

Africa driving a transformed economy: Day 2

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Highlights from day two of the [7th Annual Top Empowerment Virtual Conference](#).

The [7th Annual Top Empowerment Virtual Conference](#), presented by [Topco Media](#) and Nedbank, concluded on 21 July 2022 after two highly successful days. The virtual conference brought together a trusted network of top companies, entrepreneurs and leaders embracing technology, transformation and innovation in Africa. The conference partners included Nedbank, Avbob, Hollard Insurance, Nemesis Accounting, IDC, Merchants and UFS.

Zakhele Mgobhozi, Top Empowerment Awards' title winner of Top Entrepreneur of the Year in 2021, opened day two's proceedings with a stirring fireside chat. The founder and group managing director of Modern Centric Holdings espoused the virtues of pioneering transformation in a company ecosystem. He shared how businesses must inspire entrepreneurship and provide sustainability from rural roots to the corporate level. "Collaboration is the new innovation," Mgobhozi said. "Business needs to drive transformation not just because you want to tick a box – you need to prepare, employ and support."

This was echoed by a case study presented by Murray Chabant, chief executive officer at Signa Group. It investigated meaningful ownership versus BEE Scorecard ownership levels, addressing the value of meaningful ownership in the business and its power to transform business. According to the speaker, BEE creates an inclusive environment for employees and empowers employees in decision-making in business, with the future of South Africa tied to the development of SMMEs. Chabant stated: "We're going to see a lot of wealth creation in the hands of black South Africans who are employed in these businesses in the future."

Lindiwe Mandonsela, executive director for compliance at B-BBEE commission, delivered the first keynote address on the second day of the virtual conference. She spoke of the pressing issue surrounding understanding the power of BEE and the BEE scorecard when empowerment is tangible, and how to guard against falling into the tick box approach and instead learn how to create tangible impact.

Taking centre stage was the Honourable Dr Chana Pilane-Majake, deputy minister of Public Services and Administration. The Honourable Minister addressed the conference on South Africa's journey to transform public service and stated that public services have a responsibility to ensure that transformative goals are achieved at all levels in the public and private sectors and are coupled with skilling, education and training, and other academic institutions. "Transformation in the private sector must be understood in the context of participation by the previously marginalised in business opportunities that should create a platform for people of South Africa to share. The transformation agenda must embrace conditions of employment in the private and public sector, and there need to be interventions at every level to take into consideration where women are placed," said the Honourable Minister Pilane-Majake.

Rethinking Social Solutions in Business and Beyond

Nedbank hosted the day's first panel discussion with a theme exploring the significance of creating a just transition framework and how it can help in facilitating equitable access to the benefits across the continent. Nedbank actively enables a just transition to low carbon resilient economies.

The discussion was moderated by Gaylor Montmasson-Clair, an economist at Tips. The panellists included Dr Terence Sibiya, managing executive at Nedbank Limited; Cas Coovadia, chief executive officer at Busa; and Louise Naudé, senior manager: Climate Change Portfolio and Presidential Climate Change Commissioner, WWF.

During the discussion, Louise Naudé shared: "The greatest injustice is happening if we are too slow to act on climate

change.” From this timeous conversation, the panellists agreed South Africa needs national conversations regarding carbon reduction efforts and policies, and the government must collaborate with the private sector and other key stakeholders for solutions. Dr Sibiya emphasised: “We’ve seen the advantage of the private sector and government working together to manage crises in South Africa. We need to ensure that there is a real partnership between the public and private sectors with the involvement of other stakeholders.”

The day’s second panel discussion focused on how businesses can attract the right people into their organisation and better understand culture fit. The discussion was moderated by Joni Peddle, CEO of Resilient People, and panellists included Dr Mavis Mazhura, Psy.D., licensee and leadership coach; Rabi Adetoro, HR leader, coach, speaker and trainer at MTN Nigeria; Nikki Bush, human potential expert, business speaker and author.

Panellists discussed how Covid-19 had allowed organisations and leaders to rewrite the human resources playbook. The current need in HR is well-being and psychological safety, and leadership has to provide a customised approach to every team member – even with hybrid work models recreating corporate cultures. Rabi Adetoro stated: “We need to think differently, instead only thinking of culture fit, we need to think about culture add.”

Prof. Francis Peterson, rector and vice-chancellor at the University of the Free State (UFS), was the day’s second keynote speaker, explaining the critical role of higher education in ensuring the employability of graduates. He shared that one of the significant challenges facing South Africa is its high rate of unemployment. “Close to 77% of university students and 98% of TVET college students rely on government funding. The employability of graduates is of little use to South Africa if they are not absorbed into the national economy.” He added, “It has become essential that institutions of higher learning incorporate the latest advancements in technology. The role of the university is to help students think creatively, independently and develop entrepreneurial mindsets.”

Hollard Insurance hosted a panel discussion on advancing transformation through skills development in South Africa. Lumko Mtimde moderated it, special advisor to the Minister in the Presidency, Republic of South Africa, and the panellists included Dr Felleng Yende, CEO at FP&M Seta; Josh Adler, vice president, Growth and Entrepreneurship, African Leadership Academy; Siyanda Kunene, director at Kunene Makopo Risk Solutions; and Paula Mendes, Group HR manager: Skills, EE and OD at Hollard Insurance.

The panellists agreed that skills development plays a vital role in ensuring participation in the economy by people who would otherwise be excluded from it. The panel highlighted a tendency in business to look at workplace skills as a tick box exercise; leadership skills can be taught and practised, harnessed and enhanced. Dr Fellende stated: “We have wonderful examples of excellent ethics and ethical leadership across the continent upon which or from which young people in South Africa particularly can draw.”

Sectors in the Spotlight: Exploring sector specific challenges and opportunities

Day two’s Sectors in the Spotlight focused on agriculture. A panel discussion explored the agriculture sector, how to reap a regenerative future, and the importance of youth in building a competitive and resilient industry. It was moderated by Thando Matutu, business manager at Agripreneur SA. The panellists comprised Litha Kutta, enterprise and supplier development director at Tiger Brands; and Tracy Dawson, partner at Jack Hammer Global and EMEA practice lead of agriculture at Kestria.

Interesting insights emerged from the discussion, with panellists agreeing that despite agriculture being an R332bn industry, few young people see farming as a viable career, and more education and outreach are required to turn this challenge around.

Thabiso M. Mohlabeng, digital marketing executive at Topco Media, moderated a fireside chat focused on addressing the challenges and opportunities around digital infrastructure. Panellists included Ofentse Mokwena, strategic projects lead at Uber RSA; and Ayanda Dakela, head of programme management office and IDMS leader at the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure. The panel discussed smart cities on the horizon, digital infrastructure investment at the telcos,

explored the evolution of African telecoms and addressed digital infrastructure building transportation, supplier, taxi, and infrastructure policy.

Ofentse Mokwena emphasised the importance of technology: “Technology enables an even greater scale of impact of one piece of infrastructure. Information technology is spreading faster than the heavy infrastructure that communities need. The risk of not having a vibrant telecom environment is much higher today than they were 20 to 30 years ago. Young people need to convert the digital resources they access into tangible resources.”

The final panel discussion of the conference centred on public-private partnerships (PPPs), the collaboration between them, unlocking value from state-owned enterprises, how government processes enable economic transformation, and exploring the specific roles of each counterpart in business, government and NGOs. Panellists included Tshifhiwa Tshivhengwa, chief executive officer at TBCSA; Bongumusa Makhathini, CEO and partner at Empowerment Capital Investment Partners; and it was moderated by Langa Madonko, head of Investor Relations at SAVCA.

The panel discussed the decline in PPPs in South African organisations, the invaluable development of the tourism industry in South Africa from PPPs, and how government and the public sector no longer trust each other enough to fast-track PPP frameworks. The panellists highlighted how PPP models could focus our contribution to producing the best efforts – while achieving investment returns and impacting society on a bigger scale. Panellists agreed that leaders need to recognise that SMMEs are the backbone of the economy and must channel investment into those platforms.

Watch the videos here:

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