to lead with confidence.

Q: As we celebrate International Women's Month, what message would you like to send to young women aspiring to become leaders in legal, compliance, or corporate governance?

A: My message to young women is: Own your expertise, embrace challenges, and never be afraid to step into leadership. The legal and compliance fields are evolving, and there is a growing need for diverse perspectives in shaping corporate governance and regulatory frameworks. Build your knowledge, seek mentorship, and always uphold the highest ethical standards in your work. Most importantly, support other women on their journey—when we lift each other up, we create stronger and more inclusive industries. Your voice, skills, and leadership are valuable, and the world needs more women driving change in these critical fields.



Zanele Fezile Ndlovu:
Head of Legal, Compliance & Company Secretary

Q: Can you share with us your career journey and what led you to your current role at Letshego?

A: My career in legal, compliance,

‘We Need More Examples of Women Leading Successfully’

By Ayanda Dlamini

Women are making waves in the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) space, and one such standout in the field is Nomfundo Jiyane, who has dedicated nearly 20 years to Information Technology (IT). Armed with a Bachelor of Science in Computer Science and Mathematics from the University of Eswatini (UNESWA), Nomfundo is fuelled by a passion for excellence, creating transformative customer experiences, and driving initiatives that make a difference.

A strong advocate for continuous learning and improvement, Jiyane also holds a Management Certificate from the University of Pretoria, a Senior Management Development Programme from the University of Stellenbosch Business School, and is currently pursuing an MBA at the prestigious Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS).

With 18 years of experience, 13 of which were in leadership roles, Nomfundo has worked with distinction across the banking and telecommunications industries. Her career highlights include: serving 3 banks in Eswatini, namely; Eswatini Bank, Swaziland Building Society, and Nedbank Eswatini.

She has also led impactful projects at MTN Eswatini over six years, before advancing to the MTN Centre of Excellence

(COE) in Johannesburg where she became the first-ever Head of Technical Operations.

In this role, she ensured the seamless operation of enterprise solutions across multiple markets. Her role involved maintaining infrastructure, systems, and software as well as resolving critical issues to minimize downtime.

After two decades in the corporate space, Jiyane called it quits and founded XperienceIT a specialized IT company that provides customer-focused solutions for both large organizations and SMEs. The company helps businesses with digital transformation, automation, integrated customer experience (CX), user experience (UX), and more.



When quizzed on what challenges she has faced as a woman in the IT industry, and how she overcame them, she said, “I’ve always approached life with the mindset

that obstacles are lessons, and truthfully, I don’t believe I’ve faced significant barriers in my career. I consider myself fortunate to have been employed immediately after university and to have worked across both the financial and telecommunications industries. In every role, I have been given the space to put my best foot forward. I don’t have a ‘bad boss’ experience. Instead, I’ve encountered both women and men who have been intentional about supporting, mentoring, and encouraging me to grow. My journey has reinforced the power of positive leadership and the importance of creating environments where talent is nurtured, regardless of gender.”

With her experience in leadership, Nomfundo believes that it is important to encourage more women to step into leadership. She says women need to see real examples of other women leading successfully, it reinforces the belief that they belong in those spaces too. “So, if you are already in leadership, please lead knowing that the world and other young women are watching you and want to learn from what you have done to be successful. Mentorship and sponsorship are also key, having experienced leaders advocate for and guide emerging female leaders makes a huge difference. Always ask yourself how many of your previous colleagues can openly advocate for you to be hired back at their company or in another company. If you get a few names then you are on the right track.”

15 MINUTES TALK ON WOMEN EMPOWERMENT WITH NOMFUNDO



What would you say to young girls and women who want to enter fields that have historically been dominated by men?

Male-dominated industries? What is that? Joking, it remains a reality that there are spaces where we need to knock harder. Breaking into male-dominated industries requires confidence, competence, and resilience. Young women should focus on building deep expertise, knowledge, and skills are the greatest equalizers. Speak up, take on challenges, and don't shy away from leadership opportunities. Find a mentor, both male and female. These provide guidance and open doors. Most importantly,

Advocating for change isn't just about speaking up, it's about being heard. Women can use their voices effectively by being clear, confident, and solution-focused.

don't wait for permission to take space, own your achievements, and advocate for yourself. Success isn't about proving others wrong; it's about proving yourself right. Stay focused, keep learning, and remember that every industry benefits from diverse perspectives, including yours.

How can women use their voices more effectively in advocating for change, be it in business, the workplace, and in the larger societal context?

Advocating for change isn't just about speaking up, it's about being heard. Women can use their voices effectively by being clear, confident, and solution-focused. In the workplace, this means backing up ideas with facts, building strong networks, and supporting each other in important conversations. In society, it's about using different platforms, whether in leadership roles, community work, or social media, to push for real change. The key is to

stay consistent, engage the right people, and turn words into action. Change happens when voices are not just loud, but also strategic and persistent. For example, if you engage in character assassination, publicly tearing down colleagues, leaders, or competitors, this signals a lack of professionalism and emotional intelligence. No matter how valid your points may be in the boardroom if you're known for online attacks, people will question your judgment and ability to lead.

Looking back at your career journey, what would you say has been the most empowering decision or moment in your life?

I want to highlight one career move that truly built my resilience. I started my career in banking, working for three Eswatini Bank. I quickly transitioned from a basic system administrator to a leadership role, eventually reaching senior management. Throughout my journey, I diligently practiced identifying problems at their root and working through others to

ensure alignment on outcomes. I've always been confident in taking on challenges, so stepping into leadership came naturally.

In 2016, I was presented with an opportunity to move into telecommunications—an entirely new industry for me. Despite having zero prior experience, I decided to leap. I understood my adaptability, my willingness to continuously learn, and most importantly, that industry knowledge can be acquired, but leadership and problem identification are transferable skills.

I emphasize problem identification over problem-solving because I believe that when we focus on understanding where issues originate, we can implement solutions that are both effective and sustainable. This prevents recurring challenges and allows leaders to focus on driving progress rather than staying stuck in reactive problem-solving.

My decision to transition industries was validated by my performance and the recognition I received. One of my proudest moments was being nominated as a unique contributor to the company for two or three consecutive years, an honor given to less than 15 percent of the staff. I was also recommended for a role in the company's Centre of Excellence, which I accepted and fulfilled as the first and only Black female at the executive level. Every day in that role was an incredible experience because I knew I wasn't just representing myself but was paving the way for other Black women in leadership.

Today, that same resilience and adaptability have led me to establish XperienceIT, where I focus on Project Management and Training. These two areas align perfectly with my passion for structured execution and empowering others. My journey across industries has reinforced the value of strong leadership, continuous learning, and the power of well-equipped teams. Through XperienceIT, I aim to drive impactful solutions while helping businesses and individuals build the skills they need to succeed.

AWARDS AND RECOGNITION

Nomfundo's dedication has earned her numerous accolades, including:

- Top10Achiever, Nedbank (2014)
- UniqueContributor, MTN Eswatini (2023)

MAJOR PROJECTS DELIVERED

Nomfundo has successfully led several impact initiatives, including:

- Nedbank Debit CardImplementation (2014)
- Nedbank CoreSystem Change (2016)
- MTNEswatini Fixed Line Implementation (2018)
- MTNCOEICT ContactCentreTakeover (2023)



We Want To Fund More Youth Entrepreneurs – YERF CEO



By: Sizwe Dlamini

The Chief Executive Officer of the Youth Enterprise Revolving Fund, Mandla Nkambule is one relaxed leader; after exchanging pleasantries he talks to us about the previous night's UEFA Champions League matches, and how one team in the English Premier League has lost its shine; and yes, laughing at their apparent demise (we all know the team right?). Getting into the business of the day, Nkambule reiterates that their main function as a Fund is to disburse as much funding to entrepreneurs as possible. This, however, is in sharp contrast with what they have managed to achieve in funding rates, a fact the CEO concedes. So, what is the challenge, why aren't entrepreneurs receiving this funding? This interview will answer all the questions you might have as an entrepreneur or relevant stakeholder. He also talks laments the issue of non-repayment of loans.

What is the mission of the Youth Enterprise Revolving Fund (YERF)?

We see ourselves as the bank for young entrepreneurial eSwatini, addressing the needs of the 'missing middle'—a group often deemed high-risk by traditional commercial banks. These perceived risks stem from a lack of collateral, as many young people do not yet own assets to secure loans.

Our mandate is to provide seed capital to aspiring young eSwatini aged 18 to 35 years, enabling them to start businesses, create job opportunities, and alleviate poverty. This initiative reflects the Government of Eswatini's belief in the potential of its youth. By harnessing the demographic dividends of a youthful population, which constitutes 72% of our total population, the Government aims to leverage this energy and innovation.

It is essential to empower our youth to actively participate in mainstream economic development. The Revolving Fund is one of

the key programs the government has established to support and maximize the contributions of our young population.

Are you fulfilling this mandate of funding youth entrepreneurs?

We have made significant strides over the years, but I would say that we have not reached that level of funding as yet. There are several reasons behind this, limited resources have constrained our ability to provide larger loan amounts. If we are giving out loans of about E20 000 per beneficiary, then we have not met our mandate. Smaller loans in the past weren't enough to help youth scale their businesses, and we're working on improving this.

We've also focused on ensuring sustainability by offering more support and training for young entrepreneurs, particularly in rural areas. Although loan repayment rates have improved, reaching all youth—especially those without tertiary education—remains a challenge.

We are fulfilling our mandate to an extent, we're still striving to provide greater funding and support to ensure the long-term success of youth businesses and reduce unemployment.

Additionally we are trying to change our public perception by digitising our services and sharing our information on all social media platforms.





What are you doing to ensure that you increase the loan uptake?

We have implemented several measures to ensure that we increase the loan uptake. One of them is automation. We have introduced a digital system that enables youth entrepreneurs to apply online. It is important to appreciate that we are dealing with young people who prefer digital methods over traditional ways of doing things. However, I must reiterate that we still have paper applications for those who prefer using them.

The second thing we did to increase the uptake was the introduction of continuous loan applications. This means that entrepreneurs can apply anytime, compared to cycle applications.

The third measure was the decentralization of our services. We now have regional offices in all the four regions of the country at Siteki, Nhlanguano, Manzini and Mbabane. Interestingly, we did not have an office in Manzini, yet it is the country's most populated town and now we have an office there. Furthermore, we have also opened satellite offices across the country through partnering with different government agencies and ministries.

Under Government we have partnered with the Ministry of Sports, Culture & Youth Affairs to share satellite offices in places like Sithobelweni and Hlatikulu. We also have a satellite office at Mhlambanyatsi Inkhundla. We've also collaborated with the Pigg's Peak Town Council to use their community hall as a training space for young entrepreneurs. We are planning further expansion to areas like Mankayane and Buhleni, where we see significant growth potential.

We have partnered with several organizations such as NGOs, and parastatals such as National Agricultural Marketing Board (NAMBORD), National Maize Cooperation (NMC) and SEBENTA National

Institute.

As a result, we have noticed a significant improvement in loan uptake and overall applications because of these measures. For instance, in the FY 2024/2025 we received about **600 loan applications amounting to E25 Million**. As impressive as this is, we still aren't there, as we feel the quality of applications is not where we would like them to be.

Serving as the CEO of the YERF means you deal with SMEs daily. How have you found it, particularly because you spent the better part of your career in the private sector and non-government organizations?

Being on the ground working with SMEs has been an eye-opener. It has transformed my life. As challenging as my job is, it is also gratifying and fulfilling. The opportunity to contribute to social and economic development, particularly through empowering the youth, has been incredibly rewarding. It's not just about financial success but using the knowledge I've gained to create positive change.

There have been complaints about delays in loan approvals and disbursements. Is it true, and if yes, what is the cause?

Loan approvals and disbursements are meant to happen

within five days. The loan approval paperwork takes just one day, and we have our own reserves in-house, meaning the money doesn't come from the government.

However, one of the key requirements is that we never give cash directly to the entrepreneur; instead, we send it to the supplier. The challenge arises when suppliers delay their deliveries. Some suppliers, including large companies take 3, 6, or even 12 months to deliver, which significantly impacts the young entrepreneurs.

Another issue is that sometimes agri-products are banned from entering or leaving the Kingdom due to diseases such as foot-and-mouth, which adds complexity, particularly for young entrepreneurs in agriculture. Generally, the loan disbursement process should take only five days as all the necessary paperwork is provided.

Why do you think we are not where we should be when it comes to the level of entrepreneurship in the country?

We need all sectors of the economy to work together, and be intentional and directional. Entrepreneurship needs to be a part of us as eSwatini. Research indicates that more than fifty thousand eSwatini run businesses, albeit informal in most cases. This goes to show that we are entrepreneurial, but we need all the sectors to come together. Having had the privilege of working in the private sector and with non-governmental organizations, I can assure you that we have the capability. We need to be intentional and directional and not leave entrepreneurship to certain stakeholders. Government, schools, the private and public sectors, civil society and other stakeholders must all champion entrepreneurship.



You mentioned that you are funding a lot of entrepreneurs in rural areas. What kind of businesses are they involved in?

The youth in rural areas engage in various agricultural activities, including poultry, livestock farming, as well as crop farming. In addition to agriculture, the youth are using their artisan skills, including welding and sewing. Our funding portfolio is diversifying beyond agriculture in rural areas, with young people also involved in construction and other associated industries.

You recently rolled out a campaign urging beneficiaries to pay back their loans. In actual fact, over 150 beneficiaries were blacklisted in 2024. Could you share some of the factors contributing to this?

A significant factor contributing to the failure of youth entrepreneurs to repay their loans is the lack of an entrepreneurial culture and mindset. Many young individuals may not be exposed to an environment that fosters innovation, risk-taking, and resilience, which are essential for successful entrepreneurship. This gap can lead to a lack of confidence in managing their businesses effectively, ultimately impacting their ability to meet financial obligations.

Additionally, many young entrepreneurs lack the essential skills in financial management, marketing, and operations, leading to poor business performance and financial distress also family conflicts can disrupt business operations, causing projects to be abandoned and loan repayments to cease.

New Opportunities: Some entrepreneurs abandon their ventures when they encounter new opportunities, like further education or employment, indicating a lack of long-term commitment to their business.”

Cash flow constraints is another issue affecting early stage businesses, leading to them facing financial instability, with delayed customer payments and inconsistent sales cycles, negatively impacting cash flow. These linked with unfavourable

economic conditions such as inflation, currency depreciation, and market volatility can reduce profitability and hinder entrepreneurs’ ability to meet loan obligations”.

Limited Access to Markets:

Without sufficient access to markets, young entrepreneurs struggle to generate sales, impacting their ability to repay loans.

High Competition: Increasing competition in the entrepreneurial landscape makes it difficult for new businesses to stand out, putting pressure on profitability. Social and Cultural Barriers: Cultural attitudes



toward debt and entrepreneurship, as well as the stigma of failure, may deter young people from prioritizing loan repayment.

Insufficient Support Structures:

Lack of ongoing support, such as mentorship and business advisory services, leaves entrepreneurs without the guidance needed to navigate challenges.

External Factors: Unexpected events like geopolitical tensions, natural disasters, or economic downturns can significantly impact businesses, causing additional financial strain”.

What strategies have you put in place to enhance loan repayment?

To bolster the sustainability of the Youth Revolving Fund and enhance loan recovery, a multifaceted approach is essential

Training and Capacity Building:

Implementing comprehensive training programs focused on key business areas—financial management, marketing, and leadership—can equip young entrepreneurs with the skills

they need to succeed. Practical workshops and mentorship from experienced entrepreneurs can provide invaluable guidance.

Market Access Initiatives:

Establishing partnerships with local businesses and organizations can help young entrepreneurs access markets for their products. Platforms that connect youths to potential customers and facilitate networking can enhance visibility and sales opportunities.

Creating a Supportive Ecosystem:

Building a supportive ecosystem that includes mentorship programs, access to business advisory services, and peer-to-peer networks can empower young entrepreneurs. Ongoing support can help them navigate challenges and increase their chances of success.

Flexible Loan

Products: Offering flexible repayment terms based on the cash flow cycles of businesses can ease the financial burden on entrepreneurs. Tailored repayment plans that

consider the specific challenges faced by youth-led businesses can contribute to improved repayment rates.

Promoting a Culture of

Accountability: Encouraging a sense of community among beneficiaries can foster a culture of accountability. Peer support groups can help young entrepreneurs share their experiences and motivate one another to honour repayment commitments. Monitoring and Evaluation: Establishing robust monitoring and evaluation systems can help identify potential repayment issues early on. Regular check-ins with loan beneficiaries can provide insights into their business performance and enable timely intervention support.”

10. How has the non-repayment of loans impacted the overall sustainability of the Youth Enterprise Revolving Fund?

The non-repayment of loans has significantly impacted the overall sustainability of the Youth Enterprise Revolving Fund. The fund is designed to operate

through a cycle of loan disbursement and repayment. Hence, the effectiveness of these funds is contingent upon the ability of beneficiaries to repay the loans. When repayment defaults occur, not only does this jeopardize the fund's sustainability, but it also limits future lending opportunities for other young entrepreneurs.

Are there specific sectors or groups of beneficiaries who are more likely to default on their loans?

Fifty percent (50%) of the total non-performing loans are concentrated in the agriculture value chain, particularly in livestock sectors such as feedlot and pig farming. This significant increase in defaults is primarily attributed to the soaring costs of animal feed and the low selling prices for livestock products.

The reality! The path to entrepreneurship is often fraught with challenges but choosing to confront those difficulties head-on is what separates successful entrepreneurs from those who fall by the wayside.

Startup failures are a common part of the entrepreneurial landscape, particularly within the first three years.

Lastly, what are your long-term aspirations for the Fund?

Our long-term aspiration for YERF is to create a sustainable and self-sufficient Fund that continually supports young entrepreneurs in Eswatini. I envision a future where our beneficiaries not only thrive in their businesses but also contribute to the local economy and create job opportunities for others. Our legacy will be defined by a generation of empowered entrepreneurs who inspire future innovators Cultural Shift towards Entrepreneurship: I aspire for YERF to play a key role in shifting cultural perceptions around entrepreneurship in Eswatini, fostering a mindset that embraces innovation and risk-taking. Our legacy should inspire young people to see entrepreneurship as a viable pathway to personal and economic growth, transforming the entrepreneurial landscape of our nation.

Good luck CEO as you continue with this mammoth task and thank you for your time.

You are most welcome.

YERF KEY REQUIREMENTS FOR ACCESSING FUNDING?

- Business Plan and Cash Flow Forecasts:** Many young entrepreneurs find this challenging due to a lack of entrepreneurship skills. To assist them, we have developed a toolkit for reference.
- Company Formation and Registration:** A trading license is required.
- Letter of Intent or Market Interest:** Potential clients often struggle with this requirement, fearing commitment. Educating them on the process is essential.
- Know Your Customer (KYC):** This involves obtaining a stamp from the Mphakatsi and Inkhundla.
- Land Rights/Lease Confirmation:** Verification of land allocation for the business is necessary.

Repayment structure

Loan repayment is structured for a maximum of 36 months. We offer flexible terms that align with the cash flow cycles of businesses, easing the financial burden on entrepreneurs. Repayment schedules are tailored to the nature of each project and may be monthly, quarterly, or annually, starting once the business begins generating sales.

We recognize that the first year can be particularly challenging for new businesses. Therefore, we assist in identifying and negotiating markets for these ventures. If project launches are delayed due to vendor-related issues, such as stock unavailability or equipment supply delays, the repayment terms can be adjusted accordingly however we have noted that our beneficiary's cash flow is often impacted by delays in customer payments, which can hinder timely loan repayments to YERF. This has been identified as an emerging risk".

HOW DOES THE YERF FUNDING MODEL WORK? WHAT ARE THE REQUIREMENTS FOR YOUTH ENTREPRENEURS TO ACCESS THESE LOANS?

The Youth Enterprise Revolving Fund (YERF) is a financial framework designed to support young entrepreneurs by providing access to the capital and resources necessary for launching and growing their businesses. Our model is bundled: we offer start-up capital as well as funding for business growth and expansion, complemented by training, coaching, and mentorship".

While we initially supported viable business ideas, we are now shifting our focus towards funding results, specifically aiming for profitable and sustainable projects. Although our loan requirements may seem stringent, they are essential since we provide unsecured loans with no collateral or deposit required. This approach is consistent with most development finance institutions, although we are considering the possibility of partial collateral in the form of suretyship or financed assets.

The current loan limits per product are as follows.

Standard Loan		Order Finance		Loan Increase	
Category	Amount	Category	Amount	Category	Amount
Individuals/ Sole Traders	50 000	Individuals/ Sole Traders	80 000	Individuals/ Sole Traders	50 000 70 000
Registered Companies	100 000	Registered Companies	150 000	Registered Companies	100 000 150 000
Registered Cooperatives	150 000	Registered Cooperatives	200 000	Registered Cooperatives	150 000 200 000

Noncedo Ndlangamandla

Breaking Stereotypes & Navigating The Tough Terrain of Criminal Law

By: Ayanda Dlamini | Photo: N.Ndlangamandla // Freepik

Women have been notoriously underrepresented in the criminal defence bar. Long considered a male bastion, many female lawyers have had a difficult time making a career for themselves in this highly competitive and demanding area of the law. Long hours, unpredictable pay and client bias are a few of the reasons why women tend to exit criminal law.

Attorney and Principal at Mabila Attorneys in association with N. Ndlangamandla Attorneys Noncedo can be described as a disruptor in the Eswatini jurisdiction. Admitted into practice as an attorney of the High Court of Eswatini in 2012, Ndlangamandla has been listed in the Best African Female Lawyers (Super Heroes Influencers, Disruptors (SHID) in 2022, as one of the most influential female attorneys in Africa, further entrenching her influence.

Tell us about yourself, and what you do in your field.

I am an admitted attorney who has been practising within the Kingdom of Eswatini since 2012. I am practising under the law firm styled *MABILA ATTORNEYS IN ASSOCIATION WITH N. NDLANGAMANDLA* which is situated in the Mbabane area in the District of Hhohho. I predominantly specialise in criminal law as opposed to civil and labour-related matters.

What challenges have you faced as a woman in your industry, and how did you overcome them?

The legal field is a tough terrain, with the majority of its practising attorneys being males. With that said, often subtle but pervasive, the women in the legal community face obstacles such as gender bias and stereotype, work-life balance struggles, persistent gender pay gap and underrepresentation in Leadership. These challenges thus require more than individual effort and demand a collective commitment from the legal community.

What do you think are the most crucial steps to achieve gender equality in the legal profession, both in Eswatini and globally?

Historically, women faced significant challenges and barriers to entering the legal profession globally. However, over time, concerted efforts were made to address gender inequality, promote inclusivity, and provide equal opportunities for women in law.

“To confront the entrenched gender biases and break the glass ceiling, I decided to only employ female lawyers”



While progress has been made, it is worth noting that gender equality remains a work in progress in the legal profession, as it does in many other industries. Women still face some barriers and disparities, including unequal pay, fewer opportunities for career advancement, and challenges in balancing work and family responsibilities.

However, it is important to emphasise that there are numerous successful and respected women in the legal profession internationally, and many law firms and organisations are actively working towards creating more inclusive environments. Women are taking on prominent roles as judges, advocates, attorneys, and legal academics, and contributing significantly to the field.

Equal access to professional development opportunities, such as continuing legal education programmes, leadership training, and networking events, would be crucial in levelling the playing field and ensuring equal career advancement prospects for all legal professionals.

Promoting gender equality within the legal profession is also essen-

tial. This would involve addressing issues such as the gender pay gap, ensuring equitable representation of women in leadership positions, and implementing policies to prevent gender-based discrimination and harassment.

As a leader in your field, how do you ensure that other women and girls have the opportunities and support they need to thrive?

To confront the entrenched gender biases and break the glass ceiling, I decided to employ female lawyers only within the law firm. The decision was based on the effort of changing trends and empowering others whose opportunities are limited by the male-dominated industry. I believe that it is equally important to mentor other women by providing guidance and helping young women lawyers navigate the profession's challenges.

How do you handle the emotional aspect of being a criminal attorney?


As a criminal defence attorney, it is imperative to be able to develop the skill of having the ability to detach emotionally from the case, and simply look at the facts, and the law and piece together what

the case is all about. Within the court system, the duty to execute respect and courtesy towards my clients rests solely upon me, and neither the said respect nor courtesy cost me anything but that investment simply makes my job easier.

How do you stay current on changes in criminal law?

To stay current on changes in criminal law, I subscribe to legal news sources, network with other legal professionals, regularly check for updates from reliable legal platforms such as Eswatini Legal Information Institute (EswatiniLII) and actively seek out new cases law and legislative developments in the relevant legal publications.

What advice would you give young women and girls aspiring to break into criminal law?

Young women who aim to enter the male-dominated field of law, should actively seek mentorship and find the right allies within the industry, remove fear and challenge the status quo, remain resilient in the face of potential challenges and stereotypes and keep on educating themselves by building technical skills. 

WHEN WOMEN WORK TOGETHER



Zanele Thabede highlights the impact of the Women Working Together Initiative (WWT), co-founded in 2012 to empower and connect women in Eswatini. The WWT aims to break barriers and amplify women's voices, fostering collaboration and support. Thabede stresses the need for unity in challenging societal norms and promoting leadership for future generation.

By: Ayanda Dlamini | Photo: Women Working Together Initiative

Empowering women is essential to the health and social development of families, communities and countries.

The concept of 'women empowerment' has gained significant traction, with a shared understanding that it fundamentally involves achieving equality between men and women across all sectors of society. This includes ensuring equal opportunities in employment, healthcare, and education; fostering leadership roles for women in both business and government; enhancing access to vital resources; combating discrimination; and raising public awareness about gender issues.

In Eswatini, the 'Women Working Together Initiative' (WWT) was launched to champion the empowerment of women and create valuable networking platforms. Established in 2012 by visionaries Zanele Thabede and Ntombikayise Nyoni, the initiative welcomes participation from various sectors,

including business and entertainment, aiming to promote collaboration and support among women across the nation.

The main objective of WWT is to create a transformative, inspirational and empowering social networking platform for women in Eswatini. The initiative showcases women's talents, ideas and markets their businesses.

One of the Co-founders, Zanele Thabede-Vilakati, is a believer in equality for all and participation of women in all spheres of life. She has worked in various Non-profit making organizations on HIV and Women's Rights, mainly conducting Research and programming.

"Women working together is about 12 years old, as old as my first born child. It is my passion, to see women network and create opportunities and share space. When we started the initiative, the events space was very wanting and most women didn't feel welcome in sports bars and golf courses where men networked and all."

the 'Women Working Together Initiative' (WWT) was launched to champion the empowerment of women and create valuable networking platforms.

"It's good to see that some places are more receptive now and even making space for women, back then it was as We have partnered with over 50 women and have had more than thousands of women join our events throughout the years. We're still going and hope we make more connections and encourage more women to connect," she says.

This initiative, according to Zanele, was based on building a network of women that can create and share opportunities with each other.

"That is how I have played my part in trying to ensure that women and girls have opportunities and support. I'll make an example of Mandela Washington Fellowship sharing events, where we have been able to bring together young women to assist with their application to the fellowship. Both Ntombikayise and I are Mandela Washington Fellows.

"We have also exposed women to showcasing opportunities of their small business products and cost shared rental space, and the ultimate networking and opportunity event we have had was the soup kitchen concept, which was a business competition partnered with some great business opportunities as well as Thokozile Jele, known."

She believes that women's empowerment is important because of the myths around women, the history of leadership, and cultures that haven't always been favourable to women.

"Women struggle to get out of this mind-set and how they have been socialized - to see their sisters as competition and made to think all their good for is household chores and nurture and feminine tasks only. It is important you exhibit the possibilities and constantly train the mind-set that even women are capable of it all and that is what women empowerment is, changing the thought process and giving women the opportunity to do what they previously were not privy to doing."

"In the world we live in today, mental health is very important in all spaces. For women, the prevailing situation is the myth that women cannot work together and be happy, everyday life events prove this myth wrong. So it is very important for women to support and lift each other always."

OTHER SUCCESS STORIES OF WOMEN WORKING TOGETHER

DALA SPACES

Founders: Philippa Thorne and Tiwi Gondwe

Dala Spaces is a flagship design concept store and platform showcasing a curated collection of home ware, fashion, jewellery, and beauty from local designers, artisans, and brands. Founded by Tiwi Gondwe and Philippa Thorne, Dala Spaces provides a shared retail space at Malandela's Lifestyle Centre in Malkerns.

More than just a store, Dala Spaces serves as a creative hub for local brands to flourish. It acts as both a catalyst and launch pad, offering entrepreneurs and creatives access to mentoring sessions, as well as networking and collaborative opportunities.

With a strong online presence, Dala Spaces uses a consistent social media strategy that ensures equal visibility and exposure for each brand, while maintaining a cohesive brand identity.



EMC STUDIO FASHION BRAND

Co- Founders: Emely Mbewe and Theresa Mbewe

Running a business as sisters offers numerous advantages, such as deep-rooted trust, seamless communication, complementary skill sets, unwavering support, shared values, and a unique understanding of each other's strengths and weaknesses. This often leads to more effective decision-making and a stronger commitment to the success of the business. This is the case with EMC Studio, where sisters Emely and Theresa Mbewe co-founded the award-winning fashion brand.

Drawing inspiration from the beauty of diverse cultures, from the golden sands of North Africa to the striking prints of West Africa, and Eswatini's traditional tapestry, EMC Studio delights the senses with elegant scarves, flowing dresses, metallic beads, and lush brocades. The collection also celebrates the bold, vibrant head wraps, kente fabrics, and exquisite accessories of the equatorial region.

As they describe it, "We travel right down to the motherland, immersed in rooted culture and vibrant colors—from vivid buhlalu to stunning shweshwe prints. Let's celebrate and sing praises to the richness of our African past and the bright future ahead."

One of their most sought-after collections pays homage to '80s denim, afros, skinny jeans, and colorful bomber jackets. Emelye and Theresa are a powerhouse in the fashion industry, becoming the go-to designers for many of Eswatini's prominent personalities, whether for award shows, weddings, high-tea gatherings, or other social events.

"We are EMC Studio, a fashion house, a family!", the sisters proudly proclaim.



10 Minutes with... Anakhondza

By: Phesheya Mkhonta | Photos: DT Photography

We caught up with Khonza 'Anakhonza' Kunene, one of Eswatini's pioneering musicians, who now shares his creative talents across multiple fields, including as an events MC/host, voice-over artist, radio host, musician, and producer. When asked to describe himself, he simply said, "I'm just an African who loves the arts."

From music to voice-overs and festival hosting—how do you juggle so many creative roles, and what fuels your passion for each?

For me, it all comes naturally. The real effort is in preparing for each event or production, not in finding time. As they say, "you always make time for what matters." My passion for what I do is driven by the satisfaction of getting the job done. I'm addicted to the feeling of doing well in everything I try—it's that "after-action satisfaction" famously quoted in an old ad for an adult beverage.

MTN Bushfire Festival is known for its vibrant energy. How does it feel to stand at the heart of that energy as the Festival's longest serving MC?

It's the most electrifying experience. The energy of thousands at the MTN Bushfire Festival is unmatched for an MC. For me, it's home—where I belong. Being part of such a large production allows me to contribute to the experience of every festivalgoer, and that's what matters most.

What's the most rewarding part of hosting the MTN Bushfire Festival for you—seeing the crowd, the performances, the on-stage production coming together or something else?

It has to be seeing all the pieces that it takes to put the festival come together. Seeing the joy in people's faces. Also, it has to be knowing that

it is not just fun for the sake of having fun, but it is all for a good cause. It is indeed art with a heart.

If we could go inside your playlist right now, what unexpected songs or genres would we find there?

Aside from the usual mainstream and underground hip-hop, I enjoy listening to Indaira Sfair, an incredible Brazilian harmonica player. I'm also a fan of Jeremy Loops, a South African modern folk musician, and Zoë Modiga, a talented jazz singer. And of course, Romain Virgo, a Jamaican singer, is another one of my favorites, just to name a few.

Behind the mic and the music, what's something about you that fans would be surprised to learn?

I'm an introvert. People would be surprised that I really don't like attention and being in large crowds. I always say that if it wasn't for the career I'm in, I would most probably live the quietest life away from everything and everyone. I guess it's the age old story of the gift and the curse.

What's the craziest thing you've ever experienced while on stage or hosting an event that made you laugh or left you speechless?

I once saw Mshikishi shut down a stadium, and it was unforgettable. We had David Masondo of Soul Brothers fame (RIP) as the main act, but he refused to perform after Mshikishi, insisting on going before him out of respect. I was surprised—why would a world-famous

artist show such respect? Masondo explained that Mshikishi had been his inspiration growing up. Mshikishi took the stage last, and he brought the house down, with fans so excited they threw money at him. He was truly in his element that night. It was pure magic.

You've got an open invitation to any country in the world for a cultural exchange—where would you go and what would you bring from Eswatini to share?

I'd pick Ethiopia. I think the most unique thing about our country is our story. We are a small country that has managed to hold on to its culture. We are a colourful and bright nation that has its problems but still prevails. Other than our traditional attire, I would take that with me... the story of our people.

What's the best piece of advice you've ever received that's shaped the way you approach your career and life?

The best advice I've received is to consistently develop and nurture relationships in this business.

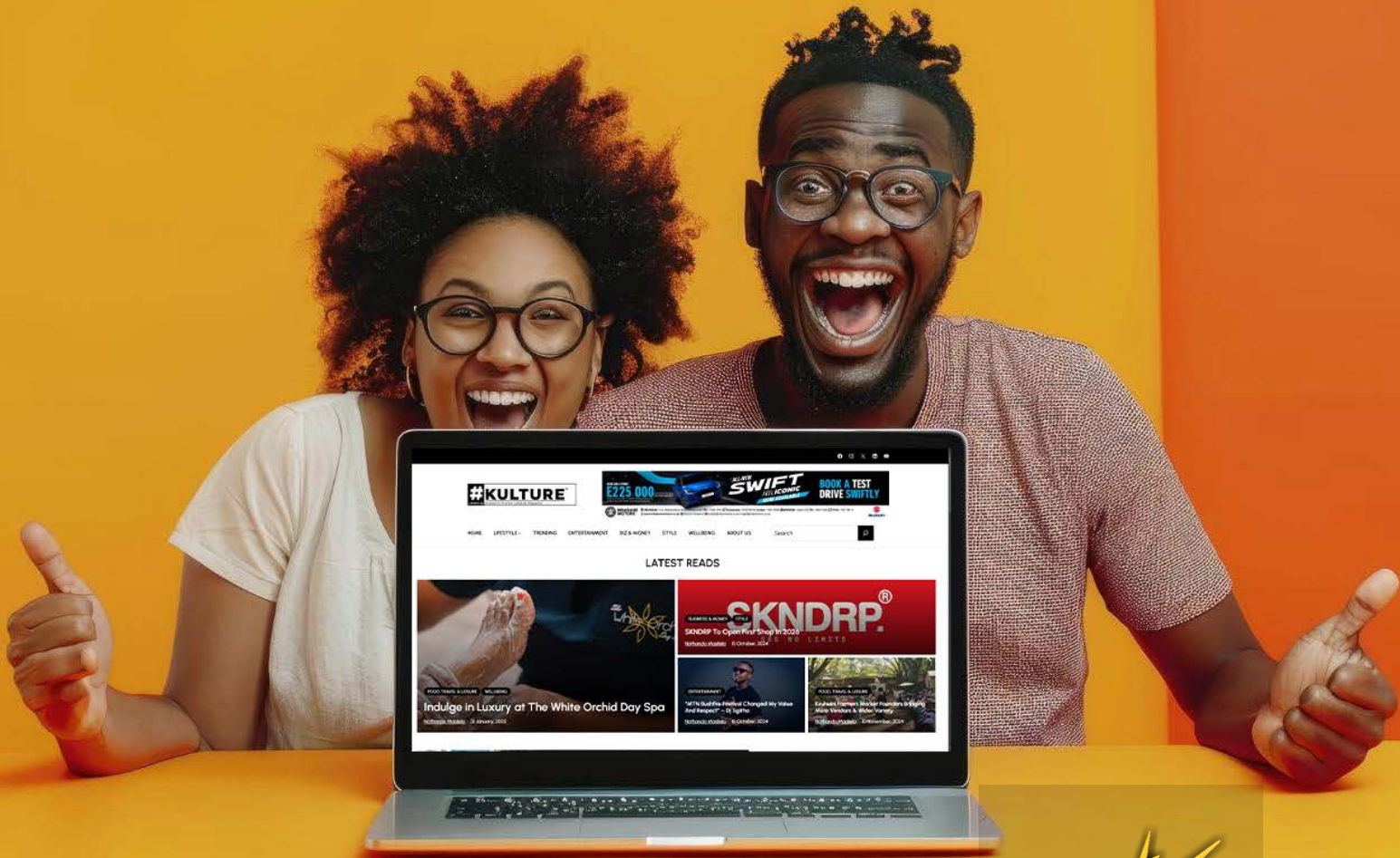
What's one thing you still want to achieve in your career that you haven't yet?

I'd love to own a radio station. That's what is still on my to do list.





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