

Technology can empower spazas for economic growth

By  Andrew Dawson

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Spaza shops, the heart and soul of many communities, have the potential to be so much more, thanks to mobile technology solutions which are not only moving these traders toward a more advanced trading marketplace, but also helping them to become increasingly self-sustainable.



Source: @startupafrica [startupafrica](https://www.startupafrica.co.za/)

Sustainability, humanitarian growth and giving back to communities are becoming increasingly important topics of conversation.

We need to look at ways of leveraging the technology we already have to help these community hearts and centres to become the pivot point for economic growth and development in South Africa.

A platform for growth

One of the focuses for current technology solutions is on delivering improved ordering and stock management systems to help spazas have better and more product availability.

While this is important in helping them to serve their communities with goods, there is far more power in the technology.

These platforms have the potential to expand from a business to business, to a business to community offering, that offers untold opportunities. They can be used as hubs of education, job creation and self-empowerment.

The technology is there, but what we need is a change in mindset, from simply enabling the marketplace to showing the communities the direct positive impact that technology can have on their lives. We need to start engaging on the level of the 'community place' instead of just the marketplace.

Not about ticking boxes

Enterprise and supplier development is an essential component of doing business in South Africa, as is Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE). The problem is that they have become tick-box exercises, simply a compliance process that holds up business if it is not complete.

We need to take a step back and embrace the spirit of these initiatives, change the narrative around them so that we can bring the community back into focus and have an actual positive impact on communities that are lesser served.

There are unique ways that this funding can help empower and nurture merchants, giving them a platform where they can go and study mobile-friendly courseware on entrepreneurship, finance, merchandising, sales, and other tools to help them run a better business.

This can be delivered through existing technology platforms, enabling spaza owners to better support their communities, with a positive spin-off effect to the community itself at large.

Altruism to the fore in 2022

Sustainable growth and development need a mind shift. We need to become more altruistic in the way we approach the channel – it is not about pushing product, but about creating community support, which will, in turn, drive sales if it is done in the right way.

We need to work toward creating channels to allow funding from mandatory initiatives to start targeting our vulnerable communities. This is the only way to start making a real, meaningful and sustainable difference.

If we can channel the funds to the right communities for the right reason, we can make a significant difference.

We need to bring the real spirit of Ubuntu back to Africa – it is not just a catchy buzzword like B-BBEE has become, but a movement that means so much more.

Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu means that people are people because of other people, and the same spirit applies to the channel. From manufacturer, through to distribution, to retailers like spaza owners, the channel only exists because of the other parts.

Spazas are at the heart of South Africa's economy and they have massive power to create sustainable economic growth and development.

ABOUT ANDREW DAWSON

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