

Building a Youth Village with Bruce Dube



By Cari Van Wyk

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28-year-old Bruce Dube owns and co-owns many digital media platforms through which he shares his passion for youth development and plays a significant role in promoting the role youth plays in our country and across the continent. Dube is one of the most active and successful leaders in youth development and entrepreneurship, his [roles and achievements](#) too many for this short intro. Let's hear what he has to say about South Africa and Africa's youth.



Bruce Dube

■ Tell us a bit more about yourself and how you're involved in the youth of South Africa

I am the MD of a digital publishing company called [Nine80](#) Digital Media which is a publishing company that targets the South African and African youth demographic. The business currently has a footprint in South Africa, Botswana, Kenya, Nigeria and Zimbabwe. We have dedicated youth portals running under the [Youth Village brand](#) in each of these countries that aim at facilitating better access to developmental information on areas like education, employment, entrepreneurship, health, opportunities, etc. In South Africa alone we generate over a million unique youth visitors every month from our digital platforms.

On a personal level, I am an advocate for youth development and I have spoken on local and international platforms like Brussels Forum, Friends of Europe Summit, World Bank Young Professionals, British Council Global Change Makers and the German Marshall Fund of the United States on the importance of capitalising on Africa's demographic dividend.

■ What are the biggest challenges our youth is facing in your opinion?

I believe unemployment and access to opportunities are some of the biggest challenges faced by South African youth and I believe we need to urgently address these issues so we can capitalise on our youthful human capital which, if not addressed, will create problems for South Africa and the continent as we have seen with other fragile states on the continent where strikes and uprisings are the order of the day and young people are usually at the forefront of these movements.

■ You could be classified as a young mover and shaker. What were some of the obstacles you faced?

My biggest challenges were access to funding, networks and mentorship which I believe are core to a startup looking at scaling. A lot of challenges I went through could have been averted if I had access to these.

▣ ***Your greatest achievements so far?***

My greatest achievement has to be building a digital media company with a continental footprint which is self-sustainable and gaining massive momentum in all regions we are operating in. The business has 15-20 employees and is still growing. What is also exciting about this business is that we are part of a generation that is shaping the content and the format in which it's being consumed by African youth. It's also comforting to know that we are stimulating young people to stand up and be proactive in issues affecting them.

▣ ***What can be done to accelerate youth development in the country?***

I think in a lot of instances young people are constantly seen as drivers of change and not vehicles of change. I think we need to create more spaces where youth can contribute actively to issues affecting them and be part of those solutions. I also think that we need to expose our youth to more opportunities and resources, build more infrastructure in communities and create spaces for youth to learn, think, grow and create.

▣ ***Entrepreneurship is often being hailed as the panacea for unemployment and youth becoming active in the economy. Do you think this is true? Why?***

Definitely. Drawing from the high levels of youth unemployment in SA which is listed as one of the highest globally, it's clear that whilst it's important to expose the youth to more employment opportunities that could see them entering the job market, it's equally important to seek to nurture a generation of job creators and not job seekers.

SMEs are the largest recruiters of jobs in South Africa, attributed to at least 60% of all jobs and contributing 40% to the country's GDP. These analytics indicate that [SMMes in South Africa employ more people than the private sector and government](#) combined and because of that we need to see a lot more youth active in these space so they can create employment for more youth and be part of solutions to service and infrastructure development in their communities. With every challenge faced by communities, these challenges present business opportunities youth can tap into.

▣ ***In your experience, how do the youth of our country and the African continent approach and view the challenges they are presented with?***

I think most South African and African youth see constraints faced by the continent as just challenges and not opportunities and I think we need to stimulate a generation of solution seekers and innovators. Africa is a continent filled with many challenges but has natural resources and human capital potential that, if tapped into, can see the advancement of the continent from an infrastructure and employment point of view.

▣ ***Which industries offer the most challenges for youth to access opportunities?***

Assuming we're talking entrepreneurial opportunities, I think capital extensive industries like manufacturing, mining and construction are the most challenging for youth to tap into as they require a lot of capital and the capital usually requires collateral which most of our youth don't have. I also think most of these industries have already been monopolised by major corporates which make it even harder for small players and startups.

▣ ***Any words of wisdom or inspiration that you would like to share with SA's youth?***

Starting up I had a series of failures and from those failures I learned to persevere and keep pushing for my dream until it became a reality so I would like to encourage SA's youth to not allow anyone to belittle their dreams, to persevere, to work hard, to look around their communities for opportunities because remember with any challenge you see, an opportunity to address the challenge is presented. Furthermore, I would like to encourage young people to start with the little they have, where there are. Some of my greatest accomplishments did not necessarily have great beginnings, a lot of my projects got

better with time but had I not tried and started something I would never have been where I am now.

ABOUT CARI VAN WYK

Cari Coetzee is a contributor to Bizcommunity Tourism, Agriculture and Lifestyle.

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