

SA's leaders in business transformation and empowerment named

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The 13th annual Oliver Empowerment Awards honoured the organisations and individuals powering transformation in SA and celebrated 20 years of democracy.

The winners of the 13th annual Oliver Empowerment Awards were revealed on 25 April 2014 at the Emperors Palace in Johannesburg, honouring the nation's leaders in business transformation and empowerment.

Leading the individual category was Future Black Leader Award winner Simphiwe Xulu. Judges praised the Mhlathuze Water operations manager for her value-centric leadership style, which they said "consistently delivers business results through empowering people."

Top Black Leader of the Year winner Sizwe Nxasana, CEO of FirstRand Group was also honoured, with Top Black Female Leader of the Year awarded to Boniswa Corporate Solutions CEO, Lynette Magasa.

In the organisational category, Eskom Holdings emerged as a multiple award winner, taking the Socio-Economic Development Award as well as the Enterprise & Supplier Development Award, a recognition of its investment in the economic sustainability of emerging business partners.

Volkswagen was honoured with the Skills Development Awards for its highly integrated development programmes that judges said "place continuous learning at the heart of the organisation."

The results, which recognised a total of 20 companies and individuals were audited by SekelaXabiso, which also sponsored the Enterprise and Supplier Development Award.

The winners represented a pool of local and multinational entrants who demonstrated the highest calibre of SA businesses, said Ralf Fletcher, CEO of Topco Media, which organised the awards.

"The quality of applications this year was remarkable. We had some big multinationals up against some of our South African JSE companies, so those being nominated were really our head and shoulders in business," he said.

Judged by a panel of independent industry insiders including Microsoft South Africa's CEO Mteto Nyati, Government Communications Information Services' Chief Director Donald Liphoko, South African Bureau of Standards' (SABS) CEO Bonakele Mehlomakulu, and Siphwe Ngwenya, Chief Executive Officer, Gauteng Growth Development Agency, winners were selected based on their contribution to a culture of entrepreneurship, best practices and sustainable models of business transformation.

Nominees had to demonstrate an average annual revenue of more than R35m, hold a valid, SANAS approved B-BBEE Certificate and prove the successful implementation of effective B-BBEE policies and measurement mechanisms.

The criteria provided a comprehensive look at the level of empowerment amongst these companies, a requirement that sets the awards apart, said Fletcher.

"By unpacking what they are doing and why they are doing it, the focus on how nominees demonstrate the effect of their empowerment programme is what really differentiates us from other awards," he said.

Taking place almost 20 years to the day on the anniversary of the advent of democracy in South Africa, the awards also celebrated the strides South African businesses have made by paying tribute to those who have been a part in that history.

Among these, was the Lifetime Achievement Award, given to the three remaining Rivonia Trialists: Andrew Mlangeni, Dennis Goldberg and Ahmed Kathrada. A fitting recognition, as the awards also took place 50 years from day of Nelson Mandela's statement from the dock at the opening of the defence case in the trial.

"50 years ago, these men stood on trial for equality, becoming one of the main links in our history that brought democracy and equal opportunities to South Africa. We wanted to recognise that, and their contribution towards SA business," said Fletcher.

Honorary awards were also given to leaders in the health, education and rural development sector. "The culmination of these was a reflection of the opportunities that are today available to all South Africans, but were not always possible in the past."

"We are celebrating 20 years of democracy this year, but it's also 20 years of success in black business. These winners made a mammoth contribution to that. But transformation is a journey, it doesn't stop, and it's something that can always be improved," said Fletcher.

The event also celebrated the launch of *South Africa 20 Years of Success: Business & Government publication*, a commemorative book produced by Topco Media with the support of the Department of Arts and Culture, which was a gold sponsor of the awards.

The Oliver Empowerment Awards category sponsors included South African Weather Services, Limpopo Economic Development Agency, South African Civil Aviation Authority, SekelaXabiso, Khaas Logistics, National Youth Development Agency and TUMI.

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