

Circular economy: Businesses that change the world see more than just making a profit

 By [Anton Ressel](#)

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Social enterprises, businesses with a mandate that extends beyond simply making a profit, is a concept that is not new. As far back as the 15th century, scholars were highlighting the need for the haves in society to support the have-nots in order to subvert social unrest.



Source: [Unsplash](#)

In more recent times, the concept of businesses doing good has become very much a part of mainstream society, and many of today's very successful businesses are what can be classified as social enterprises. Well-known examples include Ashoka, Grameen Bank, the Bodyshop and Toms Shoes.

Closer to home, the last decade or so has seen a huge increase in businesses with a social imperative being launched in SA, partly in response to the inability of government to provide sufficient services to all who need them, and partly in response to a need to redress our past and uplift sections of our society that were historically marginalised.

Organisations like the Bertha School for Social Entrepreneurship and programmes like FNB's Social Entrepreneurship Impact Lab (Seil) and the SAB Foundation Social Innovation & Disability Empowerment Awards are just a few initiatives providing practical support to emerging social entrepreneurs.

Social enterprises are often well-positioned to take advantage of pressing national and global challenges, and the Covid-19 pandemic is one such example. Zinacare, a health company founded by Philip Mngadi that started out providing access to affordable and discreet home testing kits for a variety of sexual and feminine health issues, and quickly and successfully

pivoted into offering drive-through Covid testing sites across Gauteng.

After opening their first drive-thru testing centre in Kyalami in the middle of 2020, they launched two additional drive-thru testing facilities and an on-demand testing service for company employees. This rapid pivot – supported through funding from FNB – saw Philip increase turnover by over 100% and his employment impact by 600%, whilst successfully completing thousands of Covid tests with a turnaround time of 48 hours. Once again, providing a positive and much-needed social service (fast and safe Covid testing for citizens and employees) turned into a successful business model.

Even companies that started out as 'regular' businesses are adapting to the new norm of adding value and creating a positive impact on society.

Former senior vice president at Apple, Angela Ahrendts, has been vocal on the importance of businesses building a social imperative into their business model. One of her famous quotes is: "If you aren't building a social enterprise, I don't know what your business model will be in five years."

Referring to Apple, she adds: "We wanted to be led by our mission and embed our values throughout the world." While one may not immediately think of Apple as a social enterprise, in recent years the company has made large shifts towards sustainable and socially impactful ways of doing business, including offering recycling services in 99% of the countries in which it operates and funding solar projects to benefit needy communities in countries such as Thailand and the Philippines.

This increased focus from many multinationals around 'doing good business' is powerful evidence of a global shift towards a more sustainable and socially impactful approach. Long may it continue.

ABOUT ANTON RESSEL

Anton Ressel is an experienced business development consultant, mentor and SME specialist. He is the Senior consultant at ED and CSI specialist agency Fetola (www.fetola.co.za), a winning mentor on the SAB Kickstart Entrepreneur Competition, and a published author across multiple publications. His passion is helping small businesses become big ones. Follow @antonres on Twitter.

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