



June 16 @ 50

Special Edition



Harrowing image: Sam Nzima captured this iconic photograph of 12-year-old Hector Pieterse being carried by 18-year-old Mbuyisa Makhubo after he was fatally shot by apartheid police during the Soweto Uprising on June 16, 1976. Pieterse's weeping sister, Antoinette Sithole, runs beside them.

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Tribute to a resilient and youthful spirit

MATUMA LETSOALO

Fifty years have passed since the youth of Soweto changed the course of South Africa's history, yet the questions they asked remain as relevant today as they were on 16 June 1976. What does meaningful access to quality education look like? How do we create opportunities for every young person to realise their full potential? And how do we honour the sacrifices of those who believed that education was worth fighting for?

As Youth Month draws to a close, we proudly publish this special commemorative edition marking the 50th anniversary of the June 16 Soweto Uprising. This milestone invites us not only to remember the bravery of the young people of 1976 but also to reflect honestly on the progress we have made and the work that still lies ahead.

The students who marched through the streets of Soweto did far more than reject an unjust education system. They challenged a system that sought to limit their aspirations and deny them the opportunity to shape their own future. Their courage became a defining moment in South Africa's democratic journey and reaffirmed the power of young people to influence the nation's direction.

Today, South Africa's youth face a different struggle. While political

freedom has been achieved, economic freedom remains elusive for far too many. Youth unemployment continues to rank among the highest in the world, leaving millions of talented and capable young people excluded from meaningful participation in the economy. At the same time, inequality, poverty, digital exclusion and unequal access to quality education continue to limit opportunities and deepen social divides.

These realities demand that we move beyond commemorating June 16 as a historical event. The spirit of 1976 calls on us to confront today's challenges with the same courage, urgency and determination. It also reminds us that young people should not only be the beneficiaries of education and economic policy but also active participants in shaping them. Their voices belong at the centre of conversations about education reform, economic growth, entrepreneurship, innovation, job creation and South Africa's future development.

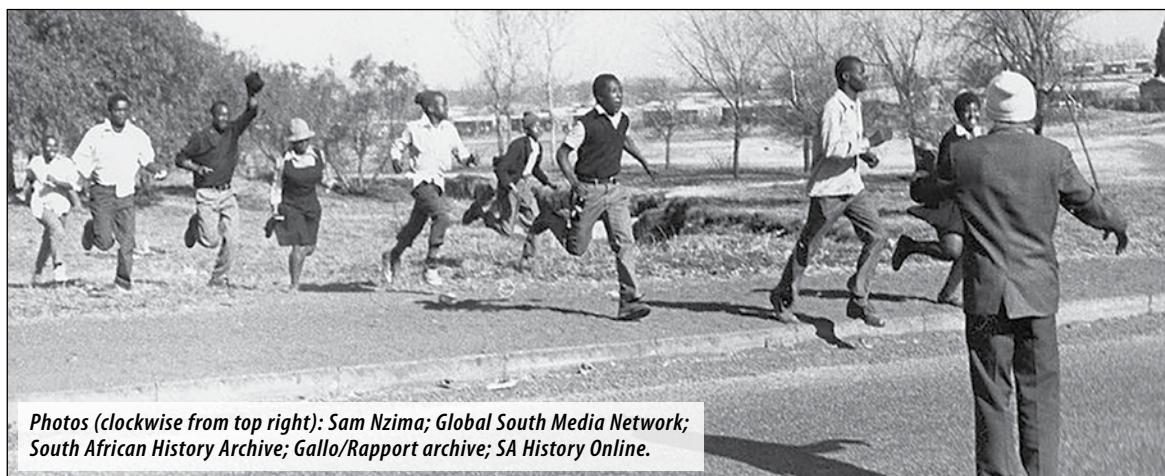
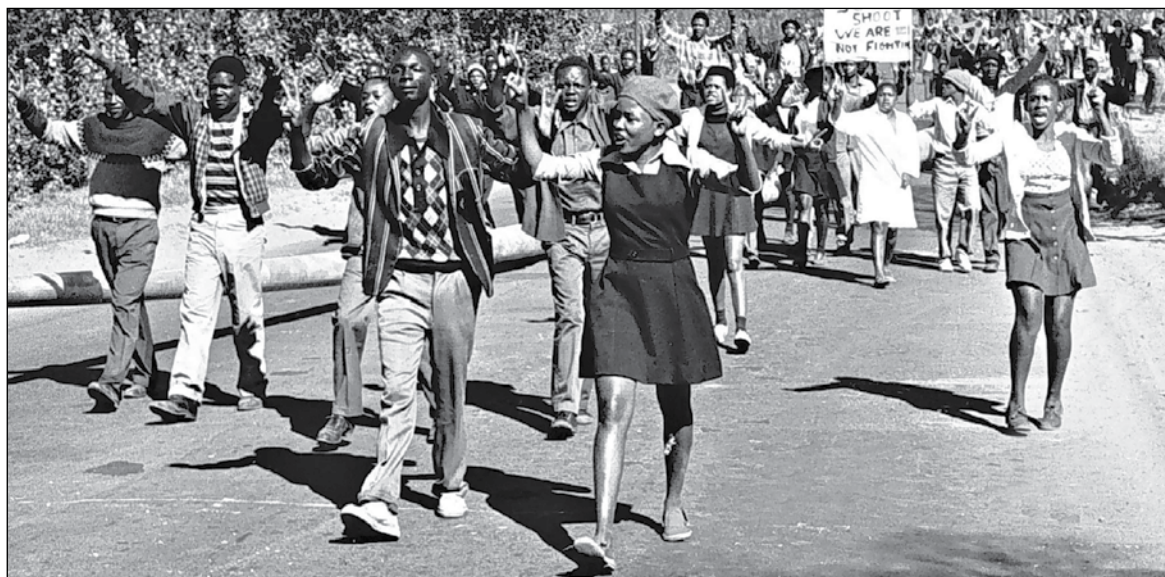
Education remains the most powerful bridge between potential and opportunity. However, education on its own is no longer enough. It must be accompanied by deliberate efforts to stimulate inclusive economic growth, expand access to skills development, embrace technological innovation and create pathways into

meaningful employment and entrepreneurship. The future of South Africa depends on whether today's youth are equipped not only to find jobs but also to create them.

In this special edition, we revisit the events of June 16 through the voices of those who experienced them firsthand. We honour the enduring contributions of leaders such as Seth Mazibuko and Sibongile Mkhabela, explore the life and legacy of Tsiet-si Mashinini through Sam Mathe's compelling biography, and reflect on the spread of the student uprising beyond Soweto to communities such as Hammanskraal. These stories remind us that history is not confined to textbooks; it continues to shape the choices we make as a nation.

As we commemorate this historic milestone, let us ensure that the legacy of June 16 is measured not only by how well we remember the past but also by how boldly we invest in the future. The greatest tribute we can pay to the generation of 1976 is to build a South Africa where every young person has access to quality education, meaningful opportunities and the ability to contribute to a growing, inclusive and prosperous economy. That responsibility belongs to all of us.

*Matuma Letsoalo
Chairman, Inside Education Foundation*



Photos (clockwise from top right): Sam Nzima; Global South Media Network; South African History Archive; Gallo/Rapport archive; SA History Online.

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The countdown to June 16 . . .

In this exclusive extract from Sam Mathe's book, Tsietsi Mashinini: Elusive Hero of Soweto, the award-winning journalist and author tells how Mashinini's proposal for a protest march on June 16 was accepted by about 500 delegates from different schools in the township

SAM MATHE

On Sunday, 13 June, about 500 students from different schools in Soweto met at the Donaldson Orlando Community Centre (DOCC) in Orlando East, one of the earliest sections in the township, with a rich history of anti-apartheid activism and pioneers in various fields. The DOCC ranks among Soweto's oldest landmarks and has gained a place in history as a space for artistic, sporting and civic activities.

Opened on 10 January 1948 in memory of Lt-Col James Donaldson, the centre hosted the first annual festival of the black arts in 1973, organised by Mdali (Music, Drama, Art & Literature), a cultural group founded in Alexandra by Mongane Serote and Molefe Pheto. It also provided a stage for leading jazz singers from the Sophiatown era, notably Dolly Rathebe, Dorothy Masuku, Thandi Klaasen and Miriam Makeba. (Following the 1976 uprising, Makeba would play a significant role in Tsietsi's life in exile.)

The DOCC was a creative space for prominent playwrights like Gibson Kente, Sam Mhangwane and Boikie Mohlamme – Soweto's 'big three' of black theatre whose works inspired a younger generation of dramatists, including Tsietsi Mashinini, Seth Mazibuko and Duma Ndlovu. And Nelson Mandela worked out and sparred in its gymnasium with famous fighters of the day, such as Jerry 'Uyinja' Moloi and Eric 'Black Material' Ntsele.

On this day, however, the students didn't gather there to watch a boxing match, although their meeting involved planning a fight; it was an unprecedented gathering to discuss how they could challenge the Afrikaans decree as well as other apartheid injustices.

For Tsietsi and the SASM leadership, the historic student summit

was also an opportunity to engage with the incident at Naledi High in a higher gear and galvanise students into protest action on a larger scale. About 55 junior and high schools were represented by at least two student delegates from each. Due to their political activism, there were more representatives from Naledi and Morris Isaacson.

There was an air of camaraderie, with students laughing and talking animatedly outside the venue just before they packed the hall. Six people were identified as police informers and politely asked to leave.

The proceedings were chaired by SASM executive members Tebello Motapanyane, David Kutumela and Zwelinzima Sizani. Seth Mazibuko, then a 15-year-old class prefect from Orlando West Junior Secondary School, was invited to update delegates about the state of affairs at his alma mater on the issue of Afrikaans and the boycott. This school had come to symbolise the protests against the Afrikaans-language decree.

A leading item on the agenda was the election of an executive, as police detention and harassment had caused some vacancies. Tsietsi Mashinini was elected as president, and Seth Mazibuko as his deputy. Murphy Morobe, another Morris Isaacson High student and Tsietsi's classmate, was elected treasurer. Zwelinzima Sizani, a former Orlando High student, was elected as organiser, and Sibongile Mkhabela (née Mthembu) as secretary – the only woman on the executive. They would form the SASM Action Committee, or simply, the Action Committee. This was suggested by Sizani in order to protect SASM against being banned.

Tsietsi Mashinini suggested that high-school students should stage a protest march on 16 June – the day on which mid-year exams were due

to start – in solidarity with their junior-secondary and higher-primary counterparts who had been boycotting classes for the preceding six weeks. His proposal was met with cheers of approval by the majority of delegates.

Motapanyane and other seasoned SASM members proposed a strike instead; in other words, a 'solidarity' boycott of classes and mid-year exams. But Tsietsi argued that boycotts had been tested and found to be ineffective. He cited the cases of the junior-secondary and higher-primary schools that had been boycotting classes since April. Although the students had made it clear that they were not prepared to accept the Afrikaans decree, authorities had remained unmoved. It was time to adopt a different strategy.

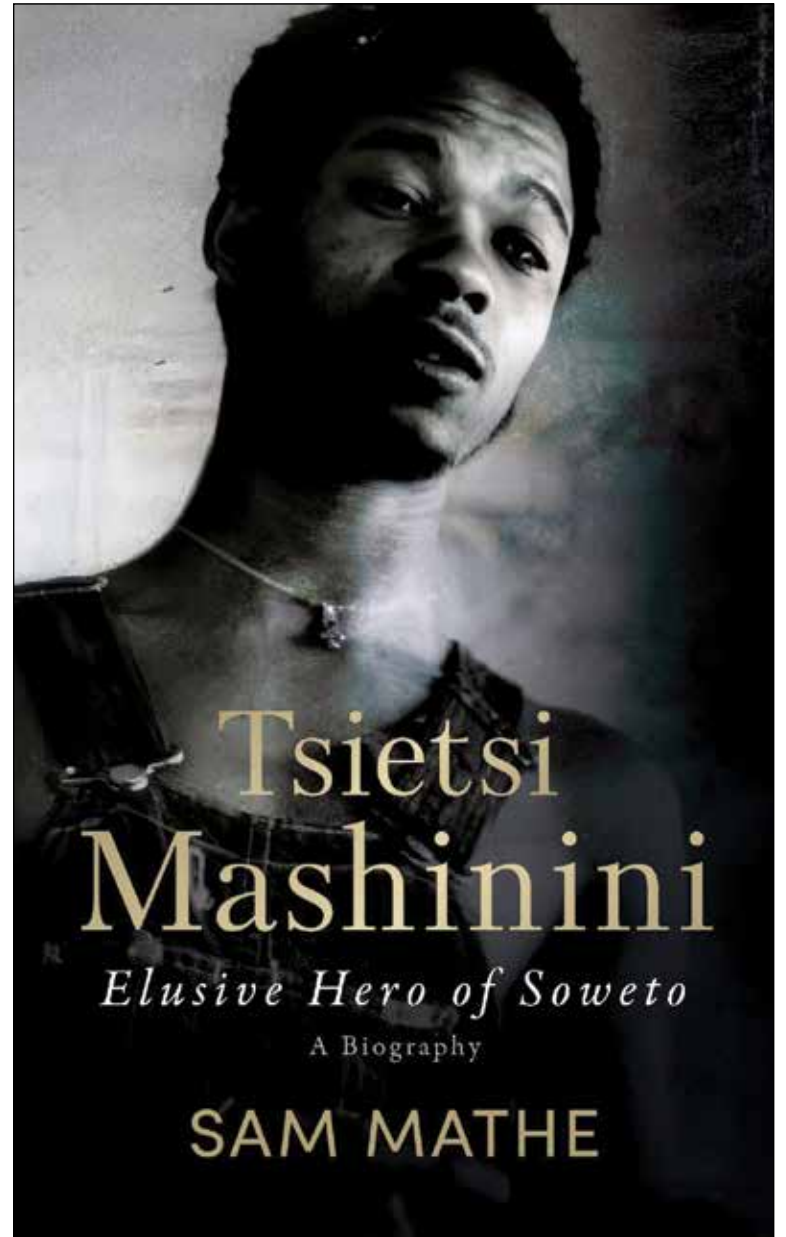
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“Once inside the stadium, Tsietsi would read a memorandum of demands, including ... the release of all political prisoners.”

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A mass demonstration in the full public glare would make it difficult for the authorities to victimise individual students. As long as the marchers remained peaceful and did not provoke the police, everything would be fine.

Tsietsi's proposal for a march two days later – on Wednesday 16 June – eventually prevailed and was approved by the majority of delegates. He and other Action Committee leaders spent the intervening days visiting schools to inform students and rally support.



Revolutionary: Fifty years after the Soweto Uprising, little is known about its most iconic leader, Tsietsi Mashinini, who played a key role in instigating the protest which changed South Africa forever, only to flee the country and be mysteriously murdered. Mathe – who knows the Mashinini family and Tsietsi's widow and has their support – tells Tsietsi's full story for the first time in this book, published by Tafelberg, an imprint of Jonathan Ball Publishers.

There were also placards to be prepared for all the schools intending to participate. The routes and schedules for the march were meticulously mapped out so that at a particular time all schools would converge at Orlando West Junior Secondary – on the corner of Vilakazi and Moema streets – as a show of respect for and solidarity with the school that had started it all. Thereafter, the marchers would proceed down Vilakazi Street, into Khumalo Road over the bridge, turn left into Klipspruit Valley Road – popularly known as Killer Road, due to its frequent fatal car crashes – and end up at Orlando Stadium, the mecca of South African football.

Once inside the stadium, Tsietsi would read a memorandum of demands, including the abolition of Bantu Education and its odious policy of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in favour of equal education for all, and the right of students to be taught in their home languages as well as English, regarded as a gateway to educational and professional opportunities in South Africa and beyond.

The memorandum would call for the release of student detainees and others who had been arrested during the school boycotts and

protests since April. These included Enos Ngutshane and a number of black consciousness leaders, including the SASO Nine. It would also call for the abolition of apartheid in favour of a constitution that would recognise the rights of all citizens regardless of colour.

Lastly, it would call for the release of all political prisoners in order to enable a new political dispensation based on dialogue between the government and authentic black leaders, as opposed to the puppet administrators known as 'chief ministers' in the homelands and township councillors.

After Mashinini's speech, the students would disperse, satisfied that they had made their point. The ball would then be in the authorities' court.

All this information and all these preparations had to be kept under wraps until the big day – a secret to be concealed from parents, newspapers, and, of course, the authorities.

Some participants said later that, after meeting at the stadium, the students intended to continue to the Department of Bantu Education's regional offices in Diepkloof, where they would hand over a list of demands.

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June 16, 1976: The day that changed

In this extract from Sam Mathe's biography, Tsietsi Mashinini: Elusive Hero of Soweto, he describes the chaos and violence that unfolded as thousands of students tried to march on Orlando Stadium, only to be met with police dogs and gunfire

SAM MATHE

A great deal has been written about that fateful day that changed the course of South African struggle history. In some instances, there have been conflicting narratives, depending on which side of the political fence the story was told. For instance, the official version from the police has always claimed that the students were the aggressors who threw stones at them before the first shot rang out. But this was contested by a number of eyewitnesses, including journalists. These conflicting and competing perspectives have been captured in various publications – notably the report of the Cillie Commission of Inquiry, published in 1980.

What is not in dispute, however, is the weather. By all accounts, it was a foggy and very cold morning, even by winter standards on the Highveld.

Pupils wore their school uniforms as if it were any normal day. Estimated at 20 000, columns of students from all corners of Soweto took to the streets. Brandishing crudely written posters, they sang and shouted slogans as they gathered at various assembly points throughout the township before the big march.

At Morris Isaacson High, the school bell rang as usual at 8am for the morning assembly. The assembly sessions were normally the responsibility of Norman Malebane, the deputy principal. But on that morning, a student, Tsietsi Mashinini, took over the august proceedings as he burst into the singing of 'Masibulele ku Jesu, ngokuba wasife-la' (Let's thank Jesus, for He died for us), an old isiXhosa Methodist hymn.

Malebane stopped in his tracks, bemused. He shook his head and laughed as he turned and walked back to the staffroom, where he joined his colleagues.

Mashinini broke another tradition when, instead of leading students in reciting 'The Lord's Prayer', he asked Thandi Mkhize, another learner, to sing Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika, at the time

a hymn that was deemed by the authorities inappropriate to be sung in public.

Thandi was one of the female students who would take turns in singing hymns at assembly. That morning, she was expected to lead pupils in a church song as usual, but found herself in the uncomfortable position of singing composer Enoch Sontonga's banned anthem. The rest of the students took it up and belted it out with gusto. It stirred something deep in their souls: a yearning for a free and just society for all.

Soon after they had hummed the moving anthem's last note, Mashinini raised his right hand and, with a clenched fist, shouted, 'Power!' In response, a forest of fists punched the air as the students shouted back, 'It's ours!' in a chorus.

This was a peaceful march for a just cause, Mashinini told the students. The police would confront them and try to provoke them into behaving in an undisciplined fashion, but it was important that they act with restraint and maintain the moral high ground.

Thereafter, Mashinini, Murphy Morobe and other leaders led students through the gate, which bore a cardboard sign with the words 'No SBs [security branch police] allowed. Enter at your own risk'.

The atmosphere felt like that of a public holiday as the young marchers poured onto busy Mphuti Street. They turned right and faced the morning sun in the direction of Orlando Stadium, their intended destination. On their way, they collected students from other schools, including neighbouring Thesele Secondary in White City Jabavu, where two of the Mashinini brothers, Mpho and Lehlohonolo (Cougar), were scholars. They greeted motorists they encountered on the way with the Black Power salute.

At Mofolo Central, they paused outside Sally Motlana's Sizwe Stores, which would soon become a sanctuary and meeting place for Mashinini



Making their voices heard: Students march on June 16, 1976, carrying posters condemning the imposition of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in black schools. Photo: SA History Online

(referred to as 'field marshal' by some of his admirers) and his lieutenants fleeing from the security police. They were joined by columns of students from Naledi High and other schools in deep Soweto.

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This was a peaceful march for a just cause, Mashinini told the students.

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In Dube, near the vocational training school on Mncube Drive, a large Plymouth sedan came in their direction. The driver and all her passengers were white women, about five in all. Tsietsi and other older students in charge of the march marshalled the students to the sides of the road, allowing the vehicle to pass without incident. The students cheerfully waved at its occupants. Minutes later, a huge delivery truck with a white driver received the same courtesy.

However, this courtesy wasn't extended to Daniel Smit, inspector of black schools in the West Rand region. He was driving to Jabulani in the direction of Morris Isaacson High School when the marching schoolchildren stopped him, damaging his car. He was lucky to escape with minor injuries and managed to reach Jabulani, where he opened a case of assault and damage to property.

On their arrival at Orlando West High (Matseke), the Morris Isaacson



Inspiration: The dramatic events of June 16 have inspired artists over the years, as seen in Sifiso Gumede's powerful 2017 linocut, Education Not Bullets. Photo: ArtbankSA

crowd received a cold reception from MP 'Shumi' Mzaidume, a stern headmaster with a reputation for intolerance of student activism. His students were busy writing their first mid-year exam. He told the rowdy, uninvited guests that he did not appreciate any disruption from ill-disciplined learners who didn't know the purpose of schools. However, when the Matseke students realised what was happening outside, they dropped their pens, tore up their exam papers and joined their visiting peers outside. Many converged on the school gate, and some even jumped over the fence in their eagerness to leave the school premises. There was a lively, carnival-esque atmosphere as students milled around, laughing, chanting and chatting excitedly.

At mid-morning, Lieutenant-Colonel Johannes Augustus Kleingeld, commander of the Orlando Police Station, led a 50-strong squad in a procession of four police trucks, two patrol

vans with dogs and three heavy-duty armoured vehicles to the learners' assembly point up the ridge across the stream separating the two Orlandos. Ironically, the students' march had been planned three days earlier, right under Kleingeld's nose – directly opposite the police station at the DOCC.

The paths of the students and the police crossed at the intersection of Klipspruit Valley and Khumalo roads, where Hastings Ndlovu would later be shot. Although the circumstances surrounding his killing are still sketchy, he is regarded as the first casualty of the uprising.

Majakathata Mokoena, a student leader from Orlando High, had to intervene to remind the students that theirs was a peaceful march; there was no need to risk the wrath of the police by damaging property.

Despite attempts by the police to dissuade the students from pro-

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the course of South Africa's history



Students march on the morning of June 16. Their optimism was soon shattered by the violence turned on them by the apartheid police. Photo: Courtesy Global South Media Network



Power! At morning assembly at Morris Isaacson High on June 16, Tsietsi Mashini took over the proceedings from the school principal and after asking a student to lead them in singing the banned anthem, *Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika*, he raised his right hand and, with a clenched fist, shouted, 'Power!' In response, a forest of fists punched the air as the students shouted back, 'It's ours!' in a chorus. Photo: SA History Online

ceeding further, they pushed ahead regardless and crossed the bridge into Orlando West. From the westerly direction, columns of marchers emerged from all corners of the neighbourhood, swelling the numbers in the vicinity of Matseke High and Phefeni Secondary School, near the home of the Mandelas, the Tutus and the Sisulus.

The clock struck ten, and the wintry air was thick with tension and expectation. 'Get that car out of here! They are coming,' a school-teacher from Matseke High urged a driver from *The Star* newspaper. His passenger, Lucy Gough Berger, was a middle-aged white woman and a popular columnist. The teacher had a hunch that white lives would be in danger. He was proven right minutes later when the already tense situation spiralled out of control with the first shots fired by police.

More uniformed police – mainly white – and riot squad men arrived on the scene with dogs, mostly German shepherds. Joking, laughing and smoking, they took their positions in

a half circle and faced the students like an army preparing for battle, a small battalion in a sea of black faces displaying placards with slogans like 'Down with Afrikaans', 'Black Power', 'This is our day' and 'No to Afrikaans', while chanting freedom songs like 'Niyabasaba na? Hayi asibasabi, siyabafuna' (Are you scared of them? No, we are not scared. We want them) and 'Senzeni Na?' (What have we done?), a haunting, mournful hymn steeped in the tradition of struggle songs and usually sung at funerals and night vigils. Others showed the police peace signs.

Someone remembered 'Mbhayimbhayi' (Cannon), exiled singer Miriam Makeba's militant song. The rest joined in spontaneously and chanted it to their hearts' content. As the crowd grew bigger, the singing got louder, and the barking of the police dogs became incessant. Held securely on their leashes, the animals bared their canines and wagged their tails, as if understanding the significance of the day.

The bulk of the student crowd was concentrated at the entrance of Orlando West High, facing the police who were positioned about 80 metres up the street on the western side of Moema Street.

A group of curious residents – mostly women – gathered on the roadside across from the two schools. 'Are you going to kill our children?' one woman asked a black sergeant. 'No,' he replied calmly. 'The children are not fighting anyone. They are only demonstrating.'

The students were now singing 'Morena Boloka Sechaba sa Heso', the Sesotho version of the anthem 'God Save Our Nation'. Two policemen broke ranks and strode menacingly towards the students, who then started waving their hands, gesturing for the policemen to go away.

Without saying a word, one of

them picked up what might have been a stone and hurled the unidentified missile in the direction of the students. His colleague immediately followed his example with a number of teargas canisters.

Several demonstrators who stood in front and on the flanks of the crowd panicked and ran helter-skelter in all directions. As they scattered in retreat, one young woman stood her ground. She defiantly stepped towards the police and screamed, 'Shoot me! Shoot me!'

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'Are you going to kill our children?' one woman asked a black sergeant. 'No,' he replied calmly. 'The children are not fighting anyone. They are only demonstrating.'

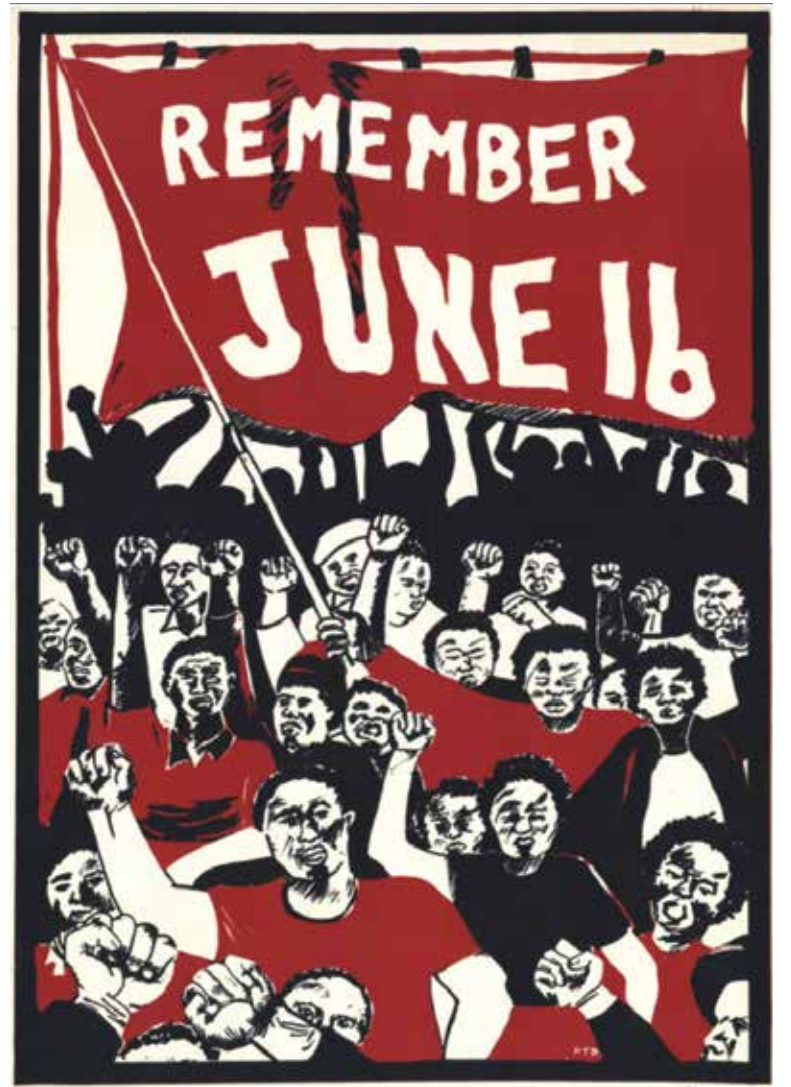
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Taken aback by the unexpected bravery, the men in blue lowered their weapons in a gesture of capitulation.

Emboldened by this incredibly courageous act, the retreating students regrouped and launched a frenzied counterattack on the police with a hail of stones.

The police raised their firearms again and aimed at the rampaging crowd. Bang! Bang! Bang! The loud sound of gunfire was matched by the children's heart-rending screams that pierced the cold morning air. A fleeing schoolboy was struck by a police bullet.

In the chaos and confusion of the situation, Antoinette Pieteron searched for her younger brother, Zolile Hector Pieteron. Earlier that morning, the 17-year-old Form II (Grade 9) pupil had seen him in the crowd and warned him not to roam



Memory is a weapon: This poster, titled *Remember June 16*, was produced by the Cape Youth Congress in 1987 to commemorate the 1976 Soweto Uprising. Photo: South African History Archive

around. She wanted to go back home with him after the march. The two siblings lived with their grandmother in White City Jabavu, where Hector was a Standard Five (Grade 7) pupil at Itshepeng Higher Primary School. But the previous night he had slept at his parents' home in Meadowlands.

Where could he be in this war zone? Had he managed to elude the bullets and find his way home? As these questions flashed across Antoinette's anxious mind, she saw a group of boys surrounding a youngster who lay injured on the side of the street. As she approached them, she screamed hysterically when she realised the injured child was Hector.

Suddenly, a lanky youth clad in faded denim overalls appeared out of nowhere, picked up Hector, and began to carry him down the street, with an anguished Antoinette jogging next to him. He was later identified as the 18-year-old Mbuyisa Makhubu.

Sophie Tema, a reporter for *The World*, was proceeding down the street leading from the Phefeni Clinic in a staff car driven by Stanley Mtshali when she saw the group coming towards them. She ordered Stanley to stop the car – a battered VW Beetle – so that they could take the injured boy to the clinic. Makhubu put Hector inside the car, and he and Antoinette climbed in, with Tema following them on foot.

Following a tip-off, the editor of *The World*, Percy Qoboza, had sent two news teams to cover the day's events. One team consisted of Sophie Tema and Dan Tleketele, driven by Mtshali. The other consisted of the photographer Sam Nzima and other reporters, driven by Thomas Khosa.

Nzima also witnessed the scene surrounding Hector Pieteron and managed to fire off a few frames. He knew that, if the police realised he had taken the pictures, they would confiscate the film. So he gave the roll to Thomas Khosa, who was also trying his hand at photography under the mentorship of the seasoned lensman and former Robben Islander, the late Moffat Zungu. Khosa sped out of the troubled neighbourhood and drove in a northerly direction via the old New Canada Road that connected Soweto to the city. About fifteen minutes later, he stopped outside the offices of *The World* and *Weekend World* newspapers at 11 Newclare Road, Industria, on time for the darkroom guys to process the images for the late-afternoon edition.

At the clinic, the doctor who examined Hector had sad news: The boy was dead. A police bullet had struck him in the back, and he was bleeding through his mouth. According to a postmortem report, the shot caused severe damage to the liver and kidneys, causing instant death.

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Preserving a legacy: Seth Mazibuko describes the 1976 Soweto student uprising as “the battle of the book versus the bullet that produced the ballot”. Photo: Facebook

The last unfinished march: Seth Mazibuko and the legacy of 1976

THEBE MABANGA

Seth Mazibuko, the youngest and one of the most recognisable leaders of the 1976 Soweto student uprising, was thrust into history by a seismic and tragic moment.

Fifty years later, he sees the anniversary not as a memorial alone, but as a chance to complete a generational mission: to preserve the legacy of June 16 and inspire young people to keep fighting for a better future.

This year, through the Seth Mazibuko Foundation, he helped organise the 1976@50 Conference, the first academic gathering dedicated to documenting, interpreting and showcasing the history and social impact of June 16 and its enduring influence on South Africa’s politics and society.

Speaking at a colloquium on the eve of the conference, Mazibuko said that in a democracy, “instead of throwing stones, we must be gathering stones to build the South Africa we want”.

He described the 1976 uprising as the work of “children who wanted to see change”.

Mazibuko had turned 16 the day before that fateful day. Born on June 15, 1960, and raised in Orlando East, he recalls that in those years one “had no choice” but to become politically active; the alternative, he says, was a life of crime or drifting into antisocial behaviour.

He credits the Black Consciousness Movement with giving his generation ideological direction after the ANC,

PAC, and other liberation movements had been banned.

The seeds of Black Consciousness were planted by Steve Biko, but they were also carried forward by figures such as Saths Cooper, Barney Pityana and the late Stanley Ntswa through church and civic structures. Biko’s call for self-reliance and psychological liberation, Mazibuko argues, remains unfinished business.

He believes the liberation of the mind should have been the foundation of policies such as Black Economic Empowerment but says it has not been fully realised more than three decades into democracy.

Mazibuko was present at the planning meeting on June 13, 1976, where students agreed on a peaceful protest three days later.

The march was meant to proceed to Orlando Stadium, but police violence shattered the plan before it could be realised. This year, organisers staged a commemorative march to symbolically “finish what we started”.

Another veteran of the uprising, Sibongile Mkhabela, told the colloquium that reflections on June 16 must remember “what the system did to people” and honour those who were jailed, tortured and killed.

She insisted that the uprising was never simply about Afrikaans as a language but about “the suppression of ideas”.

Mkhabela also stressed the need to recognise the central role of women in the struggle. Women leaders, she said, were not peripheral figures in

1976 but key organisers and actors whose contributions are too easily erased from the national narrative.

Participants at the colloquium argued that, despite June 16 becoming a national holiday, civil society has gradually been sidelined in discussions about how to carry forward the ideals of the uprising. The 1976@50 Conference aimed, in part, to bridge that gap.

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“Some of us are disappointed in our democracy ... what we fought for has not been fulfilled.” — Seth Mazibuko

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One theme explored at the conference was how the unrest spread beyond Soweto to Alexandra, Hammanskraal and Langa in Cape Town — echoing the way resistance had spread after the Sharpeville massacre in 1960. A week after Sharpeville, PAC leader Philip Kgosana led a massive anti-pass march from Langa to Cape Town’s De Waal Drive, now renamed Philip Kgosana Drive. That tradition of mass mobilisation would later become central to the UDF-led resistance of the 1980s.

Mazibuko has spoken candidly about his disillusionment with aspects

of post-apartheid South Africa. In a recent SABC interview, he said: “Some of us are disappointed in our democracy. Many of us are moaning that what we fought for has not been fulfilled.”

He often describes June 16 as “the battle of the book versus the bullet that produced the ballot”. But he argues that beyond the right to vote, many constitutional promises remain unrealised for ordinary black South Africans. Through his foundation, he now hosts “Courageous Conversations for Courageous Activism” with young people, urging them to engage critically with the Constitution and the unfinished project of social justice.

For Mazibuko, inequality remains brutally visible. He says it pains him to see mostly black children dying in unsafe scholar transport accidents or from consuming contaminated food — tragedies, he says, that rarely afflict children in affluent communities.

A year after the uprising, Mazibuko was detained and held for 18 months in solitary confinement without charge. He was later prosecuted under the Suppression of Communism Act and spent seven years on Robben Island, where he studied toward a Bachelor of Education degree.

After his release, he dedicated his career to education, serving as a teacher, principal and later chief operating officer of the Moral Regeneration Movement.

Yet the trauma of 1976 never fully left him. He still recalls seeing alongside Winnie Madikizela-Mandela the bodies of slain students piled up at

Baragwanath Hospital. There is also a trace of survivor’s guilt in the way he speaks about his comrades: of the 11 accused who stood trial with him before being sent to Robben Island, only three are still alive.

Today, Mazibuko worries that South Africa has become “an angry nation”, pointing to xenophobic violence and the steady erosion of public trust in institutions. He says the country must return to a basic question: What was the struggle about?

At the same time, he wanted the 50th anniversary to mark a handover. He says he is ready to “pass on the torch” of activism and entrust the work of commemorating June 16 to a younger generation already working alongside his foundation.

The foundation now focuses on hunger relief, food insecurity, restoring a culture of teaching and learning, and supporting students who cannot afford tertiary education.

Mazibuko is also leading a campaign to find Mbuyisa Makhubu, the young man photographed carrying the dying Hector Pieterse in Sam Nzima’s iconic image of June 16. “Dead or alive”, he says, Makhubu must be found — whether as an elderly man somewhere in exile or as remains that can finally bring closure to his family and his generation.

For Mazibuko, that would help complete the mission of the children of 1976: to ensure their story is not only remembered but also finished with dignity.

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New book reframes the Soweto Uprising's impact beyond June 16

JOHNATHAN PAOLI

On the morning of 16 June 1976, thousands of students marched through Soweto to Orlando Stadium in protest against the apartheid government's decision to impose Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in black schools.

Conservative estimates found that the subsequent uprisings claimed at least 575 lives, including 451 people killed by police, with roughly a quarter of the victims under the age of 18, while a further 3,900 people suffered serious injuries.

Between 16 June 1976 and 28 February 1977, the police arrested almost 6,000 people on charges of public violence, riotous assembly, malicious injury to property, and arson. Just under half of the arrested people were under 18 when they were rounded up.

Yet as historian Dr Julian Brown argues in his new book, *Soweto Uprising: A Documentary History*, the events of 16 June were neither the beginning nor the end of the story.

"It is only when we see how the uprisings were not a single moment of resistance, but rather a series of new forms of protest, organisation, and commitment that erupted in many places and in many forms that we can begin to discern their significance," Brown writes.

Published ahead of the 50th anniversary of June 16, his book seeks to recover a broader history of the uprising through an extensive collection of original documents, witness testimonies, newspaper reports, organisational records and archival material.

Brown, an associate professor at Wits University's political studies department, sat down for an interview with Inside Education and explained why he believes the uprising must be understood as a national process rather than a single day of tragedy.

"The more we focus on the public holiday ... the easier it is to treat the protests that continued in Soweto as an afterthought, to ignore the fact that Cape Town, Bonteheuwel and other parts of the Cape erupted in August and September of that year; that Gqeberha, that Durban, and areas around what were [the homelands of] Bophuthatswana and QwaQwa all saw mass student protests, mass police violence, and significant individual deaths over the course of the next six months," he said.

Brown warns that the emphasis on a single day risks obscuring the protests that continued throughout 1976 and into 1977, confining the fo-



Historian Dr Julian Brown argues in *Soweto Uprising: A Documentary History* that the events of 16 June were neither the beginning nor the end of the story.

cus to Soweto only and reducing the restructuring of resistance to a single confrontation between students and police.

"What I'm trying to do with this book is to simultaneously provide a narrative that guides readers but also to put in front of people sources from the time so that they can hear and see the voices of activists and individuals and ordinary witnesses in their own words, which is what allows us to see something that often gets highlighted in more processed and analysed histories, which is the odd and idiosyncratic details that are specific to one person's experience but not necessarily to everybody else's."

Among the most memorable discoveries were deeply personal accounts of violence and solidarity and "a great deal of disturbing material".

Brown recalls one testimony involving a young activist who watched a woman help schoolchildren recover from tear gas exposure before being shot in front of them.

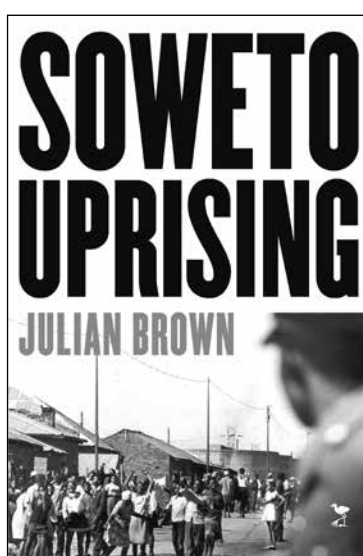
He notes that the uprising left behind an extraordinary documentary record but warns readers about the limits of historical memory.

"We have no idea what, for example, Hector Pieteron felt, because he died in June; we have no idea why so many people participated and what their experience was. We only know what survives," he said.

A major point of the book is its re-assessment of the role played by the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM).

Brown argues that the BCM's intellectual and organisational influence has often been acknowledged in passing but insufficiently integrated into mainstream narratives of 1976.

The book's opening chapter traces the emergence of Black Consciousness from university campuses in the late 1960s and its spread into



township schools. The philosophy appealed to the youth, and Soweto proved especially fertile ground for these ideas.

"The ideas and ideals of Black Consciousness and the institutions that supported it became central to the development of the political consciousness of the youth in Soweto," he writes.

Another recurring theme is the political sophistication of the students who led the uprising.

"We have a tendency to remember it [June 16] both as a tragedy, because of the deaths of young people who were killed before their lives could develop, and we have a tendency to think of it as a purely educational struggle," he said.

“

The uprisings were not a single moment of resistance

”

Brown locates the protest as a breaking point of a longer process of attempts at countering the ravages of apartheid instead of a single exceptional event.

"It did not suddenly emerge in June. The circular from the Department of Bantu Education came out in 1974, with 1976 being the year in which it [Afrikaans as a medium of instruction] was to be implemented. Throughout late 1974 and 1975, parents and teachers' organisations and principals all tried to use official means to roll back this policy. It's only after the failure of petitions and other forms of above-ground politics



Tragic death: The image of a fatally wounded Hector Pieteron, carried by a distraught Mbuyisa Makhubu and flanked by Hector's devastated sister, Antoinette, has become an iconic reminder of the human cost of the June 16 1976 Soweto uprising. Photo: Sam Nzima

that 1976 came about," he said.

While the decree of 1974 acted as a catalyst, Brown argues that students quickly connected educational grievances to broader questions about apartheid, economic inequality and political exclusion.

"The marches that followed on June 17th, 18th, 19th and throughout the rest of the year were in part about the language issue but increasingly about everything to do with the Bantu education system as it was at the time and about the grotesque violence of the police in response to the student march," Brown said.

"In other words, by August and September that year, school students, a whole new generation of activists, were connecting specific educational problems with broader apartheid policies and with the economic structures of South Africa and were trying to protest against all of them," he said.

As South Africa marked 50 years since the uprising, Brown believes the central lesson remains relevant.

"Our democracy is founded on the unplanned, unthought, spontaneous uprisings of ordinary citizens; it was not planned from above. It is not defined by its governmental structures, as important as those are. It is defined by the willingness of ordinary

people to put their lives on the line for democracy," he said.

Brown argues that the struggle of 1976 was fundamentally about participation, dignity and the right of ordinary people to shape the decisions that affect their lives.

He hopes readers will recognise the intellectual depth of the young people who led the uprising.

"I think it is worth repeating that the sophisticated analysis that the youth, school children in their late teens and early twenties, had of the connection between education and capital, between the labour market and politics, between social segregation and intellectual segregation, is one that we need to recapture for ourselves," he said.

"Everybody is capable of complex, sophisticated thought, and we very often forget that young people are as capable of that sophistication as those of us with multiple degrees after our name," he added.

The work restores complexity and nuance to an event that is often reduced to a single photograph, a single day and a single place.

Rather than simply commemorating the past, Brown invites readers to encounter it anew through the words of those who lived it.

June 16 @ 50

From Soweto
1976 to
#FeesMustFall

A dialogue on 50 years of youth struggle, education and unfinished change

JOHNATHAN PAOLI

Fifty years after the Soweto Uprising and a decade after the height of the #FeesMustFall movement, academics, activists, and former student leaders gathered at the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) earlier this month to reflect on the enduring role of young people in shaping South Africa's future.

Opening the event at the HSRC offices in Cape Town, researcher Dr Angélique Wildschut said the dialogue was intended not only as a commemoration of the past but also as a forward-looking conversation about the future of education, skills and youth development.

"This collaboration is intentional. Since this conversation seeks to look back and reflect, it is important that it is also forward-looking and places the relevance of this particular occurrence within the context of a better future for African youth," she said.

The event, titled "Soweto 1976 Meets #FeesMustFall: Youth Dialogue on Past and Present Struggles", brought together veteran 1976 activist Sibongile Mkhabela, #FeesMustFall leader Nompandolo Mkhathshwa, University of Cape Town SRC member Kgabe Molepo, and HSRC researchers Professor Sharlene Swartz and Dr Adam Cooper.

The discussion explored the connections between the 16 June 1976 uprising against Bantu education and the imposition of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction; the 2015-2016 #FeesMustFall protests for free and decolonised higher education; and the challenges confronting young South Africans in 2026.

One of the most powerful interventions came from former Soweto Students' Representative Council and South African Students Movement leader and Soweto uprising veteran Sibongile Mkhabela, the only female member of the "Soweto 11" who was arrested and tried by the apartheid state.

In a recorded interview played during the session, Mkhabela argued that the generation that inherited democracy had failed young people.

"We should be on trial as a generation. We've had the opportunity to do better for young people, for our children, for our country. We haven't done as much as we're capable of," she said.

Mkhabela criticised what she described as an overly utilitarian education system that prioritises economic productivity at the expense of critical thinking, creativity and citizenship.

"We haven't demanded the best of ourselves. And as a result, we have not asked the best of our children if you're looking at the schools and how they're performing," she said.

Drawing parallels between apartheid-era education and contemporary schooling, Mkhabela argued that today's system risks reducing young people to "servants to the market" rather than developing them as engaged citizens capable of interpreting social problems and shaping society.

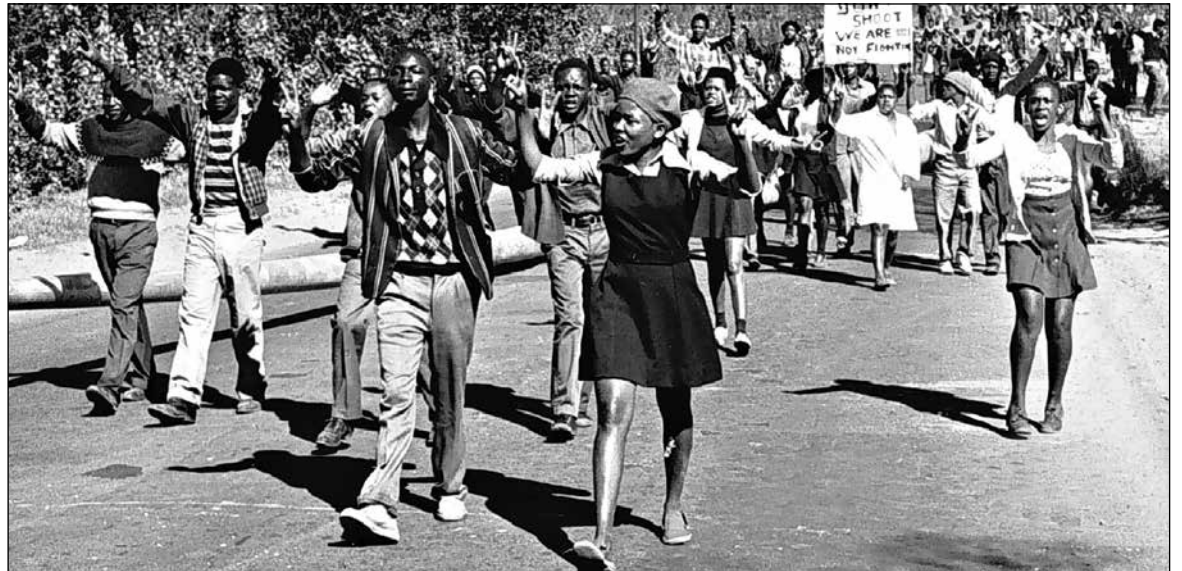
Reflecting on current conditions, Mkhabela said South Africa had failed to provide many young people with access to arts, culture, music and sport, which all provide critical thinking skills.

"We had the opportunity, and we still do have the opportunity. So if I were a young person today, I would say that we have squandered huge opportunities for our young people. But I don't think it's too late. I think it can still be done," she said.

Former ANC MP, Wits SRC President and #FeesMustFall leader Nompandolo Mkhathshwa drew direct links between the 1976 uprising and the student protests that erupted four decades later. She argued that both movements challenged systems that limited the prospects of black youth.

"They were not just fighting against being forced to be taught in a language that was not their home language. They were fighting against a system that sought to reduce young black people to being of a particular class in society, to contributing in inferior spaces in society. And so when you think about Fees Must Fall and its call for free education, which was initially a call for a 0% fee increment, it wasn't just about the numbers," she said.

Likewise, #FeesMustFall was never simply about tuition fees only. "It was about how access enables us to ensure that young people have access to an education. Part of it was to say it must be a decolonised quality education. We don't want to have access to an education that's not going to enable us to participate effectively and meaningfully in



Making history: Students from Soweto march on June 16, 1976. Photo: SA History Online



The panellists in the dialogue (top row from left) were Nompandolo Mkhathshwa, Prof Sharlene Swartz, Sibongile Mkhabela and (bottom row from left) Dr Adam Cooper, Dr Angélique Wildschut and Kgabe Molepo. Photos: HSRC; Mkhabela, courtesy of YouTube

the economy," she said.

While acknowledging the expansion of student financial aid since the protests, describing the growth in funding support as one of the #FeesMustFall movement's major achievements, Mkhathshwa said the struggle for meaningful and decolonised education remained unfinished.

To achieve the vision imagined by the youth of 1976, she said, the country would need to address deeper structural inequalities.

UCT Clinical Psychology MA student and SRC member Kgabe Molepo reflected on how activism differs in a democratic South Africa compared with apartheid.

He noted that while today's youth enjoy constitutional freedoms unavailable to the 1976 generation, the struggle has become more complex. "For them, the enemy was clear. They were openly repressed. But for us now, it's bureaucracy and a different type of fight," he said.

Molepo warned that democracy can create the illusion that change happens automatically. "It doesn't happen automatically. We need to put in the work for things to change," he said.

He maintained that protests remain necessary but argued they must be linked to longer-term legal, institutional and policy strategies. Molepo reflected on the opportunities and limitations of social media activism.

While digital platforms make mobilisation easier, they can become performative if campaigns fail to produce concrete outcomes. "Viral posts are there, but afterwards, we just back off," he said.

Reflecting on the tactics used during #FeesMustFall, Mkhathshwa said student activists deliberately sought innovative forms of protest. But Mkhathshwa emphasised that successful activism extends beyond demonstrations. "The post-protest work is so important because that's what translates into policy reform," she said.

She described the painstaking process of ensuring agreements reached during protests were properly implemented through university governance structures. Looking back, she identified unity across political lines as one of the movement's greatest achievements.

Professor Sharlene Swartz presented research on social restitution and public attitudes towards addressing the legacy of apartheid. Her findings showed that support for addressing historical inequalities has grown over the past decade, particularly among younger South Africans.

"Gen Z, young people who are 14 to 29, those young people that Mam Sibongile was referring to, you're the ones who are saying we actually want to do something about it," she said.

Swartz highlighted the stark racial inequalities that continue to characterise South African society, noting that white South Africans enjoy living standards comparable to those of some of the world's wealthiest nations, while black South Africans rank closer to those of developing countries. "It's that gap, for me, that needs more discussion, more conversation," she said.

Swartz rejected suggestions that race should no longer feature in public debates. "When there are no

more differences, we can stop. But if it's going to take another 20 or 30 years, we're going to keep talking about the differences," she said.

Dr Adam Cooper focused on youth unemployment and the enduring legacy of apartheid's economic structure.

He argued that South Africa's economy remains heavily influenced by historical patterns rooted in mining, energy and racial exclusion.

"That structure of a very limited informal economy ... still defines the kinds of livelihoods available to young South Africans. And I think we really need to understand that history rather than just try and change the numbers," he said.

Cooper said young people remain "at the back of the queue" in the labour market despite often being better educated than older generations.

To address unemployment, he proposed a three-pronged strategy centred on self-employment, public employment and structural economic transformation. The dialogue ultimately revealed striking continuities between 1976, 2016 and 2026.

While the forms of struggle have evolved (from confronting apartheid laws to challenging university fees, unemployment and inequality), the underlying demand remains the same: a society in which young people have genuine opportunities to shape their own futures.

Fifty years after the Soweto uprising and 10 years after #FeesMustFall, the panellists agreed that South Africa's youth remain at the forefront of demanding that the promises of freedom, education and equality become a lived reality, and not just a promised vision.

June 16 @ 50

Sarafina! brings the spirit of 1976 back home

CHARMAINE NDLELA

As South Africa marked 50 years since the Soweto Uprising of June 16, 1976, the spirit of the generation that challenged apartheid's education system returned to the stage with *Sarafina! The Homecoming* at the Soweto Theatre.

More than a musical, the production served as a powerful reminder of the sacrifices made by thousands of young people who demanded dignity, equality and the right to quality education.

Through song, dance and storytelling, audiences were transported back to one of the defining moments in South Africa's history, when students took to the streets to reject the imposition of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction and challenge the injustices of Bantu education.

The atmosphere inside the theatre was charged with emotion as performers brought to life the hopes, fears and determination of a generation that refused to accept oppression.

Running from May 8 to 31, *Sarafina! The Homecoming* formed part of the national commemorations marking five decades since the uprising.

The production unfolded just kilometres from Morris Isaacson High School, one of the schools at the heart of the 1976 protests.

Choreographed by Nompumelelo Gumede-Ngema, the 2026 revival reimagines the classic musical for a new generation while honouring the courage of the youth who helped shape South Africa's liberation struggle.

As part of this year's commemorations, Soweto Theatre announced the return of original *Sarafina!* cast member Khanyo Maphumulo on June 16.

Maphumulo was only 14 when she performed the role of Magundane and became renowned for the powerful vocals that carried the story of the 1976 generation to audiences across the globe.

Created by the late Dr Mbongeni Ngema in collaboration with jazz legend Hugh Masekela, *Sarafina!* remains one of South Africa's most enduring cultural works. Decades after its debut, the musical continues to resonate across generations.

The production also paid tribute

to Ngema's legacy, highlighting the power of art to preserve history and inspire social change. Through *Sarafina!*, Ngema gave a global voice to the anti-apartheid struggle and immortalised the courage of young people who stood up against injustice.

Veteran actor and theatre practitioner Mpho Molepo returned to direct the production for a second consecutive year following his acclaimed 2025 staging.

Speaking to *Inside Education*, Molepo said the themes explored in *Sarafina!* remain as relevant today as they were five decades ago.

"People always ask what *Sarafina!* is about, and I keep saying it is about young people at a particular moment in history. But it also speaks to the present. The youth of today must continue asking how they can change the material conditions of their lives," he said.

Molepo acknowledged the progress made since the dawn of democracy while noting that significant challenges remain.

"Since 1994, the country has moved forward in making education accessible. While there may still be shortcomings within the system, access itself was almost unimaginable for many during apartheid," he said.

Drawing parallels between the 1976 generation and contemporary student movements, Molepo pointed to campaigns such as #Rhodes Must Fall and #Fees Must Fall as evidence that young people continue to challenge inequality and demand transformation.

"For me, those movements reflected the spirit of 1976. Young people are still questioning the system and demanding change. Those who sacrificed their lives during apartheid would be proud to see a generation continuing that struggle," he said.

Molepo also underscored the enduring role of theatre in society.

"Theatre allows us to reflect on who we are as a society. It can educate, mobilise and inspire change. I do not think anyone can walk into *Sarafina!* and leave unchanged, especially young people who may not know this history."

For 26-year-old ensemble performer Thembi Ngwenya, being part of the production has been both emotional-



Charged with emotion: The *Sarafina!* performers brought to life the hopes, fears and determination of a generation that refused to accept oppression. Photo: Eddie Mtsweni



Topical: *Sarafina!* director Mpho Molepo said the themes explored in *Sarafina!* remain as relevant today as they were five decades ago. Photo: Eddie Mtsweni

ly demanding and deeply meaningful.

"There are moments when I become so emotional that I struggle to sing. It is such a beautiful story to be part of because it carries so much pain, anger and resilience," she said.

“Those who sacrificed their lives during apartheid would be proud to see a generation continuing that struggle. — *Sarafina!* director Mpho Molepo

Ngwenya believes that while educational opportunities have expanded significantly since apartheid, many learners and students still face barriers.

"The system is better than before, but there are still challenges. Some

students believe they have funding only to discover years later that their fees have not been paid. Those realities are heartbreaking," she said.

For her, performing in *Sarafina!* is a way of honouring those who paved the way for future generations.

"What makes me proud as a young person is being able to tell the story of those who came before us and fought for the opportunities we have today."

The Soweto Uprising was never solely about language policy. At its core, it was about dignity, identity and the belief that young people had the right to shape their own futures.

Before thousands of students marched through the streets of Soweto on June 16, 1976, they had already overcome fear, intimidation and the harsh realities of apartheid rule. Their courage helped alter the course of South African history.

Fifty years later, South Africans continue to honour the learners who fought for freedom, dignity and the right to quality education.

While many challenges remain

within the education system, one of the most significant gains since 1976 has been the recognition of learners' linguistic rights. Unlike during apartheid, when Afrikaans was imposed as a medium of instruction, South Africa's democratic Constitution recognises 12 official languages and protects the right to receive education in the language of one's choice where reasonably practicable.

In recent years, the Department of Basic Education has expanded Mother Tongue-Based Bilingual Education, enabling learners to continue learning in their home language beyond the Foundation Phase while gradually strengthening their English proficiency.

Sarafina! The Homecoming reminds audiences that the struggle of 1976 was not simply about rejecting Afrikaans as a medium of instruction. It was about affirming the right of every child to learn, dream and succeed on their own terms — a message that remains as relevant today as it was half a century ago.

June 16 @ 50

The bitter, brutal story of 1976 comes to life on stage in Rise '76

Tiisetso Mashifane wa Noni's adaptation of Sifiso Mxolisi Ndlovu's book humanises the tragedy without cheapening it

SANDILE MEMELA

Tiisetso Mashifane wa Noni, director of the acclaimed stage play *Rise '76: The Story of June 16th*, is a superstar who has risen to staggering heights.

The young, multi-award-winning director was always going to meet history with ambition.

Her stage adaptation of historian Sifiso Mxolisi Ndlovu's book, *The Soweto Uprisings: Counter Memories of June 1976*, is soul-stirring theatre.

Its outstanding achievement is that it does what 33 years of commemoration have often failed to do: it humanises the tragedy without cheapening it. That is storytelling with muscle, research, insight and moral courage.

To understand *Rise '76*, you must first understand Sifiso Ndlovu. He is a product of the student uprisings himself. A child of 1976 who, from Bantu Education schools, went on to study history at the universities of Natal and Wits to fulfil a mission: to tell a more comprehensive story of the uprising.

A professor of history at UNISA, Ndlovu is also a member of UNESCO's Scientific Committee responsible for updating the General History of Africa series.

In his book, Ndlovu challenges the dominant narrative that students were the sole leaders of the resistance.

He argues, with archival rigour, that June 16 was not made only by placards and petrol bombs. It was made by parents who sheltered chil-



Rising star: Writer and director Tiisetso Mashifane wa Noni has received widespread praise for her stage play. Photo: X

dren, principals who tried to mediate, teachers who were expelled for defiance, school boards who wrote letters, journalists and editors who risked careers, and community members who carried the wounded.

Above all, Ndlovu transcends partisan politics. He refuses to hand June 16 over to any political party as property. He insists on a human record. Parents, principals, teachers, black police, white doctors, nurses, and Broederbond inspectors are all placed in the same frame.

That is intellectual courage. That is history as it was lived, messy and shared.

There is an intuitive link between Ndlovu and Mashifane wa Noni. The play is an intergenerational encounter between a child of 1976 and a child of a child of 1976.

The historian gives facts and context. The artist gives breath and blood. Together, they resurrect a national memory that politics has flattened.

Rise '76 honours Ndlovu's mission completely. It does not reduce 1976 to Hector Pieterse, Tsietso Mashinini, and police bullets. Instead, it brings the full cast into the room.

The production traces the buildup with patience. Problems started in 1974. By February 1976, tension was simmering. Then the textbooks arrived in Afrikaans. Teachers were ordered to teach maths and science in a language they barely spoke. Students refused to learn. Empty classrooms became classrooms of resistance.

The audience feels the frustration before they feel the fire. That slow burn is Ndlovu's scholarship translated into stage time.

Most crucially, the play avoids divisive, partisan point scoring. In an era where every historical event is claimed, *Rise '76* refuses. It does not turn June 16 into ANC property or Azapo property. It treats it as a human catastrophe. That is brave and faithful to Ndlovu's method.



Speaking truth to power: Lead actor Alex Sonó plays Bafana, a student poet, who is killed for his words.

His book insists that history is made by people, not slogans and symbols.

Meneer De Beer, the hardline Afrikaner school inspector carrying out the Broederbond's wishes, is not a cartoon villain. He believes in order and language survival.

“

[Ndlovu] insists that history is made by people, not slogans and symbols.

”

Alfie Ndlovu, the school principal, a character torn from life, can speak Afrikaans and tries to mediate by encouraging teachers to use English to teach Afrikaans. He is pragmatic, not heroic.

Teachers are divided. Some comply, some resist and are expelled. That division reflects the real dilemma of black educators caught between survival and solidarity.

The most striking characterisation is that of the black police offi-

cer. He raids houses to arrest Bafana Buthelezi, a composite of Mashinini and Seth Mazibuko, and displays brutality for his superiors' approval.

Yet when confronted to explain his behaviour later, he says: "Betrayal is survival. I, too, must feed my family." That line is uncomfortable because it is true. Many people can relate.

Ndlovu forces us to ask what makes an oppressed man become the fist of the oppressor. The play does not easily condemn but makes us think.

Even white police and doctors get interiority. Kleynhans, who killed Lesley Hastings Ndlovu on June 16, is shown traumatised by his act. White pathologists and black doctors and nurses at Baragwanath Hospital are depicted as overwhelmed by blood and injured children.

Violence dehumanises both the victim and the one holding the gun. Showing that human side to violence is rare on South African stages, and it matters.

Rise '76 treats Ndlovu's work with respect. It is fact-based and accurate. It resurrects details often omitted: the June 13 strategic planning meeting that resolved the march would be peaceful. The role of radical poetry as "inflammatory"

material that invited police attention. Testimonies from the Cillie Commission. The ratio of 48 police against over 2,000 students.

We learn the agony of Sam Nzima, whose photograph of Hector destroyed his family life and career.

Above all, we see the black woman kneeling in pain, a visual that centres the overlooked trauma of black mothers. We see an uncle searching for a four-year-old lost in chaos while the mother keeps her pain silent.

June 16 was not only students with placards, either. It was children, homes, futures interrupted.

The depiction of June 16, where Ndlovu was killed first, is vital. Many productions jump to Pieterse. *Rise '76* shows escalation. We learn that 176 students died that day across Soweto. The number is spoken, not shouted. That restraint makes it heavier.

The production is raw and riveting. Acting is tight. Space becomes a classroom, police van, hospital, and kitchen. Sound and movement carry tension. Poetry that got Bafana killed is performed with urgency. When Bafana dies "for poetry", we understand why the state feared words. It still does.

For some, the play is too long. The

June 16 @ 50



Counter memories: Historian Sifiso Mxolisi Ndlovu with journalist and author Sandile Memela.



Talking shop: Lead actor Alex Sonó and Sandile Memela.

comprehensive detail that makes it rich also makes it heavy. Cillie Commission excerpts, teacher debates, and hospital scenes are all valuable, but they slow the momentum. A sharper edit would let emotional peaks land harder. Riveting should not mean exhausting. Yet there is a 15-minute interval, and the work remains powerful to the end.

few framing moments via narrator or projection could contextualise without preaching. Maybe.

For the first time in decades, a mainstream stage work depicts the

tragedy of imposing Afrikaans as a medium of instruction without slogans. It shows language as a weapon of policy. That is urgent today when debates on language, curriculum,

and decolonisation are alive. Rise '76 reminds us that language policy is never neutral. It shapes who learns, who leads, and who is buried.

The play also intervenes in mem-

ory. By showing black police, principals, and parents who disagreed, it complicates "us vs them". It shows oppression works by recruiting the oppressed. That lesson is painful but necessary for accountability and healing.

Rise '76 is an outstanding production. It is great storytelling because it trusts the audience. It does not manipulate. It presents, contextualises, and balances. It honours teachers who wanted to teach, students who refused to learn, police who needed to feed families, and parents who buried children.

Yes, it may be a bit too long. But it is soul-stirring and historically responsible. It honours Ndlovu's intellectual labour by making his counter-memory live. It honours the dead by refusing propaganda. It honours the living by showing trauma inherited by all.

This is the theatre South Africa needs: research-driven, morally complex, and rooted in human experience. If you care about history, language, and how ordinary people get caught in political machines, see this play. Take your children. Take your students. June 16 was not just a date. It was a wound. Rise '76 does not bandage it, but opens it so we can see clearly and maybe finally heal.

Book Review: *Malume's Painting: The 1976 Student Uprising*

Journalist, communication strategist, men's health advocate and prolific author Sandile Memela has woven his real-life encounters of the Soweto Uprising into an educational and inspiring graphic teen novel called *Malume's Painting: The 1976 Student Uprising*.

"The children must know their history to define a new future for themselves," Memela says of his motivation to write the book, which tells the story of Bhekisizwe, an activist who returns to South Africa from exile following the fall of apartheid.

He reconnects with family, including his sister Zoleka and her children. He quickly realises that the children are disconnected from the history of the struggle and ensconced in comfortable suburban life.

Through his painting and teaching, he sets out to correct this anomaly and fill a void with an important record of history.

The story, beautifully illustrated by Mpumelelo Ndlovu, is told in a crisp, lucid and easy-flowing, age-appropriate manner and contains salient observations and lessons about the vagaries of township life and the changes South Africa has undergone to become a democracy.

Memela dedicated the book to his twin sisters, Busisiwe and Ntsiki Memela, who were student leaders during the uprising and went on to become operatives in the ANC's military wing, uMkhonto weSizwe.

It is a worthy read for any teenager who needs an accessible record of this important history. — THEBE MABANGA



Good read: Sandile Memela's book, illustrated by Mpumelelo Ndlovu, tells of an activist who returns from exile and sets out to teach his sister's children about the history of June 16, 1976.

“This is the theatre South Africa needs: research-driven, morally complex, and rooted in human experience.”

The production presents hard, cold facts with minimal analysis or interpretation. That is a strength and a limit. Strength, because it avoids lecturing and lets viewers conclude. Limit, because younger audiences unfamiliar with 1976 may leave moved but unclear about structural forces: Bantu Education, labour needs, Black Consciousness, and Frelimo rallies. A

June 16 @ 50

The story behind ‘Soweto Blues’

Miriam Makeba's famous song about the June 16 uprising

GWEN ANSELL

Miriam Makeba sang a famous song about the June 16, 1976, Soweto Uprising.

The song was called Soweto Blues and its opening lines go:

*The children got a letter from the master
It said no more Xhosa, Sotho, no more Zulu
Refusing to comply, they sent an answer
That's when the policemen came to the rescue
Well, the children were flying, bullets, dying
Oh the mothers screaming and crying
The fathers were working in the city
The evening news brought out all the publicity
Just a little atrocity
Deep in the city*

The song recalls the events of that day when schoolchildren, marching peacefully in Soweto to protest the imposition of Afrikaans as an official language of instruction, were shot down by the police of the apartheid regime.

“There's nobody ... who made the world more aware of what was happening in [apartheid] South Africa than Miriam Makeba.” — Hugh Masekela

The system's architect, Hendrik Verwoerd had declared that black children must never be educated above the level of “hewers of wood and drawers of water”.

Soweto Blues is one of the two compositions most closely associated with the events of June 16.

The other, Isililo (Tears of Soweto), from Sakhile, was written in retrospect, in 1982, as the group's co-leader, saxophonist Khaya Mahlangu, reflected on his nightmare memories of Soweto on that day.

But Soweto Blues was written as the news of the massacre reached the world. The story of the song is a



Voice of protest: Miriam Makeba travelled from her home in exile in Guinea in 1977 to record 'Soweto Blues' in Kumasi, Ghana, with Hugh Masekela and Stanley Kvesi Todd. Photo: Miriam Makeba Foundation

story of solidarity with the struggle against apartheid across the African continent.

Ask who composed the song, and the answer is likely to be trumpeter Hugh Masekela and/or his ex-wife Miriam Makeba. The song, officially released in 1977 by Makeba, is best-known in the version released on her 1989 album, *Welela*.

The lyrics are instantly recognisable as being penned by Masekela the rhymer – “Just a little atrocity/ Deep in the city”.

But the melody tells a bigger,

pan-African story. It was co-written by the trumpeter and guitarist Stanley Kvesi Todd, founder of the Ghanaian ensemble Hedzoleh (“Freedom”) Sounds.

Masekela was introduced to the West Africans by Afrobeat legend Fela Kuti in 1973, and the collaboration produced three albums led by his name: *Introducing Hedzoleh Soundz* (1973); *I Am Not Afraid* (1974); and *The Boy's Doin' It* (1975).

But there were other collaborations between Kvesi and Masekela,

too, including the 1977 *You Told Your Mama Not to Worry*, which was recorded in Kumasi, Ghana, with Kvesi as co-producer.

Makeba came from her exile home in Guinea to record; there were compositions by Masekela and Todd, tunes adapted from tradition, and a title track about exile composed by South African singer and songwriter Letta Mbulu. *Soweto Blues* closed the A-side. The original album, regrettably, is hard to find.

The 1976 uprising sparked in Soweto but spread across the coun-

try, from the urban settlements of Langa and Gugulethu in the Cape to the rural villages of the North West province. Parents scoured mortuaries for their dead children, many of whom had apparently been shot in the back. Nobody knows precisely how many died, but the national figure is estimated to be well more than 700.

And just as the rising itself cannot be narrowed to what happened in Soweto – even if the name “sells” – so the song paying tribute cannot be confined to South Africa alone. It came from a trumpet player exiled in the US, a singer sheltered in Guinea, and a musician born in Ghana.

Half a century later, the song's words still hold lessons about the events of June 16. The story of its creation teaches too: about a shared African history in which borders did not define humanity.

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Legacy of an icon

In an article on *The Conversation* website titled “The legacy of iconic singer Miriam Makeba and her art of activism” in March 2022, Nomfundo Xaluva, Senior Lecturer at the South African College of Music at the University of Cape Town, described Makeba (1932-2008) as “a stalwart and an icon of African liberation and identity”.

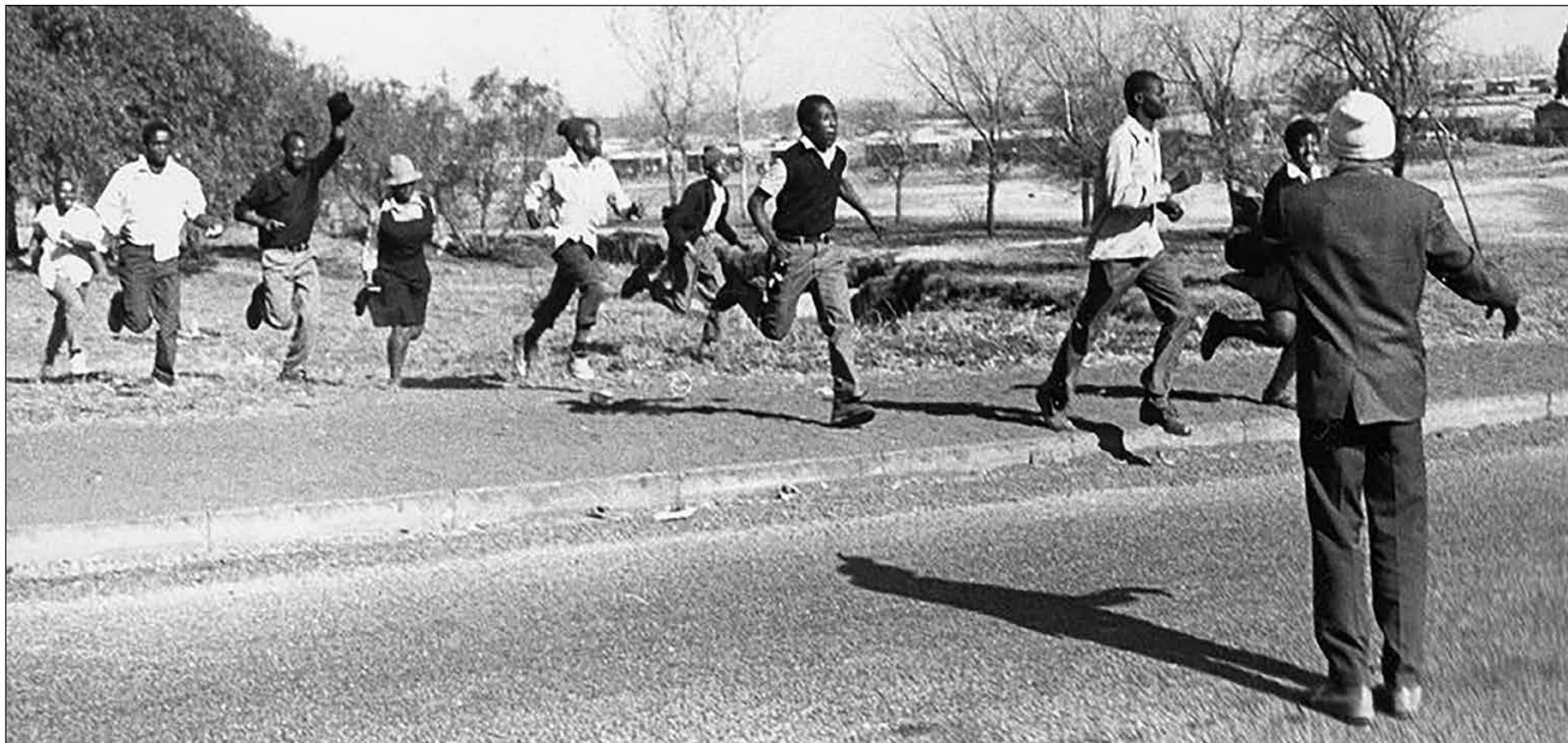
Below are some excerpts from Xaluva's article:

- “Her legacy carved the way for future generations to live a life of authenticity, fearlessness and bravery.”
- “She contributed to black people's struggle for liberation and defended the integrity of African identity and artistry while living in a land absent from her

ancestry.”

- “Despite being banned from her home country for her outspokenness and resistance to apartheid, Makeba went on to build an illustrious international career, performing on some of the world's most prestigious stages.”
- “Makeba would describe life in apartheid South Africa when introducing her songs and would use every opportunity to address inequality.”
- “Her artistry was a lantern that burnt vigorously through one of the darkest eras in history.”
- “She fought more with her ‘artivism’ than many a man did with their armed weaponry.”

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Nationwide struggle: Students protesting during the June 1976 uprising in South Africa. Photo: Gallo Images / Rapport archives

It wasn't just Soweto in flames . . .

Remembering the forgotten student uprising in Hammanskraal

PRECIOUS MASHABA

The study of South Africa's 1976 student uprisings has traditionally focused on the events that unfolded in Soweto on June 16, 1976. While this focus is understandable given the scale and symbolic significance of the events there, it has often overshadowed the experiences of students in other parts of the country.

My research project on the student protests that took place in Hammanskraal on 21 June 1976 emerged from an interest in understanding how the uprising spread beyond urban centres and how students in rural and peri-urban communities experienced and responded to apartheid education.

The process of conducting this research highlighted the importance of local histories in broadening historical understanding and revealed both the opportunities and challenges associated with reconstructing under-documented historical events.

One of the most interesting aspects of this research was reconstructing the events that unfolded on 21 June 1976 at Kgetsi-ya-Tsie Secondary School in Temba. Oral testimonies revealed that students learnt about the Soweto uprising through newspapers that circulated among learners after being brought to school by teachers.

After reading reports of the demonstrations in Soweto, students began discussing their own frustrations with

the Bantu Education system. Isaac Thage recalled how students gathered after assembly and refused to proceed to their classrooms. What followed was a spontaneous decision to set fire to the school building.

The burning of Kgetsi-ya-Tsie was particularly significant because it demonstrated the extent to which the Soweto uprising had inspired students beyond major urban centres. The events in Hammanskraal revealed how information travelled rapidly across communities and how local students interpreted national developments through their own experiences of educational inequality. The protest was not merely an act of solidarity but also a response to the conditions that students faced in their own schools.

The testimonies collected during this research further revealed that student grievances extended beyond the Afrikaans language issue. Participants frequently discussed overcrowding, corporal punishment, poverty and the perceived irrelevance of aspects of the curriculum.

Josias Rangwashe, for example, reflected on how students questioned the usefulness of subjects that appeared designed to prepare black learners for subordinate positions within society.

He recalled questioning the value of subjects such as agriculture that seemed designed to prepare black students for a life of labour rather than meaningful opportunities for

advancement. Such sentiments reflected a growing awareness that education under apartheid was intended to reproduce inequality rather than overcome it.

Although the protest began at Kgetsi-ya-Tsie High School, its impact was soon felt at neighbouring schools, including Ratshepo Middle School in Kudube. At the time, Ratshepo occupied a unique position within the educational landscape of Temba. Owing to accommodation shortages, the school shared premises with Kudube Lower Primary School while new buildings were being constructed elsewhere.

“
Students increasingly linked their everyday educational experiences to the broader structures of apartheid oppression. —
Precious Mashaba

June 21 proceeded as usual, and there was little indication that the day would become one of the most memorable in the area's history. However, the atmosphere changed dramatically when students from Kgetsi-ya-Tsie arrived at the school after setting their own school alight.

According to oral testimonies collected during this research, the students from Kgetsi-ya-Tsie approached Ratshepo from the back of the school, using footpaths that allowed them to

avoid the police who had already been alerted to the unrest. Their arrival created confusion among the students at Ratshepo, many of whom had only heard rumours about the burning of Kgetsi-ya-Tsie. The sight of fellow students arriving in large numbers transformed what had been an ordinary school day into a moment of political awakening.

According to one person's oral testimony, “when the pupils came [from Kgetsi-ya-Tsie], they did not come chanting or fighting; they came in silence. At the back of the school's toilets, by the school fence, there was a small passage that people used to walk to the (Kopanong) station between the Apies River [Tshwane River] and the school. They gathered there. I can't say Kgetsi-ya-Tsie's pupils threw stones to attack the school. What happened was that a group of Form 3 (Grade 10) went to the fence and started talking to the pupils on the other side of the fence.”

Shortly after the students arrived at Ratshepo Middle School, the police appeared on the scene. Having already responded to the unrest at Kgetsi-ya-Tsie, they were determined to prevent the protest from spreading further. Faced with the presence of the police, students scattered in different directions, bringing the confrontation at Ratshepo to an abrupt end. In the aftermath of the unrest, Ratshepo Middle School was closed for several months.

The arrival of the Kgetsi-ya-Tsie students did more than disrupt classes; it created an opportunity for students at Ratshepo to voice frustrations that had been building for years. The protest became a platform through which students could challenge an

education system they regarded as inferior and discriminatory.

In this respect, the events at Kgetsi-ya-Tsie and Ratshepo mirrored developments occurring throughout South Africa, where students increasingly linked their everyday educational experiences to the broader structures of apartheid oppression.

The study of the Hammanskraal student protests contributed to a deeper understanding of the diversity of experiences that characterised the 1976 uprising. Importantly, the research revealed that the students of Kgetsi-ya-Tsie were not the only young people in Hammanskraal who actively resisted the apartheid education system.

Student unrest affected several schools across the region, including Sekitla High School in Mathibestad, where approximately 200 pupils were arrested and imprisoned for several months following incidents of property destruction.

By examining these lesser-known episodes alongside the events at Kgetsi-ya-Tsie and Ratshepo, my study highlights the widespread nature of student resistance in Hammanskraal and challenges narratives that focus exclusively on major urban centres.

Recovering these local histories not only broadens our understanding of the 1976 uprising but also ensures that the experiences of communities often overlooked in historical scholarship are recognised and preserved.

• Precious Mashaba is an MA history student at the University of Pretoria. Her research focuses on student politics and overlooked histories of resistance during apartheid.

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UNISA is helping shape Africa's future

Professor Puleng LenkaBula aims to strengthen collaboration between the continent's universities

LEBONE RODAH MOSIMA

As the first woman to lead the University of South Africa (UNISA) in its 148-year history, Professor Puleng LenkaBula has become one of the continent's most influential voices in higher education.

Now, her appointment to the board of the African Association of Universities (AAU) offers an opportunity to advance UNISA's interests and also a broader vision for Africa's scientific, educational and economic future.

LenkaBula views her selection as recognition of UNISA's longstanding contribution to higher education and an opportunity to strengthen collaboration among African universities.

The AAU board, she explained, oversees and shapes the scientific agenda of universities across the continent, including universities of technology, research-intensive institutions, virtual universities and open distance learning institutions.

For LenkaBula, the appointment comes at a crucial time for a continent with the world's youngest population.

"It's also important because this is the continent with the most youthful dividend, meaning that measurement of how you optimise the talents, the skills, the expertise, but also the aspirations of youth and young adults through education, knowledge, science and participation in higher education."

She sees her role as an opportunity to showcase UNISA's achievements while sharing lessons from South Africa's higher education and innovation systems with institutions across the continent.

LenkaBula believes UNISA's influence stretches far beyond South Africa's borders.

She pointed to partnerships across the continent, including support for higher education development in Ethi-



Continental reach: Prof Puleng LenkaBula, UNISA's Principal & Vice-Chancellor, has been appointed to the board of the African Association of Universities. Photo: UNISA/X

opia and Eritrea, while noting that many open universities have drawn inspiration from UNISA's model.

"If you look at all the open universities on the continent, most draw their models or support from the University of South Africa," she said.

She added that institutions such as the Open University in the United Kingdom, India's Indira Gandhi National Open University and the Turkish Open University have adopted approaches pioneered by UNISA.

With more than 400 member institutions spanning different regions and language groups, LenkaBula hopes the AAU will increasingly recognise the value of open distance and e-learning universities, which have often been overshadowed by traditional institutions.

"UNISA has demonstrated that it can be a comprehensive university with strength in technology, research and the ability to operate at scale," she said.

Central to LenkaBula's vision is the belief that African universities must play a leading role in addressing

poverty, economic development and technological independence.

She believes existing partnerships between UNISA and the African Union, supported by a memorandum of understanding, can help advance the continent's Agenda 2063 aspirations.

“It's time Africa invests in developing its own infrastructure, algorithms and software systems to protect its independence and security. — Prof Puleng LenkaBula

Among the priorities she identified are aviation, maritime studies, space sciences and digital sovereignty.

"We also need to strengthen the blue economy or marine aspects of our sci-

ences to resource societies in strengthening their economies," she said.

"It's time Africa invests in developing its own infrastructure, algorithms and software systems to protect its independence and security."

According to LenkaBula, dependence on foreign digital platforms presents risks to Africa's sovereignty and long-term development.

Beyond academia, LenkaBula's worldview has been shaped by extensive engagement in international ecumenical movements and global advocacy work.

She has worked with the World Council of Churches on issues of poverty, ecology and justice and has received training within the United Nations system focusing on ethics, gender equality and economic justice.

Through her AAU role, she hopes to challenge perceptions about women in leadership and advance a culture of dignity and inclusion.

She also stressed the need to confront patriarchal violence, gender inequality and femicide, arguing that

universities have a responsibility to advance the dignity and wellbeing of women and girls through education and scientific innovation.

LenkaBula believes the continent's most urgent challenge is investing more aggressively in higher education infrastructure, research facilities and laboratories.

"I think the most urgent intervention is to invest in higher education financing, infrastructure and laboratories to address underdevelopment and foster innovation," she said.

While acknowledging South Africa's investment in higher education and student support through NSFAS, she argued that more resources are needed to strengthen critical scientific disciplines.

She also called for a more balanced approach to international mobility, rejecting the notion that Africans should feel confined to the continent while cautioning against unchecked brain drain. "When people leave, we must ensure they bring back knowledge, languages, cultures and values that enrich Africa," she said.

For her, the goal is to "Africanise the world" while ensuring that global experience ultimately contributes to Africa's development.

LenkaBula's confidence in UNISA's future is underpinned by the institution's recent achievements. The university now serves more than 423,000 students across South Africa and beyond.

UNISA contributes 10.3% of South Africa's higher education research output, ranks second nationally in research production and remains a leading producer of doctoral graduates.

The institution has also maintained unqualified audits for five consecutive years and grown its asset base from R6 billion in 2021 to nearly R30 billion.

"We are very proud of our academicians and those who support them for reclaiming this position," she said.

The university has also directed significant resources towards student support, contributing R400 million last year to assist postgraduate and undergraduate students facing financial hardship.

For LenkaBula, these achievements demonstrate what universities can accomplish when they take ownership of their future.

Rather than waiting for governments or private investors to lead, she believes African universities must become catalysts for development, innovation and social transformation.

"I'll project some of this advocacy within the board and in the programmes and operations of the AAU so that we strengthen how universities are partners to our societies in shaping futures, in changing the plight of poverty, activating the talents, expertise and commitments of youth and young adults, and enabling them to be agents of change," she said.

UNISA honours youth of '76

Today, 16 June, we commemorate Youth Day ... [which] honours the courageous young generation of 1976, whose collective defiance ... reshaped the trajectory of our country's history and accelerated the struggle against apartheid.

"As we mark ... this historic uprising under the theme 'Reset@50 – The Future Calls' and its accompanying slogan 'Our National Commitment to the Future – Freedom Lives in Every Generation', we ... remember [and] ... reflect, renew and reimagine our role in advancing the ideals for which young people fought with such conviction.

"[...] Reset@50 challenges us to critically examine the

progress we have made and to recommit ourselves to building a society in which education remains a catalyst for inclusive growth, innovation, and opportunity for all – particularly for the youth who continue to navigate complex realities in a rapidly changing world.

"Let us honour the legacy of 1976 ... by empowering the next generation, strengthening our communities and affirming that, indeed, freedom lives in every generation."

• This is an edited version of a message to the Unisa Epistemic Community from Principal & Vice-Chancellor Prof Puleng LenkaBula:

June 16 @ 50

Why Ma Vesta Smith matters

Unsung activist
deserves
recognition
50 years after
June 16

MARIA SURIANO

While many men are remembered as heroes of political struggles, women seldom get enough attention. Vesta Smith is a good example. I have written her biography, and with the Soweto youth uprising in mind, I tell a bit in this article about the activist affectionately known as Ma Vesta.

Why is Vesta Smith important?

Vesta Smith was a community activist who dedicated her life to the anti-apartheid struggle, social justice, non-racialism and gender equality.

She participated in key events in South Africa's history, attending the Congress of the People in 1955, where the Freedom Charter was adopted, and the historic 1956 Women's March. Two decades later, during the Soweto uprising, Ma Vesta became a trusted mentor to younger militants.

Her political work happened largely outside formal politics. It was grounded in building non-racial and inter-generational networks of care and solidarity. She hid students in her home while they were on the run from the security police and supported the families of political prisoners. She paid the price with four months in prison.

Ma Vesta's story contributes to efforts to uncover the radical ideas, practices and key figures behind the students' protests. These helped pave the way for South Africa's democratic transition and continue to echo in today's student struggles for decolonisation.

Ma Vesta's passionate, community-based activism matters because it reveals the importance of "everyday politics" — the small acts of resistance, often outside official politics, that foster personal and collective emancipation.

This invites us to reconsider the dominant narrative of the liberation struggle, long centred on prominent male leaders and party strategies.

Who was Vesta Smith?

Born in Johannesburg in 1922, she was forcibly relocated in 1941, along with her mother and sisters, to Noordgesig. She lived there until her passing in 2013. Segregation laws governing residential areas reserved this small section of Soweto for poor townpeople classified as "coloured".

She was born into a stable family.



Trusted mentor: Vesta Smith provided practical help, political guidance, and emotional support to student activists in 1976. Photo: Courtesy Smith family

Her father, Stephen Mpama, moved in the circles of Johannesburg's black intelligentsia. Her early life was marked by hardships after his premature death in 1927. Inner-city cosmopolitanism shaped her non-racialism, and daily racial discrimination informed her refusal to be subservient to white people.

From the late 1960s to the mid-1990s, she worked consecutively for the South African Council of Churches, the South African Committee for Higher Education and the Legal Resources Centre. Although formally an administrator at these progressive organisations, Ma Vesta relentlessly pursued social justice by mobilising her broad political networks.

In the 1980s, she connected legal advocacy to black townships through advice centres, while participating in key anti-apartheid campaigns. After 1994 and the first democratic elections, she advocated for women's empowerment and poverty alleviation in the townships.

What are the key takeaways?

Drawing on personal conversations with those who knew Ma Vesta and on archival sources, private papers and press coverage, the book is structured around four key themes.

First, her activism was grounded in her faith — fighting injustice was a spiritual duty. Her work within the Young Women's Christian Association from the 1960s onwards pioneered the idea that Christianity and political activism should be intertwined.

Second, Ma Vesta's politics were non-sectarian. Although aligned with the ANC resistance movement, she was a "bridge-builder". She connected the struggles of the 1950s to those of the 1970s and 1980s as well as activists across generations, townships and ideologies.

Third, non-racialism was central to her political work. The formal and informal, secular and religious connections she forged over time reflected this belief. In the 1970s, her rejection of apartheid categories matched the Black

Consciousness Movement. The book traces her friendships and shifting relations with white liberals, alongside her understanding of her blackness.

Fourth, looking beyond prominent leaders reveals the pivotal yet under-recognised contributions of black women who worked on the ground. What dominant historical accounts leave out about everyday politics deserves closer examination.

What was her impact on young militants?

During the 1976 uprising, Ma Vesta emerged as one of the senior activists who provided practical help, political guidance and emotional support to student activists. This was regardless of their political affiliation.

Many young militants who encountered her in 1976 and afterwards describe her as a formative influence. She helped shape their political thinking and sustained them through difficult times.

She built networks with fellow anti-apartheid activists across generations. This brings into view a political world of friendships and mutual support. What emerges is a collective political biography, but also an intimate portrait. Locating her in Noordgesig extends our understanding of June 1976 beyond its epicentre in Soweto.

Why has she been overlooked?

Ma Vesta's absence from academic and popular accounts of the liberation struggle reflects broader patterns in how this history has been written.

First, scholarship has focused mostly on male leaders, their strategies and political organisations. It has overlooked community activists and organic intellectuals, particularly black women outside formal leadership structures. Ma Vesta's politics were not defined by rigid allegiances. So, figures like her are harder to categorise and less visible in such accounts.

Her erasure may also be attributed to her refusal to accept racialised politics and apartheid racial classifications (black, white, coloured, Indian). This sits uneasily with recent efforts to celebrate iconic struggle figures from coloured communities as "coloured", a framing she herself would have rejected.

Lastly, she was disillusioned with the unfulfilled promises of the ANC government that won democratic power in 1994. This may have also contributed to her being marginalised.

It's important to restore Vesta Smith to her rightful place in South African history. Not as a footnote to more famous figures, but as a central example of how grassroots activists can become extraordinary agents of change and liberation.

But recovering this story is not only about correcting the historical record and advancing epistemic justice. It also speaks to pressing contemporary concerns. Her Christian-based activism offers a counterpoint to the recent resurgence of narrow identity politics in the country.

During South Africa's first major xenophobic attacks in 2008, she called a Johannesburg radio station to question assumptions of national superiority over other Africans. She never grew tired of addressing issues of social justice.

Her commitment to community empowerment after 1994 is also a reminder that the democratic transition was only one step in the struggle for equality and dignity. Above all, her life shows that transformation is often driven by those who work in the background.

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Maria Suriano is an Associate Professor in the Department of History at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg.

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‘Giving jobs, not looking for them’

Entrepreneurship education drive aims to turn SA learners into job creators

JOHNATHAN PAOLI

South Africa’s push to embed entrepreneurship throughout the education system is gathering momentum, with officials, universities and policymakers arguing that entrepreneurial thinking must become a core part of learning if the country is to address persistent youth unemployment and prepare learners for a rapidly changing economy.

The Basic Education Department (DBE)’s Entrepreneurship Unit Communications Manager, Moeketsi Nchoba, sat down with *Inside Education* to discuss how entrepreneurship education (EE) holds the potential to fundamentally reshape opportunities for young people by equipping them with skills that go far beyond starting businesses.

“The potential is genuinely transformative. South Africa has over 60% youth unemployment among 15–24 year olds, and that’s not just an economic crisis, it’s a human dignity crisis. EE addresses it at the root,” Nchoba said.

“When done well, EE doesn’t just prepare young people to find jobs; it prepares them to create value in whatever path they choose. A learner who leaves school curious, resilient, collaborative and confident in their own agency is equipped for employment (‘intrapreneurship’), further study, entrepreneurship (for-profit business), and active citizenship (social entrepreneur). Those aren’t separate tracks, they’re the same foundation,” he said.

Nchoba emphasised that entrepreneurship education is not intended for a small group of aspiring business owners but for all learners across the country.

“What’s exciting is that the research shows these capacities aren’t fixed; they can be deliberately developed in every child, across every subject, from Grade R to Grade 12. We’re not talking about a programme for a select few. This is for the child in a rural Eastern Cape classroom just as much as one in a Sandton school,” he said.

On the role of educators, Nchoba argued that schools require teachers and entrepreneurs working together to cultivate entrepreneurial mindsets.

“The combination is where the magic happens. Teachers are irreplaceable. They hold the daily relationship with learners, they understand the curriculum, and they’re the ones who create the conditions for deep learning over time,” Nchoba said.

“*The ideal model is a genuine partnership with entrepreneurs as guest voices, mentors, or problem-posers who enrich what teachers are already building.—* Moeketsi Nchoba

At the same time, he said entrepreneurs bring practical experience and serve as relatable role models for learners.

“When a young person sees someone from their own community who looks like them, who faced similar obstacles, and who built something, that’s a powerful moment for self-efficacy,” he said.

Nchoba said the ideal approach involves entrepreneurs acting as mentors, guest speakers and problem-solvers within learning programmes rather than making occasional appearances.

“The ideal model is a genuine partnership with entrepreneurs as guest voices, mentors, or problem-posers who enrich what teachers are already building,” he said.

Looking ahead, he said 2026 represents a major expansion phase for entrepreneurship education initiatives.

Nchoba outlined a “few key things on the horizon”, including provincial



Reaching out: The Chairperson of the Inside Education Foundation, Matuma Letsoalo, and Higher Education and Training Minister, Buti Manamela, at the Foundation’s National Education Summit in April. Photo: Eddie Mtsweni



Team effort: Entrepreneurship education holds the potential to fundamentally reshape opportunities for young people by equipping them with skills that go far beyond starting businesses. Photo: Vecteezy.com

policy dialogues in all nine provinces following the inaugural National Policy Dialogue last year, expanded teacher development programmes, and strengthened partnerships with universities.

“The overarching goal remains unchanged: every South African school implementing EE as a genuine part of how teaching happens, not as an add-on, by 2035,” he said.

The DBE’s entrepreneurship agenda has its roots in the E3 initiative (Entrepreneurship, Employability and Education), which emerged from several national policy frameworks, including the National Development Plan (NDP).

The NDP identifies education as a key mechanism for enhancing the entrepreneurial capacity of the country and calls for educational programmes that promote entrepreneurial thinking among learners.

The E3 initiative began in 2018 with 73 pilot schools introducing project-based learning methodologies designed to foster entrepreneurial mindsets, reflective learning and the development of 21st-century skills.

The programme later expanded to additional schools and was conceived as a long-term transformation strategy aimed at changing how teaching and learning occur across all grades and subjects.

Its ultimate objective is to produce a generation of engaged, innovative and self-reliant citizens capable of contributing to South Africa’s economic development.

The initiative seeks to ensure that learners leave school with problem-solving abilities, entrepreneurial competencies and the confidence either to continue their studies, enter employment or establish their own enterprises.

Former DBE Deputy Director-General for Curriculum Policy, Support and Monitoring and current Free State Education MEC, Dr Mamiki Maboya, described the programme as a platform for integrating

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World class: Learners from the Pace Commerce and Entrepreneurship School of Specialisation in Jabulani, Soweto, performed well recently at the Young Entrepreneurship Programme (YEP), coming in third among world contenders. Photo: Eddie Mtsweni



Not too young: Entrepreneurship education can be deliberately developed in every child, across every subject, says the DBE's Entrepreneurship Unit Communications Manager, Moeketsi Nchoba. Photo: Vecteezy.com

21st-century skills throughout the curriculum.

“Our value proposition is that we provide the platform for all education initiatives working with DBE schools who are striving to bring 21st-century skills into the pedagogy,” Maboya said.

She explained that learners are encouraged to identify needs, develop solutions and create projects that address real-world challenges.

“From a young age, learners will grow their empathy, become caring, and develop a continuous problem-solving mindset that is driven by what they care about,” she added.

The growing focus on entrepreneurship education was reinforced by Higher Education and Training Minister Buti Manamela during his keynote address at the Inside Education Foundation's National Education Summit in Sandton on 20 April.

Addressing delegates, Manamela argued that South Africa's education

system must move beyond preparing learners solely for traditional employment.

“For too long, our education system has been designed to prepare young people for employment. But the reality we face today is stark: There are not enough jobs to absorb them. So we must build a system that not only prepares job-seekers but also produces job creators,” he said.

The minister highlighted efforts already underway within the post-school sector, noting that all 50 public Technical and Vocational Education and Training colleges now offer entrepreneurship programmes and that more than 47,000 students participated in such programmes during 2024.

However, he stressed that entrepreneurship education extends beyond business training.

“Entrepreneurship is not simply about teaching business skills. It is about building a capability, a mind-

set and a confidence to act,” he said.

According to Manamela, three key ingredients are necessary for entrepreneurial success: exposure, opportunity and confidence.

“Exposure means real experience, students running real businesses, making real decisions, and facing real consequences. Opportunity means access to markets, to funding, and to systems that are not closed off to new entrants. Confidence means networks, mentorship, support, and the belief that success is possible,” he said.

The minister also warned that entrepreneurship cannot flourish without broader economic reform.

“Entrepreneurship will not thrive in an economy that is structurally closed. For millions of young people outside formal employment, this is not an optional extra. It is a pathway to survival and to dignity,” he said.

Complementing the DBE's efforts is a major new initiative led by Universities South Africa through its Entre-

preneurship Development in Higher Education (EDHE) programme.

Launched in October 2025 and funded by Absa Bank, the Entrepreneurship Education in Schools Initiative seeks to integrate entrepreneurial competencies into teacher education programmes at South Africa's public universities.

“

Entrepreneurship is not simply about teaching business skills. It is about building a capability, a mindset and a confidence to act.” —

Buti Manamela

”

The initiative is built on the belief that entrepreneurial thinking must be cultivated from the earliest stages of education and that teachers play a critical role in this process.

A recent report coordinated by the University of Pretoria's Professor Melodi Botha found that 24 public universities currently offer pre-service teacher education degrees, providing a substantial platform for embedding entrepreneurship into teacher training.

The programme's objectives include developing a national framework for entrepreneurship education in teacher training, standardising entrepreneurial competencies, building educator capacity through train-the-trainer workshops, and establishing a national network of “entrepreneurship champions” across higher education institutions.

According to the initiative's concept note, compiled by USAf Entrepreneurship Director Dr Edwell Gumbo, entrepreneurship education is being positioned as a strategic response to South Africa's unemployment crisis and broader economic challenges.

“By targeting foundational levels of education, this initiative aligns with national priorities to foster skills development, promote innovation, and enhance youth employability. It marks a critical shift towards building an entrepreneurial culture across the entire education continuum, from school to university and beyond,” Gumbo wrote.

The document argues that entrepreneurial competencies such as creativity, opportunity recognition, innovation, resilience, financial literacy and problem-solving should be integrated throughout teacher education curricula.

The initiative will follow a three-phase implementation model.

The first phase focuses on developing a national framework through collaboration between entrepreneurship experts, education specialists and policymakers. This framework will define the entrepreneurial competencies that should be embedded in pre-service teacher education programmes and provide guidance for implementation.

The second phase centres on stakeholder engagement through colloquia and roundtable discussions where education leaders, curriculum experts and entrepreneurship specialists will review, validate and refine the framework.

The third phase consists of regional train-the-trainer workshops aimed at developing a cohort of entrepreneurship champions within faculties of education. These educators will then support the broader integration of entrepreneurship education within their institutions.

Expected outcomes include a nationally validated framework, improved entrepreneurial teaching methodologies, stronger institutional commitment to entrepreneurship education and enhanced collaboration between universities, government departments and industry stakeholders.

The concept note argues that embedding entrepreneurial competencies at the teacher-training level represents a long-term investment in South Africa's future.

By equipping educators with the tools to foster innovation, creativity and problem-solving among learners, the initiative aims to create a generation of young South Africans capable not only of seeking employment but also of creating opportunities for themselves and their communities.

As the country celebrates Youth Month and entrepreneurship education gains traction across schools, universities and government policy, advocates believe it could become a central pillar in efforts to build a more inclusive, innovative and economically resilient South Africa.

June 16 @ 50



Paying respect: President Cyril Ramaphosa lays a wreath at the Hector Pieterse Memorial Site in Soweto to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the 1976 youth uprising. Photo: GCIS

President outlines government's plans to boost youth employment

State undertaking far-reaching reforms to improve economy

CYRIL RAMAPHOSA

Fifty years ago, the youth of 1976 stood up against injustice and demanded the right to learn, to dream and to determine their own future.

Their courage helped open the doors of freedom. The responsibility of our generation is to ensure that those doors lead to opportunity.

The youth of South Africa rose up to reject an education system that sought to keep them in servitude and deny them the opportunity to realise their potential. Exactly 50 years later, as young South Africans, you face a different challenge: finding your place in an economy that has for too long kept its doors closed to you.

We know that for many young South Africans, the promise of democracy can feel distant when jobs are scarce, when opportunities seem out of reach and when qualifications do not always lead to employment. Many of you are working hard, applying for jobs, pursuing training and seeking opportunities, only to face disappointment. We hear these frustrations, and we under-

stand that they are real.

Inclusive economic growth is essential if we are to tackle youth unemployment in a meaningful and lasting way. That is why we are investing in a massive infrastructure programme and undertaking far-reaching reforms to make our economy more competitive. We have embarked on a second ambitious investment drive, raising R890 billion in new investment pledges in the last year.

However, these efforts will take time to translate into jobs. And even as the economy grows, young people may still find it difficult to participate in that growth.

That is why we have been investing in programmes that give you access to learning and work opportunities, skills, experience and an income.

One of our most successful programmes has been the Presidential Employment Stimulus, which was launched at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic. Today, that stimulus has created in excess of 2.5 million work and livelihood opportunities. More than eight in ten of these opportunities have gone to young people, and two-thirds to women. It has enabled

the most rapid expansion of public employment in our history.

While these numbers are impressive, what really makes this initiative stand out is the impact that it has on the prospects of those involved and the contribution it makes to the areas in which they work.

“Your country sees your potential and will work with you to ensure that you realise it.” —
President Cyril Ramaphosa

Last year, through the Basic Education Employment Initiative, 200,000 unemployed young people provided valuable support to nearly 22,000 schools in remote villages, townships, dense inner cities, special needs classrooms and farm schools. The programme is giving young people their first foothold in the world of work while strengthening the foundations of learning in the schools that need it most.

The Social Employment Fund, another successful programme, offers part-time work for young people in social

development programmes in areas like education, food and agriculture, health care, environmental improvement and safety. Because it is part-time, participants get regular and predictable income while spending the rest of their time looking for work, exploring business opportunities or improving their skills.

Alongside these public and social employment programmes, the Presidential Youth Employment Intervention is steadily dismantling the barriers that keep young people locked out of the labour market. Through the SA Youth online platform, more than 5.7 million young people are now able to search for opportunities, overcoming some of the impediments that often hold them back, such as transport and data expenses. To date, the intervention has facilitated access to over 2.3 million earning opportunities.

The revitalised National Youth Service has placed more than 132,000 young people in paid service to their communities. These are young people learning the dignity of work while giving back to the society that raised them.

The Youth Employment Service, which is a business initiative, places young people in quality year-long work experience opportunities in companies across the country.

We are also pioneering smarter ways of spending training funds. The Jobs Boost Outcomes Fund pays for

training for young people only when they are placed in a real, quality job. It is a model that demands results.

Behind every one of these numbers is a young person whose dignity has been restored, whose confidence has been renewed and whose horizon has broadened. Although these opportunities are mostly short-term, there are thousands of stories of young people who have used them as a stepping stone towards finding a permanent job, starting a small business or studying towards a new career.

The value of these opportunities can be measured not merely by what young people earn while they're in the programme but by what they leave with: skills, experience, self-esteem and a sense of purpose.

Much work remains. The scale of the challenge demands that we sustain and deepen these efforts. Every company, every department, every organisation and every South African who is able to open a door for a young person must do so.

Your country sees your potential and will work with you to ensure that you realise it. Let us together build a South Africa in which every young person finds their place in an inclusive economy and in a thriving society.

• Cyril Ramaphosa is President of South Africa

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Entrepreneurship takes centre stage

SA's 26 universities can turn entrepreneurial vision into economic and social reality

GCINA NHLEKO

When Dr Phethiwe Matutu, CEO of Universities South Africa, took the stage at the recent Entrepreneurial Executive Leadership Workshop 2026, she delivered a direct yet powerful message: entrepreneurship is no longer a peripheral activity but the central lens for teaching, research, and community engagement.

Beside her, Mahlubi "Chief" Mabizela, Director of Operations and Sector Support at Universities South Africa, set a tone of disciplined leadership as MC, reminding delegates: "This is a leadership room, and over the next two days, leadership in action will matter most."

Behind the scenes, Dr Edwell Gumbo, Director of Entrepreneurship at Universities South Africa, had spent months architecting a vision to transform entrepreneurial intent into tangible student impact across all 26 public universities.

The result was the most consequential Entrepreneurial Executive Leadership Workshop to date, a workshop that decisively pivoted from discussion to implementation, from policy to measurable outcomes.

The Entrepreneurship Development in Higher Education programme, implemented by Universities South Africa in partnership with the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), continues to play a catalytic role in transforming South Africa's 26 public universities into entrepreneurial and innovation-driven institutions.

As the primary funder and strategic partner, the DHET has provided the sustained backing necessary to move beyond pilot projects toward systemic reform. This support enabled the 2026 workshop to address head-on the inefficiencies, weak ecosystem coordination, and limited impact metrics identified in previous years.

International expertise brought a fresh perspective. Dr Tonny Omwansa, CEO of the Kenya National Innovation Agency, shared how East Africa's startup resurgence occurred when Kenya stopped asking "what does the policy say?" and started asking "what does the market need?" He challenged South African universities to embrace innovation optimally by enabling students to test business ideas without bureaucratic delays.

Prof Ceri Nursaw, CEO of the National Council for Entrepreneurship

Education in the UK, added a global observation: "Universities are great at starting things and limited at sustaining them." These insights helped delegates see that while challenges are universal, South Africa has a clear pathway to becoming a leader in entrepreneurial education.

Private sector partners demonstrated their commitment to moving beyond rhetoric. Fanus Basson of Absa Group reinforced that industry partnerships must be intent-driven: "We are here to build pipelines. A student with a prototype needs a pathway to market, not just a pitch competition."

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"Our students are makers. We need to teach them how to sell what they make." – Prof Simphiwe Nelana

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Octavius Phukubye, Executive Director of the Mr Price Foundation, offered the most direct industry verdict: "We don't need more business plans; we need more paying customers." Tandokazi Nquma-Moyo of the Technology Innovation Agency identified the critical obstacle known as the "valleys of death" — the gap between proof of concept and marketable product — and outlined practical bridging strategies. Dr Nombasa Tsengwa, former CEO of Exxaro Resources, urged the infusion of agility and entrepreneurial thinking across entire faculties, not just within business schools.

University executives delivered the practical approaches that turned inspiration into implementation. A highlight was the DVC Leadership Panel on Execution, chaired by Prof Eugene Cloete, CEO of the Cape Higher Education Consortium. Prof Simphiwe Nelana from the Vaal University of Technology spoke about embedding entrepreneurship into technical curricula: "Our students are makers. We need to teach them how to sell what they make." Dr Aldo Stroebel from the University of Mpumalanga cautioned against "policy piles" that gather dust, stating: "Execution is



Leadership in action: Participants at the workshop celebrate a successful event. Photo: USAF



Entrepreneurial future: Academics at the 2026 Entrepreneurship Development in Higher Education Entrepreneurial Leadership Workshop discussed ways of cultivating an entrepreneurial mindset to benefit students at South Africa's universities. Photo: Vecteezy.com

the only currency that matters." Prof Bulelwa Nguza-Mduba from the University of the Free State called for breaking down silos: "To foster an entrepreneurial environment, we must integrate entrepreneurial thinking into all departments."

In a technology transfer masterclass, Anita Nel, Director of Innovus at Stellenbosch University, offered a powerful metaphor: "Most universities sit on a goldmine of intellectual property but lack the pickaxe of commercialisation strategy." She provided a practical framework for turning research assets into revenue-generating ventures.

Communities of practice sessions, chaired by Prof McEdward Murimbika, Director of the Wits Centre for Entrepreneurship, featured honest critiques that opened the door to genuine reform. Prof Evelyn Derera from the University

of KwaZulu-Natal challenged her peers: "We publish papers on SMEs, but we never start one." Prof Rendani Maladzhi from the Durban University of Technology shifted the conversation from academic outputs to economic outcomes, warning: "Without impact metrics, policy is merely poetry. We measure how many papers we publish on SMEs, but we don't measure how many SMEs we actually create."

By the workshop's close, concrete outcomes had emerged:

- Accountability metrics for measuring entrepreneurial outputs complementing academic publications;
- Cross-university partnerships to break down silos of innovation;
- Industry pipelines connecting student prototypes to market pathways; and

- Policy reforms embracing innovation for students.

As delegates stepped out into the Cape winter sunshine, the feeling was not one of an ending but of a new beginning. Dr Edwell Gumbo's closing words captured the moment perfectly: "We have spent two days moving from policy to impact. But the real work begins on Monday morning. The question is not about inspiration; it's about what you will implement."

With the funder's support, international benchmarks, industry pipelines, and committed higher education leaders now aligned, South Africa's 26 universities have never been better positioned to turn entrepreneurial vision into economic and social reality.

• Gcina Nhleko is the Corporate Communications Manager at Universities South Africa

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PROFILE

The rise of Godiragetse Mogajane

From bicycle courier to logistics empire

LEVY MASITENG

When Godiragetse “Godi” Mogajane began delivering food by bicycle in Hammanskraal in 2021, few could have predicted that within a few years he would be leading one of South Africa’s fastest-growing logistics companies.

Today, the 27-year-old entrepreneur is the founder and chief executive of Delivery Ka Speed, a logistics company operating across Gauteng, Limpopo and the North West. The business employs hundreds of young people and provides services to major retail, e-commerce and courier brands.

What started as a response to a local challenge has

evolved into a business aimed at connecting underserved township communities to the mainstream economy.

“I saw that people in Hammanskraal were often excluded from delivery services because many areas were unmapped or considered difficult to reach,” Mogajane said. “Instead of seeing a challenge,

I saw an opportunity to create something that would serve our communities.”

Armed with a bicycle, a cell-phone and determination, he began taking food deliv-



Keep on truckin: Godiragetse “Godi” Mogajane “saw an opportunity to create something that would serve our communities”, and it’s been a rip-roaring success.

ery orders through WhatsApp. The service quickly gained traction as residents embraced a delivery option that understood local streets, landmarks and community dynamics.

As demand grew, Mogajane expanded beyond food deliveries.

Today, Delivery Ka Speed operates as a full-service courier and logistics company, facilitating deliveries for leading e-commerce platforms and consumer brands while helping bridge the gap between national retailers and township consumers.

The company’s growth has been rapid. It now operates five warehouses across three provinces and manages a fleet of more than 150 drivers delivering parcels daily to township communities.

Within six months of launching, the business had fulfilled more than 6,500 orders and generated its first R1 million in revenue.

In 2024, Delivery Ka Speed expanded into more than 20 townships across Gauteng, Limpopo and North West, strengthening its position in the township logistics sector.

The expansion has continued in 2026 with the opening of new collection and logistics points in Polokwane, Soweto’s Bara area and Soshanguve, bringing courier services closer to residents and small businesses.

Mogajane said the new sites form part of a broader strategy to establish a nationwide township logistics network.

“Our Soweto point is more than just a pickup point — it’s a logistics breakthrough,” he said. “Designed specifically for the unique needs of township communities, this is the first of many points we’re rolling out across the country.”

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Success is never measured only by profits. — Godiragetse Mogajane

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One of the company’s flagship initiatives is a rent-to-own scooter programme that enables delivery riders to become owners of their vehicles after 18 months. Delivery Ka Speed also creates opportunities for drivers who already own vehicles, helping young people generate sustainable incomes.

“Success is never measured only by profits,” Mogajane said.

His innovative approach has attracted national recognition.

In 2022, Mogajane won the Entrepreneurship To The Point Future Table Competition, securing R50,000 in funding and R100,000 worth of business support.

Two years later, he won three ma-

ior honours at the Township Economy Awards: Youth Entrepreneur of the Year, Male Entrepreneur of the Year, and the Transport and Logistics Award.

“It is beautiful to see my dream and my team’s hard work come alive, creating opportunities for young people and bringing essential logistics services to underserved township communities,” he said.

Delivery Ka Speed’s ability to navigate areas often overlooked by traditional courier networks has helped it establish a distinct niche in the logistics sector. The company has increasingly positioned itself as a business-to-business logistics partner for retailers and organisations seeking access to township markets.

Despite the rapid growth, Mogajane remains committed to the vision that inspired his first bicycle delivery.

His mission, he said, is not only to move parcels but also to move communities forward.

As South Africa marked Youth Month, his journey serves as a reminder that innovation does not always begin in corporate boardrooms. Sometimes it starts on the dusty streets of a township, with a bicycle, a dream and the determination to solve a problem others have overlooked.

From delivering meals in Hammanskraal to building a logistics network spanning multiple provinces, Mogajane is proving that South Africa’s young entrepreneurs are not waiting for opportunities — they are creating them.

Winning ways: Godiragetse Mogajane has garnered numerous awards and says: “It is beautiful to see my dream and my team’s hard work come alive.”



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PROFILE

From humble Hammanskraal to the spotlight

How Pogiso 'PJ' Mokoto is stitching her way to success

LEVY MASITENG

At 33, Pogiso "PJ" Mokoto has turned her passion for fashion and beauty into a thriving business, proving that talent, determination and self-belief can create opportunities beyond one's circumstances.

The fashion designer and makeup artist from Refentse RDP in Hammanskraal has built a growing reputation through her business, FAIRBOXpro, which is known for its bespoke fashion designs and professional makeup services.

Speaking to Inside Education, Mokoto said one of the defining moments in her career came when she was selected to design an outfit for South African media personality and entrepreneur Boity Thulo.

The opportunity arose through an organisation that promotes locally produced goods and services. When organisers needed a designer, a friend recommended Mokoto.

"I was super excited," she said.

For Mokoto, dressing a celebrity of Thulo's stature was more than a professional assignment. It was an opportunity to showcase her creativity and demonstrate that talent from township communities can compete on a national stage.

"It was a great experience, worth it and a big opportunity for me to show my talent," she said.

While many people recognise her for her fashion and makeup skills, Mokoto said building a successful business required more than technical expertise.

Before launching FAIRBOXpro, she "had to learn how to work with people and how to manage a business effectively before starting one", she said.

Mokoto's journey began with formal studies in fashion design, graduating in 2013. Since then, she has built a loyal client base by prioritising communication and customer satisfaction.

"I discuss with my clients what they want and what would be com-

fortable for them," she said.

Listening carefully to clients and understanding their needs before offering professional advice has become one of her defining business principles.

Her expansion into makeup artistry came naturally after she identified a gap in the market.

"I noticed that after making an outfit, my clients needed to go look for someone who could do their makeup. That is when I decided to learn how to do makeup," she said.

Today, FAIRBOXpro offers both fashion and beauty services, providing clients with a convenient one-stop experience.

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"I love what I do, and I do it with passion." — Pogiso "PJ" Mokoto

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Although much of her support comes from outside her immediate community, Mokoto remains focused on growing her business. She credits her progress to self-motivation and a strong belief in her abilities.

"I inspire myself. If I do not push myself, it is not going to work, even if the next person does it," she said.

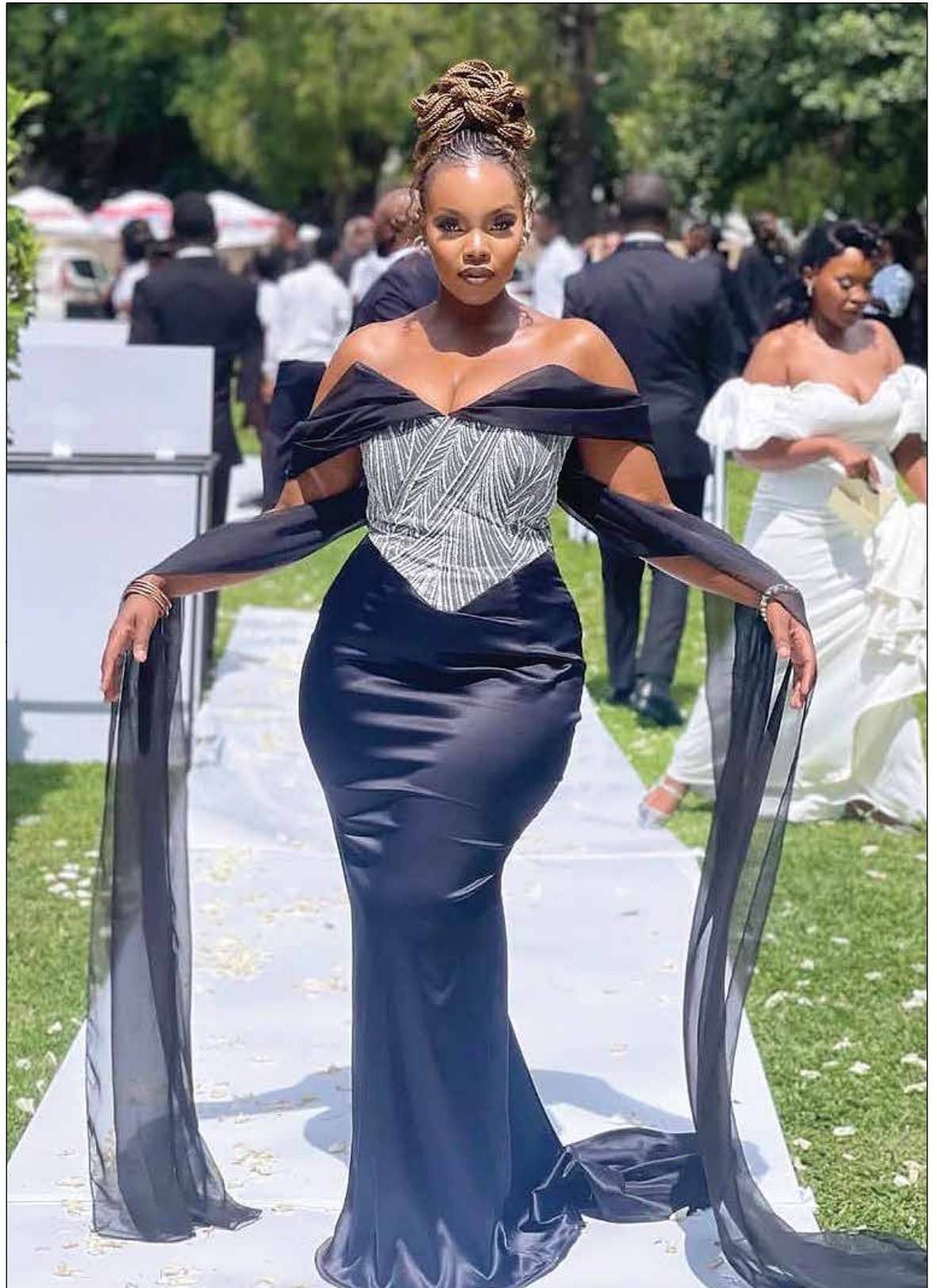
Her designs cater to clients of all ages and are worn at weddings, matric dances, birthday celebrations and formal events.

Mokoto also wears her own creations, using herself as a walking advertisement for her brand.

"I love what I do, and I do it with passion," she said.

Her dedication has inspired many young people in her community, although she remains modest about her achievements.

While honoured by the recognition, she believes there is still much



Stunning creations: Pogiso 'PJ' Mokoto shows off her dressmaking and makeup design talents.

more she wants to accomplish.

Looking ahead, Mokoto hopes to take FAIRBOXpro to the next level by opening a dedicated studio.

"The feeling of opening the door to my own studio would be great," she said.

For now, she remains focused on ensuring every client leaves with a product they love.

Despite the challenges of entrepreneurship, her commitment to quality and customer satisfaction remains unwavering.

As South Africa marked Youth Month, Mokoto's journey stands as an example of how passion, resilience and self-belief can transform a dream into a successful enterprise.

From the streets of Hammanskraal to dressing one of the country's most recognisable personalities, her story is a reminder that success can begin wherever opportunity meets determination.



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PROFILE

Khojane Morai: 'Self-reliance is the best tribute to the youth of 1976'

LEBONE RODAH MOSIMA

Actor and entrepreneur Khojane Morai believes the most meaningful way for young South Africans to honour the legacy of the 1976 generation is through self-reliance, entrepreneurship and economic independence.

Morai said earlier generations fought for political freedom, while today's youth face the challenge of building sustainable livelihoods and creating opportunities for themselves.

"You can't always be a 'yes man'. If someone wants you to work overtime or come in before 8 o'clock, and you're always going to say yes, that's not how the economy grows," he said.

"The only way to do that is by creating more businesses. You'd rather fail in your own thing than join five or six generations of a company that has existed.

"I'm not saying that's wrong for people to do. All I'm saying is that if you are going to honour those who died for our independence and our freedom, you'd rather build something than join what's always been there."

Youth Day commemorates the Soweto Uprising of June 16, 1976, when thousands of pupils protested against the apartheid government's decision to impose Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in black schools. The protest was met with police violence and became a defining moment in South Africa's liberation struggle.

"June 16 means a lot to me. There are so many young lives that were lost in 1976," Morai said.

"Some sacrificed their education, and some sacrificed their lives just to fight for freedom."

Born into a royal family in the Eastern Cape, Morai grew up between Mthatha and Matatiele before moving to Johannesburg to pursue a career in acting.

Although his parents were not directly involved in the events of 1976, he said family experiences of apartheid-era hardship shaped their understanding of the struggle and influenced the lessons they passed on to him.

Morai recalled experiencing racial bullying while attending a multiracial school "because of my skin colour and who I am," he said.

He said some people questioned whether he belonged at the school, but the sacrifices of the 1976 gen-



eration had helped secure greater freedoms and opportunities for young South Africans today.

Morai's acting career gained momentum in 2019, and he has since appeared on television and streaming platforms, including *Mzansi Magic*, *Showmax* and Netflix-linked productions.

He is known for his role as Nolo in the SABC2 telenovela *Lithapo* and has appeared in productions such as *Umbuso*, *Intlawulo*, *Forever Yena* and *White Lies*.

Morai said the film and television industry continues to play an important role in educating young people about apartheid and preserving

“Do something for yourself and don't rely too much on what others might say ...” — Khojane Morai

the memory of the 1976 uprising. He cited *Studying Under the Barrel of a Gun*, a recent film centred on

student resistance during apartheid, as an example of how contemporary storytelling can help younger generations understand the sacrifices of the past.

"Storytelling was one of the art forms used to relay messages, so art has always been used as a form of activism to a certain extent," he said.

"I believe that even now we are able to tell stories and inform people through our art forms."

Morai is currently hosting an independently financed podcast, *The Master Key*, featuring professionals from the entertainment industry, and is working on a fashion collaboration with a prominent local designer.



Dressed for success: Actor and entrepreneur Khojane Morai says young South Africans must take greater control of their financial futures.

He said young people must take greater control of their financial futures, particularly at a time when youth unemployment remains one of South Africa's most pressing challenges.

Morai also argued that many political leaders underestimate the economic value of the arts and creative industries. Greater investment in film and television, he said, could stimulate economic growth while creating sustainable opportunities for young creatives.

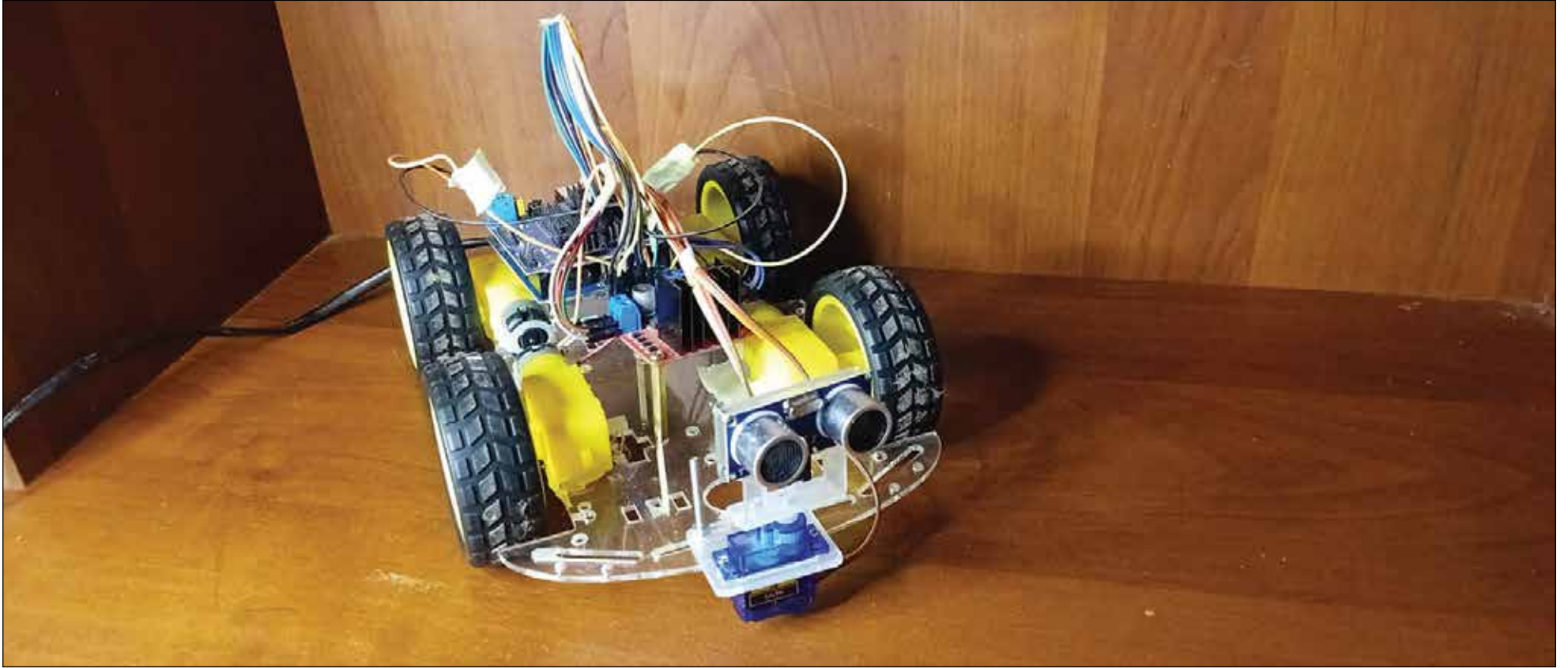
South Africa's cultural and creative industries are increasingly recognised as contributors to economic growth, job creation, skills development and social cohesion.

Looking ahead, Morai said he hopes the next decade will see young people create their own opportunities through determination and self-belief.

"Do something for yourself and don't rely too much on what others might say, because if you wait for people, you'll always be disappointed," he said.

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PROFILE



Prototype: Matlou had to teach himself coding, electronics, artificial intelligence concepts and problem-solving skills while balancing schoolwork and examinations to develop the NaviBot.

Learner builds AI-powered robot to aid visually impaired people

LEBONE RODAH MOSIMA

A Limpopo high school learner has developed a robotic navigation device aimed at helping visually impaired people move more safely and independently, earning him top honours at a youth innovation competition.

Monyebodi Lefa Matlou, a Grade 11 learner at Radira Secondary School, won the Ultimate Techno Propeller award at the Nka'Thuto EduPropeller awards ceremony in Mokopane in April for his invention, Navi Bot.

The prototype uses sensors and programmed decision-making to navigate obstacles and provide real-time support for visually impaired users.

Nomalungelo Gina, the Deputy Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation, said the competition marked the culmination of a year-long innovation programme in which learners were mentored to identify community challenges and develop practical solutions.

Matlou said developing the robot in a rural school environment came with significant challenges, including limited access to robotics components, sensors and reliable internet connectivity.

"One of the biggest challenges was limited access to advanced technology and resources," he said.

"As a Grade 11 learner in a rural schooling environment, it was difficult to get robotics components, sensors and reliable internet access for research and programming."

He said he had to teach himself



Bright spark: Monyebodi Lefa Matlou won the Ultimate Techno Propeller award for his invention, Navi Bot.

coding, electronics, artificial intelligence concepts and problem-solving skills while balancing schoolwork and examinations.

"Another challenge was testing and fixing the robot because some components did not always work correctly, which required a lot of patience and troubleshooting," Matlou said.

Despite the obstacles, he developed a working prototype capable of moving independently and avoiding obstacles. "Navi Bot is still at the basic prototype stage," he said.

"The project is still being improved to make it more accurate, reliable and user-friendly."

Matlou said the device has not yet undergone full testing with visually impaired users and would require additional funding, mentorship and technical support before it could be commercialised.

"Financial support would help cov-

er production costs, better sensors, batteries, AI systems and manufacturing," he said.

"I would also need partnerships with schools, disability organisations and technology companies to test and refine the product with real users."

He hopes to add advanced artificial intelligence capabilities, voice assistance and improved object-recognition technology while eventually patenting the invention and launching a technology company focused on assistive robotics.



"I want to create technology that solves real-world problems and improves lives." — Monyebodi Lefa Matlou



"This project has inspired me to pursue a career in robotics engineering with a specialisation in artificial intelligence and machine learning because I want to create technology that solves real-world problems and improves lives," he said.

Matlou said he plans to monetise the invention through product sales, maintenance services, software updates and customised assistive technology solutions.

"The goal is not only to generate income, but also to make the invention sustainable so it can continue helping more people and funding future innovations," he said.

Nka'Thuto co-founder Thandeka Mhlanga said the EduPropeller programme follows a funnel-based model that begins with about 600 learners from six schools in Limpopo before narrowing participants down to a final bootcamp cohort.

"The most recent impact study, conducted five years ago, found that approximately 40% of programme participants pursued STEM-related fields after completing high school," Mhlanga said.

She acknowledged that securing funding remains a challenge because the programme combines science, technology, entrepreneurship and youth development, making it difficult to fit within traditional corporate funding categories.

Mhlanga added that intellectual property protection forms part of the bootcamp curriculum, with learners receiving training on protecting, managing and commercialising innovations.

The Department of Science, Technology and Innovation (DSTI) said Nka'Thuto provides rural and township learners with opportunities to develop STEM, innovation and entrepreneurial skills while tackling local challenges.

The department said the programme has reached tens of thousands of learners since 2017 through its activation and innovation expo phases, although only a small number advance to the bootcamp stage.

The DSTI said school-level data from participating communities indicates increased uptake of STEM subjects and improved academic performance among learners who complete the programme.

"School-level data indicates a noticeable increase in STEM subject uptake among learners, suggesting that the programme is contributing positively to learners' interest in science, technology, engineering and mathematics pathways," it said.

The department invests about R1.8 million annually in Nka'Thuto and says the programme reports twice a year through the National Science and Technology Forum.

While Nka'Thuto has helped learners develop innovative concepts, the DSTI acknowledged that resource constraints currently limit its ability to support inventions through full product development and commercialisation.

To maintain momentum after the bootcamp, the programme establishes Innovation Clubs at participating schools where learners continue developing skills in coding, animation and digital technologies.

The DSTI said its long-term goal is to strengthen pathways connecting school-based innovation with universities, incubators, innovation hubs and entrepreneurship support programmes.

"Many former participants and winners of the programme are currently completing tertiary studies, entering the workforce or exploring entrepreneurial opportunities," it said.