



Insightful. Innovative. Inspired.

[www.insidebiz.co.sz](http://www.insidebiz.co.sz)

## INSIDE

### SECURING ESWATINI'S DIGITAL SPACE

ESCCOM ASSISTANT  
DIRECTOR OF CYBERSECURITY  
NOKUTHULA HLOPHE SPEAKS  
ON ONLINE SAFETY

### THE PRICE OF AGOA EXPIRY

WHAT NEXT FOR ESWATINI  
AS THE KINGDOM FACES A  
COMPLEX TRADE CROSSROAD?

### FROM KAHLATSI TO BMW GLOBAL

Njabulo 'JB' Masuku  
on his setbacks and  
break-throughs  
across continents



# Steel Beneath the Smile

History maker by 23, and now Mbabane Municipality CEO, Gciniwe Fakudze opens up about her path, faith & vision for a more vibrant, smarter capital city

## NEW STREETWISE<sup>®</sup> LOADED



**STREETWISE<sup>®</sup> 2 LOADED**  
**53.90** 2 Pc. Original Recipe<sup>™</sup>  
1 Loaded Fries

**STREETWISE<sup>®</sup> 5 LOADED**  
5 Pc. Original Recipe<sup>™</sup>  
1 Lrg. Loaded Fries

**115.90**

**STREETWISE<sup>®</sup> 5 LOADED**

Also Available in  
Streetwise<sup>®</sup> 3 Loaded for 69.90  
& Streetwise<sup>®</sup> 4 Loaded for 95.90

All visuals & / or images for display purposes only. Prices may vary. Delivery fees not included. While stocks last. T&Cs apply. V&T



# ESRIC

Ensuring your tomorrow, *today.*

# CYBER INSURANCE COVER

**UP TO E50 MILLION COVER**

In today's digital world, cyber risks like data breaches and system failures can be costly and disruptive. Our cyber insurance gives your business the protection and peace of mind it needs. Here's what's included:

## CYBER LIABILITY

Loss of data/breach of confidential information.

## DATA PROTECTION INVESTIGATION AND PROTECTION FINE

Cost of getting data back & related fines.

## CYBER EXTORTION

Cash paid to alleviate extortion threats.

## BUSINESS INTERRUPTION

Network Interruption.

## EVENT MANAGEMENT

Legal & IT expenses.

*T's & C's Apply*

Contacts

☎ 24081600

✉ [underwriting@sric.sz](mailto:underwriting@sric.sz)



# ESRIC

Ensuring your tomorrow, today.

# CYBER INSURANCE

## Your Digital Shield in Eswatini's Connected Economy



### Digital transformation reality check

Digital transformation is reshaping how businesses operate. As we embrace digital banking, online transactions, and cloud-based systems, cyber threats have become real business risks that traditional insurance simply cannot address.

The harsh reality: Businesses today face ransomware attacks that shut down operations for days, data breaches that expose customer information, and cyber extortion demands that can cripple cash flow. Without cyber protection, companies face devastating losses that can end decades of hard work in hours.

Eswatini Royal Insurance Corporation (ESRIC) offers comprehensive cyber insurance coverage of up to E50 million, providing businesses with essential protection against the evolving world of cyber risks.

### Cyber insurance, what it covers:

- Cyber liability**
  - Loss arising from an actual or alleged breach of confidential information by the insured or an information holder.
  - An actual or alleged security failure.
  - Actual or alleged failure by a company to notify a data subject or any regulator of an unauthorised disclosure or transmission of personal information for which the company is responsible in accordance with the requirements of any data protection legislation.
- Security Failure :**
  - Any intrusion of, unauthorized access or unauthorized use of company's computer system, including that which results in or fails to mitigate any;
  - Denial of service attack or denial of access.
  - Receipt or transmission of a malicious code, malicious software or virus.
  - The loss of data arising from the physical theft or loss of hardware controlled by the company.
- Cyber extortion**
  - Cyber extortion advisor cyber extortion advisor emergency number.
- Loss;**
  - Any cash or monetary instrument which the Insured as paid to prevent or end an extortion threat.
  - Reasonable and necessary costs and expenses of the cyber extortion advisor to conduct an investigation to determine the cause of and to end an extortion threat.
- Data protection & cyper liability**
  - Defence costs incurred in connection with a regulatory investigation and data protection fines that the company is legally liable to pay.

- Event management**
  - Cover is for legal services, IT services, data restoration, reputational protection services, notification costs, credit monitoring and ID monitoring incurred consequent an insured event.
  - It covers only costs incurred within one year from the date of notification to the insurer.

### Legal Services:

- Services provided by a response advisor for the purpose of co-ordinating the IT specialist and crisis consultants, advising, notifying and corresponding on any notification requirements with any relevant regulator.
- Monitoring complaints raised by Data Subjects and advising the insured on responses to an insured event.

### 5. Business Interruption

- Any network loss incurred by the insured resulting from a material interruption of the Insured's computer system.
  - There is a time excess of 12 hours.
  - Cover is for a maximum of 120 days after expiry of waiting hours period.
- Interruption and mitigation costs:**
- Any network interruption costs incurred after waiting period in mitigating the impact of a material interruption to computer system.
- Network loss – reduction of net income that would have earned:**
- Additional expenses incurred to ensure continuation of company operations.
  - Material interruption refers to degradation of service caused by security failure.
  - Security failure – any intrusion or unauthorised access (hacking).

### The bottom line

In Eswatini's rapidly digitalizing economy, cyber insurance is not optional it's essential business infrastructure. As digital banking, e-commerce, and cloud computing become standard business tools, cyber threats evolve alongside these technologies.

With ESRIC's cyber insurance, digital disruptions become manageable challenges rather than business disasters, allowing you to pursue digital transformation with confidence.

T's & C's Apply

## EDITORIAL TEAM

### Editor In Chief

Ntokozo Nkambule

### Reporters & Content Contributors

Phiwa Sikhondze, Phesheya Mkhonta, Tlalane Dlamini, Ayanda Dlamini, Phumelele Mkhonta, Sibusiso Mngadi

## BUSINESS SERVICES

### Publishers

Raspers Media (PTY) Ltd  
Office No. 7 | Ground Floor | Sokhahlilo Building  
Dzeliwe Street | Mbabane | Kingdom of Eswatini  
Email: info@affinityinc.africa  
Tel: (+268) 7661 8219

### Brand & Business Development

Phesheya Mkhonta - Business Development & Client Services  
Zwakele Hlanze - Brand & Creative Strategy  
Zamokuhle Dlamini - Accounts & Admin

### Advertising & Sales

Affinity Incorporated T/A Affinity  
phesheya@insidebiz.co.sz / info@insidebiz.co.sz  
Phesheya Mkhonta - 7622 3121  
Ntsika Shongwe - 7630 6784  
Tlalane Dlamini

### Digital Channels

Nkosinathi Manyika - IT & Multimedia Specialist  
Nothando Masilela - Social Media Assistant

### Corporate Distribution

Affinity

## PRODUCTION

### Design & Multimedia

Zwakele Hlanze, Lindokuhle Shabangu,  
Sifiso Masilela (Craft Space)

### Printing



Remata Print & Communications  
International Business Gateway Park  
Cnr New Rd & Sixth Str | Midrand | Gauteng | South Africa  
Tel: (+27) 11 848 0000 | Fax: (+27) 11 848 0036  
www.remata.co.za

## CONTACT DETAILS

### Inside Biz

Affinity Incorporated (PTY) Ltd  
Office No. 7 | Ground Floor | Sokhahlilo Building  
Dzeliwe Street | Mbabane | Kingdom of Eswatini  
Email: info@affinityinc.africa | Tel: (+268) 7661 8219

f | facebook.com/InsideBiz.co.sz  
@ | instagram.com/InsideBiz.co.sz  
X | twitter.com/inside\_biz  
in | linkedin.com/company/inside-biz  
| youtube.com/@insidebizmagazine

## DISCLAIMER

### Inside Biz

Inside Biz is published by Raspers Media Pty Ltd. All material is strictly copyright and all rights are reserved. Reproduction without permission is forbidden. Every care is taken in compiling the contents of this magazine, but we assume no responsibility in the effect arising therefrom. Although information in this publication is derived from sources believed to be accurate and reliable, it is for general purposes only. It is not intended as financial advice, independent financial advice should be sourced before investment decisions are taken.

## EDITORS NOTE



# Non-Renewal of AGOA: Effects Too Loud to Ignore

**T**he silence is deafening. The African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) expired on September 30, 2025, and has yet to be renewed by the US. The question is, why are we so silent as a country? Are there measures in place that we don't know about, or are there no political points to score this time?

I remember the uproar in 2014 when then-US President Barack Obama terminated the trade agreement, citing unmet human rights standards and poor labour conditions in the country. Every media outlet, civic group, and business organization, among other stakeholders, protested because they understood the harmful impacts. Granted, I know Eswatini is not the only country affected this time around, as was the case in 2014. The entire Sub-Saharan region is feeling the pain, but at least they are discussing it. Since the non-renewal, neighbouring South Africa has been very vocal. They are talking about life beyond AGOA, while we remain silent as a country. I also acknowledge that the trade programme might be renewed, but we are still too quiet for a country with an unemployment rate of over 35%.

I believe the non-renewal deserves the same attention given to the health sector when the egotistical Donald Trump took office for his second term, announcing that he would cut funding for health programmes. However, that has not been the case this time. For those unfamiliar, the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) is a non-reciprocal US trade preference programme introduced in May 2000 to support sub-Saharan African economies. It grants duty-free access to the US market for over 1,800 products from many African countries.

In 2023, US imports under AGOA totaled nearly \$10 billion. While this is just a small

part of overall US merchandise imports, it represented a significant share of exports from eligible countries like Eswatini. Julie Nixon from Fair & Square notes that the effects of the non-renewal are already being felt, with hundreds of people losing their jobs overnight. She states that one of her top customers has 253 stores in the US, with annual order values between E1.5 million and E7 million. The Ministry of Commerce, Industry & Trade, led by Minister Manqoba Khumalo, has been mostly silent apart from a press statement they released. The minister tried to ease fears, saying that despite the non-renewal, Eswatini will be better off due to the 10% tariff arrangement the country has with the US, one that is the lowest in the region. However, exporters and economists do not fully agree with this.

What's troubling about the silence is that it deprives us of the chance to think about life beyond AGOA. Even if the trade agreement is renewed, it's clear we need to explore other options. As Julie mentioned in an interview with us, they started looking for new markets in January, particularly in Japan and Taiwan, and are also exploring export opportunities within Africa to leverage the AfCFTA. So, let's have an open, honest discussion about this. No one is blaming anyone for the non-renewal, but the impacts are too loud to ignore.

**Enjoy Your Read - Ufundze Kahle**

*Ntokozo Nkambule*



# 30 weminyaka yelusito lolukhonsile

For 30 years, FNB Eswatini has helped small business thrive, economies grow and communities flourish.

From a suite of funding solutions and digital banking tools, to expert advice and market access, we're making growth simple, convenient, and scalable.



Help changes everything

Change to **FNB**

**FNB Business**

**First National Bank** of Eswatini Limited, Company Reg. No: 24/1988  
A Financial Institution licensed under the Financial Institutions Act of 2005, and an Insurance Services Provider licensed under the Insurance Act of 2005

**30 YEARS**  
of help that works

# CONTENTS

## Inside This Issue



## On The Cover

We sat down with Gcniwe Fakudze for a candid conversation on her career journey and why developing a thick skin is important when leading in public office. **P20**

---

## Features

### **CARBON ECONOMY**

Eswatini Stock Exchange Leads National Drive for Sustainable Finance. **P10**

### **CHAMPIONING CYBERSECURITY IN ESWATINI**

Nokuthula Hlophe, Assistant Director of Cybersecurity at ESCCOM, shares how the Commission is driving national awareness, readiness, and resilience in the digital space. **P14**

### **AGOA NON-RENEWAL HITS LOCAL EXPORTERS**

Since the trade agreement lapsed in September, Eswatini's exporters are already feeling the strain. We explore the impact and what lies ahead. **P16**

### **A NEW ERA OF TRUST: THE FIRST ENPF CEO AWARDS**

By launching the Lidlelantfongeni Stakeholder Recognition Awards, ENPF CEO Futhi Tembe set the stage for a new culture of trust and financial dignity. **P24**



28



30



36



40



14

## Regulars

### AGRI-BIZ

EADF Empowers Eswatini's Agricultural Entrepreneurs. With over E32 million disbursed, the Fund is transforming agriculture into a vibrant, youth-led sector. **P28**

### CAREER CONNECT

Hlathikhulu to the World - Njabulo 'JB' Masuku's takes us down memory land on his path to BMW USA, highlighting his determination, resilience, and a bold pursuit of global opportunities. **P30**

Why Young Professionals in Eswatini Feel Stuck - An Analysis by Our Guest Writer. **P34**

### HUSTLE

Master of the Grill- The Smoke & Grill and Asado Butchery's Siphon Khaile on turning bold flavours into bold business moves. **P36**

### LIFESTYLE

Homegrown Spirit - From its first pour at Dwaleni Farm Lodge to a national sensation, Spotted Horse Gold Rum by has become a symbol of pride, craftsmanship, and possibility. **P40**

10 Minutes With... Nosizwe Sigwane. Stepping outside the boardroom with FNB Eswatini's Head of Transact and Liability Products. **P42**

# NEWS IN BRIEF

## MVUSELELO FAKUDZE RE-ELECTED AS BUSINESS ESWATINI PRESIDENT



**M**vuselelo Fakudze, Chief Executive of Standard Bank Eswatini, has been re-elected as President of Business Eswatini (BE) during the organization's 2025 Annual General Meeting (AGM), acknowledging his steadfast leadership and the significant progress made under his tenure.

In an electoral process conducted with innovative efficiency and transparency through the OpaVote online platform, members endorsed a leadership team for the 2025-2027 term. The results showed a clear mandate: stability and excellence at the helm, supported by strategic growth within the leadership team.

Alongside Fakudze's re-election, the membership re-elected Tokky Hou, Managing Director of Far East Textiles, to continue serving as Chairperson of Business Women Eswatini. This clear mandate is a nod to her strong leadership and the crucial role she plays in promoting women in business.

Muzi Siyaya, the Managing Director of Ubombo Sugar, was elected as the new Vice President of Industrial Relations. Siyaya moves from his previous role as Vice President of Trade & Commerce, bringing his extensive experience to this key position. Anthony Geldard, CEO of LOGICO, succeeds him as Vice President - Trade & Commerce. Geldard is expected to bring new energy to shaping trade policy and expanding business opportunities for Eswatini companies.

## CENTRAL BANK GRANTS PROVISIONAL BANKING LICENSE TO SBS BANK ESWATINI



**T**he Central Bank of Eswatini (CBE) has issued a provisional banking license to SBS Bank Eswatini (SBSBE), enabling the Swaziland Building Society (SBS) to evolve into a medium-sized commercial bank.

The move marks a major milestone for Eswatini's oldest and most established local financial institution, which has been operating as a

mutual building society since 1962. The transformation will allow SBS to expand its services beyond the traditional building society model and take on a larger role in the country's banking sector.

According to the CBE Governor, Dr. Phil Mnisi, the decision follows a thorough review process conducted in accordance with the country's banking regulatory framework. SBSBE submitted its application to the Central Bank on June 30, 2025, and a detailed evaluation confirmed that the institution met all necessary prudential and regulatory standards to qualify for a provisional license.

SBSBE becomes the second bank to receive a banking license from the CBE in 2025, following Letshego Eswatini Bank (LEB). The CBE also provided a status update on LEB, which received its provisional license on June 13, 2025, to operate as a digital bank, noting that it is on track with meeting the conditions tied to its provisional license.

## E.NATHI DLAMINI APPOINTED NEW ESCCOM BOARD CHAIRPERSON



**T**he Minister of Information, Communications and Technology (ICT), Savannah Maziya, has announced the appointment of a new Board of Directors for the Eswatini Communications Commission (ESCCOM), with Business Eswatini CEO, E. Nathi Dlamini, named as Chairperson.

According to Minister Maziya, the new Board appointments mark a renewed commitment

to strengthening governance, leadership, and innovation in Eswatini's ICT sector as the country continues to drive its digital transformation and inclusion agenda.

Other newly appointed members include Joseph Waring of Waring Attorneys and Loncwala Mahlalela-Ziyane, who will serve alongside

continuing members: Mvilawemphi Dlamini, ESCCOM Chief Executive; Bheki Ndzinisa, representing the Ministry of Finance; and Bongiwe Dlamini, representing the Ministry of ICT.

Expressing gratitude on behalf of the new Board, the Dlamini commended the Minister for her visionary leadership and progress

achieved within the ICT sector.

"We have witnessed your ambitions, Honourable Minister, and we promise to do our best as we continue to serve. In this industry, we need people who think outside the box, people who bring fresh ideas and inspire innovation," he said.

## UNESWA ENDOWMENT FUND LAUNCHES EMVASI ALUMNI CLUB AND 2025-2030 STRATEGY



**The University of Eswatini (UNESWA) Endowment Fund has launched the Emvasi Alumni Club, along with the UNESWA Endowment Fund Strategy Map (2025-2030), an initiative aimed at strengthening the institution's long-term financial stability and decreasing its reliance on government funding.**

The initiative stems from years of financial pressure that have challenged UNESWA's ability to operate effectively, with debts now exceeding E500 million owed to service providers, pension funds, and financial institutions.

Vuli Simelane, CEO of the UNESWA Endowment Fund, stated that the new strategy aligns with the university's broader development plan. "We are shifting from a purely donation-based model to a more commercial focus," he said, "investing in sectors like real estate, mining, technology, food retail, and logistics to secure the university's future."

At the heart of UNESWA's new financial vision is the Emvasi Alumni Club, a dynamic platform uniting former students, current students, staff, and friends of the university. The Club aims to mobilize resources, foster professional networks, and reignite pride in the institution while serving as a hub for business and social engagement.

The UNESWA Alumni Club aims to boost revenue by commercializing the Sports Emporium, opening an on-campus coffee shop and restaurant with local partners, and introducing new income streams such as branded merchandise, on-campus advertising, member subscriptions, and various alumni events.

## CENTRAL BANK UNVEILS NEW E-PROCUREMENT SYSTEM TO BOOST EFFICIENCY



**The Central Bank of Eswatini (CBE) has officially launched a new electronic procurement (e-procurement) system, marking a major leap toward transparency, efficiency, and accountability in its supply chain management.**

The new system was unveiled during the 2025 CBE Supplier Day. The system, developed in-house by the Bank's Information Technology Division, will allow suppliers to register, upload compliance documents, and compete for tenders online from the comfort of their offices or homes. It replaces the traditional paper-based procurement process, which the Bank says has been both time-consuming and cumbersome.

Unlike the previous system, suppliers can now register at any time, without waiting for a tender to be advertised before joining the database. The system features two main components: a supplier registration portal that feeds into the CBE database, and a tender application interface that automates the submission and evaluation process, reducing manual errors and administrative delays.

CBE's Deputy Director of Procurement, Warren Dlamini, said the e-procurement system is part of the Bank's broader modernization strategy aimed at aligning internal operations with global best practices.



# Eswatini Prepares for Carbon Economy: ESE Spearheads National Effort for Sustainable Finance

By Phiwa Sikhondze

**E**swatini is taking decisive steps to align its financial system with the global shift toward sustainability. In an era where climate finance has become a key feature of modern economies, the Kingdom has positioned itself to participate actively in the rapidly growing global carbon market.

The Eswatini Stock Exchange (ESE), in partnership with the Taiwan Embassy, the Financial Services Regulatory Authority (FSRA), and the Central Bank of Eswatini (CBE), led this initiative through a Carbon Market Training Program held at the CBE Complex in Ezulwini. The three-day training, which took place from October 13 to 15, 2025, aimed to enhance local capacity and improve understanding of carbon markets among key national stakeholders, including regulators, bankers, investors, policymakers, and environmental specialists.



ESE Vice Chairperson Precious Nkambule

This initiative marked a major milestone in Eswatini's efforts toward sustainable finance and environmental resilience. The sessions were led by two expert lecturers from Taiwan's National Sun Yat-sen University, Centre for Carbon Research and Solutions, who brought international experience in carbon trading, emissions verification, and climate policy design.

Participants attended sessions on voluntary carbon credits, emissions verification, carbon offset certification, and market pricing mechanisms. The aim was not only to educate but also to establish a foundation for Eswatini's future development of its own national carbon credit registry and trading platform.

Opening the program, ESE Vice Chairperson Precious Nkambule highlighted the broader significance of the training, noting that carbon markets are "one of the most effective mechanisms in addressing the urgent challenge of climate change."

"As a country, Eswatini is not insulated from the realities of climate change," Nkambule said. "We are experiencing shifts in weather patterns, threats to food security, and risks to our natural resources. At the same time, our economy is seeking new opportunities for growth and diversification. Carbon markets offer us a unique chance to position ourselves within the global sustainability agenda while

unlocking new streams of investment." She emphasized that the success of the programme would ultimately be measured by how effectively the lessons learned are translated into policy reforms, new investment frameworks, and credible market structures.



Embassy of the Republic of China (Taiwan) Deputy Economic Counsellor, Carlos Lin

The Embassy of Taiwan in Eswatini has played a key role in promoting the Kingdom's sustainable finance efforts. Speaking on behalf of the Embassy, Carlos Lin, Deputy Economic Counsellor at the Embassy of the Republic of China (Taiwan), the diplomatic representative, emphasized that reducing carbon emissions "has become a global trend" and a necessary step for participating in international trade. "For companies wishing to join the global supply chain," he stated, "achieving carbon emission reduction is no longer optional; it is an obligation."

He explained that the development of carbon credits should align with Eswatini's nationally determined contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement. "Generating carbon credits also contributes to the Kingdom's emission-reduction targets," Lin added. According to the Embassy, potential projects for Eswatini could include reforestation, renewable energy, and cook-stove replacement programs, all of which have proven successful across Africa in generating verifiable carbon credits. Taiwan, through its Carbon Solution Exchange, will provide technical guidance on certification and market access.

"We look forward to seeing Eswatini join other African countries in developing its own carbon credit projects and, step by step, establishing its own carbon credit trading platform," Lin said.

The Financial Services Regulatory Authority (FSRA), represented by its Chief Executive Officer, Ncamiso Ntshalintshali, highlighted the importance of a strong regulatory framework to ensure that Eswatini's involvement in the carbon economy is both trustworthy and compliant. "This training occurs at a critical juncture," he said. "The global financial landscape is evolving rapidly, with markets increasingly adopting mechanisms to support climate action. Carbon markets have become a dynamic tool, turning environmental responsibility into economic opportunity."



FSRA CEO, Ncamiso Ntshalintshali

Ntshalintshali referenced projections indicating that the global voluntary carbon market, valued at over USD 2 billion, is expected to grow rapidly as countries commit to net-zero emissions. For Eswatini, he said, "the imperative is clear: to build the regulatory and technical capacity needed to participate effectively, ensuring compliance, transparency, and investor protection." He reaffirmed FSRA's support for the ESE's Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Taiwan Carbon Solution Exchange

(TCX), signed in March 2024, describing it as a "strategic partnership grounded in shared goals of innovation and sustainability."

"The FSRA's role," he explained, "is to ensure that financial innovations such as carbon trading are developed within a transparent and accountable framework that protects investors while promoting sustainable economic growth." The regulator, he added, is also creating Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) guidelines to make sure all market participants act responsibly. "By embracing the carbon economy early," Ntshalintshali said, "Eswatini can position itself as a responsible and forward-looking player within the SADC region and beyond."



CBE Deputy Governor, Felicia Dlamini-Kunene

Deputy Governor of the CBE, Felicia Dlamini-Kunene, placed the carbon market discussions within the context of broader financial stability and innovation. "The Bank's mandate extends beyond monetary and financial stability," she said. "It includes fostering a financial system that supports inclusive and sustainable economic growth." She explained that the Central Bank's new Centre of Excellence & Innovation, which co-hosted the training, has been established to encourage knowledge sharing and research on emerging issues such as sustainable finance, digital transformation, and green investments.

She praised the ESE and its partners for their foresight, adding: "These partnerships demonstrate what can be achieved when institutions unite around a shared goal, developing a financial ecosystem that supports sustainable growth while positioning Eswatini to participate meaningfully

in emerging global opportunities such as carbon trading." The Deputy Governor also highlighted the MoU between ESE and TCX as a key step in building local expertise. "The signing of this memorandum stands as a significant milestone in our journey,

*A "carbon-ready" Eswatini could integrate its agricultural, forestry, and energy sectors into international carbon credit systems, generating new revenue streams while encouraging conservation and climate adaptation*

bringing valuable expertise that will guide Eswatini's participation in the global carbon market framework."

**Carbon Markets: Converting Emissions into Economic Opportunities**

Carbon markets operate on a straightforward yet transformative idea: emissions reductions have worth. By putting a monetary value on carbon, countries and companies can exchange emission allowances or credits, creating a financial motivation for pollution control and environmental innovation. Worldwide, carbon trading has become a vital part of net-zero transition strategies, with African nations such as Kenya, Rwanda, and South Africa already establishing national frameworks. Eswatini's entry into this space could attract foreign direct investment (FDI), promote green business growth, and support rural livelihoods through community-based carbon projects.

A "carbon-ready" Eswatini could integrate its agricultural, forestry, and energy sectors into international carbon credit systems, generating new revenue streams while encouraging conservation and climate adaptation. Eswatini's carbon finance goals align with various national and global frameworks, including the National Development Plan (2023-2028), the Nkwe! Declaration, and the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (2021-2025).

Collectively, these frameworks highlight resilience, environmental responsibility, and sustainable development. By integrating carbon finance into these priorities, Eswatini seeks to ensure that environmental efforts support economic empowerment and inclusive growth. Summing up the spirit of the event, ESE Vice Chairperson described the carbon market initiative as "a vision of sustainability."




## Sambulelo Funeral Cover

**FINSURE Assurance Limited, a proud subsidiary of the Eswatini Development Finance Corporation (FINCORP), has unveiled its latest innovation, the Sambulelo Funeral Cover, a tailor-made solution that brings dignity, security, and inclusivity to every LiSwati.**

With flexible payment options, fast payouts, and cover ranging from E5,000 to E50,000, the Sambulelo funeral cover ensures dignity and security for individuals, families, and communities. Available nationwide, the product reflects FINSURE's mission to make insurance accessible to all, regardless of income or social status.

Funerals are a deeply cultural moment in Eswatini. They are not only times of mourning but also times of

# Sambulelo Funeral Cover: Affordable Peace of Mind for Every LiSwati

immense financial responsibility. Too often, families are left scrambling to meet costs during a period of grief. Recognising this, FINSURE has stepped in with Sambulelo, a product designed to ensure that no LiSwati faces this burden alone.

What sets Sambulelo apart is its inclusivity. Whether you are an SME owner, sugarcane farmer, hawker, vendor, or part of the informal sector, this cover was created with your reality in mind. Payment options are flexible to all, monthly or annually, so your cover moves with your cashflow, not against it.

FINCORP Group Managing Director, Dumisani Msibi, describes the product as a direct response to the needs of emaSwati.

"Funerals are not only moments of grief but also times of immense financial strain for many families. The Sambulelo Funeral Cover is our response to customer needs."

Emphasizing the flexibility, Chief Insurance Officer at FINSURE, Nozipho Dlamini, adds:

"Our customer proposition hinges on accessibility; all emaSwati must be able to have funeral cover regardless of their economic or social status. We are not imposing a product, but providing a needed solution that mirrors the heartbeat of our communities."

True to Eswatini's spirit of togetherness, Sambulelo initially targets community groups of 20 or more, echoing the nation's tradition of collective support during times of loss.

### Other key features include:

- **Fast payout:** Benefits are paid as a lump sum within 24 hours, directly into the beneficiary's account.
- **Dependents covered:** Biological, step, and legally adopted children are covered up to 21 years (extended to 25 for students). Permanently disabled dependents enjoy lifetime cover.
- **Flexible premiums:** Payments can be made monthly or annually through bank debit orders, mobile platforms, source deductions, or cash.
- **Accessibility:** Available nationwide at FINCORP and FIRST FINANCE outlets in Mbabane, Manzini, Nhlngano, Siphofaneni, and Tshaneni.

A six-month waiting period applies for natural death, waived for transferring schemes. Standard exclusions include deaths resulting from active participation in war or riots.

With the Sambulelo Funeral Cover, FINSURE Assurance is reaffirming its mission of making insurance products accessible to all, no matter their status or income. By focusing on inclusivity, flexibility, and timely benefits, FINSURE is not only offering peace of mind but also ensuring that no LiSwati faces the financial strain of a funeral alone.



**Sambulelo initially targets community groups of 20 or more, echoing the nation's tradition of collective support during times of loss..**



## Bring Your Group On Board Today!

Together, we celebrate life.  
Together, we honour loss.  
Sambulelo Funeral Cover helps groups of 20+ give every member the farewell they deserve - with affordable cover, swift support, and flexible plans. From FINSURE Assurance, your partner in peace of mind. Because in Eswatini, we face life together.



**Sambulelo**  
Funeral Cover

 [www.fincorp.co.sz/finsure](http://www.fincorp.co.sz/finsure)

 [info@finsure.co.sz](mailto:info@finsure.co.sz)

 +268 2404 1121/1116

# From Awareness to Action: ESCCOM's Multi-Layered Fight Against Cybercrime

By Phiwa Sikhondze | Photo: Craft Space // ESCCOM

**A**S Eswatini advances its ambitious digital transformation, the growing spread of cybercrime introduces new threats—from mobile money scams to cyberbullying. Leading the effort to protect the Kingdom's digital ecosystem is the Eswatini Communications Commission (ESCCOM), through its Cybersecurity Unit. In this interview, Nokuthula Hlophe, Assistant Director of Cybersecurity at ESCCOM, discusses how her team raises awareness, builds capacity, coordinates national incident responses, and positions Eswatini among Africa's emerging leaders in cybersecurity readiness.

**Q: What does your role as the Assistant Director of Cybersecurity at the Eswatini Communications Commission (ESCCOM) entail? What does your Unit do?**

A: In a nutshell, I am responsible for overseeing the country's cybersecurity strategy, ensuring that measures are in place to protect critical infrastructure. I also lead national cybersecurity capacity building and incident response efforts while collaborating with stakeholders across the public and private sectors to strengthen the country's overall cyber resilience. I am also responsible for developing cybersecurity awareness programs to ensure that citizens practice good cyber hygiene. My unit manages national cyber incidents, monitors the internet for threats targeting Eswatini organizations, and provides advice to all stakeholders when a threat occurs. We promote national initiatives to develop a skilled cybersecurity workforce, and we propose, support, and review cyber laws, legislation, and frameworks.

**Q: The global cybercrime industry is reportedly worth trillions of dollars. What is Eswatini's standing in fighting cybercrime, especially compared to neighboring countries?**

A: According to the Royal Eswatini Police Service (REPS), Eswatini lost approximately E15.9 million to cybercrime between September 2024 and September 2025. The highest rates of crime and scams happen in digital financial services, especially in mobile wallets and internet banking. This amount is small compared to South Africa, which loses about R2.4 billion to cybercrime. However, comparing cybercrime across countries is hard for several reasons, mainly due to differences in definitions, reporting practices, legal systems, and technical capacity.

The country participated in a survey called the Global Cybersecurity Index (GCI) conducted by the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) in 2024. The GCI measures how well a country is prepared to prevent, detect, and respond to cyber threats. It focuses on cybersecurity capabilities, assessing a country's cybersecurity maturity and preparedness, and not the number of crimes. GCI scores are based on 5 pillars namely:

**Legal measures** - Cybercrime laws, data protection laws

**Technical measures** - Existence of CSIRTs, cyber drills, detection systems

**Organizational measures** - National strategies, public-private coordination

**Capacity building** - Training, education, cybersecurity programmes

**Cooperation** - International and inter-agency coordination

Eswatini, along with two neighboring countries (Botswana and Mozambique), is rated as establishing in terms of cybersecurity readiness. The areas for potential growth include capacity building and technical measures. In Africa, Eswatini ranks 13th out

of 44 countries. This represents an improvement over the previous GCI ranking of 26.

**Q: How does the country balance its goal of becoming a digital-first nation with the need to protect itself and its citizens from cybersecurity threats?**

A: Becoming a digital-first country means adopting digital services, infrastructure, and innovation across all sectors and national priorities. However, this also increases cyber risks, so cybersecurity must be integrated from the beginning rather than added later. Eswatini is on the right track by using a multi-layered approach to cybersecurity. The country has drafted regulations and will issue directives that include mandatory legal and technical requirements for critical information infrastructure.

To promote good cyber hygiene, ESCCOM runs targeted awareness campaigns to educate citizens and organizations about cyber risks. To develop a skilled workforce, in partnership with EIMPA and the Ministry of ICT, the Commission holds technical workshops and provides free cybersecurity courses open to the public. This strategy ensures ongoing protection of critical infrastructure, essential services, and personal data while encouraging innovation and building trust in the digital environment for citizens and businesses.

**Q: ESCCOM's Chief Executive, Mvilawemphi Dlamini, mentioned during this year's Cybersecurity Awareness Month launch that more funding is needed to combat cybercrime. As a Commission, are you discussing resource mobilization with the government and other stakeholders?**

A: Since the Cybersecurity Agency was established in 2022, it has not received any direct government funding to support national cybersecurity efforts. As a result, the

Commission operates with limited resources, which significantly restricts its capacity. Nevertheless, we continue to engage with the government and regularly seek support from stakeholders to advance key cybersecurity initiatives. For example, we have partnered with UNESCO on a Child Online Safety project and obtained funding from the UK Government to enhance the capabilities of law enforcement and the judiciary in fighting cybersecurity threats and cybercrime.

**Q: What are some initiatives your Office has implemented or is currently undertaking to combat cybercrime in the country?**

Our approach to fighting cybercrime is multi-faceted and emphasizes awareness, capacity building, research, partnerships, and incident response. Firstly, awareness and outreach are key parts of our efforts. We tailor our awareness campaigns to different audiences. For instance, when visiting schools, our messages vary based on the students' age groups. We also participate in community outreach whenever invited, such as during the Day of the Elderly event hosted by the Deputy Prime Minister's Office, where we raised awareness about online scams and ways to protect against cyber threats. Beyond schools and communities, we engage with organizations and churches. We always encourage these institutions to invite us to hold awareness sessions on cybersecurity and safe online practices.

We also focus on capacity building. This involves equipping stakeholders within the cybercrime ecosystem with the knowledge and tools they need to combat cybercrime effectively. For example, last year we conducted a capacity-building exercise for prosecutors and law

“ **Our approach to fighting cybercrime is multi-faceted and emphasizes awareness, capacity building, research,**

enforcement officers, focusing on the Computer Crime and Cybercrime Act, explaining what the offenses entail and how to collect digital evidence properly. We also create supporting documents and guidelines, such as our Cybercrime Guidelines for Law Enforcement, to enhance investigation and prosecution capabilities.

Thirdly, we invest in research and benchmarking. By conducting



Cybersecurity personnel and IT professionals attend a two-day Cybersecurity Response technical training session

research and assessing our cybersecurity maturity, including participation in international surveys, we can identify our strengths, gaps, and areas for improvement. This allows us to refine strategies and policies to combat cybercrime more effectively. Finally, we have an Incident Response Team (IRT) within ESCCOM that monitors the internet for potential threats targeting Eswatini organizations. We have the tools to detect such threats, and whenever an incident occurs, we quickly notify and advise the affected organization on appropriate response measures. Overall, our work focuses on raising awareness, building capacity, enhancing readiness, and responding quickly to incidents, all to foster a safer and more resilient digital environment for everyone in Eswatini.

**Q: What are the most common types of cybercrime you see in the country?**

A: The most common types include mobile wallet fraud (fake scams), phishing, cyberbullying, and cyber harassment. Financially motivated scams continue to pose the greatest threat, especially as the use of digital banking expands.

” **Q: Which age group is targeted most in the country, and why?**

A: Senior citizens are among the most targeted groups because they are generally less familiar with digital platforms and online security practices. However, young people are also vulnerable, especially to cyberbullying and exploitation through social media.

**Q: Media reports claim that local large corporations and small businesses don't report cybercrime incidents because they're afraid of**

**reputational damage. What have you observed?**

A: That is true to some extent. Big corporations often worry about how disclosure might impact their reputation or customer trust. However, the culture is shifting. Last year, we had only one corporate incident reported to us. This year, the number has increased, indicating growing confidence in our processes and a greater recognition of the importance of collaboration. The Commission continues to strongly encourage organizations to report such incidents because reporting is essential; it helps us better understand the national threat landscape and develop appropriate interventions to protect the wider business community.

**Q: Cyberbullying is a significant issue, especially for young children. What actions is the Commission taking to address this, and similarly, what should parents and guardians do to safeguard their children?**

A: The Commission has launched multiple initiatives to combat cyberbullying. We continue to run nationwide awareness campaigns in schools, communities, and churches, advocating responsible online behavior among young people. Additionally, we are developing a Child Online Protection Strategy to safeguard children from potential online threats while enabling them to use digital technology safely and responsibly. During Cybersecurity Awareness Month, we will host a Youth Indaba, where young people can openly discuss digital issues that impact them. For parents, we always recommend open communication with children about online dangers, establishing clear rules for internet use, and monitoring their digital activities. When setting up a child's device, it's also important to enter their correct age, as many platforms automatically activate protective features for minors. 📱



# Non-Renewal of AGOA: Local Exporters Already Feeling the Effects

By Phiwa Sikhondze

**T**he African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), signed into U.S. law in 2000, has given African countries tariff-free, preferential access to the U.S. market for more than twenty years. This program has been especially transformative for light-manufacturing sectors such as apparel and textiles, allowing countries to develop competitive export industries, generate jobs, and connect to global value chains.

AGOA included special provisions, such as the “third-country fabric allowance,” which allowed eligible least-developed countries to source fabric globally while exporting finished apparel duty-free to the United States. This provision proved vital for countries like Eswatini.

However, AGOA was allowed to lapse on 30 September 2025, ending preferential access for 32 countries, 22 of which qualified for apparel provisions. The International Trade Center (ITC) estimates that the expiration, combined with new U.S. tariffs introduced earlier in 2025, could reduce projected exports of AGOA beneficiaries by roughly 8% by 2029, amounting to \$189 million. Of the total impact, \$138 million is expected to come from declines in apparel and textile exports to the U.S., which are projected to fall by 9.7% by 2029, the largest reduction among all sectors. Other affected sectors include skins, leather and footwear (-3.3%), processed foods and animal feed (-1.6%), and vehicles (-1.3%).

AGOA has played a vital role in supporting thousands of jobs and livelihoods in Eswatini, particularly in

the textiles and apparel sector, which in 2024 made up the majority of our approximately US\$70 million in AGOA exports.

Losing duty-free privileges leads to higher tariffs, less competitiveness, and potential job losses in a sector that employs thousands of EmaSwati. Although Eswatini had a reciprocal 10% tariff on U.S. exports—the lowest in the region—the expiration of AGOA removes this benefit. Along with additional U.S. tariffs introduced earlier in 2025, the cost of Eswatini’s apparel exports to the U.S. could increase significantly, threatening profit margins and causing some buyers to rethink orders. Other industries, like processed foods and leather products, will also face higher tariff pressures, making it harder for the country to stay competitive in exports.

However, the government of Eswatini is confident that the country is well-positioned to strengthen its trade relations with the U.S. even after the expiration of AGOA. The Minister of Commerce, Industry, and Trade, Manqoba Khumalo, acknowledged that the end of AGOA brings challenges. Still, he emphasized that Eswatini has already secured one of the most competitive tariff regimes in the region for the post-AGOA period.

This being the lowest in the region makes Eswatini the most attractive location for US-bound exports compared to our neighbours. Consequently, we expect not a net loss but a net gain in both investments and job opportunities, as businesses seeking competitive access to the US market are likely to relocate or expand their operations in Eswatini,” he said.

To prepare for potential changes, the Ministry has put contingencies in place. “Should there be any shift away from AGOA, Eswatini’s highly competitive tariff regime is expected to attract even more companies, ensuring that existing factory shells remain in use and continue to drive industrial activity,” Khumalo said.

The Minister further assured that the government is actively encouraging diversification into sectors like agro-processing, ICT, and renewable energy, which can also benefit from our industrial infrastructure.

He also emphasized that Eswatini is pursuing broader trade strategies to ensure long-term growth. These include tapping into opportunities under the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and making it easier to do business to attract more participation in the economy. Although AGOA’s expiration poses challenges, Eswatini’s proactive negotiations and strategic positioning have created a new landscape where we are more competitive than ever. We believe



Minister of Commerce, Industry, and Trade, Manqoba Khumalo

this will attract new investments, create more jobs, and bring greater economic benefits for all our people," Khumalo said.

**Economist's Perspective**

Economist Dr. George Choongwa provided a more cautious analysis, warning that broader structural factors restrict Eswatini's ability to fully benefit from post-AGOA opportunities. "With the highly unpredictable global market shifts under the Trump Administration's tariff policies, Eswatini should anticipate a moderate but noticeable decline in economic growth as measured by GDP," he said. "The manufacturing and agriculture sectors (the largest employers of low and medium-income workers) will be hardest hit."



Economist Dr. George Choongwa

While Eswatini's 10% tariff arrangement is the lowest in the region, Dr. Choongwa argues that its impact is limited because Eswatini's economy heavily depends on South Africa. "Eswatini's economy is pegged to South Africa, which faces a harsher 30% tariff on U.S. exports. If South Africa, for example, decides to completely change its trade agreements with the U.S., then all its allies like Eswatini, Lesotho, and Namibia will have no choice but to follow suit. This is what puts Eswatini in a straitjacket. Eswatini's fiscal and monetary sovereignty is highly regulated by South Africa," he explained.

He further questioned expectations of a surge in investment or job creation based solely on tariff advantages. "Tangible increases in investment come only when a country has fiscal sovereignty to fully leverage its resources. With a new 10% U.S. tariff on our exports, we cannot expect much competitive investment; it's like tying a boat to the dock and trying to paddle it into deeper waters."

Dr. Choongwa noted that while the long-term outlook for U.S. tariffs remains uncertain, exporters should prepare for reduced fiscal space and tighter budgets, advising that the government "cut down on public

expenditure and borrowing to increase domestic reserves and resilience."

He urged policymakers to act quickly in securing alternative markets in Europe, Asia, and Africa but warned that "it's not the number of partners that matters most; it's the strength of the currency in those trade relationships." "Eswatini's economy is at a crossroads," he said. "It faces three urgent trade challenges: the loss of AGOA, the South African economic crisis, and the need to pursue new global opportunities. Any mistake could cause serious economic instability."

**“ Eswatini's economy is at a crossroads... It faces three urgent trade challenges: the loss of AGOA, the South African economic crisis, and the need to pursue new global opportunities ”**

For mitigation, he recommended reforms in Public Financial Management (PFM), reducing debt, and establishing an integrated foreign trade and investment plan aligned with Eswatini's membership in SACU, COMESA, and the frameworks of the EU.

**Private Sector Perspective**

While the government stays optimistic, local exporters are already feeling the impact of AGOA's expiration. One of them is Julie Nixon, the Country Director for Fair and Square, a leading entrepreneur known for connecting Eswatini's handmade producers to international markets. Nixon has created a network of artisans whose products have reached major retailers in the U.S.

"Our mission is to build the capacity of start-ups to enable them to reach export level," Nixon said. "Direct market access is a key part of our work, linking enterprises directly to buyers worldwide. One of our top customers has 253 stores in the USA, with annual order values between E1.5 million and E7 million. AGOA was a significant advantage in the handmade sector because all orders went to the USA duty-free."

The impact of AGOA was not only economic but also social. Nixon recalls how an order worth E3.3 million during the pandemic kept over 150 staff and 700 artisans employed when most operations had ground to a halt. "That order saved eight local enterprises and many jobs," she said. But the



Fair and Square Country Director, Julie Nixon

post-AGOA situation has been sobering. "Sadly, one of the key components of maintaining this large U.S. retailer was AGOA, and no orders have been placed for 2026 shipping," Nixon revealed.

Although Eswatini's tariff system remains the most competitive in Southern Africa, Nixon says the additional 10% tariff now paid by U.S. clients has become a major obstacle to exports. "This particular client did not order in 2025 nor placed orders for 2026," she said. "However, we are hopeful that the beauty, quality, and high design of the handmade sector in Eswatini will eventually overcome the tariff barriers."

To offset the decrease in U.S. demand, Nixon's company started exploring alternative markets earlier this year. "We started looking for new markets in January, most specifically Japan and Taiwan," she said. "We are also researching opportunities to export within Africa to take advantage of AfCFTA. We'll be meeting buyers from Nigeria and Tanzania at the end of October."

She commended the Eswatini Investment Promotion Authority (EIPA) and the International Trade Department for their proactive support. "We were contacted and asked to send all the HS Tariff Codes for our product lines currently exported to the United States. These codes are being used in ongoing negotiations with U.S. trade teams. We remain hopeful for a fruitful outcome."

On the government's optimistic stance, Nixon offers a balanced view. "Eswatini does have the lowest tariff cost compared to many other countries, and exports to the USA form only a small percentage of the global handmade market," she said. "So, I tend to agree with the government's outlook. It's up to enterprises to find and secure other markets to fill the gap caused by these trade tariffs. My concern is more with the apparel and sugar sectors, so let us all hope for positive trade talks."



## Celebrating 30 Years of Fuelling Entrepreneurial Dreams

This year, FNB Eswatini proudly celebrates 30 years of partnership, innovation, and shared success with entrepreneurs who power our nation's economy. Since opening our doors in 1995, our mission has remained clear: to be more than just a bank by being a trusted partner in growth, helping businesses start, scale, and thrive across the Kingdom.

As we celebrate this milestone, we look back with pride on how far we've come, and forward with excitement for what lies ahead.

### Empowering Dreamers and Doers

Entrepreneurship is the heartbeat of economic resilience and growth. Every small business that dares to take a risk and every visionary who turns an idea into reality adds strength to Eswatini's economy.

Since 2010, our partnership with the Entrepreneur of the Year Awards (EYA) has allowed us to celebrate these dreamers and doers. Each year, we witness the country's brightest business minds being recognised for their innovation, determination, and courage.

For FNB, the EYA is more than an event. It is a reflection of our purpose. By celebrating entrepreneurship, we affirm our belief that Eswatini's prosperity depends on those who create opportunities for others.

### Three Decades of Partnership and Trust

Over the past 30 years, we've built relationships that go beyond banking. Many entrepreneurs who opened their first accounts with us in 1995 are still with us today, growing from humble beginnings to regional and international success stories. One such story is SGL Technologies. Managing Director George Henwood recalls the early days of FNB's customer service:

"They treated us equally, and what I liked most was how FNB managers greeted everyone in the queue. That personal touch has kept us with FNB ever since," he says.

SGL, which deals in computer software, hardware, and installations, turned 32 this year and has banked with FNB since day one.

"The transition from Meridian Bank to FNB was smooth. FNB was fresh, innovative, and approachable. I still have a great relationship with my business manager, who has grown with me through the years," says Henwood. Beyond being a client, SGL has worked with FNB for over 25 years, setting up IT systems and benefiting from property and business finance facilities.

"FNB supported us when we needed financial backing, even during the 2000 tech boom. They've been our partner in every sense," he adds.

Stories like these capture the spirit of relationship banking which is not just transactional, but transformational.



## Innovation That Drives Growth

Since 1995, the world has changed and we have stayed at the forefront of that evolution. Innovation has always been part of FNB's DNA, guiding us as we adapt to the evolving needs of entrepreneurs in an increasingly digital world.

Our FNB Business Toolkit simplifies operations for SMEs, offering cash-flow planning, budgeting tools, and expert advice. We've also introduced Scored Lending, a progressive credit model that looks at a business's performance and cash flow rather than traditional collateral; opening doors for entrepreneurs with great ideas but limited assets.

Technology has revolutionised business, and in Eswatini, we have been driving banking innovation. The FNB App for Business allows entrepreneurs to manage finances anywhere, while FNB Online Banking for Business provides efficient tools for payroll, payments, and daily operations.

For us, innovation isn't about keeping up, it's about staying ahead, anticipating client needs, and creating tools that make running a business easier, faster, and smarter.



## Shared Prosperity: Our Guiding Principle

We have always believed that when our clients succeed, we succeed. Our growth is tied to the prosperity of the communities we serve.

Through initiatives such as the Entrepreneur of the Year Awards, financial literacy drives, and mentorship programmes, we continue to invest in the growth of small businesses and local industries.

When entrepreneurs grow, Eswatini thrives and that's the true meaning of shared prosperity.



## Looking Ahead: The Next 30 Years

As we celebrate three decades of service, we are filled with gratitude for every entrepreneur who has trusted us with their vision. We have seen countless businesses grow from sketches on paper to thriving enterprises, and each story strengthens our resolve to do more.

The next chapter for FNB Eswatini is about deepening our impact. We are expanding access to affordable finance, supporting youth and women-led enterprises, and investing in new digital platforms to ensure that no dream is left unsupported.

Eswatini's future, from agribusiness and manufacturing to technology and social enterprise, is full of promise. And FNB Eswatini is ready to fuel that growth with smarter tools, wider access, and the same personal touch that has defined our first 30 years of help that works.

Help changes everything

Change to **FNB**

**FNB Business**



# Leading with Purpose

By: Ntokozi Nkambule | Photo Cred: Craft Sapce // Lokuhle Media Group | Interview Location: Bahle Gallery

**M**any may mistake Gciniwe Fakudze's kindness and wit for someone you can easily walk over. However, this is quite the opposite. A lover of life, Gciniwe is intelligent, experienced, resilient, and thick-skinned. Her career is nothing short of inspiring. From leading the Siteki Town Council at just 23 to now heading the country's capital, she shares her journey of leading local government authorities. It's a journey that has seen her establish local government authorities from scratch, and it has not been without its challenges. The big question now is what she has in store for the country's capital city. Sit back, grab a cup of coffee, and learn more about Fakudze's bold vision and aspirations for Mbabane.

**Q: You are a Town Planner by profession, but also a motivational and public speaker. Did you know that you might end up in town planning, given your multi-talented nature?**

I've always been someone who talks a lot, whether at home or with friends. Because of that trait, I believed I would make an incredible lawyer, which is why I intended to pursue a career in law. However, my late mother had other ideas; she thought I would be the family doctor. As tempting and exciting as that sounded, there was one problem: I am afraid of blood and needles. I then chose Town Planning, which I believe became the perfect fit because it allows me to work with people, something I genuinely enjoy.

**Q: You have also worked as a news anchor at Channel YemaSwati. Tell us why you chose to go into television and how it has influenced your career and profession.**

From the outset, Town Planning and Television seem unrelated, but in reality, nothing could be further from the truth. My time at Channel YemaSwati under Qhawe Mamba's guidance taught me essential soft skills needed to grow in my Town Planning career. I still remember Qhawe Mamba's wise words when I arrived at Channel YemaSwati. He told me that television would teach me humility, respect for others, punctuality, and a better understanding of EmaSwati, which my 'fancy' Bachelor's Degree could never provide.

**Q: Was Channel YemaSwati your first ever job?**

No, it wasn't. Mainly because I love money, and I am not ashamed of that. I held three jobs while studying at the University of Witwatersrand, and Channel YemaSwati was among them. I was a SiSwati tutor on campus and also worked as a waitress. I have always been involved. My parents instilled a work ethic in me and my siblings. Believe it or not, we used to work at PEP stores during our high school holidays. This was all facilitated by my mother, who was an employee at the clothing brand. But the catch was, we weren't working for free; my mother paid us, so from a relatively

young age, I got used to money and learned to appreciate the freedom it brings. Even while working and studying, I never felt it was too much because it came naturally to me. Since I love nice things, the only way to afford them was to work.

**Q: You became the Town Clerk for the Siteki Town Council at a relatively young age. How did that come about?**

Relatively young is putting it mildly hahaha (chuckles)...I mean, I was only 23 years old. But how does that come about? When I tell people I have seen God in my life, this is what I mean. The Siteki Town Council job almost never happened. While I was working at Channel YemaSwati, I got a call inviting me to a job interview, which I initially thought was from the Municipal Council of Mbabane. That happened because I did not answer the phone, but a co-worker did. I then visited the Municipal Council of

Mbabane for the interview, only to be informed that they had not scheduled any interviews.

Crushed, I went back to work and continued with my day. Only to get home and be told by my father that the Siteki Town Council had been looking for me. I then called the Town Council and was informed that they would not

reschedule my interview due to my missing the original date. Despite this, I went to the Town Council and sat there all day. I was finally allowed to speak with the person handling the recruitment process, where I explained my situation. Thankfully, he agreed, saying that procedurally, it was allowed. I then completed the interview, and as they say, the rest is history. But the key point here is that I applied like everyone else and had been applying to all the town councils across the country.

**Q: How challenging was the role, considering your limited experience in such a position?**

Look, I was bright and had the academic qualifications, but the reality was I was 23 and lacked experience, so I needed guidance. I was lucky to receive support from the Ministry of Housing & Urban Development and Councillors.

**...He told me that television would teach me humility, respect for others, punctuality, and a better understanding of EmaSwati, which my 'fancy' Bachelor's Degree could never provide...**



One challenge I faced was that my position required me to stay in Siteki. The problem was I was earning only E3,000, yet I needed to rent a place and buy food with that amount. So, yes, I was a young Town Clerk, but my salary wasn't like that of a typical CEO. I will always be grateful to my father, who helped improve the situation by deciding to move to Siteki. He was studying Theology at the Siteki Nazarene Bible School. We lived together and shared house costs. This also gave me the chance to bond with my father, something I will forever cherish. Aside from those challenges, Siteki Town Council provided me with an entry point and connected me with residents, making it a significant period of my life.

**Q: You were then appointed as the CEO of Matsapha Municipality, a town that you played an instrumental role in transforming. What were your key deliverables?**

Matsapha had always been an industrial estate; my mandate was to establish it as a local government authority. Before I joined, the town was under the Ministry of Commerce, Industry & Trade, but the government, in its wisdom, realized that the town was no longer just an industrial estate but a human settlement. For example, the first public toilets were built during my tenure. There were no parks, markets, or other essential support services and amenities that make a town. Most of what Matsapha is today was built from scratch.

**Q: Establishing Matsapha as a local authority must have been challenging.**

Despite many successes we achieved as a team, this was a very challenging process. It required visionary leadership and startup resilience. The team I collaborated with was incredible, and I could not have accomplished it without them. Creating something new often faces resistance, as people tend to resist change even when it's for their benefit. My experience as the CEO of Matsapha Municipality also played a key role in developing my emotional intelligence. I became comfortable with discomfort, and my

conflict resolution skills improved significantly. I learned how to handle negative feedback and community engagement, as these can be unsettling.

**Q: Your appointment as the CEO of the Municipal Council of Mbabane was not straightforward. There was resistance from certain quarters. How did that affect you?**

I firmly believe that God directs every step of my life. Therefore, wherever I find myself at a particular moment is because God has deemed it right and at the right time. When this happened last year, with my face plastered across newspapers nationwide, I understood why I faced challenges in Matsapha. Leading the Matsapha Municipality was not always easy. We achieved results, but people often did not applaud; instead, they complained more. I learned what public service truly involves and what it means to serve people genuinely.

I won't lie, the start of my Mbabane experience was discouraging, especially knowing I had given it my all. The evidence was clear for everyone to see, and any reasonable person would have been affected by this. But then I quickly reminded myself that this is a public space, and these things happen. The emotional intelligence I developed in Siteki and Matsapha proved helpful. I remember my family and friends being stressed because I wasn't as stressed as they expected. All I knew was that I had prayed for this opportunity my entire life, so when the challenges came up, I entrusted everything to God.

**Q: Did you ever consider giving up the fight and returning to the private sector?**

No, that thought never crossed my mind. When I left the public sector for the private sector, I was clear that I needed to gain enough experience for my next assignment. So, this noise would not deter me. This has always been my vision, not necessarily the Municipal Council of Mbabane, but a step up in local government. I am, however, grateful to friends and family who checked on me regularly. I

wish I could sit here and say this broke me, but it didn't. Yes, I was disheartened, but I did not break.

**Q: With this setback now clearly behind you, would you say you're happy where you are?**

I am happy. I forgave and moved on. One of the things I was mindful of was ensuring that the situation did not overshadow my joy and enthusiasm. I had to celebrate what I had achieved, as it was something I had been working on for a long time. Whatever battles you fight as a person, once you land, ensure that you celebrate. Gciniwe Fakudze, the individual, is happy, but I am also excited to be working with an incredible team who are highly talented and inspired. The key thing now is to deliver for the people of Mbabane. We have been given a mandate, and our job is to execute it.

**Q: One of the challenges you have inherited is the exodus of major corporations from the capital city. Arguments made for this exodus are that the city suffers from urban decay. How would you respond to that?**

I think that, as a country, we often overlook the fact that companies leaving the city, not the country, benefits the entire nation. From a town planning perspective, the key point is that major cities and towns should complement each other, not compete. Having mentioned that, we are aware of the economic effects when big companies leave the town.

Cities and towns around the world suffer from urban decay; it isn't a new phenomenon exclusive to Mbabane. Does the city suffer from it? To some extent, yes, but the most essential thing is implementing urban regeneration, which focuses on improving the physical, environmental, and socio-economic conditions of a city. Our task is to ensure we carry out urban regeneration, and we have already begun doing so. For example, the Public Service Pensions Fund Ingcamu apartments, located 1 km from the CBD, demonstrate the appeal they add to the town. One of our goals is to make Mbabane a 24-hour city, which requires taking certain measures, such as providing accommodation in the CBD. Conversely, offering mixed-use services can be challenging, as some residents may feel uncomfortable with it. Therefore, the idea is to provide complementary mixed-use services.



**Q: Talk to us about smart city living in relation to Mbabane.**

Smart city living is about a way of governance; it's how we use information, technology, Artificial Intelligence, and big data to ensure that our residents receive quality service conveniently and affordably. What we have come to appreciate is that our residents are quite knowledgeable and smart citizens.

**Q: You are deeply passionate about promoting home ownership. Why is this so important to you?**

It's not just me, but our Councillors and His Lordship the Mayor are equally passionate about ensuring that residents own their title deed properties. Mbabane has 11 informal townships where residents do not own the properties they live in. This was probably acceptable years ago, but not in today's world. Owning a property with a title deed offers many benefits, such as dignity and economic independence, since the property can serve as collateral.

We are collaborating with the government on a project to make this a reality. However, this is challenging because some residents oppose the idea of being governed by a municipality. Their biggest fear is that they will now be charged property taxes. We must then educate residents that taxes can lead to progress and are not as high as they have been claimed to be.

Remember that property rates vary by area. Rates paid by someone from Thembelihle will differ from those paid by residents of Msunduzi, for example. Currently, property in these informal areas does not appreciate because it is not registered with a title deed. This shows how property ownership can provide financial independence and security to the people of Mbabane. The truth is that property rates are not the highest household expense, but the value property offers is arguably the most important.

**Q: Let's talk about your passion for mentoring young people.**

I see mentorship as a human responsibility. I believe all the challenges and opportunities we face in life are not just for ourselves but also for others. If Gciniwe can become a Town Clerk at age 23, why not you? My journey has inspired many young girls, just as other leaders inspire me. The struggles we face are also blessings because many women now realize that we all encounter challenges. Whatever you experience is meant to

happen so that you can inspire and motivate others. I always promote that everyone should mentor someone. You don't need to be a CEO to mentor; find someone in your field and support them. Helping others is a spiritual act. Let's bring people along and avoid wanting to be the only woman in the room, or the only young person in a leadership role—the mindset of being 'the only one' needs to end. Your journey isn't just yours. Always keep that in mind.

**Q: Your life has been in the public eye from the first time you appeared on our television screens to your career in both the public and private sectors. How have you managed to handle that?**

It has all been God. Without my spirituality, I would not have suc-

**How I carry myself and my appearance in public are all intentional. This is the brand I've built and continue to develop. I often tell young girls I mentor that their appearance shapes how the world perceives them. Before you say a word, the world has already formed an opinion about you...**

ceeded. Whenever things do not go as planned, I turn to God, and the same happens when I achieve something; the first thing I do is thank God. When I reflect on my life and career, from challenges to triumphs, the only thing I see is God. Being a public figure has not been easy. Remember, I did not choose to be a public figure, but the nature of my job and roles is what has made my life public. The sad part is when people feel like they have a say in how you should live your life. It's interesting that people genuinely believe they know what's best for you.

**Q: To achieve what you have requires a lot. Do you believe in work-life balance?**

To a certain extent. The reality is that, to grow in their respective careers, individuals must be willing to sacrifice certain things. From the age of 23, I have always been career-oriented. It

has always been meetings and reports. Does that mean that some things fall away? Probably, but it is something I would do again. I am happy with where my life is, and as stated earlier, I believe God has planned all the steps of my life.

**Q: How do you relax after work?**

My favorite thing to do will always be cycling. I am, however, learning golf, which has been quite interesting for me. So I'll be teeing off soon. Traveling is also something I immensely enjoy.

**Q: You also call yourself a fashion icon. Explain that to us.**

I've always loved everything about clothes and looking good since I was very young. But more than that, it's about my brand. How I carry myself and my appearance in public are all intentional. This is the brand I've built and continue to develop. I often tell young girls I mentor that their appearance shapes how the world perceives them. Before you say a word, the world has already formed an opinion about you. So it's beyond fashion; it is a brand.

**CEO, thank you very much for your time.**

It has been a pleasure.<sup>ib</sup>

## Smart City Living

### Transforming Mbabane for the Future

Smart City living represents the future of urban development — cities that leverage technology, sustainability, and innovation to enhance quality of life. In the Kingdom of Eswatini, this vision is taking shape through the Mbabane Municipal Council's strategic efforts to modernize the capital's urban landscape.

From introducing digital service systems for efficient governance to improving waste management, traffic flow, and public infrastructure, Mbabane is laying the foundation for a connected, eco-friendly city. The council's initiatives also emphasize green spaces, climate resilience, and data-driven planning to ensure inclusive growth that benefits all residents.

Through collaboration with government, private partners, and international agencies, Mbabane aims to meet global Smart City standards — creating a capital that is technologically advanced, environmentally conscious, and socially responsive. The city's transformation signals Eswatini's readiness to embrace a sustainable urban future.



## A New Era of Trust: Inside the First ENPF CEO Awards

By Own Correspondent

**T**hey arrived without spectacle, three women who had never sought the spotlight, yet became its most deserving subjects. Each walked a different path, through retrenchment, marriage, banking halls, and lecture rooms, but all carried the same armour: an unwavering culture of saving and strong discipline in handling money. Coincidentally, former students of St Theresa's High School in Manzini, the trio reunited not for reunion photos, but to embody a national message that saving is not a luxury, it is leadership.

Their voices formed a quiet choir. "I lost my job, but I refused to lose my future," said one. "I mastered a budget before it mastered me," added another. "I chose integrity over self-enrichment," reflected the third. They became the face of something far greater than an awards ceremony. They were living proof of a movement, a new tradition of trust.

When ENPF Chief Executive Officer, Ms Futhi Tembe, stepped forward to inaugurate the first-ever Lidlelantfongeni Stakeholder Recognition Awards, she was not launching a programme; she was unveiling a new culture of financial dignity.

"Today is more than just a recognition ceremony. It is a celebration of commitment, foresight, and the spirit of nation-building. Your voluntary contributions are not just numbers in an account; they are a testament to your belief in a secure future, not only for yourselves but for the generations to come," she declared during the Voluntary Contributions Recognition ceremony at the organization's headquarters in Manzini.

"At ENPF, we are driven by a vision of financial security and dignity for all our members. But that vision can only be realized through partnerships with people like you, who go above and beyond the minimum, who understand that saving is not a sacrifice, but an investment in peace of mind."

CEO Tembe expressed that the dedication and financial leadership shown by the voluntary

contributors are deeply inspiring to the Lidlelantfongeni team. This commitment is a challenge and a mandate to the fund itself; to continuously innovate and ensure that every single Lilangeni contributed is managed with the highest standards of integrity, transparency, and meticulous care.

She offered deep gratitude to those who choose to contribute voluntarily, thanking them not only for their trust but for their leadership in setting a critical example for others to follow. Looking ahead, Ms. Tembe conveyed excitement for the future, noting that with the continued support of its members, the fund will grow into a stronger, more resilient financial institution designed to fully serve the retirement needs of every emaSwati.

These awards, a pioneering weekly recognition series running until December 2025, honours individuals,

***"The honourees...stood not as recipients, but as exemplars. They set a fine example for others through decades of consistent contributions"***

employers and tenants whose commitment to the Fund goes beyond obligation. Unlike performance metrics or corporate rankings, these awards recognise mindset, the courage to do the right thing against all odds, to plan when postponement beckons, and to lead quietly, without applause.

The first honourees were Ms. Vuyisile Dlamini, Ms. Lindiwe Shongwe-Masina, and Ms. Buselaphi A. Dlamini-Mokoena. They stood not as recipients, but as exemplars. They set a fine example for others through decades of consistent contributions, voluntary top-ups, and steadfast faith in an institution that has never betrayed their trust. In a world numbed by financial scandals, they stood as reminders that integrity is a currency too.

What distinguishes these awards is their soul and spirit of Lidlelantfongeni, meaning “those who build for tomorrow.” They are rooted in four guiding values: integrity, excellence, accountability, and service. In a society where many still believe someone else, family, children, fate, will carry them into old age, the awards aim to shift the narrative from dependency to self-determination.

As CEO Tembe remarked: “The seeds you plant today will grow into the shade that shelters your tomorrow. Keep planting. Keep believing. And together, let’s build a legacy of financial security, prosperity, and pride”.

### Three Journeys, One Truth: Their Voices

Buselaphi Dlamini-Mokoena remembers the day life tested her resolve. In 2016, her employer in the Hospitality sector, closed shop resulting in her retrenchment. Many would have feared, spent, or surrendered. She reinvested. “When that pension came, I refused to squander it. I took a large portion, including what remained of my contributions, and invested them at Lidlelantfongeni.” Years later, when she lost her husband and was left to care for the children, it was not donations or dependency that upheld her, it was her own foresight. “Lidlelantfongeni has been my rock. No losses, no scandals. Just honest stewardship. I sleep because I know where my money lies.” Today, she teaches her children the habit to save.

Lindiwe Shongwe-Masina, after forty-one years in banking, speaks with the clarity of a banker and the conviction of a believer. “Financial freedom is earned through



discipline,” she says. In her family, she was the anchor of saving, the guardian of budgets. She watched colleagues drown in debt cycles and swore never to live at the mercy of debt. “Even E200 a month is something. You don’t chase instant gratification; you build

home. She tested two major institutions. Their answers unsettled her, fees, indifference, and erosion of capital. Her son, financially literate, guided her back. “He said, ‘Nkhosi, return to Lidlelantfongeni. They guard your future.’ He was right.” With her funds safely managed,

***The seeds you plant today will grow into the shade that shelters your tomorrow. Keep planting. Keep believing. And together, let’s build a legacy of financial security, prosperity, and pride ”***

your comfort brick by brick.” She remained with Lidlelantfongeni after retirement for one reason: trust. “There has never been a cent lost there. No theft. No mismanagement. It is rare in this world.”

Vuyisile Dlamini began her journey at Swazi Bank, saving from an E800 salary. She was even able to buy her mother a lounge suite from her savings. Years later, as a lecturer at VOCTIM preparing for retirement, she searched for a new financial

she was able to fund a holiday in Cape Town with her husband; a trip paid entirely from disciplined saving. Now, at the advice of her son, she contributes even for their long-serving domestic helper. “Everyone deserves dignity in their old age,” she says.

Within every testimonial lay a unanimous tribute to ENPF and its flagship savings culture under Lidlelantfongeni. They spoke not of profits, but of peace. What they

found was transparency, stewardship, and care, qualities rarer than returns. "When the world shakes," one said, "I still sleep. Because my savings are safe."

**A Movement Larger Than Awards**

These women may represent the first cohort, but they signal a broader awakening within the nation. The Lidlelantfongeni Awards are not merely decorative acknowledgments. They are strategic interventions, designed to demonstrate that pensions are not passive funds; they are instruments of nation-building. Every voluntary contribution strengthens not only the individual, but the national

economy. Retirement is not an age; it is a decision.

This cultural shift must now include men. Across testimonies and narratives, it became evident that women have often led the saving culture. Men, too, must be encouraged; not to catch up, but to stand alongside, to lead households with prudence rather than pressure. Financial strength must become a family value, not a gendered burden.

CEO Tembe's decision to personally present each award underscored a simple truth: leadership is presence. "Leadership," she said, "means showing up for those who show

up for themselves." By 2025, a hall of honour will exist, built not of trophies but of stories, of teachers, traders, nurses, entrepreneurs, ordinary people who made extraordinary decisions.

The inaugural CEO Awards have done more than honour savers, they have repositioned savings as an act of self-respect. They have shown that wealth is not measured by what we spend, but by what we protect. Eswatini is entering a new chapter, one in which pensions are not paperwork, but pride. In which retirement is not feared, but prepared for. In which institutions are not distant, but dependable.





# Global Comfort Meets Local Living

*On September 15, 2025, Eswatini welcomed a new era of retail excellence with the grand opening of Ashley Furniture HomeStore at the Matsapha Lifestyle Centre. As the world's largest home furnishings manufacturer, Ashley's arrival goes beyond the excitement of a store launch it marks a milestone in Eswatini's economic growth, global partnerships, and rising lifestyle standards.*

By: Tlalane Dlamini | Photo Cred: Tlalane Dlamini & Ashley



## *A Celebration of Partnership & Progress.*

The ribbon-cutting ceremony brought together leaders from both the public and private sectors, including Minister of Commerce, Industry and Trade, Manqoba Khumalo, United States Chargé d'Affaires Marc Weinstock, executives from Ashley Furniture Industries and the AI Mansoor Group, Manzini REO Chief Gija, and Matsapha Mayor Lindiwe Dlamini.

"Ashley's investment is a powerful endorsement of Eswatini as a preferred destination for global investors," said Minister Khumalo. "It demonstrates the confidence that international brands have in our economy and our people."

The store's location at the Matsapha Lifestyle Centre a development endorsed by His Majesty King Mswati III, cements Matsapha's reputation as a vibrant commercial and lifestyle hub.

Mark Marais, Ashley Furniture's Vice President of Sales for Africa, described the opening as "a celebration of growth, opportunity, and quality living." With 21 stores across Africa and a presence in 126 countries worldwide, Ashley continues to bring its signature blend of American craftsmanship and modern design to new markets.

## *What Clients Can Expect: A Lifestyle Destination*

Step inside the new Ashley Furniture HomeStore Eswatini, and you'll immediately feel the difference. The store is designed as an immersive home experience, where every corner tells a story of comfort and craftsmanship.

Soft lighting, subtle scents, and perfectly curated room displays invite guests to imagine how each piece could look in their own space. From cozy family lounges to luxurious master suites, Ashley offers a world of inspiration all under one roof.



## *Living Room Luxury*

Find statement sectionals, plush recliners, and elegant coffee tables that combine comfort with style like Dining & Décor Delights & more.

Expect solid wood dining tables, artisanal chairs, and décor pieces that add warmth and character. From rustic farmhouse designs to sleek modern finishes, every piece is crafted to last and to impress.

## *Beyond the Showroom*

Ashley's arrival is also a win for the local economy. The new store brings job creation, skills development, and partnership opportunities for local suppliers, artisans, and interior designers.

"This partnership is about more than furniture," said Marais. "It's about helping families create spaces they love and homes that reflect who they are."

Chargé d'Affaires Marc Weinstock added that Ashley's decision to invest in Eswatini reflects "the confidence U.S. businesses have in the country's potential and its people's capabilities."

## *Design, Comfort & Inspiration Under One Roof*

Whether you're furnishing your first apartment, upgrading your family home, or simply seeking inspiration, Ashley Furniture Eswatini offers something for everyone.

Expect:

- A wide range of collections to suit every style, from contemporary chic to classic comfort.
- Affordable luxury, with flexible payment options.
- Expert design advice from trained local consultants.
- Exclusive opening offers on selected items.





## Turning Agricultural Dreams into Reality through Access to Finance

*Access to finance remains a major challenge for farmers across Eswatini, especially those in rural areas and emerging agribusinesses. For many, the dream of expanding operations or starting a successful commercial venture has been hindered by a lack of capital, collateral, or access to affordable loans.*

By: Phiwa Sikhondze | Photo Cred: InsideBiz



**T**he Eswatini Agriculture Development Fund (EADF) is bridging that gap by providing tailored financial support that enables emaSwati to start, grow, and sustain agricultural enterprises. Through offering project-specific financing, flexible repayment options, and technical guidance, EADF is advancing national food sovereignty and supporting the broader economic development agenda of the Kingdom.

Since its inception, the Fund has supported a growing number of projects across livestock, crops, and agribusiness value chains, transforming Eswatini's agriculture into a vibrant, modern, and youth-driven sector. To date, the fund has disbursed E32 million to support emaSwati in agribusiness.

### From One Cow to a Thriving Feedlot: The Story of Frank Masilela

For Frank Masilela, an Environmental Health Scientist from Matsetsa under Lugongolweni Inkhundla, his passion for meat production was sparked by a simple observation: as Eswatini's population grows, grazing land shrinks, yet the demand for beef keeps rising. "I started small, with one cow," he recalls. "After seeing how well it performed, I knew I could expand this into something bigger."

He later sold that single cow, leaving him with no stock to pursue his dream. Undeterred, Masilela developed a

business plan and started seeking funding. That's when he found EADF through a link shared online by a friend. The application process, he says, was surprisingly smooth. "It was so smooth that I thought it was a scam," he laughs. "Everything was digital, the officers were responsive, and within a month, my application was approved."

Even before the funding was finalised, EADF officers and Livestock Extension Officers from the Ministry of Agriculture demonstrated a level of dedication that set them apart. "The officers actually took the initiative to visit me in Matsetsa, uninvited, just to assess my site and understand my vision better. That showed me they genuinely care about the success of farmers, not just about giving loans."

In May 2025, EADF approved E261,000 to help Masilela establish his feedlot. The fund purchased 18 cattle, supplied animal feed, and reha-

tated his kraal, enabling him to start operations on a commercial scale. Unlike traditional lenders, EADF did not require collateral, only a viable business plan and the applicant's commitment to success. Since June 2025, Masilela has completed two sales cycles, sold 11 beasts, and begun his structured repayments.

"EADF gave me everything I needed to start from scratch," he says. "They've also been with me every step of the way, providing training, record-keeping templates, and ongoing support from my extension officer."

Even after disbursing the funds, EADF and Livestock Extension Officers from the Ministry of Agriculture have continued to support Masilela through on-site visits, mentoring, and monitoring to ensure sustainability. The officers often provide technical advice, helping him manage feed, animal health, and sales more effectively. Masilela notes that EADF's model is especially inclusive.

With markets secured at Lowveld Meat Industries and Bushlands, Masilela's next goal is to expand into feeder stock production, strengthening the beef supply chain and creating jobs in his community.





## Infinito Investments: From Family Farm to Commercial Powerhouse

In Sicunusa, four brothers (Maphephetse, Simphiwe, Ndumiso, and Sinethemba MkhaliPhi) are transforming commercial crop farming through their company, Infinito Investments.

Before venturing into agribusiness, all four brothers faced long periods of unemployment despite holding tertiary qualifications in different fields. “We all had degrees, but no jobs,” recalls Ndumiso. “That’s when our father advised us to use his farm to build our future.”

Infinito Investments was established in 2018 with 20 hectares of maize. Despite challenges in obtaining funding, they persisted. “Most banks considered us too young and crop farming too risky,” says Ndumiso. “When we found EADF, we finally met a financier who believed in our vision.” Through EADF, Infinito Investments secured E2.5 million in funding for a Massey Ferguson 6713 tractor, rehabilitation of farm equipment, and operational support.

“EADF walked with us through the entire process,” Ndumiso shares. “The specialists guided us in preparing our documents, explaining every requirement, and helping us align with the Fund’s expectations. That kind of support is rare.”

The tractor, which arrived toward the end of their second season, a season during which they worked on 40 hectares, is set to boost their productivity. It performs work equivalent to two standard tractors, enabling the brothers to cultivate 80 hectares of maize with ease, doubling their previous capacity.

During harvest, Infinito employs over 100 local workers, directly contributing to rural job creation and food produc-

tion. “With EADF’s flexible repayment terms, we’re now focused on scaling sustainably,” says Maphephetse. “We foresee a seven-digit revenue this coming season, all made possible by the new equipment.”

None of the brothers has a qualification in agriculture, but their hands-on experience and lifelong exposure to farming have become their strongest assets. EADF’s willingness to back them despite their academic backgrounds demonstrates the Fund’s confidence in practical skills and commitment.

They also praise the Fund’s repayment flexibility, especially the repayment leave, which allows farmers to repay after harvest seasons or sale cycles instead of monthly payments like traditional banks. “EADF has given us a repayment leave to start servicing our loan in August next year,” says Ndumiso. “That makes a huge difference. It means we can focus on production without worrying about missing payments.”

Unlike traditional lenders that rely on collateral and strict repayment terms, EADF designs its financing based on project milestones and seasonal cashflows. This guarantees farmers access funds as needed and repay according to their production cycles.

Through this model, EADF empowers farmers to:

- Start and expand agribusinesses without heavy upfront capital.
- Access inputs, equipment, and livestock directly through fund-facilitated procurement.
- Receive mentorship and continuous guidance from agricultural extension officers.
- Repay flexibly, aligned with sales or harvest cycles.

This approach has unlocked opportunities for emaSwati, including the previously disadvantaged youth, women, and families who previously had no access to formal finance. It also ensures that EADF-funded projects contribute meaningfully to Eswatini’s goals for food sovereignty, employment creation, and rural development.

EADF is not just about loans; it is about empowering emaSwati to turn their agricultural ambitions into sustainable enterprises.

Farmers like Masilela and the MkhaliPhi brothers embody EADF’s mission: to make farming not just a livelihood, but a business of national importance.

“EADF has given us confidence to dream bigger,” Masilela concludes. “We’re not just feeding our families anymore; we’re contributing to feeding the nation.”

## EADF QUICK FACTS

- Targeting all agricultural value chain players (inputs suppliers, producers, processors, aggregators...etc)
- Supports livestock, horticulture crops, and other agribusiness ventures
- Offers financing without traditional collateral
- Provides technical assistance and mentorship through collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture (Crop and Livestock Extension services) and strategic partners (NAMBOARD, NMC, DAIRY BOARD, EWAVE etc.)
- Open to applicants aged 18 years or older
- Supports start-ups and existing projects that require expansion
- Promotes national food sovereignty and rural empowerment

# Divine Alignment

## How Njabulo Masuku Journeyed from Eswatini to BMW USA...

By: Phesheya Mkhonta // Pics: Supplied

**F**rom herding cattle in Hlathikhulu to managing IT systems for BMW in the United States, Njabulo 'JB' Masuku's story is a remarkable journey of faith, resilience, and vision. A proud Liswati, he reflects on his path across three continents, the setbacks and breakthroughs that shaped him, and his advice for young emaSwati dreaming of global careers.

His move to the US was not without challenges. When his South African spousal permit was unexpectedly canceled, he spent months in limbo, searching for work both in Eswatini and the US until what he calls a "divine alignment" opened the door to his current role at BMW.

**IB: Can you take us back to the beginning? Where did you grow up, and what initially sparked your interest in IT systems?**

**JB:** I have quite a mixed background. I grew up mostly in the Malkerns area, so naturally, the town for me was Manzini. My childhood was mostly solitary, surrounded by agriculture and snakes. Lawuba, to be precise, was what I'd like to call our holiday destination and weekend rural getaway where my father grew up. I

have many fond memories and lessons there, coming from a large family where we spent a lot of time together, and being exposed to herding cattle and getting into trouble for letting the cows eat maize plantations, and working in the fields during various seasons of planting, weeding, and harvesting. I used to think of Lawuba as a holiday spot because I went to school in Mhlambanyatsi, which was mostly Caucasian at the time, and most of my classmates talked about Harare, Gold Reef City, uShaka Marine, and similar places during school holidays. All I could talk about was Hlathikhulu or Maphungwane, where my aunt lives.

My childhood was a journey of contrasts, from the warmth of family to the solitude of being the youngest of seven. I often found myself alone, which nurtured a deep sense of observation, introspection, and noticing patterns or systems. I can't downplay the privilege it was for me to attend Usutu Forests Primary School, which offered computer lessons to early primary students in the late 80s in a non-traditional environment for a Swazi boy. I can't quite explain it, but this exposure must have helped develop my interest in IT.

**IB: Did you always know you'd end up working in tech?**

**JB:** Not at all. My tech journey was more about curiosity, trial, and error than certainty. I did well in Computer Studies throughout high school, but I received a "D" on my final IGCSE exam. That was discouraging, especially because I had good grades in other subjects. I was only 17 then,

and I thought about taking a gap year before applying to university. My parents moved to Geneva, Switzerland, and recommended Webster University, believing that Computer Science was a good fit for my early interest in IT. My father, in particular, believed IT was a guaranteed success path and wouldn't hear otherwise.

Initially, because of that "D," I couldn't get into the Computer Science program directly, so I enrolled in International Business with a minor in Computer Science and excelled in my computer modules. When the business program was discontinued, my credits qualified me for a BSc in Computer Science with an emphasis on Information Management, along with a minor in International Relations. My father's influence sealed my future in tech.

**IB: How did formal education and early work experiences shape your ambitions?**

**JB:** Formal education provided me with the foundational tools, but hands-on experience gave me wisdom. Studying Computer Science and International Relations in Geneva exposed me to global perspectives. I started out with humble jobs in Geneva, including cleaning at a shoe repair shop, working as a "Student Support" supervisor in an international school, and later as an intern at the Mission of the Kingdom of Lesotho. Those days taught me discipline and humility. Over time, I realized that my analytical skills and love for solving problems were assets in various environments, and IT became the perfect platform for expressing those talents. It wasn't just

“ *The transition was financially tough and emotionally exhausting...Life here is expensive, but it offers many social benefits not available in developing countries. I would still choose Switzerland or Eswatini any day!* ”

a career—it felt like a calling to bring order, efficiency, and impact to complex environments. The best part was being able to immediately apply what I learned in real work situations during my studies, which built my confidence and drive to go beyond limits.

My parents never let me rest. I could play hard, but I had to work hard first. I wasn't the most gifted student with perfect grades; I was average, but my work ethic made me stand out. While studying IT, I immersed myself in related topics outside of class. After earning my BSc in 2005, I was fortunate to be mentored by Bongani Mashwama, who gave me my first formal job at BNM Technology in Mbabane. He taught me about leadership within consulting and gave me a blank slate to develop. I set up servers and networks, managed projects, engaged clients, built websites, fixed PCs, bought spare parts, and even assembled computers from scratch. I felt like a limitless wizard blending business with technology, laying a solid foundation for my future ambitions.

**IB: You subsequently spent several years as a systems analyst at Eswatini National Provident Fund (ENPF) before moving to South Africa. How challenging was this transition?**

**JB:** One of the best gifts I received at ENPF, which was also my longest-serving employer, was training support for certifications like COBIT, ITIL, and PRINCE2. That same gift became somewhat of a curse because I developed an eagerness to implement everything I had learned right away, which perhaps wasn't the right time or fit for the organization. I suppose I had not yet learned how to communicate change or exercise



patience, and so I began to feel stifled. I was yearning for growth, was newly married, and felt a spiritual nudge to grow, to stretch beyond the familiar and embrace new challenges. I initially moved to South Africa to be with my new family. I left a stable job to pursue a deeper calling, and that decision, though difficult, was one of the most transformative of my life. I felt like I had no choice but to play the cards I was dealt because the irony is that I had made a conscious decision in my formative years never to live in South Africa or the U.S., for instance. These were the two countries I really wanted to avoid at all costs because of how liberal and competitive they are. However, my family needed me to be in South Africa, so I leaped.

**IB: What challenges did you initially face when you moved to South Africa, and how did you overcome them?**

**JB:** Culture was the biggest adjustment. Eswatini is laid back, community-driven, and often relational in its work style. South Africa was more competitive, aggressive, and survival-driven. When I first moved to South Africa, I was unemployed, and I explored the entrepreneurship route. I quickly realized, however, that most opportunities were already spoken for and guarded by gatekeepers in the fields of my interests, which made it difficult to break in despite the country's large, sophisticated market.

I then opted to seek employment, which is an incredibly daunting and intimidating task when you have ambitions and immediate responsibilities. I found myself quickly relying more on praying than applying for jobs, admittedly realizing I could not progress on my own will and strength.

Something happened during this season of praying that resulted in a random phone call from a founder of a software development and business consultancy firm, whom I had lost touch with three years earlier. The company was involved in developing bespoke web-based applications for the social impact space and for government agencies. I was immediately offered a job and introduced to the corporate culture of South Africa, where racial discrimination is nuanced in every level of engagement. Even the social culture was different.

I quickly missed the days when I could ask to open meetings with prayer, as this was standard practice in Eswatini culture but mostly frowned upon in South Africa (I should specify Gauteng, where I mostly worked). Although I have been described as confident and pushy, I really struggled to be aggressive to the required level for my project management position. I experienced being demoted for the first time in my life, a huge setback that I rarely talk about. I had to adjust and focus on the assignments that were given to me and had to observe and reflect on my failures. I didn't give up; I just didn't have aggression in me, but I had to focus on my strengths. So I identified gaps in my work environment that could be filled with my skills. I went for it; being wounded did not stop me. I had to do it in disappointment, I had to do it even when it didn't feel good, and not long after my demotion, I was elevated to Head of Business Operations and Director.

**IB: Wow! You are currently based in the US. How did that come about?**

**JB:** Just when I was acclimatizing to the South African environment and beginning to understand it, and

hoping to expand my horizon, my spousal permit was not renewed by the South African government just 1.5 years into my BMW contract, which should have been four years. As God would have it, I reported to a US-based technology unit at the Spartanburg Plant while working at the Rosslyn Plant. I was basically working remotely because I was serving BMW Group globally, based in South Africa. This gave me a good view of the German culture, South African Culture, and American culture. When my contract was terminated because of my spousal permit, I was immediately transitioned to a U.S. role. It was not just handed to me, but by divine alignment, there was an opening that I was interviewed for within the same team. I had already been panicking for close to 6 months, trying to find a job in Eswatini and looking for employment in the US market, while hoping the South African government would reconsider my immigration status, given that I have critical skills.

It was a frightening moment. Professionally, it meant taking on a global role at BMW Group, but I needed to stay in the US. It helped greatly that I already had a good relationship and, of course, a BSc from a US university. Personally, it meant uprooting my family and starting fresh. The transition was financially tough and emotionally exhausting. As a family, we faced many financial setbacks during this time. I was also pursuing a PGDip in Management Practice at Henley Business School, which was poorly timed, but I had to see it through. Working in the U.S. is fast-paced, and there are fewer labor protection laws; you can be fired instantly! However, I am enjoying working under a leadership team that is knowledgeable, supportive, empathetic, and still expects high standards. All my teammates have an incredible level of skill and expertise, which can be quite intimidating. I often second-guess myself, but luckily, feedback here is frequent, direct, and not offensive or

personal. I also find Americans to be very welcoming, making our transition very comfortable for my family. Life here is expensive, but it offers many social benefits not available in developing countries. I would still choose Switzerland or Eswatini any day!

**IB: What does your current role as a Microsoft Systems Administrator entail?**

**JB:** BMW's IT infrastructure is supported by multiple IT hubs worldwide. Our department is responsible for Microsoft products, which enhance productivity, provide advanced security, simplify IT management, and scalability, all of which are critical to BMW's global operations. My role contributes directly to this mission by ensuring that over 150,000 users worldwide have the right tools, licenses, and configurations to stay productive and secure. I initially focused on browser configurations for Chrome and Edge, a task that may seem straightforward but quickly becomes complex when balancing requirements for thousands of web-based applications across multiple geographic regions. Each region has its own legislative constraints, information protection, and cybersecurity standards, which add layers of complexity to ensuring secure, compliant, and seamless access. Lastly, I am responsible for the support strategy and SLA performance using analytics and insights for third-party service providers that manage daily incidents and system maintenance.

**IB: How do you approach solving complex business problems through IT?**

**JB:** I like to say I approach problems with a systems-thinking mindset and a servant leader's heart. Practically, that means simplifying complexity, identifying root causes, and automating processes. For example, reducing processing time often requires letting the database do more of the work, automating repetitive tasks, and continuously analyzing business processes for inefficiencies. I dislike



solving the same problem twice, so I always document and create frameworks to prevent repeat issues.

In South Africa, I introduced "black box" meetings to review mistakes in detail and document solutions for the future. Complex problems require breaking issues down into simple components, then situating them in a broader context. Sometimes the solution lies in unexpected places, like how the science behind flight came not from copying birds, but from studying water flow.

**IB: Having worked in Eswatini, South Africa, and the US, how would you describe the main cultural differences?**

**JB:** Each culture has its own rhythm. BMW as a whole is process-driven, precision-focused, and based on German-style engineering. The USA culture is relaxed but structured and compliance-driven. This sounds a little contradictory, but what I am saying is that it's not so much about getting to the office at 8 am in a suit and leaving at 5 pm, but more about performance. South African culture felt a lot more like being micromanaged, but it was more passionate and aggressive. Eswatini was relational, laid back, and community-based. Of course, my biases would be at play here because I probably share more community values and deeper relationships with people in my home country. Anyway, these differences taught me that leadership is not one-size-fits-all. It's about listening, adapting, and leading with authenticity, and the same goes for those being led, be attentive and adaptable, be teachable! All these cultures have appreciated me for being teachable and adaptable.

HELLO  
BMW!

Welcome to your My Trips monthly review.  
Discover the highlights of May with your BMW  
i4 M50.

This review will be available until the beginning of  
next month.

**“...I must mention three people who truly believed in me and pushed me beyond my limits: the late Langalakhe Dlamini (may his soul RIP) during his time at ENPF, Bongani Mashwama at BNM Technology, who hired me twice in my career...”**

**IB: Beyond being teachable, what would you say are the most important lessons you've learned in your career so far?**

**JB:** The greatest lesson is being self-aware and observant. Know your limits, know your strengths, know your weaknesses, know how to improve, and how to show up in different seasons and environments. I enjoy being in leadership positions, and in my younger years, I couldn't wait for a management role, but I realized that I could exert influence without being a leader. Influence is earned through consistency, humility, and a willingness to serve. Don't chase the position, don't rush to the summit! Life is a long, beautiful, meandering journey with ups and downs.

**IB: How important has mentorship, continuous learning, or certifications been to your professional development?**

**JB:** I'm not sure I can answer this question directly without mentioning some key people in my mentorship. My father has been an incredible guide and mentor in resilience and leadership. He is also an engineer, so being involved in technology and problem-solving helped me find many valuable parallels. I must mention three people who truly believed in me and pushed me beyond my limits: the late Langalakhe Dlamini (may his soul RIP) during his time at ENPF, Bongani Mashwama at BNM Technology, who hired me twice in my career—the second time making me the project lead for installing the first generation of prepaid meters in Eswatini and the initial prepaid system.

I also worked for a very hard-working and incredibly intelligent man in South Africa by the name of Tiledi Kekana at eSoftware Solutions. There are other people that I spent less time with, but they were supervisors from whom I had great mentorship and support, and those would be Dingane Nkwanyane at RSTP and Futhi Tembe at ENPF. I am currently in good hands; even now, I have incredible leaders. I use them as mentors; it is a choice to be mentored by your supervisors, but they also have to be approachable, supportive, and show interest in your own growth. So far, the list I have mentioned has always supported my professional and academic growth. As alluded to earlier, all these have contributed in their own way to where I am now. Without one of them, I would not be here!

**IB: What advice would you give to young EmaSwati dreaming of a global career?**

**JB:** Start with belief. Your background is not a barrier; it's a blessing. Invest in your skills, seek mentors, and start small, even if it means volunteering or doing odd jobs. Don't wait until you're desperate. Prepare early by aligning with global opportunities.

I began by cleaning shoes while studying in a foreign country. Today, I work for the BMW Group, one of the biggest and prestigious brands in the World. Your story matters, and the world needs it.

**IB: What's next for you? And do you see yourself giving back to Eswatini?**

**JB:** My immediate goal is to pursue a master's degree, inspired by my

current boss, who recently earned a PhD. For now, I'm focused on family and excelling in my current role. Long-term, I want to contribute to Eswatini's development. I've been part of social initiatives like Young Climber, and while I'm not planning to return just yet, I hope to bring back wisdom and energy to make a positive impact. Eswatini has immense potential, and I want to be part of shaping its future.

**IB: Thank you for sharing your journey with us, Njabulo. We look forward to following the next chapters of your inspiring story.**

**JB:** Thank you for the opportunity, and I wish Inside Biz continued success with the publication. **IB**



# Stuck In The Middle: Why Eswatini's Young Professionals Feel Trapped In Their Careers...



By Phumelele Mkhonta (Guest Writer)

**There is a peculiar scene that unfolds in office corridors across Eswatini every weekday morning. A young professional walks in wearing her sharp blazer and a determined smile. 'She' greets her colleagues, turns on her computer, and opens the same spreadsheet she has been updating for the past three years. Her cursor blinks. Her motivation does not!**

This young professional is neither lazy nor lacking in dreams. She might just be stuck. She is part of a growing number of young, educated professionals in Eswatini who feel like their careers have hit a quiet but stubborn wall. They have degrees, energy, and ambition, but find themselves in roles that do not develop, companies that do not innovate, and an economy that doesn't offer enough room for their aspirations.

## A SMALL ECONOMY, BIG FRUSTRATIONS

Eswatini's economy is small and centred around a few sectors—government, sugar, textiles, banking, and a modest services industry. The unemployment rate hovers around 33%, with youth unemployment estimated to be over 50%. Poverty remains persistent: nearly 58.9% of the population lives below the national poverty line. In a country where opportunities are limited and industries are slow to diversify, career mobility often resembles musical chairs—few seats and many players.

For many young professionals, the story begins with hope. They study hard, sometimes abroad, believing education is their ticket to a better life. But when they return home, reality hits harder than a network outage during a Teams meeting. The available jobs rarely match their qualifications or ambitions. The same faces hold leadership roles for decades. And promotions? They move more slowly than the Mbabane morning traffic. "I thought a degree would open doors," says one 27-year-old marketing graduate (commenting anonymously). "But here, it feels like the doors are locked, and someone misplaced the keys."

## TOXIC WORK CULTURES AND LEADERSHIP GAPS

Part of the frustration stems from workplace culture. Many organizations in Eswatini still have strict hierarchies, leaving little space for creativity or advancement. Leadership often favours a command-and-control style, with little emphasis on mentorship or professional growth. It's common to hear young employees describe environments where ideas are dismissed, innovation is suppressed, and loyalty is valued more than performance. In some offices, nepotism and favouritism are so deeply rooted that the "who you know" principle outweighs the "what you know." The result? Bright minds are dulled by bureaucracy, and enthusiasm is replaced by quiet resignation.

## THE MENTAL HEALTH UNDERCURRENT

Behind the polished Instagram posts of graduation gowns and office selfies, there is often a quiet mental health story unfolding. Being stuck professionally can trigger a mix of stress, anxiety, and burnout. For many, the burden of family and societal expectations adds an extra layer. If you studied in South Africa, Europe, or Asia, you're expected to "make it" quickly and visibly. Parents beam with pride at the airport, expecting that their child will soon become the family's financial anchor. But when the reality is underemployment or stagnant growth, that pride can turn into silent pressure.

Therapists and career coaches in



Psychologist and wellness coach,  
Felicia Goosen

the region are increasingly seeing clients in their late 20s and early 30s struggling with depression linked to career dissatisfaction. "It's not just about the job," noted Felicia Goosen, a psychologist and wellness coach. "It's about identity, self-worth, and

the fear of disappointing the people who sacrificed for your education." Goosen explains that millennials and Gen Z took their mental health more seriously than any other generation; hence, their dissatisfaction with their careers was more prominent, destabilizing the workforce. The Wellness Coach notes that a generational gap in workplaces sometimes creates apathy towards young professionals. "This causes the young professionals to resent their workplaces, and they feel life is passing them by. In this case, professionals must take account, forgive themselves, and be strategic before resigning. Everything is strategy," explained the wellness coach.

## THE RETURNEE REALITY CHECK

Many young professionals who have studied abroad talk about the "reverse culture shock" they feel when they return home. Overseas, they experience vibrant workplaces, mentorship programs, and clear career paths. At home, they face underfunded industries, resistance to change, and a cultural tendency to stick with "how things have always been done." The disconnect between international exposure and local career realities can be discouraging. Some react by lowering their expectations, while others plan their next move. Talent retention becomes a national issue as the most talented individuals seek fulfilment elsewhere.

## COPING AND REINVENTION

Yet, amid the frustration, there are signs of resilience. Some young professionals have decided that if the system won't change for them, they will change their paths themselves. Take the rise of side hustles. Across Eswatini's urban centres, you will find accountants running baking businesses after hours, engineers launching eco-startups, and journalists turning to digital content creation. These ventures are not just financial lifelines; they are outlets for creativity and sources of personal pride.

Others have taken bolder steps: quitting uninspiring jobs to retrain or switch to new industries. Career development experts say that adaptability is becoming the new currency of success. "The young professionals who thrive are those who stop waiting for the perfect job to appear," says one HR consultant. "They create opportunities, even if it means starting small." One of these trailblazers is Temnotfo Mvubu, a marketing

strategist whose journey reflects both the frustrations and possibilities of Eswatini's professional landscape. Interestingly, Temnotfo did not start in marketing at all; she studied architecture technology. Like many young professionals, she found herself working in a field far removed from her formal studies, a direct result of the mismatch between skills and local job opportunities.



Marketing strategist, Temnotfo Mvubu

Her journey into marketing began with a personal blog, a creative side project that unexpectedly caught her manager's attention. That moment opened doors to content creation and social media work. Over the years, she strategically upskilled, embraced digital tools, and by 2024, fully transitioned into remote freelance marketing. "Yes, I have felt stuck before. Temnotfo's personal success comes from intentional reinvention. She constantly expands her network, attends industry events, stays on top of marketing trends, and prioritizes her mental health. For her, local limitations are not walls; they are puzzles waiting for innovative solutions. Her story is both a testament and a roadmap: thriving in Eswatini's constrained job market often requires courage, creativity, and a Wi-Fi connection.

The situation is not hopeless. However, it requires a rethink from both individuals and institutions. For organizations, this involves modernizing workplace cultures, creating spaces for young voices, and establishing true growth paths. For governments and policymakers, this means diversifying the economy, supporting innovation, and directly confronting structural barriers such as nepotism. For young professionals, it means recognizing that being stuck doesn't have to be permanent. Sometimes, it's the uncomfortable pause before reinvention. Back in her office, Nokwanda stares at her blinking cursor and takes a deep breath. Maybe tomorrow she'll enrol in that online course. Or pitch that business idea. Or have an honest conversation with her manager. Being stuck is real. But so is the quiet power of choosing not to stay there.

**Phumelele Mkhonta is an award-winning Environmental Journalist, popularly known as Green Girl.**



## VIEWS FROM AN EXPERT

Seasoned human capital practitioner, executive coach, and mentor Sharon Maziya shares her insights: First, the question of feeling stuck in one's job or career is a very relevant and robust topic, one that many young professionals silently struggle with.

### 1. Acknowledge Your Feelings, It's Okay to Feel Stuck

Before doing anything, pause and understand that feeling stuck is not failure; it's feedback. It often shows that you've outgrown your current role, are misaligned with your values or passions, or are seeking meaning or direction. "Being stuck is not a dead end; it's a signal that it's time for a shift."

### 2. Find the Root Cause

You can't move ahead until you recognize what's truly holding you back. Think about these questions:

- **No Growth:** Have I stopped learning or being challenged?
- **Toxic Culture:** Is the environment sapping my energy or confidence?
- **Misalignment:** Do my values or passions conflict with my job?
- **Comfort Zone:** Have I settled because it's "safe"?
- **Societal Pressure:** Am I doing this for approval rather than purpose?
- Be brutally honest with yourself.

### 3. Reconnect With Your Purpose

Purpose drives perseverance. Ask yourself:

- What type of work energizes me?
- What problems do I want to address in the world?
- What skills or talents do I excel at naturally?

### 4. Create a Growth Strategy

- Once you notice the gap, begin constructing a bridge to reach your destination.
- **Upskill:** Enrol in short courses, participate in workshops, or earn professional certifications.

- **Network:** Surround yourself with people doing what you aspire to do.
- **Find Mentors:** Gain valuable insights from those who have navigated similar transitions.
- **Volunteer or Freelance:** Explore your interests in small, low-risk opportunities.
- **Define Your Role:** Sometimes you can reshape your current job to match better your goals (called job crafting).

### 5. Take Bold Action

- No progress occurs without discomfort.
- That could involve having honest conversations (with your boss, mentor, or yourself).
- Switching departments, industries, or even careers.
- Starting something new - a side hustle, a study program, or a passion project.

### 6. Manage Your Mindset

Feeling stuck often leads to self-doubt. Overcome it by:

- Practicing gratitude, focus on what's working.
- Re-framing failure as learning.
- Avoiding comparison, your journey is unique.
- Celebrating small wins along the way.

### 7. Redefine Your Success

Society often defines success as a title or salary. Redefine it as: "Doing work that aligns with who I am and adds value to others." When you shift from impressing others to impacting others, fulfilment follows naturally. "Your career is not a ladder, it's a landscape. Sometimes you climb, sometimes you move sideways, and sometimes you pause. The key is to keep moving with purpose."



## The Art Of The Grill

# With The Pitmaster Sipho Khaile

By: Phesheya Mkhonta

*Entrepreneur, pitmaster, and culinary innovator, Sipho Khaile has built more than a brand; he's cultivated a culture of authentic smokehouse experiences. Yet, behind every perfectly smoked rib or pulled pork, there's a story of risk, resilience, and reinvention. Khaile's story reminds us that authentic flavour comes from both success and struggle. Keep reading as he shares his journey with Travel Snacks, The Smoke & Grill, Asado Butchery, and open-flame catering, along with his tips for mastering the perfect braai.*

**Hi Sipho, thank you for taking the time to talk with us. Could you start by introducing yourself to our readers and sharing how your business journey began?**

It was born and raised in Manzini and attended Salesian High School until the end of Form 2. At that point, my twin sister and I moved to the UK to stay with our mother who was the special advisor and head of the health depart-

ment at The Common Wealth Secretariat. After earning my GCSEs, I got a part-time job at Pizza Hut, working in the kitchen making pizzas, which was my first real experience in the food industry. The next year, I moved to South Africa to complete my A-levels and later earned a degree in Marketing from UNISA through the Midrand Graduate Institute. After finishing my studies, I returned to Eswatini and spent several years working in the real estate industry.

**And when did you get into the food industry?**

Around that time, while I was still working, I developed a growing interest in food channels. Watching them, I noticed a rising global fascination with pulled pork, an American barbecue classic, especially popular in the Southern United States. It's made from shredded pork shoulder that's slow-smoked over wood, resulting in tender, flavorful meat. I started experimenting at home, teaching myself how to make pulled pork until I felt I had perfected the technique. In early 2016, I decided to test it by applying for a stall at the MTN Bushfire Festival, and we got accepted. Our menu was simple: we sold only pulled pork. The response was incredible, and we were invited back the following year.

Later that year, in December 2017, we opened The Smoke & Grill at the Mantega Lifestyle Centre, where we are sitting right now. Funny enough, I stumbled upon the space by chance while driving past one day. I was actually headed to Mantega Lodge to

pitch them on stocking our biltong. I then approached the center's owners, pitched my idea, and managed to secure a small spot there. We would become just the second eatery in the center. We started on a modest budget with minimal equipment, but we had one key asset: our mobile meat smoker we used at the Bushfire Festival. From there, we grew slowly, refining our craft as we went. Our earliest customers were mainly people who had tasted our food at Bushfire and followed us to the restaurant, along with tourists who, at the time, were the main visitors to the Lifestyle Centre.

**This wasn't your first business venture, was it?**

No, it wasn't. I had previously started a business called Travel Snacks, where we sold packaged biltong that I cured and dried myself at home.



These were available at most gas stations and convenience stores nationwide. Later, we expanded our product line to include snacks like nuts and dried fruit to complement the biltong and dried wors we already offered. Initially, we had a presence in most bars, restaurants, and filling stations, but we realized that the costs of restocking all those outlets were too high. So, we scaled back and focused on a few strategic locations, such as convenience centers near border gates and close to our base. The COVID-19 pandemic also affected how the business operated, so we had to adapt our strategy accordingly.

**Besides running The Smoke & Grill, you've also taken your skills on the road with open-flame catering. How did that part of the business start?**

We recognized the need to expand our business beyond The Smoke & Grill, so we ventured into outside catering for events and private functions. Over time, we refined our approach and found our niche in open-flame catering. While spit braais were already quite popular in Eswatini, we aimed to create something more unique.

Our approach features meat suspended over an open flame, slow-cooked alongside hanging fruits and vegetables to create a visually striking and flavorful experience—something that allows clients to truly ‘feast with their eyes’. We’ve also expanded our menu beyond meats, adding Mediterranean-inspired starches like garlic and herb potatoes, along with our signature chimichurri sauce. The meat is reverse-seared over the flames according to each client’s preference, moving us away from the traditional barbecue style.

Drawing from my background in biltong making, which is essentially a

form of meat curing, I decided to deepen my knowledge by taking a meat-curing course in Cape Town, where I had the privilege of learning from Richard Bosman of Richard Bosman’s Quality Cured Meats, a respected producer of Italian and Spanish-style charcuterie. We later collaborated at this year’s Standard Bank Luju Food & Lifestyle Festival. Looking ahead, Richard and I have discussed further collaboration on a business venture. The goal is to establish a specialized meat processing and curing business in the country that produces premium products such as ham, salami, and bruschetta, aimed at both local and international markets.

**Is this how Asado Butchery got started?**

Not quite. Around March this year, we came across an opportunity to lease a property in Lobamba and set up a butchery. Naturally, our interest was driven by the large amount of meat we already use for The Smoke & Grill and our biltong production, making it a logical step to become part of that value chain. The location also attracted us because it was spacious enough to include open-braai facilities. That’s when the idea struck: to create an authentic Shisa Nyama experience using the Asado technique.

Currently, the butchery mainly serves the local community in Lobamba and surrounding areas, offering traditional favorites like Inhloko and trotters (emasondvo), along with everyday cuts that aren’t fancy but are definitely higher quality. Entering this market was a strategic move. In today’s economic climate, entrepreneurs need to explore markets where profit margins might be smaller, but sales volumes are higher. This balance helps support our other, more capital-intensive ventures.

**Why the name Asado?**

The name Asado originates from the Argentine method of slowly grilling meat over an open flame using adjustable stands that let the chef raise or lower the meat to control heat and cooking speed. This technique locks in moisture and flavor, unlike traditional braai stands, which usually stay at one fixed height. Some people were surprised by how much we spent on building the custom Asado stand, especially since the butchery is located in Lobamba, but for us, it’s a long-term investment in both quality and education, showcasing what’s possible to our market.

**Can you walk us through your decision to expand The Smoke & Grill to Mbabane? What happened with that venture, since it didn’t seem to last very long?**

A common mistake many of us make in business is not doing enough research, understanding the market, the location, and all the small details that can make or break a venture. That said, I also believe in taking calculated risks. Sometimes setbacks are the best teachers; they’re part of paying your “school fees” in business, even if the lessons can be costly.

What we ultimately realized was that the population around Ezulwini, where The Smoke & Grill at Mantenga Lifestyle Centre is located, isn’t large. Interestingly, most of our customers were actually people from Mbabane or Manzini who enjoyed driving out to Mantenga as part of their experience. For them, visiting The Smoke & Grill wasn’t just about the food; it was a treat, a family outing, or a date night. Most of our business happened during the evenings and weekends rather than during the daily lunch hours. So, when we opened a branch in Mbabane, we unintentionally took away that sense of destination. Our regulars still preferred to drive to Mantenga for the ambiance and experience they associated with us.

Although many encouraged us to open in Mbabane or Manzini, that support didn’t always lead to steady customers. Our menu is distinctive, providing something different from the usual lunchtime options like stews or curries that people eat daily at work. Looking back, the location we chose in Mbabane was also not the best for convenience, even for those near the city center. So, I admit, the excitement of expanding clouded our judgment, we didn’t do enough research. Still, I see it as a valuable learning experience.



Moving forward, we've decided not to expand The Smoke & Grill to other areas. Instead, we'll focus on engaging more people through our other projects, such as event catering and the butchery, by bringing our brand to them in more adaptable ways, while The Smoke & Grill retains its current spot with its unique identity.

**That's very interesting. You've pointed out The Smoke & Grill's unique location as a key selling point.**

**What other factors do you believe have helped set the brand apart?**

Firstly, it's about experience and consistency. When we started, I was very hands-on in the kitchen, from preparing food to managing the smoking process. Over the years, I've built and trained a skilled team that now handles much of that work behind the scenes. Many team members have been with us for years, including our main meat smoker, which highlights the consistency we've maintained.

Although I'm not in the kitchen daily due to other business ventures, I remain heavily involved in sourcing our meats and raw materials, an area I'm well-versed in. Having our own butchery now gives us an edge, but even beyond that, I pay close attention to details. For example, when we buy pork belly, I'll personally specify how much fat we want on it, depending on what we're preparing in the kitchen or the smoker.

We're also very intentional about the experience we offer. We might not be a fine dining restaurant, but our setup features outdoor benches and a relaxed vibe, and we take pride in providing a top-notch smokehouse and grill experience. Looking ahead, we plan to expand with our upcoming meat-curing business, introducing new options like pizzas topped with our own smoked and cured meats.

**What would you consider a defining moment in your business journey?**

The first key experience was the exposure we gained from participating in the MTN Bushfire Festival. The feedback and encouragement we received there motivated us to open The Smoke & Grill, even though, as I mentioned earlier, the opportunity came about quite by chance. The second significant moment was securing our current location. After presenting our concept and aligning with the center's vision as a tourist destination, we were given the chance to set up here. That opportunity proved to be a lifeline because, in this type of business, location truly is everything. More recently, the chance to acquire Asado Butchery has been important. It has helped us strengthen our position within the value chain and improved our cash flow, which supports our other business ventures.

**Thank you so much for your time Khaile.**

Thank you Mhlungwane.

## PITMASTER TIPS

**As a grilling expert, what are your best tips for achieving the perfect braai?**

- Source a medium-sized steak with a little fat (fat adds flavor).
- Set your steak on low heat to cook evenly, then finish with a reverse sear on high heat for a crust and to lock in the juices.
- Let the meat rest for a few minutes to keep the juices inside.

**What are some common mistakes people make when braaiing meat, and how can they fix them?**

- Organic red meat typically has its own flavor. Instead of using spices and sauces for marinating, simply season it with coarse salt and pepper to bring out its natural taste.
- Some people tend to chop meat (kucoba) into small pieces, then it quickly becomes cold and dry. Rather, cut meat into thicker cuts, small chunks or skewer it to retain juices when serving.

**What's your personal go-to cut of meat and your favourite way to prepare it?**

- People and the market consider the Rolls-Royce of steak to be either fillet or tenderloin because of its tenderness. I personally prefer cuts from prime rib; it could be a ribeye. I also like rump cap (Picanha).
- Preparation includes coarse salt and pepper. Chimichurri sauce served on the side.

**What are the signature Smoke & Grill marinades or techniques that make your dishes stand out?**

- We use a house-made BBQ sauce to baste our smoked meats. It has a slightly sweet, acidic, tangy, and savory flavor.
- Our custom-built meat smoker uses wood to cook our meat slow and low; we don't rush!



*"it's finger lickin' good"*

## THE HEART BEHIND EVERY BUCKET

### KFC Eswatini Celebrates It's Restaurant GMs

**W**alk into any KFC restaurant in Eswatini and you'll find more than just hot meals and smiling faces you'll feel a sense of warmth, pride, and belonging. That atmosphere doesn't happen by chance. At the heart of it all is a leader who brings people and purpose together: the Restaurant General Manager, or RGM.

KFC's RGMs are the heart-beat of every store. More than just managers, they serve as mentors, problem solvers, and community builders. From guiding new team members on their first day to ensuring every customer feels welcomed, their role extends far beyond daily operations. They uphold KFC's global standards while remaining deeply rooted in the values and culture that make Eswatini unique.

"These individuals are the glue that holds each restaurant together," says Greg, KFC's General Operations Manager. "They don't just run shifts or track numbers they inspire teams, create opportunities, and build experiences that keep families coming back. They are the first to step in when challenges arise, and the last to leave

once everything is in place."

More than that, RGMs reflect the spirit of the communities they serve. They celebrate local culture, uplift their teams, and ensure that every KFC restaurant feels like home. Their ability to balance people, performance, and passion is what makes them exceptional. They embody care, pride, and resilience qualities that resonate deeply with both their teams and their customers.

KFC Eswatini is proud to celebrate its RGMs, not just as leaders of restaurants, but as leaders within the community. They are the bridge between the world's most loved chicken brand and the people of Eswatini, carrying forward a tradition of excellence and a future filled with promise.



MLAMULI MALINDZISA  
KFC Ntongweni



AYANDA DLAMINI  
KFC Siteki



MPENDULO DLAMINI  
KFC Matsapha Link



MLONDI SITHOLE  
KFC Piggs Peak



NONTOKOZO DLAMINI  
KFC Manzini Bus Rank



MUSA SIMELANE  
KFC Mbabane Plaza



SIBUSISO MNGOMEZULU  
KFC Gabis



SANDILE MADUNA  
KFC Nhlanguano



SIHLE GAMEDZE  
KFC Manzini President Ctr.



SIBUSISO SHONGWE  
KFC Ngwenya



JOZANE MAZIYA  
KFC Matsapha, Mahhala



FISIWE NDLALA  
KFC Ezulwini, Crescent



THOBILE ZWANE  
KFC Mbabane, Sosiza Rd



DAISY TSABEDZE  
KFC Malkerns

# NEW SHOOTS

How Spotted Horse Gold Rum is Turning Eswatini's Industrial Strength into a Premium Lifestyle Brand

**By:** Sibusion Mngadi // **Pics:** Supplied



When the first bottles of Spotted Horse Gold Rum were uncorked on a cool August afternoon at Dwaleni Farm Lodge, few could have imagined how quickly this home-grown creation would capture the nation's spirit. Just months later, it has evolved from a product launch into a symbol of pride, craftsmanship, and possibility.

The Royal Eswatini Sugar Corporation (RES) — a name synonymous with industrial excellence — has boldly stepped beyond the factory gates to connect directly with consumers. With Spotted Horse, the company has proven that Eswatini's manufacturing strength can be transformed into lifestyle brands that tell powerful stories of identity and innovation.

## From Strategy to Shelf

Spotted Horse Gold Rum is the first visible proof of Simama Wenabe +2B 2030, RES's growth roadmap built around two pillars: Deep Roots (operational excellence and cost leadership) and New Shoots (diversification and value addition).

"This is the first launch under our bold new strategy," said Managing Director Nick Jackson at the unveiling. "If we can move just 3% of our ethanol output into retail, we can double profitability. Rum is the new gin — and this is it."

That insight underscores RES's new direction — creating high-value consumer products that drive both profitability and national pride.

### Nationwide Acceptance

Since its debut, Spotted Horse Gold Rum has been widely embraced and celebrated across Eswatini. Through nationwide activations, professional mixology sessions, and vibrant digital storytelling, the brand has directly engaged nearly 1,000 emaSwati — gathering valuable feedback that confirms overwhelming enthusiasm for a premium, proudly local rum.

More than 90% of participants expressed purchase intent, while strong social media engagement has amplified the brand's visibility and conversation nationwide. The rum's unique blend of elegance, quality, and authenticity has turned early consumers into passionate ambassadors — sharing their experiences and helping to cement Spotted Horse as a standout in Eswatini's growing beverage industry.

Demand has surged from local establishments, with bars, restaurants, and hospitality venues across the country seeking to stock Spotted Horse — a clear sign of a growing market for proudly made Eswatini beverages.

### Exporting Eswatini's Excellence

Beyond the local buzz, Spotted Horse is now stepping onto the international stage. Through support from the Eswatini Investment Promotion Authority (EIPA), the rum has already been showcased at international trade fairs in Asia, marking the start of its global journey.

This aligns with RES's broader vision of nation branding — using value-added exports to position Eswatini as a producer of world-class quality goods. "Our products should travel where people cannot," noted Muhawu Maziya, RES General Manager – Commercial, reinforcing how Spotted Horse represents a modern, confident Eswatini ready to compete globally.

### A Symbol of Diversification and Resilience

Behind the golden liquid lies an industrial powerhouse — a distillery capable of producing 32 million litres per season, with advanced ethanol processing and decades of technical expertise. Spotted Horse is made from locally sourced molasses and crafted with care, symbolizing the country's growing capacity to turn raw materials into premium finished goods.

This fusion of heritage, innovation, and quality reflects the essence of RES's diversification strategy: combining industrial strength with creative enterprise to build sustainable, future-ready industries.

### The Journey Ahead

The success of Spotted Horse Gold Rum has validated RES's "New Shoots" approach and inspired plans for a broader portfolio of premium beverages. Each product will continue to tell a story of Eswatini's ingenuity — from the fields to the global market.

As Managing Director Nick Jackson concluded at the launch:

*"You can enjoy Spotted Horse. You can talk about it. You can tell your friends. This is the new gin — rum is the new gin. This is it."*

From a sugarcane field to the world stage, Spotted Horse Gold Rum stands as a testament to what Eswatini can achieve when vision, value, and excellence come together. It is not just a drink — it's a declaration that Eswatini's future is proudly home-grown and golden.



# 10 MINUTES WITH... NOSIZWE SIGWANE



By Ayanda Dlamini

**Nosizwe Sigwane is the Head of Transact and Liability Products at FNB Eswatini. With a Bachelor's Degree in Statistics from the University of Pretoria and a strong background in Data Analytics, she has applied her expertise across various sectors, including roles with the African Union. A 2017 YALI Fellow, she completed a Business and Entrepreneurship program at Drake University in the United States. Beyond her professional accomplishments, Nosizwe is passionate about youth empowerment, advancing women in leadership, and promoting indigenous entrepreneurship, driven by her belief in Africa's transformative potential.**

**"We often step into spaces unsure of who we are, but along the journey, we begin to discover ourselves."**

**What did you want to be when you were younger, and how far is that from what you actually do now?**

As a child, I always said I wanted to be a pilot. I remember one evening when my parents lined us up and asked about our career dreams. Without hesitation, I said, "Pilot." I was inspired by my mother, whose job often had her flying out for conferences. In high school, I gravitated toward the sciences, much like her; she was a lab technician specializing in chemistry. My parents encouraged me to become a doctor, but my love for mathematics steered me toward actuarial science. Although I didn't become an actuary, I earned a degree in Statistics, which

laid the foundation for my career today. To strengthen my business acumen, I'm now halfway through my MBA at GIBS.

**What was your first job, and what's the funniest thing that happened there?**

My first job was as a call centre agent. On my third day, I got a call from another company offering me a similar role with a better salary. It was both funny and surprising that I had to resign within my very first month on the job. I had barely learned the ropes before being "promoted" elsewhere!

**How do you balance your work and personal life effectively?**

Balance, for me, begins with faith and clear priorities. God always comes first, followed by my work and family, then my service at church, and finally my friends. I'm grateful to have friends who understand that my schedule can be demanding, yet I always try to stay connected. And of course, if I were married by now, my husband would naturally take the top spot on that list!

**As an avid reader, what is your favourite book?**

A book that has profoundly influenced me is *The Purpose Driven Life* by Rick Warren. It opened my eyes to the deeper meaning of life and how our existence fits into

God's larger plan.

One quote that keeps guiding me is, "You were made by God and for God, and until you understand that, life will

never make sense." It serves as a daily reminder that my purpose goes far beyond myself.

**What's the best vacation you've ever taken?**

Without a doubt, my trip to Mauritius with my sister, Sibusile Sigwane-Dlamini, was the most memorable. The island was stunning, but what made it truly special was the time we spent together, filled with laughter, deep conversations, and unforgettable memories I'll always cherish.

**What's your process for turning a bad day into a good one?**

For me, it's simple: I play some gospel music. The right song has the power to lift my spirit, realign my focus, and remind me of God's goodness, even on the hardest days.

**If you could bring back any fashion trend or old slang, what would it be?**

Definitely the Pantsula dress code.

It was bold, vibrant, and full of attitude, a true expression of culture and confidence. It would be exciting to see that energy make a comeback.

**Favourite Meal to Cook?**

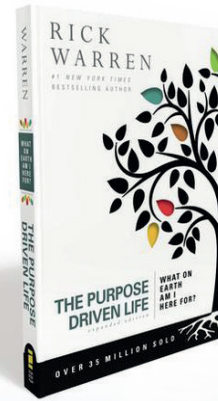
Rich oxtail served with rice, spinach, and coleslaw. A meal that feels like comfort and celebration all in one.

**Favourite Restaurant?**

Amigos, at the Gables in Ezulwini. Their seafood meals and spinach always feel like home.

**Favourite Gadget?**

My iWatch. It keeps me connected and organized, especially with my busy schedule.



Scan to register



# Earn CashBack with every swipe

As a Loyalty member, you get the best we have to offer every time you swipe your Loyalty Card.



**OR**



Available At Engen Woodlands & Gcwalisa Convenience Centre's | E&EO | T&Cs Apply

# Mbabane Marathon

2025

Fuelled By Endurance, Driven By Growth



Saturday, **22 November** 2025



Mbabane Prince of Wales

**REGISTER NOW** for the race at

[www.mbabane.org.sz](http://www.mbabane.org.sz)



MoMo  
from MTN



Title Sponsor