

KFC's Akhona Qengqe talks QSR in Africa and building the continent's talent engine

By  Lauren Hartzenberg

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"Our vision is to paint Africa red," is the ambition [boldly stated](#) by quick-service restaurant (QSR) giant KFC on many of its corporate platforms. With a presence across more than 20 markets in sub-Saharan Africa, the pan-African business remains unmatched when it comes to [brand strength](#) within the continent's fast food space.



Akhona Qengqe, KFC's new general manager for Africa. Source: Supplied

Employing 35,000 people across its restaurants and support centres, KFC Africa aims to position itself as a talent engine for Africa, driven by a people-first mindset. This approach has been strengthened by progressive leaders like Akhona Qengqe, who KFC [recently promoted](#) to general manager for Africa.

During her eight-year tenure at the company, Qengqe has occupied roles including development director, chief people and transformation officer, and chief development officer, and has led the charge on diversity and inclusion. She's also previously served as the chairperson of the board of the Franchise Association of South Africa.

Heart-led, high-performing people culture

Qengqe has been instrumental in helping KFC diversify its talent base by enabling a heart-led, high-performing people culture, and she's particularly excelled in driving the inclusion of more women in leadership. As a gender parity and female empowerment advocate, Qengqe conceptualised and launched KFC Africa's Women on the Move programme, which was created in 2021 as a 12-month programme to equip women with tools and resources that will help them leverage their leadership qualities and fuel results within the KFC business.



KFC store in Côte d'Ivoire. Source: [File photo](#)

In her new position as Africa's general manager, she's working to maintain KFC's competitive advantage across the continent and capitalise on new opportunities. For [#AfricaMonth](#), Qengge shares more on her new role and why her outlook on QSR in Africa remains decidedly positive.

■ ***Akhona, congrats on your appointment as general manager for Africa. What are your core responsibilities in this new role?***

Thank you very much. My role as general manager at KFC Africa means that I am responsible for overseeing the strategic direction and overall operations of the organisation and will also be working closely with the full leadership team to continue to drive profitability and relevance for our business and to retain our position as Africa's most loved chicken brand.

I started at KFC in 2015 as a development director before moving into the role of transformation and diversity and inclusion in 2017 and later becoming the chief people and transformation officer, Africa in 2020. These opportunities prepared me to both be a people-centric as well as a highly commercial leader.

As a people-first business it is important for us to do business in a way that benefits the communities within which we operate and the people we serve. I look forward to tackling the next phase with this purpose-led mindset.

■ ***What's currently at the top of your to-do list?***

To ensure that our business remains investable for our franchise partners for now and the future. Our culture is one of the elements that sets us apart as an employer of choice and I'd like for us to continue strengthening that. I am deeply passionate about developing talent both for growth within the organisation but also for export into other markets.

As a globally connected organisation I believe we should be a talent engine for Africa by exporting some of our talent, with a view to bringing them back to benefit our continent with the skills and experiences they've gained elsewhere.

What do you love most about working at KFC, particularly working across its Africa-wide business?

I love the AfriCAN spirit with which our teams show up everyday. We have some of the most heart-led and high-performing people across our restaurants and offices and I believe this is the reason why KFC continues to be such a strong brand in every market that we operate in.



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Having occupied various leadership positions within KFC, you've been credited with driving diversity and a high-performing people-led culture at the company. How have you tailored your leadership approach to drive results in these areas?

I believe part of what I bring to the table is my innate love of people and bringing the best out of everyone I come across, some of it I've learnt over the years from some of the great leaders that I've had an opportunity to work with. I believe that I am the result of all the great leadership and coaching I've received and this is what has set me on course to drive results.

KFC has a significant brand presence across the African continent. Outside of South Africa, which African markets are of particular importance to the KFC business? And which ones have been identified as offering significant potential for growth?

I like to think of Africa as possessing huge potential for both its people and for those looking to grow their businesses. Whilst some markets may be easier to access than others, the businesses that are courageous enough to build their brands even when the environment doesn't look favourable, will be the ones who will reap rewards later on.

Any pertinent lessons on life and business you've learned working on the ground across Africa?

Africa is a very diverse continent – much bigger than it is often positioned in scale and potential and it shouldn't be underestimated. There is incredible passion, skillset and innovation across the continent – it just needs the opportunity to be unlocked.

What is your general outlook for QSR in Africa? Are you optimistic about the future?

I am a firm believer in the resilience and agility of the franchising sector, particularly in the QSR space - and the promising business innovation that's taking root in the midst of economic challenges. What is really encouraging for us is that, despite a decline in consumer spending, QSRs will continue expanding and we saw during the pandemic that this is even heightened during economic uncertainty.

Today, it is all about customer centricity and convenience and I believe this will continue to set the tone for successful QSR strategies. I believe the food and beverage category will continue to lead e-commerce growth, and in doing so, build capability and capacity in the sector.

What legacy would you like to leave in your industry?

I'd like for people to think of QSR as the one sector that is accessible to all – regardless of economic status or geography – and whatever we can do as a brand to ensure that, we will do! Surely, everyone deserves a little finger-lickin' goodness on their doorstep..or within the click of a finger!

ABOUT LAUREN HARTZENBERG

Managing editor and retail editor at Bizcommunity.com. Cape Town apologist. Dog mom. Get in touch: lauren@bizcommunity.com

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