

EMPOWERMENT MISSION FOCUS

EMMF

THE AUTHORITY ON SOCIAL IMPACT AND CSI

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Magazine

**FASHION WITH
PURPOSE**

BALINI NAIDOO
ENGELBRECHT'S
BRAILLE INNOVATION

**BRAND,
SCIENCE
& INFLUENCE**
WITH NADIA HEARN AND
DR BONITA DE SWARDT

**THE
POWER
OF HER**

BREAKING BARRIERS & BUILDING LEGACIES

ANGEL POOE • KHOLOFELO SEHLARE • DR TRYPHINE ZULU



5TH ANNUAL

Gift EMPOWERMENT Walk

DATE
9 AUGUST 2026

2026 THEME: STEP INTO YOUR POWER

VENUE
BORWA LIFESTYLE CENTRE

START TIME
05:30

PURPOSE: ENDING PERIOD POVERTY & RESTORING DIGNITY TO GIRL CHILDREN.

NOTE:
ALL PARTICIPANTS MUST SUBMIT T-SHIRT SIZE & AFFIRMATION AFTER PAYMENT

AFFIRMATIONS INCLUDE:
I AM BOLD • BRAVE • STRONG • FEARLESS • LIMITLESS • UNSTOPPABLE

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WALK WITH PURPOSE. WALK WITH POWER. STEP INTO YOUR POWER – 2026

ORDERS CLOSING DATE
12 JUNE 2026



LETTER FROM OUR EDITOR

Dear Change-Makers

Celebrating Women Who Lead, Inspire, and Transform. As we celebrate International Women's Day, EMF magazine is proud to shine a spotlight on women who are not just making waves in their industries, but are shaping communities, redefining leadership, and inspiring others to rise alongside them. On this cover, we celebrate trailblazers like **Dr Tryphine Zulu, Angel Pooe, and Kholofelo Sehlare**, women whose journeys remind us that resilience, vision, and courage are the true hallmarks of leadership.

Inside, you'll meet remarkable women whose stories prove that impact begins with purpose:

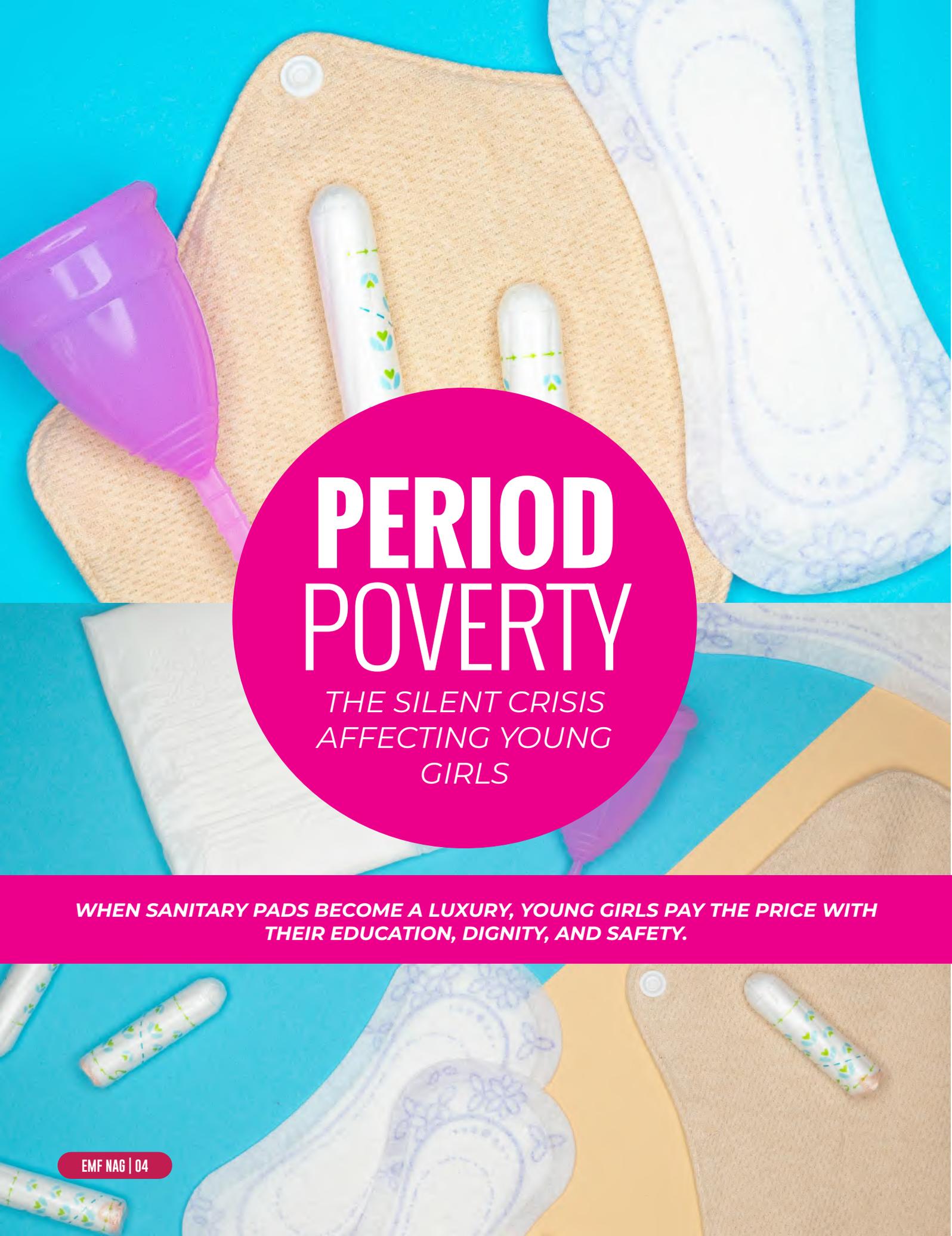
- **Gugulethu Khumalo** shares how faith, service, and resilience fuel her mission to uplift communities.
- **Lihle Shongwe and Nkosingiphile Khanyile** turned a university reunion into a growing movement of faith, service, and social impact.
- **Nadia Hearn** is elevating women's voices and building brands that connect from the inside out.
- **Balini Naidoo Engelbrecht** is leading an inclusive fashion revolution, integrating Braille into clothing to restore dignity, independence, and access across Africa.
- **Rethabile Percilla Poho and Zabelo Hlabisa** are empowering communities through beauty, philanthropy, and environmental stewardship proving that purpose-driven leadership comes in many forms.
- And the Radiant Futures Foundation demonstrates how compassion can spark a movement, as one young woman's vision transformed empathy into lasting change.
- **Dr Bonita de Swardt** guiding Africa's generation of scientists.

This issue is a celebration of courage, creativity, and community an homage to the women who refuse to wait for change and instead create it. May their stories inspire you to dream boldly, serve generously, and lead with intention.

Here's to women who lift, inspire, and transform today and every day.

With admiration,
Vonani N'wa Mathebula
Editor-in-Chief, EMF Magazine





PERIOD POVERTY

*THE SILENT CRISIS
AFFECTING YOUNG
GIRLS*

**WHEN SANITARY PADS BECOME A LUXURY, YOUNG GIRLS PAY THE PRICE WITH
THEIR EDUCATION, DIGNITY, AND SAFETY.**

For millions of young girls across South Africa and the African continent, menstruation is not just a natural biological process it is a monthly crisis. Period poverty, defined as the lack of access to affordable sanitary products, safe facilities, and menstrual health education, continues to rob many girls of their confidence, opportunities, and in some cases, their childhood.

While conversations around gender equality have grown louder, the harsh reality is that too many girls still face impossible choices every month simply because they cannot afford sanitary pads.

MISSING SCHOOL, LOSING OPPORTUNITIES

One of the most immediate and visible consequences of period poverty is absenteeism from school. Many girls miss between three to five days of school every month during their menstrual cycle. Over the course of a year, this adds up to significant learning time lost. For some, the embarrassment and anxiety become so overwhelming that they eventually drop out altogether.

The reasons are painfully simple:

- Fear of staining their uniforms
- Lack of access to sanitary products
- Inadequate sanitation facilities at schools
- Shame and stigma around menstruation

Education is one of the most powerful tools for breaking cycles of poverty yet period poverty quietly pushes many girls further behind.

THE HIDDEN SOCIAL ILLS

Beyond missed classes lies a much darker reality. When basic hygiene products are unaffordable, vulnerability increases. Some young girls are pressured into

risky and exploitative situations simply to meet this basic need. Reports from communities across the region have highlighted cases where girls:

- Engage in transactional relationships to obtain money for pads
- Experience coercion or manipulation by older men
- Face bullying and social isolation
- Use unsafe alternatives such as newspaper, cloth, or tissue

This is not just a health issue it is a protection issue, a dignity issue, and a human rights issue.

THE RISK OF SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

Perhaps the most disturbing consequence of period poverty is the increased exposure to sexual exploitation.

When a young girl feels she has no safe or affordable way to manage her menstrual cycle, she becomes vulnerable to individuals who offer money or gifts in exchange for sexual favours. What begins as survival can quickly become a cycle of abuse, trauma, and long-term emotional harm. No child should ever have to risk her safety for something as basic as sanitary protection.

THE EMOTIONAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL TOLL

The impact of period poverty is not only physical it is deeply emotional. Girls experiencing period poverty often report:

- Loss of self-esteem
- Anxiety and constant fear of embarrassment
- Social withdrawal
- Feelings of shame about their bodies
- Reduced participation in sports and school activities

Over time, this erodes confidence at a critical stage of development.

BREAKING THE SILENCE AND THE CYCLE

Addressing period poverty requires more than awareness it demands coordinated action from government, schools, corporates, and communities.

KEY SOLUTIONS INCLUDE:

- Making sanitary products affordable and accessible
- Providing free pads in schools and public facilities
- Improving school sanitation infrastructure
- Expanding menstrual health education for both girls and boys
- Strengthening child protection and community awareness
- Supporting local production of low-cost sanitary products

Importantly, the stigma around menstruation must be dismantled. Periods are natural. The shame surrounding them is not.

PROTECT THE GIRL CHILD

As the world continues to champion gender equality, period poverty remains one of the most preventable barriers facing young girls today. Ensuring that every girl can manage her period safely and with dignity is not a luxury it is a necessity.

When we place sanitary protection within reach, we do more than keep girls in school. We protect their confidence. We safeguard their futures. We affirm their worth. Because no girl should ever have to choose between her dignity and her education.



THE GIFT EMPOWERMENT WALK 2026

WALKING WITH PURPOSE, IMPACT, AND HOPE

A powerful community movement by the Enock Mathebula Foundation returns in 2026, now with the exciting addition of a Baby Crawling Competition to celebrate families and future leaders.

The Gift Empowerment Walk 2026 is set to once again bring together changemakers, families, corporates, and community members for a meaningful day of purpose-driven action. Hosted by the Enock Mathebula Foundation (EMF), the annual walk continues to grow as a flagship initiative dedicated to uplifting vulnerable communities and advancing the Foundation's mission of empowerment through education, dignity, and social support.

Scheduled for 2026, this highly anticipated event is more than just a walk it is a movement of compassion and collective responsibility. Participants will lace up their sneakers not only to promote healthy living but to actively contribute to EMF's ongoing programmes that support young people, particularly the girl child, in staying in school and thriving.

WALKING FOR A CAUSE

At the heart of the Gift Empowerment Walk is a simple but powerful belief: when communities walk together, change happens faster. Funds and awareness raised through the event will support EMF's initiatives, including:

- Fighting period poverty
- Supporting learners with essential resources
- Advancing mentorship and youth development programmes
- Strengthening community upliftment projects

The walk also serves as a platform to unite partners, sponsors, and the broader public around a shared vision of sustainable impact.

What to Expect in 2026

The 2026 edition promises an even more vibrant and family-friendly experience. Attendees can look forward to:

- A high-energy community walk
- Networking with partners and stakeholders
- Entertainment and wellness activities
- Branded merchandise and activation stands
- Inspiring moments of community celebration

But this year comes with a heartwarming new highlight.

BABY CRAWLING COMPETITION: CELEBRATING THE NEXT GENERATION

Adding a joyful family twist to the programme, the Baby Crawling Competition will take place immediately after the walk. This fun-filled activity is designed to celebrate young families while creating unforgettable moments for parents and supporters.

The competition will feature adorable little participants racing (or crawling!) toward the finish line in a safe, supervised environment. Beyond the cuteness overload, the initiative reflects EMF's broader commitment to nurturing the next generation from the earliest stages of life.

WHY THE BABY CRAWLING COMPETITION MATTERS:

- Encourages family participation in EMF events
- Creates an inclusive, multigenerational atmosphere
- Builds community bonds in a joyful setting
- Highlights EMF's long-term vision for youth development

Prizes and special recognition will be awarded, making it one of the most anticipated moments of the day.

JOIN THE MOVEMENT

The Enock Mathebula Foundation invites corporates, families, schools, and community members to be part of the Gift Empowerment Walk 2026. Whether walking, sponsoring, volunteering, or cheering from the sidelines, every participant becomes part of a growing force for good.

As EMF continues to champion dignity, education, and empowerment, the 2026 walk stands as a reminder that every step taken together brings us closer to lasting change.

SAVE THE DATE. BRING YOUR FAMILY. WALK WITH PURPOSE.

COVER STORY

DR TRYPHINE ZULU

LEADING WITH
PURPOSE, PRECISION
AND COMPASSION

FROM HUMBLE BEGINNINGS TO SHAPING THE FUTURE OF OCCUPATIONAL
HEALTHCARE IN AFRICA

UPBRINGING & EARLY INFLUENCES

Born in Maphisa, outside Bulawayo in Zimbabwe, Dr Tryphine Zulu's story is one of quiet resilience forged in the realities of the migrant labour era. Raised primarily by her mother while her father worked in South Africa, her early life was shaped by sacrifice, discipline and an unwavering belief in education. Her mother strict yet deeply loving became the family's anchor. Watching her stretch limited resources to raise children single-handedly left a lasting imprint on Dr Zulu's character.

"My upbringing taught me that circumstances do not define your ceiling," she reflects. "With resilience, education and the courage to keep showing up, you can build a life of purpose and contribution." A scholarship to an all-girls boarding school further refined the values that continue to guide her leadership today: discipline, accountability and excellence.

VALUES THAT CONTINUE TO GUIDE HER

At the heart of Dr Zulu's leadership philosophy are values rooted deeply in her childhood.

Generosity, she says, is not about abundance but about posture how one shows up for others. In her professional life, this translates into freely sharing knowledge, mentoring emerging professionals and creating pathways for those who may not yet see their own potential.

INTEGRITY REMAINS NON-NEGOTIABLE.

"Your word matters. Doing the right thing is more important than being popular."

She also learned early that meaningful growth requires sacrifice often choosing the harder path to build both character and capability.

WHEN HEALTHCARE BECAME PERSONAL

Dr Zulu's passion for healthcare was not born in lecture halls it was shaped in community trenches during one of Africa's most devastating public health crises.

As a teenager during the peak of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, she witnessed communities unravel under the weight of loss, long before antiretroviral therapy became widely accessible. Her mother volunteered as a community HIV counsellor, often with very limited resources. "Sometimes the only thing she could offer caregivers were gloves and basic support," Dr Zulu recalls. "Yet she continued to show up with compassion, courage and dignity." Watching ordinary people display extraordinary humanity during crisis profoundly shaped her worldview. Healthcare, she realized, is not just about hospitals or medicine it is fundamentally about showing up for people when they are most vulnerable.

THE JOURNEY INTO HEALTHCARE LEADERSHIP

Dr Zulu's path into executive healthcare leadership was not linear but intentionally layered. Her pharmacy training grounded her in clinical realities and patient needs. Health economics expanded her thinking to population-level decision-making and system design. Later, actuarial science and data analytics deepened her understanding of risk, benefit design and long-term sustainability. "The turning point for me was realising I could influence not just individual patient outcomes, but the design of entire healthcare systems."

INSIDE THE ROLE: MANAGING EXECUTIVE HEALTHCARE

In her current role as Managing Executive Healthcare, no two days look the same. Some days are strategic shaping how healthcare infrastructure and services should evolve to meet the needs of workers. Others are intensely operational, involving rehabilitation programme reviews, clinical engagement and problem-solving across facilities. At the centre of her work is a singular priority: ensuring injured workers receive coordinated, dignified care.

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

As a woman in executive healthcare leadership, Dr Zulu's journey has required both technical excellence and quiet confidence. "You cannot aspire to what you cannot see."

VISION & LEGACY

Looking ahead, Dr Zulu's strategic priorities include shaping healthcare strategy through the lens of social insurance, bridging rehabilitation access gaps, designing worker-centred benefits and strengthening integrated occupational healthcare through digital analytics.

Professionally, she hopes to be remembered for advancing the role of the social insurer and transforming occupational healthcare delivery. Personally, she hopes her children will remember her as a mother who loved them deeply and did her best with the knowledge she had at the time.

COVER STORY



Angel
POOLE

ROOTED IN FAITH, DRIVEN BY PURPOSE

In a world where titles often define identity, Angel Pooe stands firmly grounded in something deeper: faith, purpose, and service. This International Women's Day, EMF Magazine celebrates a leader whose work spans arts, diplomacy, youth empowerment, and women's advancement yet whose foundation remains profoundly personal.

Born and raised in Rustenburg's Kwa Phokeng, Angel's story is one of intentional growth shaped by strong family values and an unwavering commitment to community upliftment.

BEYOND THE TITLES

"Beyond the titles, I am a woman deeply anchored in faith, purpose, and service," Angel reflects. Proudly Motswana, she carries her roots with dignity. Her upbringing instilled discipline, resilience, and a deep respect for community qualities that now define her leadership footprint. At heart, she is a family woman. Home, she says, is their "small heaven on earth," intentionally built on peace, love, and faith. "Everything I build in the public sphere is grounded in the values I live privately: integrity, unity, faith, and compassion."

LEADERSHIP AS STEWARDSHIP

For Angel, leadership was never about status, it was always about responsibility.

Growing up, she witnessed how access, mentorship, and exposure could radically change lives. That awareness ignited her passion for community development.

"Community development is personal to me," she explains. "When one woman rises, when one young person is empowered, the entire ecosystem shifts."

A defining moment came when she found herself repeatedly seated at tables where she was often the only young African woman present. That experience reshaped her philosophy.

"Representation is responsibility. It is not enough to occupy a seat, you must widen the table."

Today, she measures leadership not by the rooms she enters, but by the doors that remain open after she leaves.

FROM KWA PHOKENG TO GLOBAL PLATFORMS, THE WOMAN WIDENING THE TABLE FOR AFRICA'S NEXT GENERATION

REDEFINING SUCCESS

In an achievement-driven world, Angel offers a refreshing metric for success. "Success is alignment," she says simply. For her, true success is:

- Walking in purpose
- Uplifting others while growing
- Creating generational impact

Professional milestones matter but transformed lives matter more. "Rooted in faith, driven by purpose, and committed to impact."

ARTS AS AN ECONOMIC POWERHOUSE

As a Board Member of the Gauteng Arts Council, Angel is a strong advocate for the creative economy. She is clear: the arts are not merely cultural expression they are serious economic drivers.

"The creative sector generates employment, preserves heritage, and shapes national identity," she explains. "When properly funded and structured, it becomes a catalyst for township and rural economic transformation." Yet significant challenges remain.

THE CREATIVE INDUSTRY AT A CROSSROADS

Angel identifies three critical barriers:

1. UNDERVALUATION OF INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

Creatives are often culturally celebrated but structurally underpaid.

2. ECOSYSTEM FRAGMENTATION

Artists, policymakers, distributors, and investors frequently operate in silos.

3. PERSISTENT MINDSET BARRIERS

Creativity is still viewed by some as a passion rather than a serious economic sector.

Her solution is bold but practical: professionalize the ecosystem. This includes:

- Stronger IP protection
- Accessible legal education for creatives

- Transparent royalty systems
- Data-driven mapping of the creative economy
- Regional creative hubs across Africa

“We must treat creatives as entrepreneurs, not beneficiaries.”

BUILDING SYSTEMS, NOT SPEECHES

When asked about legacy, Angel’s answer is precise and powerful. “I hope to leave systems, not just speeches.”

Her vision includes:

- Institutionalized creative programs
- Stronger intellectual property protections
- Arts embedded into national development strategies
- Cross-border African creative exchange

She is particularly passionate about ensuring African creatives access global markets without losing cultural authenticity.

“Africa should trade culture with Africa before the world consumes it,” she notes.

For Angel, legacy is not about remembrance it is about durable frameworks that outlive their founders.

DIPLOMACY WITH PURPOSE

In her role as a Diplomatic Liaison, Angel operates as what she calls a “bridge-builder,” connecting governments, creatives, businesses, and diaspora networks.

Her philosophy is clear: Africa must negotiate from a position of value.

Being part of the ForbesBLK community has further reinforced the importance of global access and representation.

A close-up portrait of a Black woman with long, dark hair, smiling warmly. She is wearing a dark, possibly black, blazer over a dark top. The background is dark and out of focus.

“THE CREATIVE SECTOR GENERATES EMPLOYMENT, PRESERVES HERITAGE, AND SHAPES NATIONAL IDENTITY,”

“Networks open doors,” she says, “but preparation keeps you in the room.”

THE FUTURE AFRICAN LEADER

LOOKING AHEAD, Angel believes tomorrow’s African leaders must cultivate:

- Strategic foresight
- Digital fluency
- Cross-cultural intelligence
- Strong negotiation capability
- Emotional resilience
- Deep empathy

Above all, she emphasizes cultural confidence.

“Global competence means nothing without cultural confidence.”

EMPOWERMENT AS ACTIVATION

For Angel, empowerment is not charity it is activation. She defines it as the intersection of:

- Access
- Confidence
- Opportunity

“You can give someone opportunity, but without confidence they may never step into it,” she explains. True empowerment equips people with practical tools education, networks, capital, and exposure while restoring their sense of agency.

WOMEN RISING TOGETHER

Her message to young women aspiring to leadership is both firm and affirming:

“Lead as yourself, not as a replica of what leadership has traditionally looked like.”

She believes women are reshaping leadership by bringing emotional intelligence, collaboration, and long-term vision into historically rigid spaces.

But she offers one non-negotiable principle:

RISE AND REACH BACK.

“The true mark of powerful leadership is not how high you climb,” she says, “but how many other women rise with you.”

LESSONS FROM THE GOLF COURSE

INTERESTINGLY, GOLF HAS Become one of Angel’s most influential leadership teachers.

The sport, she says, reinforces:

- Patience in a fast-paced world
- Emotional regulation under pressure
- Strategic decision-making
- Consistency over intensity

“You do not play the course emotionally,” she notes. “You play it intelligently.”

A BOLD VISION FOR YOUTH

If given the opportunity to implement one national intervention, Angel would launch a National Youth Enterprise & Mentorship Initiative.

Her model would combine:

- Practical business training
- One-on-one mentorship
- Seed funding
- Corporate and banking partnerships
- Real market access

The goal is clear: shift young people from job seekers to job creators.

“EMPOWERMENT MUST TRANSLATE INTO OWNERSHIP AND OWNERSHIP BUILDS GENERATIONAL CHANGE.”

THE DECADE AHEAD

Over the next ten years, Angel hopes to influence policy across:

- The creative economy
- Youth development
- Women’s leadership

She also aims to strengthen Africa–diaspora partnerships and institutionalize programs that deliver sustained transformation.

Because for her, impact is never about temporary visibility. It is about permanence.

A FINAL WORD TO CHANGE-MAKERS

To the EMF Magazine community of social entrepreneurs, NGOs, and builders across Africa, Angel leaves a timely charge:

BUILD WITH INTEGRITY.

In a fast-moving world, she warns against sacrificing values for visibility. Sustainable impact, she insists, is rooted in transparency, accountability, and purpose.

And above all:

COLLABORATE STRATEGICALLY.

Because Africa’s future, she reminds us, will not be shaped by spectators but by builders bold enough to widen the table.

COVER STORY

Driving Hope

FROM THE FAIRWAY
TO THE VILLAGE

**KHOLOFELO
HOPE SEHLARE**
IS USING SPORT, PURPOSE
AND COMPASSION TO
UNLOCK OPPORTUNITIES
FOR RURAL YOUTH.

At just 30 years old, Kholofelo Hope Sehlare is quietly but powerfully reshaping what sport can mean for young people growing up in rural South Africa. A golfer from Marapyane with a deep commitment to community development, Sehlare represents a new generation of leaders who understand that talent exists everywhere, but opportunity does not.

Beyond the titles and achievements, she describes herself simply: purpose-driven, compassionate, and committed to creating pathways for young people who come from places like she does.

WHERE THE LOVE FOR SPORT BEGAN

Kholofelo's relationship with sport began early in her village upbringing. For her, the playing field was never just about competition it was a sanctuary.

"Sport gave me hope and a sense of belonging," she reflects. "It was where I learned discipline, teamwork and confidence." That early exposure planted seeds that would later shape both her athletic journey and her community mission. While she participated broadly in sport, golf ultimately captured her heart for a deeper reason.

"Golf challenged me mentally and emotionally. It requires focus, patience and resilience. You compete with yourself before anyone else."

THE BIRTH OF K VILLAGE SPORTS ACADEMY

Growing up in a rural village exposed Kholofelo to a harsh reality: talent was abundant, but resources were scarce. Too many promising young athletes were being left behind simply because

of where they were born. That gap became her calling. She founded K Village Sports Academy to bridge the divide and ensure that rural athletes receive the exposure, equipment and encouragement they deserve.

"Limited equipment, limited exposure and limited opportunities can easily discourage talent. I wanted to help change that narrative and prove that rural talent is powerful."

THE CONFIDENCE SHIFT

One of the most powerful outcomes of the academy's work has been the visible transformation in young players who receive proper gear.

"When a child receives proper boots, they stand taller. They feel seen and valued."

For many of these children, a single pair of boots represents more than equipment it represents belief.

GOLF AS A GATEWAY FOR IMPACT

While soccer drives grassroots development, golf has become Kholofelo's strategic tool for unlocking partnerships and resources. Through fundraising golf days and collaborations, she connects with networks that support her community initiatives.

"People sometimes see sport as just recreation. But sport builds discipline, leadership, teamwork and resilience. These are life skills."

EDUCATION SHAPING THE LEADER

Although she has not yet completed her MBA at the University of Pretoria, Kholofelo speaks openly about how her educational journey has

strengthened her leadership capacity. Her studies and continuous learning have sharpened her strategic thinking and reinforced the importance of execution and sustainability in leadership.

THE ROAD AHEAD

Kholofelo's vision for K Village Sports Academy is far bigger than equipment distribution. She is working toward structured development programmes, mentorship pipelines and educational support for young athletes in rural communities. "I want to see young athletes from rural villages accessing scholarships, professional opportunities and becoming leaders in their communities."

FUELLED BY PURPOSE

On difficult days, Kholofelo returns to the same source of motivation: the young people she serves. "Where you come from does not define where you are going. Your background is not your limitation. Your dreams are valid. Stay focused, work hard and believe in yourself."

"WHEN A CHILD RECEIVES PROPER BOOTS, THEY STAND TALLER. THEY FEEL SEEN AND VALUED."



PUTTING MONEY IN THE
HANDS
— OF —
WOMEN

*THIS INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY, REAL
EMPOWERMENT MEANS REAL ECONOMIC POWER.*

Every year, International Women's Day is marked by powerful conversations about equality, leadership, and opportunity. Yet one truth remains clear across continents and communities: meaningful gender equality cannot exist without women's financial empowerment.

Putting money directly into the hands of women is one of the most effective ways to transform families, communities, and economies. When women control financial resources, the impact multiplies not just for themselves, but for everyone around them.

THE POWER OF ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE

Financial independence gives women choices. It gives them dignity. It gives them voice.

Around the world, women consistently reinvest a significant portion of their income back into their households supporting children's education, improving nutrition, and strengthening family wellbeing. This ripple effect makes women's economic empowerment one of the smartest and most sustainable development strategies.

When women earn, save, and invest, communities become more resilient and economies grow more inclusively.

BARRIERS STILL EXIST

Despite progress, many women particularly in developing and underserved communities still face major obstacles:

- Limited access to funding and credit
- Unequal pay and employment opportunities
- Cultural and structural barriers to asset ownership

- Lower participation in high-growth industries
- Gaps in financial literacy and investment access

These barriers are not just women's issues; they are economic issues that slow down national growth and community development.

MOVING BEYOND INCOME TO WEALTH

True empowerment goes beyond helping women earn money it must also support women to build and sustain wealth.

This includes expanding access to:

- Entrepreneurship funding
- Skills development and digital training
- Property and asset ownership
- Savings and investment platforms
- Financial education and mentorship

When women move from survival mode to wealth creation, the generational impact is profound.

WHAT MEANINGFUL SUPPORT LOOKS LIKE

Governments, corporates, financial institutions, and communities all have a role to play in accelerating women's economic participation.

Practical steps include:

- Supporting women-owned businesses
- Closing the gender pay gap
- Creating inclusive procurement opportunities
- Expanding access to capital and credit
- Investing in girls' education and STEM pathways
- Promoting financial literacy from a young age

Small, intentional shifts in policy and practice can unlock massive economic potential.

This International Women's Day, celebration must be paired with commitment. Empowerment is not only about motivation it is about access, opportunity, and ownership.

Putting money in the hands of women is not an act of charity; it is an investment in stronger economies, healthier families, and more equitable societies.

When women have financial power, they do more than change their own lives they help reshape the future for generations to come.

Because when women rise financially, everyone rises.

“WHEN WOMEN EARN, SAVE, AND INVEST, COMMUNITIES BECOME MORE RESILIENT AND ECONOMIES GROW MORE INCLUSIVELY”



DRIVEN TO SERVE,

BUILT TO LEAD

A MULTIFACETED LEADER IN MOTION

Gugulethu Khumalo is the embodiment of purpose-driven leadership. An Executive Director at Family Worship Centre and co-founder of several impactful organisations, she has built a reputation as a woman who wears many hats entrepreneur, community leader, life coach, motivational speaker, image consultant, preacher, and devoted family woman.

At the heart of her work is a deep commitment to community upliftment. She is the visionary behind the Umlazi Family Outreach Centre, a programme focused on empowering communities through skills development and improved access to essential services. She is also the founder of the thriving Umndeni Early Childhood Development Centre and serves as Coordinator of the KZN Churches Respond Initiative, which mobilises support through food parcels, counselling, awareness campaigns, care services, and advocacy.

Despite her many roles, Khumalo remains grounded in one clear mission: to make people better — holistically.

ONE MISSION, MANY HATS

While her responsibilities may appear diverse, Gugulethu sees them as interconnected expressions of the same calling. “They may look many, but they are one,” she explains. “Each role exists to improve someone’s life.” Her approach is rooted in discernment understanding what each situation requires and responding

accordingly. In the business space, she steps in as an entrepreneur focused on meeting and exceeding customer needs. Within communities, she becomes a development advocate. When individuals require personal growth and empowerment, her life coach and motivational speaker roles come to the forefront.

For Khumalo, leadership is about choosing the right hat for the right moment and continually developing the wisdom to know the difference.

A VISION BORN IN UMLAZI

At the centre of Gugulethu’s long-term vision is a bold and deeply personal goal: building a

planned centre aims to provide integrated services that will help community members especially young people turn their dreams into tangible realities through hard work, commitment, and access to opportunity.

BALANCING CALLING AND FAMILY

Like many high-impact women, Gugulethu acknowledges that balance does not come easily. One of her greatest challenges is managing the demands of her career alongside her responsibilities as a family woman.

Tight deadlines, frequent travel, workshops, and training commitments often require time

away from home. However, she has found a powerful tool for navigating this tension: clear communication. “If you communicate clearly,” she notes, “you are bound to receive support.” This principle has helped her maintain both her professional momentum and her family foundation.

ENTREPRENEUR AND COMMUNITY LEADER

GUGULETHU KHUMALO

SHARES HOW FAITH, SERVICE, AND RESILIENCE FUEL HER MISSION TO UPLIFT COMMUNITIES.

Multipurpose Community Centre in Umlazi. The dream was born from witnessing the stark realities of poverty and underdevelopment in the area. Rather than seeing limitations, she saw fertile ground for transformation. “We are more than our circumstances,” she says. “Our environment can be the very soil where change begins.” The

EXPANDING ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE

Among the services envisioned within her community initiatives is a clinic designed to deliver affordable, professional healthcare in a private and welcoming environment.

The clinic aims to provide:

- Antenatal and postnatal care
- Child health services and immunisations
- Curative services for children and adults
- On-site medication included in consultation fees

This healthcare focus is closely tied to her journey as a nurse intrapreneur a path sparked by a simple but powerful observation.

FROM SOUP KITCHEN TO HEALTH ACCESS

Gugulethu's intrapreneurial journey began with a soup kitchen serving elderly community members. Through daily conversations, she uncovered a troubling pattern: many seniors were defaulting on chronic medication.

The reasons were practical but serious:

- No nearby healthcare facilities
- Long travel distances
- Lack of transport or taxi fare
- Spending entire days waiting for treatment

Moved by this gap, she approached the Department of Health with a proposal to use her facility as a chronic medication drop-off point. She also requested mobile clinic support to serve the community periodically.

What began as listening turned into action and ultimately into systems-level impact.

PURPOSE IN COMMUNITY SERVICE

For Gugulethu, community service is more than an obligation; it is deeply fulfilling work that strengthens

both giver and receiver. Serving her neighbourhood allows her to contribute meaningfully while experiencing the quiet reward of positive impact. "It gives me a sense of accomplishment," she shares. "Even small changes, bit by bit, move us closer to greater things."

RESILIENCE THROUGH CRISIS

Her work proved especially critical during times of national crisis.

the COVID-19 pandemic, when many operations came to a standstill, Khumalo and her partners continued distributing food parcels to vulnerable families. Their teams were recognised as essential workers, enabling them to maintain support when it was needed most.

Following the unrest and looting period in South Africa, her persistence in stakeholder engagement paid off. Organisations she had previously approached reopened doors and extended sponsorship support.

One notable milestone came when she received a call from CEO Alef Meulenberg informing her that she had been selected for inclusion in the book *The Overcomers ~ Stories and Lessons from Entrepreneurs of a Resilient Nation*, recognition of her impact and resilience.

ADVICE TO WOMEN CHASING THEIR DREAMS

To women struggling to pursue their passions, Gugulethu offers grounded, hard-earned wisdom. Focus and determination, she says, are non-negotiable. But the true differentiator is resilience. "Your journey will

include hardships, disappointments, betrayals, and delays," she cautions. "Resilience increases your capacity to recover and keep moving."

Her guidance to emerging entrepreneurs is clear:

- Know who you are and what you believe
- Stay anchored in your vision
- Do not compare your journey to others
- Seek counsel and keep learning
- Take each step without unnecessary pressure
- And above all, never give up

Because, as she powerfully reminds us, the reward often wipes away the tears.

REFLECTION

In a world that often demands specialization, Gugulethu Khumalo is proof that purpose can successfully wear many hats. Through faith, service, and unwavering resilience, she continues to build pathways of hope one community, one family, and one life at a time.

"EACH ROLE EXISTS TO IMPROVE SOMEONE'S LIFE."



GIVING LIGHT **IN ACTION**

**HOW LIHLE SHONGWE AND
NKOSINGIPHILE KHANYILE**
TURNED A UNIVERSITY REUNION INTO A GROWING MOVEMENT
OF FAITH, SERVICE AND COMMUNITY IMPACT.

A FULL-CIRCLE BEGINNING

The story of Giving Light Organization (GLO) is one of divine timing, shared purpose and an unexpected reunion. At the heart of this inspiring movement are two visionary women, Lihle Shongwe and Nkosingiphile Khanyile.

Their journey began in 2012 at the University of Zululand. Lihle, originally from Durban, was completing her final year, while Nkosingiphile, from Newcastle, had just started her first year. At the time, the only connection they recognised was their shared love for tennis on the university courts. After Lihle graduated, life moved forward and neither imagined their paths would cross again.

But purpose has a way of reconnecting the right people.

In 2019, the two women reunited this time not through sport, but through a shared passion for effective communication and empowering others to become confident, well-rounded speakers. Their aligned vision gave birth to SYT Academy, a structured platform focused on voice projection, confidence development and train-of-thought mastery for adults, teenagers and children.

From the academy emerged another initiative, the Thought-Provoking Conversations Podcast, a monthly panel discussion designed to create safe spaces for honest dialogue and personal growth. Yet even as these platforms grew, a deeper calling was quietly forming.

THE VOICE NOTE THAT SPARKED A MOVEMENT

In 2023, both women independently felt a strong conviction to serve their communities in a more tangible way. Without consulting each other, they were wrestling with the same thought it was time to give back beyond words and workshops.

As Lihle gathered the courage to express what she believed God had placed on her heart, Nkosingiphile sent a simple voice note suggesting they meet to discuss starting something that would directly serve communities.

That voice note became the seed of Giving Light Organization.

Interestingly, the organisation was initially meant to be called Giving Life Organization. However, Nkosingiphile repeatedly and unintentionally referred to it as Giving Light Organization. Instead of correcting it, both women discerned deeper meaning in the name and embraced it. Light, after all, symbolises hope, guidance and warmth exactly what they intended to bring into underserved communities.

From there, the vision moved swiftly. Together they conceptualised the logo and brand identity, refined budgets and mobilised support from their networks. In December 2023, they successfully launched their first project: Feed a Homeless Friend.

FROM SANDWICHES TO STRUCTURED IMPACT

What began with simple peanut butter and jam sandwiches quickly evolved into something far more intentional. Through Project Feed a Homeless Friend, GLO distributed basic meals

to vulnerable individuals living on the streets a small but powerful act that ignited a broader vision.

Determined not to become a once-off charity effort, the founders intentionally structured GLO around quarterly outreach programmes to ensure sustained, measurable impact. They firmly believe that consistency, not occasional generosity, creates real transformation.

Today, GLO executes four major annual outreach projects:

PROJECT NYAKALLO (MARCH/APRIL):

Visits to orphanages with donations of food, toys and clothing, including support to Othandweni Children's Home in Soweto and Bula Mahlo in Tembisa.

PROJECT FUDUMALA (JUNE/JULY):

A winter blanket drive restoring warmth and dignity to vulnerable communities.

PROJECT IZINKANYEZI:

Outreach to homes supporting children and adults living with disabilities, including Kanguru Institute.

PROJECT FEED A HOMELESS FRIEND (DECEMBER):

The founding initiative providing warm meals to homeless communities. Since December 2023, the co-founders have successfully executed eight impactful outreach projects, steadily expanding their footprint across Tembisa, Katlehong, Soweto and the Johannesburg CBD.

ROOTED IN FAITH AND UBUNTU

At its core, Giving Light Organization is grounded in faith, Ubuntu and compassion. Lihle and Nkosingiphile describe their mission as becoming the physical hands of God's grace in communities that need it most.

For them, service goes beyond meeting physical needs it is about restoring dignity, hope and human connection.

Their faith is evident in the organisation's transparency, gratitude and intentional care in every project. Donors and supporters receive detailed feedback, strengthening trust and demonstrating measurable impact. GLO also serves as a bridge for busy professionals and everyday South Africans who want to give back but may not always have the time to be physically present.

PARTNERSHIP AT THE HEART OF THE WORK

One of GLO's greatest strengths is the powerful partnership between its co-founders. Lihle and Nkosingiphile attribute much of their progress to their alignment of purpose and deep mutual respect.

Their leadership style is collaborative rather than competitive. When challenges arise whether logistical, emotional or financial they face them together.

They openly acknowledge that the work can be emotionally heavy. Serving communities facing deep need can take a personal toll. However, they guard against burnout through prayer, honest communication and leaning on one another.

Their partnership is anchored in shared faith, transparency and a collective commitment to the vision.

GROWTH WITH INTENTION

In a relatively short period, GLO's growth has exceeded even the founders' expectations. The increasing support and successful project execution have affirmed that the vision is bigger than either of them.

as the organisation expands, they remain intentional about protecting its founding values:

- Authenticity
- Transparency
- Faith-led service
- Dignity-centred impact

For GLO, sustainable impact goes beyond donations. The long-term vision includes mentorship programmes, grocery relief, school outreach and community support systems that address the root causes of vulnerability.

Through partnerships with organisations such as Gidimani Collective, Tshambuluta Foundation and Changing Lives Charity, GLO continues to extend its reach and amplify its impact.

EMPOWERING A GENERATION OF GIVERS

Lihle and Nkosingiphile strongly believe that young professionals have a critical role to play in community development today. They challenge the common mindset that giving must wait until one is wealthy or fully established.

Instead, they advocate for generosity as a lifestyle.

To aspiring changemakers who feel called but hesitant, their message is simple and powerful: start small, but start.

The size of the first act does not determine the magnitude of its impact. What matters most is obedience to purpose and consistency in action.

They are passionate about shifting the narrative so that giving is not seen as a once-off December activity, but as a continuous posture of the heart.

VISION AND LEGACY

Looking ahead, the founders envision Giving Light Organization growing into a continent-wide movement, with local representatives across multiple provinces and new initiatives rooted in sustainable empowerment.

Their ultimate legacy is not measured only by blankets distributed or meals served. It is about cultivating a culture where compassion becomes contagious where light passes from one heart to another and generosity becomes embedded in everyday living.

Together, Lihle Shongwe and Nkosingiphile Khanyile are not simply building an organisation. They are building a legacy. And with every sandwich prepared, every blanket distributed and every prayer whispered over a life in need they continue to give light.



LEADING WITH **PURPOSE**

THE POWER OF **SOULFUL COMMUNICATION**

How Nadia Hearn is redefining communication, elevating women's voices, and building brands that connect from the inside out.

THE PURPOSE-DRIVEN COMMUNICATOR

Nadia Hearn has always been fascinated by the power of a story, how one message, shared at the right moment, can shift perception, open doors, and even change the trajectory of a community. She entered PR because she saw how communication could extend far beyond publicity; it could build trust, shape identity, and give people and organizations a voice. Over the past two and a half decades, her journey has evolved from traditional PR into something far deeper: purpose driven communication.

Having worked with global brands, grassroots, NGOs, and purpose-led entrepreneurs, she has found a common thread; people want to feel something real. Today, her work is about helping these leaders communicate from the soul of their brand to build a real emotional connection with the people they want to help and build a relationship to serve.

The Soul Brand Map™ was born out of frustration, both hers and her clients'. Too many organizations were trying to communicate without truly understanding who they were. They had logos, taglines, and campaigns, but no emotional anchors to base the core brand relationships on.

The framework helps personal brands, entrepreneurs with small businesses and NGOs to reconnect with the why behind their work and to connect it with their ideal audience. At its core is one central truth: when you know the problem you solve, your communications become clear and can connect with the intended audience.

It is a framework that blends psychology, storytelling, and strategic clarity. It helps brands articulate their purpose, define the community they serve, and express the change they create in a way that feels human, not corporate.

In her experience, the biggest communication challenge organizations face today is noise; everyone is talking, posting, publishing, but very few are connecting.

Businesses struggle because they communicate from pressure, not purpose. They chase visibility instead of clear meaningful connections that build valuable relationships with the audiences that really speak to their needs. The result is content strategies that fill space but don't move hearts.

The real challenge is slowing down long enough to ask: What do we want people to feel when they encounter our brand? That is what they will remember, how they felt. For Nadia, purpose is the emotional reason you exist. It's the human problem you're trying to solve, not the product or service you sell. In a career, purpose is the thread that ties your gifts to the impact you want to make. In a brand, it's the promise you make to the world about who you are and what you stand for. The purpose is not slogan. It's an authentic compass. For a career it's about finding your talents and aligning them to using that to serve.

IMPACTFUL CAMPAIGNS & COMMUNITY SERVICE

The better. bellville. Together. campaign stands as a powerful example of purpose-driven placemaking. It is a placemaking initiative by The Greater Tygerberg Partnership funded by CoCT, a campaign rooted in community pride and possibility.

The goal was simple but powerful: "To shift the narrative of Bellville from negative and decayed to renewed and full of potential."

Through bringing together messages for businesses, community influencers and local organizations to cocreate urban renewal through placemaking projects, the campaign sparked new partnerships, increased civic engagement, and helped reposition Bellville as a place worth investing in, emotionally and economically.

Reflecting on the experience, she shares that it reminded her that "when people feel seen, understand their role in change, they feel and think and show up differently."

Her involvement in ACT4IMPACT, an initiative by Rotary District 9350, further demonstrated how communication can serve as a catalyst for empowerment.

"ACT4IMPACT was a beautiful example of what happens when communication becomes a catalyst." Her role was to help Rotary articulate the heart of the initiative — to show communities that they weren't just beneficiaries, but active partners in change, showcasing the stories of impactful change.

By giving the campaign, a clear narrative and a strong emotional identity, volunteers, donors, and community members were able to see themselves as part of something bigger. "Joining hands with Rotary creates larger waves of change. While providing a sense of belonging is empowerment."

When measuring the impact of campaigns designed to serve social purpose beyond commercial success, she looks for three key indicators.

“Behavioral change: Did people think differently because of the campaign? Changing perceptions will change actions.”

“Emotional resonance: Did the message shift how people felt about themselves, the challenge, need or their community?”

“Sustainable momentum: Did the campaign spark something that continued after the media faded?”

For her, “Purpose driven impact is measured in hearts, connections made and thoughts moved, not just numbers reported.”

supporting NGOs and social initiatives, she believes PR should serve as a bridge. “PR should be a bridge, connecting stories of need with stories of hope. Showing solutions for social problems.”

She notes that NGOs often do extraordinary work but lack the language to express it. Communications help them translate impact into visibility, visibility into trust, and trust into support. Ultimately, “NGOs don’t need louder voices; they need clearer ones.”

EMPOWERING WOMEN & LEADERSHIP

For her, Women’s Month is both deeply personal and profoundly professional. It is a reminder of how far women have come and how much further they can still go. On a personal level, it represents resilience, the quiet, everyday courage women show in homes, workplaces, and communities. Women are inherent change makers, shaping families, industries, and societies in ways that are often unseen but deeply impactful.



Professionally, she sees Women’s Month as a call to action. Women’s voices remain underrepresented in business and leadership, media, and decision-making spaces. As communicators, she believes there is a responsibility to shift that narrative and create platforms where women are heard, valued, and recognized.

As a mentor, she works with women who lead their businesses, serve clients, and operate at C-level professionally. Her guidance begins with helping women reconnect with their true essence. Through coaching, mentoring, and her courses, she supports those navigating massive change and personal or professional challenges. Many women believe they need to become louder, tougher, or more “corporate” to lead effectively. Her

teaching challenges that belief. The power she emphasizes is already within them.

The work focuses on clarity of purpose, confidence in voice, and the courage to take up space. It is about giving women permission to create unapologetically and to design solutions with purpose, solutions that connect deeply to how they want to help and serve others. This empowerment extends beyond nonprofit spaces. It includes the freedom to become financially independent, even a six-figure earner, while building meaningful and impactful work.

Within the industry, she has seen women underestimated, interrupted, and expected to prove themselves twice as hard. Overcoming these

challenges, in her view, requires a threefold approach: representation, mentorship, and narrative ownership. Women need to see other women leading, and actively support them without jealousy, creating space for collective growth. Mentorship is equally critical. Guidance changes trajectories and sharing failures is just as important as sharing success. Women often feel pressure to appear perfect, yet leadership is rarely neat or linear. It is messy, filled with struggle and growth, and sharing those realities helps others move forward with courage.

Narrative ownership is perhaps the most powerful shift. Letting go of the “less than” or “not enough” mentality allows women to reclaim their authority. When women control their own stories, they control their own power, and they can use those stories for good.

At the heart of it all is storytelling. Storytelling is freedom. When someone’s story is told with dignity and truth, it validates their experience and expands their influence. Communication gives people the language to express their worth, and once they have that language, they cannot be silenced.

STRATEGY, CREATIVITY & PURPOSE

In her view, creativity, strategy, and purpose each play a distinct but interconnected role in building an emotionally resonant brand.

Creativity is the spark to illustrate, in different ways, the plan to the correct people. It brings expression and energy to the message. Strategy is the structure and ensures that there is a clear map, knowing where you are and where you want to be.

is the soul, the correct connection, and path between where you are and where you want to go. When all three align, a brand becomes unforgettable because it establishes lasting relationships and perceptions of how others feel and think, long term.

it comes to a standout brand story, the most important element is honesty. People can feel when a story is manufactured. A standout brand story is rooted in truth, the messy, human, imperfect truth that makes a brand relatable.

Finding real connections in what humans and businesses think, feel, and experience makes it real, not polished to fit fake needs or pain points. Understanding the audience supports positioning the correct story of match and narrative.

Balancing authenticity with strategic messaging is not about choosing between the two. Authenticity is the message, and strategy is how you deliver it. Brands integrate with them. Strategy ensures your truth reaches the right people, in the right way, for the right reason. It considers many elements: the brand itself, its reason for being, its personality, its solution, how that solution aligns with its ideal audience, and how and where those audiences need to receive the message.

SMEs wanting to improve brand credibility without large budgets, the starting point is clarity of purpose. Communicate consistently. Show your impact, don’t just claim it. Build relationships, not audiences. Use storytelling as your currency.

Credibility is earned through alignment, not advertising spending. And if there is one thing to prioritise, it is consistency.

REFLECTION & INSPIRATION

Looking back at her career, one lesson stands above the rest: lead from your values, not your fears. When anchored in purpose, decisions are made that build lasting change, not just temporary momentum.

At her core is a simple but powerful question. How can she use what she knows, has experienced, and has learned to help others? She is dedicated to supporting others to do the same, guiding them to align what they carry within themselves with the impact they want to create.

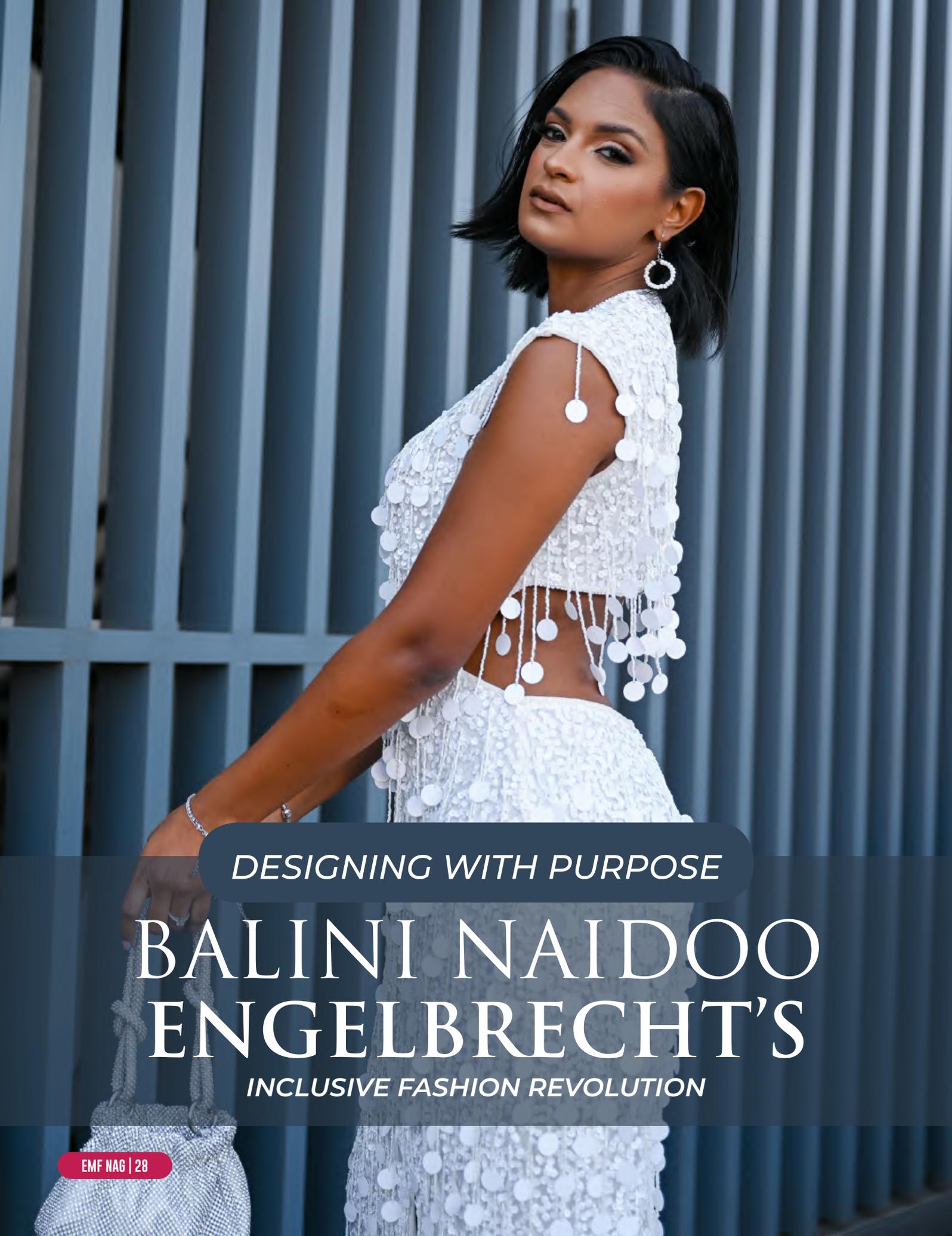
As Women’s Month is celebrated, her message to young women who aspire to lead with purpose and impact is both affirming and direct. Your voice is your power. Your story is your strength. And your purpose is to make your map to your true destiny.

Young women do not need permission to lead; they only need the courage to begin.

believes the world does not simply need more women in leadership. It needs more women leading as themselves, in ways that make it easier for other women to follow.

For those ready to take the first step, she offers a free exploration session via email at purpose@get-published.co.za

“WHEN PEOPLE FEEL SEEN, UNDERSTAND THEIR ROLE IN CHANGE, THEY FEEL AND THINK AND SHOW UP DIFFERENTLY.”



DESIGNING WITH PURPOSE

BALINI NAIDOO ENGELBRECHT'S

INCLUSIVE FASHION REVOLUTION

HOW BRAILLE- INTEGRATED CLOTHING

*IS RESTORING DIGNITY, INDEPENDENCE AND
ACCESS IN AFRICAN FASHION.*

FASHION BEYOND SIGHT

For Balini Naidoo Engelbrecht, fashion has never been only about what we see it is about what we feel, experience and own with confidence. Her pioneering work in Braille-integrated clothing is reshaping how the industry understands accessibility and inclusion.

Her inspiration was born from a deep desire to create fashion that speaks to everyone emotionally, physically and practically. Through meaningful engagement with visually impaired individuals, she recognised how heavily the fashion world depends on sight, often excluding those who navigate life differently.

“That disconnect moved me deeply,” she explains. “I wanted to bridge that gap by creating garments that allow visually impaired individuals to experience clothing independently.”

strong roots in community work further sharpened her purpose: to design with intention, not just aesthetics.

THE BRAILLE IDENTIFICATION SYSTEM

At the heart of Balini’s innovation is her Braille Identification System a subtle yet powerful feature embedded directly into garments.

The system allows wearers to identify colours, sizes and, in some designs, inspirational messaging through touch. Carefully integrated into the clothing, it remains discreet while delivering life-changing functionality.

Why does it matter? Because it restores dignity. For visually impaired individuals, everyday tasks like choosing an outfit can require assistance. Balini’s designs remove that dependency, transforming clothing from a purely visual experience into a tactile one. “Independence means confidence,” she says. “It means getting dressed knowing exactly what you are wearing.”

RETHINKING FASHION AS A MULTI-SENSORY EXPERIENCE

In an industry dominated by visual appeal, Balini is intentionally redefining fashion as multi-sensory. Her design process prioritises:

- Texture
- Fabric weight
- Stitching detail
- Strategic placement
- Tactile accessibility

For her, true inclusivity means designing for autonomy ensuring that beauty and function coexist seamlessly.

When thoughtfully executed, she believes, inclusive design enhances style rather than compromising it.

BREAKING GROUND WITHOUT A BLUEPRINT

Innovation rarely comes without resistance. One of Balini’s greatest challenges was developing a concept that had little local precedent.

“There was no blueprint,” she reflects.



She had to experiment extensively to ensure the Braille elements were:

- Durable
- Comfortable
- Stylish
- Wash-resistant

Beyond the technical hurdles, market education proved equally demanding. Many stakeholders initially struggled to understand that inclusive design is not a niche concept it is a universal improvement. Her persistence, however, continues to shift mindsets.

COMMUNITY AT THE CORE

Collaboration has been central to refining her work. Partnering with organisations such as the KwaZulu-Natal Blind and Deaf Society ensured her designs were informed by lived experience rather than assumption.

“Their feedback shaped everything placement, sizing and practicality,” she notes. This community-led approach has become a defining pillar of the Balini brand, keeping it grounded in real needs rather than abstract ideals.

Her commitment to empowerment extends beyond fashion. Through sewing and art classes in her local community, she actively transfers skills that create income opportunities and restore dignity through creativity. For Balini, empowerment must be sustainable.

RECOGNITION AND ENTREPRENEURIAL GROWTH

Balini’s work has gained national recognition, including showcases at Design Indaba and accolades from the Woolworths Youth Makers programme. These platforms significantly expanded her visibility and validated the importance of socially conscious fashion in mainstream spaces.

Yet the entrepreneurial journey has not been without obstacles. Funding constraints, scaling production and balancing purpose with profitability remain ongoing challenges.

Her strategy for overcoming them is clear: stay adaptable and remain anchored in the mission. “When your ‘why’ is strong,” she says, “it becomes easier to navigate obstacles.”

LESSONS FROM THE PANDEMIC

Like many entrepreneurs, Balini faced a major turning point during the pandemic. The disruption forced her to pivot operations, reassess production strategies and deepen her community focus.

The experience reinforced three key lessons:

- Flexibility is essential
- Diversified income streams matter
- Purpose-driven businesses are more resilient

It was a season that tested and ultimately strengthened her business foundation.

CREATIVITY AS A TOOL FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Balini firmly believes that creativity is one of the most powerful tools for solving real-world problems. “Design is not just decoration,” she says. “It is a tool for change.”

Through her work, she demonstrates how fashion can challenge exclusionary systems and reimagine accessibility in practical ways. One of her most meaningful moments came when a visually impaired individual independently identified their garment using the Braille system. “That quiet smile,” she recalls, “confirmed that this work matters beyond fashion.”

A MESSAGE TO EMERGING WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

To young women entering the social enterprise space, Balini offers grounded advice:

- Start with purpose
- Solve a real problem
- Don’t wait for perfect conditions
- Trust that your voice matters

Impact-driven businesses, she notes, may take longer to scale but they create deeper, lasting change.

VISION FORWARD: INCLUSIVE FASHION FOR AFRICA

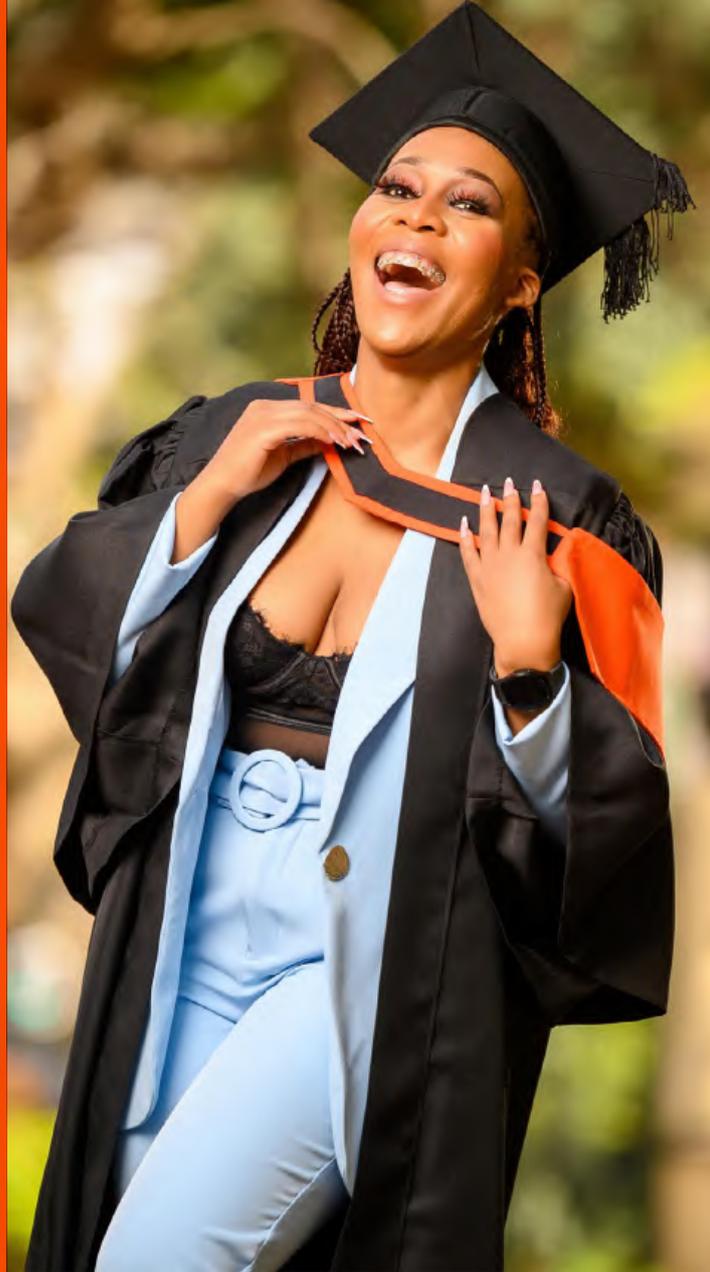
As the continent’s fashion industry continues to evolve, Balini envisions a future where inclusive design is no longer niche but standard practice. “Africa is rich in creativity and innovation,” she says. “Accessibility must be embedded from the beginning.”

For her, women’s empowerment is both personal and professional creating spaces where women can lead, earn and innovate without limitation while balancing the many roles they carry. Through every stitch, texture and tactile detail, Balini Naidoo Engelbrecht is not just designing garments. She is designing dignity. And in doing so, she is helping shape a more inclusive future for African fashion.

FROM COMPASSION TO ACTION

THE JOURNEY OF THE RADIANT
FUTURES FOUNDATION

*HOW ONE YOUNG
WOMAN TURNED
EMPATHY INTO A
MOVEMENT*



For Percilla Poho, community development did not begin with a strategy document or a formal organisation. It began with a simple but painful observation during her high school years.

She noticed that several young girls were unable to attend their matric dance because their families could not afford dresses, shoes or beauty services. What should have been a moment of celebration marking the end of a significant chapter in their lives became a reminder of inequality.

To Percilla, the matric dance symbolised more than a glamorous evening. It represented years of hard work, growth, perseverance and the transition into adulthood. She believed that every young person deserved to celebrate that milestone with dignity, regardless of their financial background.

That conviction would eventually lead her to establish the Donate A Dress Foundation in 2019, a youth-led initiative dedicated to ensuring that no learner misses this important moment due to financial constraints.

TURNING PASSION INTO PURPOSE

Fashion had always been one of Percilla's greatest passions. Her original dream was to study Fashion Design and create beautiful gowns for young girls from disadvantaged backgrounds. Although personal circumstances prevented her from completing her qualification, she refused to allow that setback to define her journey. Instead, she reimagined her dream.

Rather than designing new dresses, she began collecting gently used gowns, heels and accessories from

women who had already attended their own formal events. Her goal was not only to provide dresses, but also to create a complete experience for the beneficiaries. Percilla raised funds to cover professional hair and makeup services, ensuring that the girls felt confident, celebrated and valued on one of the most memorable nights of their school careers. “My vision was simple,” she explains. “I wanted to remove the financial barriers and restore dignity, confidence and joy.”

Her desire to serve others, however, was rooted even deeper than this initiative. It came from the values instilled in her by her grandmother, who taught her a simple principle: if you have something that someone else does not have, you should give without hesitation. Those words became the foundation of Percilla’s life’s work.

STARTING WITH ALMOST NOTHING

The early days of the foundation were far from easy. Percilla began the initiative with no funding, no team and no formal partnerships. She managed nearly every aspect of the organisation herself from collecting dresses and coordinating beneficiaries to fundraising and logistics with the support of her mother.

Convincing people to trust a brand-new initiative was a challenge. But Percilla remained consistent and transparent about her mission. Through social media, she began sharing the journey openly, allowing people to see the real impact their donations could create. Although naturally shy, she pushed herself to step forward, ask for support and advocate for the cause she believed in. Over time, as people witnessed the transformation in the lives of the beneficiaries, support began to grow.

A MOMENT THAT CHANGED EVERYTHING

One of the most memorable stories from Percilla’s journey involved a young girl from Katlehong, Gauteng. Months before her matric dance, the girl’s sister reached out to Percilla explaining their difficult living circumstances and asking for assistance. Despite being in Pretoria at the time for aviation training, Percilla committed to helping and coordinated the preparations from a distance.

The process was filled with last-minute challenges. The dress initially did not fit and needed to be replaced. Finding a makeup artist in the area proved difficult, and logistics had to be managed across multiple provinces. With the support of her mother, her team and friends from aviation school, solutions were found. A new dress was couriered, a makeup artist was secured and the necessary arrangements were made just in time. In the end, the young girl attended her matric dance like any other learner. “For me it was never just about the dress,” Percilla says. “It was about keeping a promise and showing someone that they matter.”

EXPANDING THE VISION

As the initiative grew, Percilla realised that the needs within communities extended far beyond formal events. The organisation gradually evolved into a broader community development platform. This transformation led to the rebranding of the organisation as the Radiant Futures Foundation, reflecting its expanded mission of youth empowerment and community support.

Today, the foundation works across several impact areas including youth development, gender-based

violence awareness, food security, and personal wellbeing. The organisation also runs school drives, mentorship initiatives and awareness campaigns addressing social challenges such as bullying, substance abuse and teenage pregnancy. Since 2021, Radiant Futures Foundation has actively addressed period poverty by distributing sanitary products and comfort bags to schools and shelters. Percilla believes that no girl should miss school simply because she cannot afford sanitary products. “Access to dignity should never be a privilege,” she says.

BUILDING IMPACT THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS

Over the years, Radiant Futures Foundation has developed partnerships with various stakeholders to strengthen its impact. The organisation has collaborated with the Department of Social Development in the Lejweleputswa District and has received support from companies such as Virgin Active for initiatives including anti-bullying workshops and menstrual health awareness programmes.

The foundation has also organised clothing drives, soup kitchen events and youth development programmes within local communities. Through these initiatives, the organisation continues to respond to the real needs of vulnerable individuals and families.

LEADERSHIP ROOTED IN SERVICE

Despite holding the title of Founder and CEO, Percilla does not view herself as a traditional leader. She believes leadership is about collaboration, trust and empowering others to take ownership of change. Within the foundation, team members are encouraged to

contribute ideas, participate in decision-making and take initiative in driving programmes forward. “You cannot build a strong organisation alone,” she explains. “Real impact happens when people work together.”

Youth participation is central to the foundation’s work. Young people are not only beneficiaries of the programmes but active contributors through volunteering, event coordination and community outreach. By involving young people in meaningful ways, the organisation nurtures leadership skills, confidence and a sense of responsibility for community development.

A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

For Percilla, community service is not simply a project it is a calling. She remains motivated by her deep passion for helping others and by the belief that real change begins with small acts of compassion that grow into collective action. When reflecting on the legacy she hopes to leave behind, Percilla speaks with humility. She does not wish to be remembered for titles or recognition, but for a life dedicated to service and meaningful impact. Her vision is to create a world where young people are not limited by their circumstances and where more youth believe in their ability to shape their own futures. “I want to be remembered as someone who used what she had to make a difference,” she says. “And if my journey inspires even one young person to start something that helps others, then it will all have been worth it.”





Zabele Hlabisa

*EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES THROUGH
BEAUTY, PHILANTHROPY AND ENVIRONMENTAL
STEWARDSHIP*

Zabelo Hlabisa was never just a beauty queen. From the moment she first stepped onto a stage, she understood that her purpose extended far beyond wearing a crown. For her, beauty was never simply about appearance — it was about influence, responsibility and the power to uplift others. Today, she stands as a force of nature, seamlessly blending beauty, philanthropy and environmental advocacy to empower communities and build a legacy that will endure for generations.

A CHILDHOOD SHAPED BY PURPOSE

Growing up in the lush landscapes of Mpumalanga, Zabelo's early life was filled with adventure. From girl guides and sports to an ever-present curiosity about the world, she was always eager to explore her potential. Yet it was an unexpected moment at the age of 10 that would shift the trajectory of her life.

A teacher recognised something special in her and took her under their wing, offering stability, mentorship and the encouragement she needed to dream bigger. That support led to a move to Newcastle — a transition that exposed her to new opportunities and introduced her to the world of modelling and pageantry.

At first, she questioned whether she truly belonged in that space. But the moment she stepped onto the stage, everything changed. She realised that beauty was not about aesthetics alone; it was about self-expression, confidence and using one's voice to create impact. With that revelation, Zabelo committed herself to a path that would not only redefine her future but also positively influence countless others.

BORN 2 MODEL ACADEMY: A PLATFORM FOR EMPOWERMENT

Understanding firsthand how a single opportunity can transform a young girl's life, Zabelo founded Born 2 Model Academy. The academy was created as a platform to instil confidence, discipline and self-worth in aspiring young women.

This initiative was never limited to teaching modelling techniques. Instead, it focused on equipping young women with the tools to walk into any room with poise and self-assurance, fully aware that their value extends far beyond their physical beauty.

THE BEAUTY QUEEN TAKING UP SPACE AND CEMENTING HER LEGACY

Under her guidance, many young women have graced both national and international runways, proving that beauty and intelligence are not mutually exclusive. Zabelo emphasises that true confidence is cultivated, not inherited — and that a model's most powerful accessory is purpose.

BALANCING ACADEMICS, PHILANTHROPY AND LEADERSHIP

Despite her growing list of commitments, Zabelo has remained steadfast in her academic pursuits. Mastering the art of time management, she has ensured that her

philanthropic efforts complement her education rather than compete with it.

Her journey stands as a testament to the belief that passion and discipline can coexist. Success, she believes, is not about choosing one path over another but about weaving multiple passions into a meaningful and impactful life.

MISS EARTH SOUTH AFRICA 2023: A CROWN WITH A CAUSE

When Zabelo won the title of Miss Earth South Africa 2023, the crown symbolised far more than personal achievement. It represented responsibility. She embraced her platform to amplify conversations around environmental sustainability and social responsibility.

Through her initiative, "It Starts with Me, Then You," she encourages individuals to take ownership of their environmental footprint. The message is clear: meaningful change begins with personal accountability.

She also spearheaded "Earthy Blossoming Smiles," a heartwarming project that repurposes flowers to brighten the days of hospital patients. The initiative serves as a reminder that beauty is not merely something we admire — it is something we create through acts of kindness.

LEADERSHIP ON A NATIONAL AND GLOBAL SCALE

Zabelo's leadership extends beyond pageantry. As National Director of the National Kids Festival, she transformed the event into a movement that unites communities and inspires children to dream boldly.

The journey has not been without its challenges. However, through resilience and unwavering determination, she has established the festival as a cornerstone for youth engagement and development.

Her influence also transcends borders. As a World Peace Ambassador, Zabelo uses her social media platforms to promote cultural understanding, global unity and empowerment — ensuring her message reaches audiences far and wide.

A LEGACY THAT TRANSCENDS BEAUTY

Zabelo Hlabisa's story is one of resilience, passion and purpose. She is more than a titleholder — she is a changemaker committed to creating spaces where young women feel seen, heard and empowered.

Her legacy is not defined by the crowns she has worn but by the lives she has touched. Through Born 2 Model Academy, her environmental initiatives and her global advocacy, she continues to demonstrate that beauty, when aligned with purpose, becomes a powerful force for transformation.

As she continues to rise, she carries with her the hopes and dreams of the many young women she has inspired — ensuring that her impact will be felt not only today but for generations to come.





GUIDING AFRICA'S NEXT GENERATION OF SCIENTISTS

DR BONITA DE SWARDT

Across the African continent, the future of science is being shaped not only by groundbreaking discoveries, but by the people who create pathways for others to enter the field. Among those leading this movement is Dr Bonita de Swardt, a scientist, mentor, and advocate for human capital development whose work is helping to nurture Africa's next generation of innovators.

Through her leadership in strategic partnerships and science capacity development, Dr de Swardt is ensuring that young African scientists particularly women and students from historically disadvantaged communities have the opportunity to participate in global research and technological advancement.

Her work reflects a powerful belief: that Africa's scientific future will not be determined by infrastructure alone, but by the talent, confidence, and opportunities given to its people.

THE JOURNEY INTO SCIENCE

Growing up in a marginalized community in Cape Town, Dr Bonita de Swardt had limited exposure to science and mathematics. Opportunities and role models in her environment were scarce. Yet curiosity was deeply embedded in her family. From an early age, she and her brother were fascinated by the natural world. Her brother developed a keen interest in astronomy, and despite limited financial resources, their parents

saved to buy a second-hand telescope and astronomy magazines to nurture their children's curiosity. Those simple resources became powerful tools of discovery. Using the astronomy magazines, Dr de Swardt began building models of planets in the solar system for her high school physics projects. Physics quickly became her favourite subject, and she soon realised that she wanted to pursue a career in science.

Initially, she considered becoming a medical physicist, hoping to combine her love for physics with a desire to help others. However, after completing her Bachelor of Science Honours degree, she was awarded a Master's scholarship in Cosmology. The opportunity reignited her passion for astronomy and set her on the path to a career that would eventually extend beyond research into mentorship and scientific leadership.

DR BONITA DE SWARDT ON MENTORSHIP, INNOVATION, AND EMPOWERING WOMEN IN STEM

While completing her PhD and postdoctoral research, Dr de Swardt became involved in mentoring young girls in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and supporting the coordination of South Africa's National Astrophysics and Space Science Programme (NASSP).

This experience changed her perspective on what her career could achieve. She realised that her greatest impact might not lie solely in her own research, but in developing the next generation of African scientists. Supporting young talent, particularly those who might otherwise never have considered careers in science, became a central part of her mission.

LEADERSHIP IN HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT

Today, Dr de Swardt serves as Programme Manager for Strategic Partnerships at the South African Radio Astronomy Observatory (SARAO), where she focuses on building the human capacity required to support world-class scientific infrastructure such as the Square Kilometre Array (SKA). For her, human capital development means far more than training individuals. It involves building sustainable ecosystems of skills, opportunity, and leadership that enable Africa to participate fully in global science and innovation. Large-scale scientific projects like the SKA require expertise in radio astronomy, engineering, and data science. But equally important is ensuring that African scientists are

part of that growth. Creating pathways from undergraduate studies to postgraduate research, and from internships to industry leadership, allows young Africans to meaningfully contribute to global scientific discovery. Dr de Swardt emphasizes that the digital and data skills developed through astronomy are highly transferable. These capabilities extend far beyond space science and can be applied in sectors such as health-care, climate science, finance, and entrepreneurship. "Human capital development," she explains, "is about ensuring that Africa has the knowledge, confidence, and networks to lead in science and innovation not just participate." Her leadership philosophy is simple yet powerful: plant seeds, not just pick fruit. Investing in people, mentorship, and systems often takes years before results are visible. But when those seeds grow, they transform institutions, industries, and communities.

BUILDING CONFIDENCE IN YOUNG SCIENTISTS

One of the most rewarding aspects of Dr de Swardt's work is witnessing the transformation in young scientists who once doubted their place in STEM. She often sees students who initially question their abilities grow into confident researchers, collaborators, and leaders.

Many former participants in her programmes now work across academia, industry, and international research networks. Some return as mentors themselves, continuing the cycle of empowerment. For Dr de Swardt, these moments confirm that science is not just about knowledge or discovery it is also about belonging and possibility. When young scientists begin to see themselves as contributors to global research, the impact extends far beyond the laboratory.

WOMEN IN STEM: BREAKING SYSTEMIC BARRIERS

Despite progress over the years, women remain underrepresented in many STEM fields. According to Dr de Swardt, the barriers are often systemic rather than individual. From unequal access to early science education to limited mentorship opportunities and professional networks, many women face challenges long before they reach leadership positions. In addition, caregiving responsibilities and subtle institutional biases can further limit career progression. Addressing these challenges requires intentional structural change.

Gender-responsive policies, transparent career pathways, mentorship programmes, and data-driven accountability are critical to ensuring equitable participation.

Equally important is representation. Young girls need to see women leading research teams, presenting at international conferences, and shaping global scientific conversations.

When women see themselves reflected in these spaces, the possibility of belonging becomes real.

DESIGNING INCLUSIVE PROGRAMMES

Dr de Swardt points to the Big Data Africa Programme as a powerful example of how intentional design can drive inclusion. The programme has trained more than 550 students in artificial intelligence and data science, with women making up approximately 60 percent of participants in recent years. This outcome was not accidental. Equity was built into every stage of the programme from outreach to women's science networks, to transparent selection criteria, diverse mentorship teams, and collaborative learning environments that encouraged participation rather than competition. By closely tracking participation and

outcomes, the programme continually adapts its strategies to ensure meaningful inclusion. The results demonstrate how intentional leadership can transform access to opportunity.

INNOVATION, DATA AND SOCIAL IMPACT

The impact of Dr de Swardt's work extends beyond academia.

Graduates of the Big Data Africa Programme now contribute across sectors including finance, healthcare, telecommunications, agriculture, and environmental science.

Many alumni are applying their skills to solve pressing African challenges from climate resilience to digital infrastructure development. Initiatives such as the Open Data for Social Impact Challenge encourage students to apply scientific knowledge to real-world problems like service delivery, environmental monitoring, and public health. For Dr de Swardt, science must remain connected to society. "Scientific innovation cannot exist in isolation," she explains. "It must create meaningful impact within communities." Astronomy and data science, though often perceived as abstract fields, involve analyzing complex data and extracting insights. The techniques used to study the universe are now applied to fields such as disaster prediction, medical imaging, agricultural optimisation, and urban planning. Through these skills, young scientists become problem-solvers capable of shaping Africa's digital and knowledge economies.

A CONTINENTAL VISION FOR AFRICA'S SCIENTIFIC FUTURE

Looking ahead, Dr de Swardt envisions a continent where young scientists can move seamlessly through a connected pipeline from early education to post-graduate research, industry leadership, and global collaboration. Retaining Africa's brightest talent will require

competitive research environments, access to advanced infrastructure, and strong partnerships between government, academia, and industry. International collaboration also plays a crucial role. Science today is deeply interconnected, and partnerships allow African scientists to engage with global networks while contributing unique perspectives and expertise. For Dr de Swardt, these collaborations must be built on mutual respect and shared leadership, ensuring Africa participates not only as a contributor but as a driver of global scientific agendas.

A MESSAGE TO YOUNG WOMEN IN STEM

For young women considering careers in science, Dr de Swardt offers a powerful reminder:

Confidence is not something you wait for it is something you build. Entering technical fields can be intimidating, especially in spaces where women remain underrepresented. But growth comes through learning, persistence, and community. "You do not need to feel ready before you begin," she says. "Readiness comes from doing the work." By asking questions, seeking mentorship, and trusting their abilities, young women can claim their rightful place in science. Because Africa's scientific future will be strongest when all voices especially women's voices are part of the conversation.



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