

# Milestone on SA's road to transformation and economic empowerment

As the nation commemorates 30 years of freedom marked by the first democratic election on 27 April 1994, it's important to reflect on South Africa's progress on its journey toward economic empowerment and inclusivity. Nonhlanhla Mahlaule, data capturer at the BEE Chamber, has had a front row seat witnessing transformation and empowerment in the business landscape of South Africa.



Nonhlanhla Mahlaule, data capturer at the BEE Chamber

Mahlaule's says the essence of Freedom Day is a day marking new beginnings, hope, and the courage to forge a path towards a more inclusive society. Born on the cusp of South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994, her very existence symbolises the dawn of a new era where names like "Nonhlanhla" and "Nonkululeko" signify luck and freedom.

"Pre-1994, South Africa grappled with the shackles of apartheid, where systemic discrimination deprived millions of Africans, Coloureds, and Indians of basic rights and opportunities. However, with the advent of democracy, the nation embarked on a journey of transformation, striving to rectify historical injustices and foster economic inclusivity," she says.

## Addressing imbalance

The introduction of Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) and its evolution into Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE) underscored the government's commitment to address past imbalances and promote economic participation among previously marginalised groups. "Through initiatives like B-BBEE, opportunities for skills development, ownership, and management control became more accessible, paving the way for a more inclusive business landscape."

One could say that B-BBEE took the initial vision behind creating a transformational South Africa very seriously as the implementation that takes place in this field creates inclusivity in all aspects. Through B-BBEE, previously disadvantaged Black People also have opportunities for a stake into ownership and are part of management.

"I, and most others, take great delight when I see a B-BBEE Verification Certificate or Sworn Affidavit and see the equality, ownership and women taking charge in office spaces and not being limited to their place being in the 'kitchen'. Now they are taking over boardrooms and making big decisions."

## Transformation initiatives

Mahaule's own journey showcases the impact of these initiatives. "Joining the BEE Chamber through the YES4Youth programme, I found a pathway to empowerment amidst South Africa's youth unemployment crisis. I received structured training and support, and I have not only gained valuable skills but also became a testament to the efficacy of empowerment programmes in fostering meaningful change."

Her story highlights the transformative power of initiatives like B-BBEE, where women are breaking barriers and assuming leadership roles in boardrooms, challenging stereotypes, and reshaping corporate culture. Mahaule's experience demonstrates that progress is not just a concept but a tangible reality, where individuals from diverse backgrounds are given the opportunity to thrive and contribute to a more equitable society.

"As South Africa prepares for its upcoming elections on 29 May this year, I urge my fellow citizens to exercise their democratic right and make their voices heard. Active participation is important in shaping the nation's future, ensuring that the strides made towards economic empowerment and inclusivity continue to bear fruit."

Mahaule's journey serves as a reminder that while challenges persist, progress is within reach. "As South Africa celebrates Freedom Day, let us honour the sacrifices of the past by redoubling our efforts towards building a nation where prosperity knows no bounds, and every citizen has the opportunity to thrive."

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