

Reimagining the future

 By [Nicci Botha](#)

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"It ain't about us, it's about creating a space for our children to flourish. We have a responsibility to the future," says Gavin Mageni, Head of the SABS Design Institute ([@SABS_Design](#)).

Mageni believes that we are too stuck in the present and not focusing on building a sustainable foundation for South Africa to grow. He predicts that if we don't use innovation to develop products we can sell, chances are - in next 10 years - the country won't have a viable economy.

“ Gavin Mageni [@SABS_Design](#) tells us we need to be stronger global competitors [pic.twitter.com/tbHDdqdMk2-Business of Design \(@busofdesign\) October 23, 2014](#) ”

Stuck in a rut

One of the areas Mageni highlights as a challenge to the future is the fact that we are still fixed in an economy where we don't actually benefit from our own wealth.

"We support a Northern hemisphere economy. We export raw materials and pay to import finished product back into our own market. Take diamonds. We send them to India to be cut and polished and made into jewellery, and then bring them back to sell locally. It doesn't make sense," he explains.

Teaching creativity

He says that the education system is failing because we are teaching our child to go out and get a job, rather than gearing them to be an employer.

"We need to cultivate young people's creativity. Innovation is about being inquisitive. To ask what if? And find new ways of doing things. That's how we move into the future."

"How do we go about creating jobs?" he asks. To Mageni, innovation is about designing products that have commercial value.

The vision for the future

If you were to picture the South African Bureau of Standards (SABS), you would probably envisage a dry and dusty government institution where people in white coats tested and rubber stamped products to make sure they were safe to use.

Although its offshoot, the Design Institute has been around since the late '60s. It underwent a metamorphosis a few years ago with the vision of becoming a dynamic, forward-thinking catalyst to tackling unemployment, poverty, inequality and the like.

Design isn't soft

Mageni wants to replace the image of design being soft, but should rather be seen as a problem-solving process or an improvement process that can be applied to business, to civil society and to government.

According to him, design should fill the gap between research and development and commerce, and grow businesses that focus on export/import substitution and increase the nation's competitiveness.

"State-owned entities don't get it. Innovation doesn't necessarily mean invention or being 'the first'. It shouldn't be measured by the number of PhDs and papers that are written about it, but on its commercial marketability. So they won't invest in the risk phase of product development, and we are currently experiencing a chasm between innovation and growth," he says.

Therefore, the [SABS Design Institute's Design & Innovation Entrepreneurship Centre](#) is a port of call for designers, innovators and entrepreneurs who have bright ideas and need help to bring their products or services to market. The centre offers the services of experts, be they academics, business experts or designers, to offer advice on all aspects of idea development.

The SA Innovation Summit is taking place at the Cape Town Stadium from 26-29 August. For more info, go to www.innovationsummit.co.za.

ABOUT NICCI BOTHA

Nicci Botha has been wordsmithing for more than 20 years, covering just about every subject under the sun and then some. She's strung together words on sustainable development, maritime matters, mining, marketing, medical, lifestyle... and that elixir of life - chocolate. Nicci has worked for local and international media houses including Primedia, Caxton, Lloyd's and Reuters. Her new passion is digital media.

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