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Case Study

#MoreThanAWoman

Innovate UK Global Alliance Africa project launched the #MoreThanAWoman 2023 showcase in Johannesburg, South Africa.

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Introduction

On the 8th of March 2023, Innovate UK Global Alliance Africa project launched the **#MoreThanAWoman 2023 showcase** in Johannesburg, South Africa, introducing four inspiring women innovators from township communities in Gauteng selected to share their stories and exciting projects with a gathering of investors, ecosystem enablers and support organisations from across the UK and Africa.

#MoreThanAWoman seeks to deliver on one of the core pillars of the UK Government's Strategy for International Development¹ to *"provide women and girls with the freedom they need to succeed, unlocking their future potential, educating girls, supporting their empowerment and protecting them against violence."*

Under the FCDO's Africa Technology and Innovation Partnership Programme (ATIP)², our initiative provides training and investment support alongside access to new opportunities to women from underserved innovation communities to help stimulate inclusive economic growth and the scaling of technology-enabled businesses to solve development challenges.

Eighteen months after the launch, our #MoreThanAWoman finalists have come back to share their story on the impact that the funding and support has had on their business growth and journey as innovators. Their achievements been varied and exceeded expectations, including:

- **New funding and investment** through further grants, awards and investment in the form of sponsorships and joint ventures
- **Expansion of operations** to new clients and users leading to expanded business opportunities and growth
- **International recognition** by securing places on international innovation support programmes to connect and learn from other entrepreneurs across Africa and beyond
- **New collaborative partnerships** accessing collaborative research and development on existing and new ideas with potential future commercial opportunities



**South
Africa**

The case studies below provide an insight into the multiplier effect that a small amount of support – in the form of training, funding, spotlighting and connecting – has towards scaling start-up initiatives of our #MoreThanAWoman finalists:



Thuso



Mahlodi



Lungile



Katlego

The success of the #MoreThanAWoman 2023 has spurred a second campaign in 2024-2025, expanding the ambition to support a cohort of women innovators across the three Global Alliance Africa countries (South Africa, Kenya and Nigeria) in our commitment to continue breaking down barriers to opportunities and promoting inclusive economic growth by furthering women's economic empowerment, a priority set out in the UK Government's International Women and Girls Strategy, 2023-2030³.

"I will never be able to perfectly articulate how much this program has changed my life"

Lungile Maile

Innovate UK Global Alliance Africa is a six-year project funded by UK International Development under the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and GCRF programme.



Spotlight: Thuso Motau

Thuso Motau, winner of the #MoreThanAWoman Showcase 2023 Award, explains how the award has transformed her business, the Mighty House of Soap.

A Sustainable, Community-Based Business Model



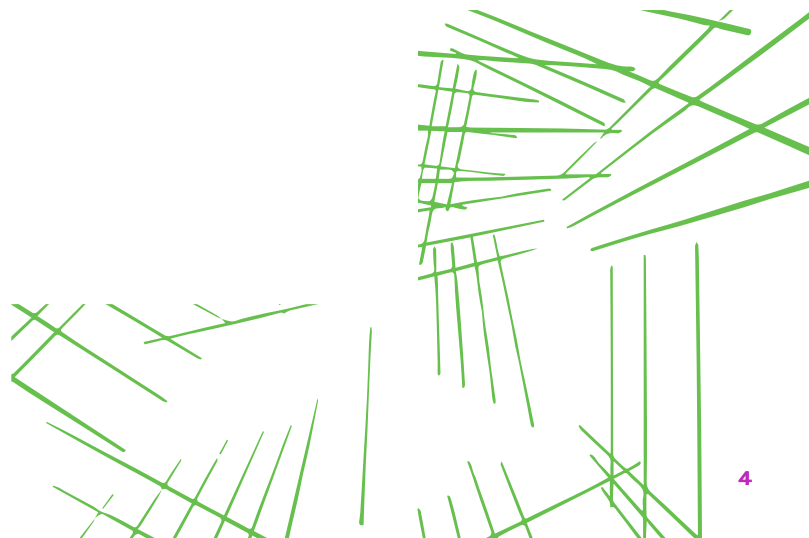
"I always say we are not a soap business. We are in an environmental business. The soap is only a catalyst of the business... [and that] business is looking into solutions that can come within the township, and provide sustainable products from the environment to the people around the communities."

Thuso Motau

The Mighty House of Soap takes used cooking oil (a common waste product with limited disposal options in Thuso's local township) and turns it into a range of soap products including bar and liquid soap. Environmental sustainability is a core focus of the business model – taking waste and turning it into something useful – from product development through to packaging and distribution.

Thuso is also continuing to invest time and energy into exploiting all potential aspects of a circular economy model. The Mighty House of Soap is currently exploring the potential for the residual glycerine from soap bars to be used to develop a cosmetics line.

The Mighty House of Soap also runs community education programmes to raise awareness of the harmful impacts of synthetic cleaning products, which increase pollution in rivers and seas and reduce biodiversity. Since the #MoreThanAWoman Award, Thuso has also opened local stores that offer the community a shop front to buy products, as well as a drop off point to recycle their used cooking oil.



The #MoreThanAWoman Programme

The #MoreThanAWoman programme helped Thuso to identify and close gaps within the business, including setting up administrative and legal processes to support business expansion and using the funding award to hire new staff, develop new marketing materials and bring a professional finish to the end products in order to compete successfully against other competitors in the market, both locally and globally.

“The Innovation Canvas business model showed me the gaps in my company and steered me towards creating more sustainable work processes. One of the things that stood out to me was marketing of the business and I’m now able to market my business across bigger [global] platforms.”

Thuso Motau

Thuso also champions the untapped potential of other women entrepreneurs within the community like herself, who have promising business models but lack the professional support and funding to enable their businesses to thrive.

New Business Opportunities

As well as scaling up her business operations using the funding award, the exposure from the #MoreThanAWoman pitch video also helped to raise the profile of the Mighty House of Soap with potential investors and partners. Thuso is currently celebrating two major contracts that resulted from the #MoreThanAWoman support: firstly, a joint venture with Biotensdon, a German biotech company, that includes investment in capital equipment with an estimated return on invest of ZAR 1.5million in FY24/25. Secondly, a new contract to supply Kruger National Parks with sustainable soap products for 21 lodges.



“Most of the time, women are not given a chance, and when I say a chance, I mean funding. We start businesses, but because it is very difficult for us to receive funding from traditional funders like banks, we give up and think this thing was not for me... so we [need] people like #MoreThanAWoman who say, I’m going to mentor you, I’m going to give you money so that you can achieve what you want to do.”

Thuso Motau

“Every time when people call me, they’ve seen the video and that’s when they take the next step to call us... That’s how the breakthroughs are happening.”

Thuso Motau

Thuso has also received further awards since taking part in the #MoreThanAWoman programme including being one of the **2023 Nedbank Business Ignite** winners.

Spotlight: Katlego Malatji

Katlego Malatji is the founder of Project One Engineering, an industrial engineering consultancy that offers design, planning and management services across the manufacturing ecosystem. The ProjectOne purpose statement is to rebuild South African manufacturing by creating production capacity and changing lives in the process.

The #MoreThanAWoman Programme

ProjectOne Engineering was already an established start up when Katlego joined the #MoreThanAWoman programme. The programme offered Katlego the opportunity to strengthen her brand recognition and develop marketing strategies to grow her business.

“The program stretched me because I had never been in an environment where we were creating media for my business. As a technical person, media is not always at the forefront of what I think about.”

Katlego Malatji

The pitch training also helped Katlego to learn new techniques in showcasing her business to potential funders and investors, as well as tailoring each pitch to the specific audience.

Exploring New Ventures



The #MoreThanAWoman programme opened new networking and business growth opportunities for ProjectOne. Katlego’s main advice for other female entrepreneurs is to **“learn to network”** and her perseverance recently paid off.

Following an initial introduction leveraged by the Global Alliance Africa team, ProjectOne is currently exploring a collaboration with a space agency to analyse and extract insights from space data to support farmers working in the agricultural sector.

Spotlight: Lungile Maile

Lungile Maile, winner of the #MoreThanAWoman Showcase 2023 Best Pitch Award, shares the story of how her business, Nubian Smarts, has grown since the programme.

An Inspiring STEM Story



Nubian Smarts is an education technology (EdTech) business that has developed STEM products and services for school-aged children living in townships in South Africa. The NuMaths application, for example, aligns with the South African curriculum and can be used offline, making it accessible for children in township communities such as Lungile's where limited internet connectivity is commonplace.

Nubian Smarts has also developed its "Culinary Coding Creativity Boxes" to introduce children to a range of STEM activities including robotics, coding, cooking and arts.

For Lungile, taking part in the #MoreThanAWoman programme helped her bring Nubian Smarts' two business products together to create a cohesive business model which could then be presented to potential clients and investors.

"It always seemed like it was two different businesses, but through telling our story... we're now able to say we are democratizing access to STEM education."

Lungile Maile

Reaching New Audiences

The #MoreThanAWoman pitch video helped Lungile reach a much wider audience, which in turn has supported business growth. Parents, teachers and schools have approached Nubian Smarts after seeing clips of the video on social media. The video has also opened access to new markets through speaking and presenting engagements including a stall at the 2023 Luju Festival and a slot on the Kaya FM radio station to promote Nubian Smarts.

"When you start a business and you come up with a vision, it can be hard to get everyone else to understand where you're going. When we play the video, everyone suddenly gets where we are going."

Lungile's business has gone from strength to strength since the #MoreThanAWoman programme. Nubian Smarts was one of the final cohort of [2023 African Impact Challenge](#) winners, receiving a \$25,000 grant to scale up her business activities and incubator training in Toronto, Canada.

New Business Opportunities

Lungile also emphasises how the #MoreThanAWoman programme has helped to open doors with potential funders and investors too. She explained:

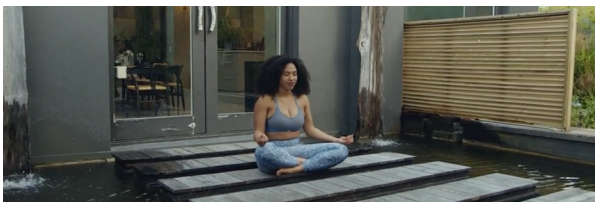
"There is power in being associated with a brand as strong as Innovate UK. It meant that certain funders, certain investors, were willing to listen to our story more. And from there... we've got investors looking at our pitch deck and looking at how they can possibly help us access new markets."



Spotlight: Mahlodi Letsie

Mahlodi Letsie is the CEO and founder of **Bare Mind Holdings**, a health technology start-up that works to promote positive mental wellbeing in African communities. Bare Mind's main product is a mobile app that delivers personalised mental health support through a gamified interface using natural language processing (NLP) tools, accessible in multiple African native languages, to support individuals on their journey to improved mental wellness.

#MoreThanAWoman Programme



An emerging start up at the outset of the #MoreThanAWoman programme, Bare Mind has developed and transformed into a thriving business over the 18 months. Mahlodi credits the programme with supporting this transformation by helping her team to clearly define their business model and set their trajectory towards accessing new markets.

"The [#MoreThanAWoman] programme stretched me because it gave me the opportunity to present myself to various stakeholders at different points in time in a more cohesive and packaged way... To me, pitching was an exhilarating experience. Being in front of people really taught me the importance of knowing your story in order to share cohesively who you are as a business."

Mahlodi Letsie

On a personal level, the programme also gave Mahlodi the opportunity to connect with and become part of a cohort of female entrepreneurs. She underscores the importance of programmes like #MoreThanAWoman in creating space for female entrepreneurs to realise their potential through mentoring, capacity building and increased business exposure.

From Networking to Investment

Both the #MoreThanAWoman pitch video and the opportunity to take part in a TEDx event with other established health and wellness brands enabled Mahlodi to expand her professional network, build exposure for her business and connect with potential business partners and investors. Whilst Mahlodi's professional confidence and skills were growing, securing investment to scale up her business initially proved challenging.

"The investment ecosystem in South Africa is quite conservative. Especially as an early stage company, it makes it quite difficult to access and unlock those funding opportunities because investors are looking for companies that are further along the trajectory. The stage that our company is in, it's quite an awkward phase because we're too early for investment, yet we need the funds to unlock our progress in different areas."

But with *"perseverance, determination, and grit"* (the three qualities that Mahlodi identifies as key to success as a female entrepreneur), Bare Mind recently successfully secured its first Johannesburg Stock Exchange-listed corporate contract to pilot its platform to an employee base of 1600, as part of an enterprise development initiative that also includes an annual grant of ZAR 600,000 (c.£26,000) to support ongoing product development.



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