People *Powered* Change

Insights from the Social Innovation Indaba *2024*

/ *Bloemfontein, South Africa*

SIX | UFS

Social Innovation Indaba

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From 30 September - 2 October 2024, SIX collaborated with the University of the Free State to host the first ever Social Innovation Indaba in South Africa. We brought together 100 leading innovation practitioners from across sectors and from around the world to discuss how people-powered change can drive innovation and improve our societies for the better.
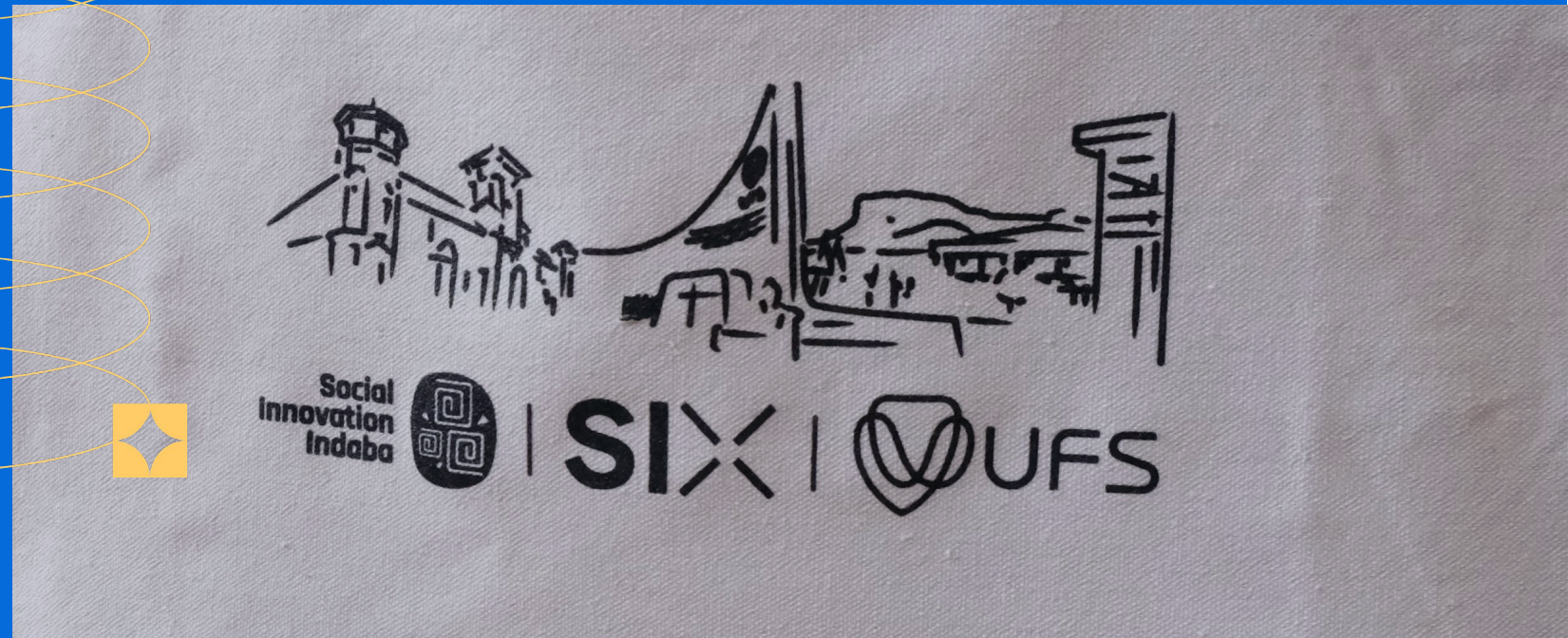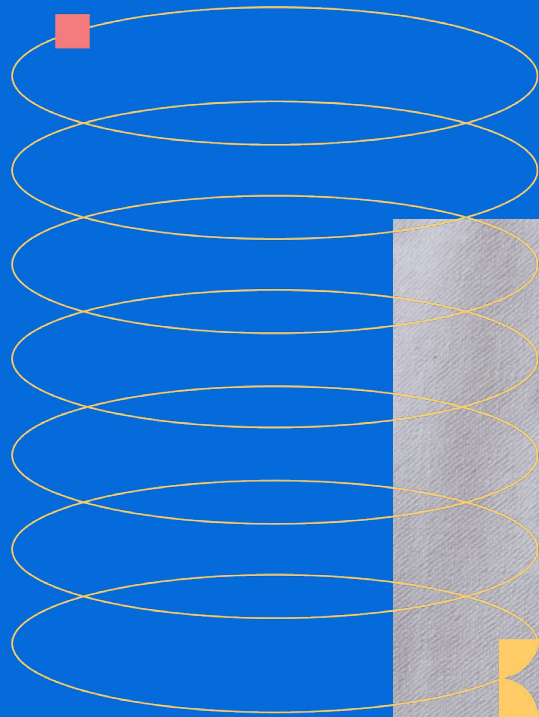
Part 1
The context

Introduction

At a time when our narratives are dominated by polarisation, division and dystopias, inspiration is more crucial than ever, and we need to look to places less well known to find it. It is important to go beyond our comfort zones. That's why we invited this particular group to meet in Bloemfontein to discuss what it takes to support and accelerate people-powered change.

In the following pages, we share some learning and insights from our perspective. For those who attended the event, we hope it jogs your memory and inspires you to continue your work, or even pick up the phone and reconnect with someone you met at the event. For those who were not able to attend, we hope this report provides insights and fresh perspectives and ideas that you want to share and connect with.
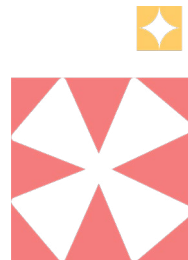
Indaba
/ɪnˈdɑːbə/
noun

'Indaba' is a term originating from the Zulu and Xhosa languages of Southern Africa, meaning "gathering" or "discussion". A vibrant platform that is rooted in the spirit of collaboration and inclusivity, an indaba embodies principles of democracy, equality, and community involvement, so that everyone's voice is heard.

Why look to the edges for innovation?

At SIX, we embrace the 'edges' to find innovation and inspiration. Innovation does not only happen in big metropolises, or well known, well resourced places.

What is on the edge clearly depends on where you are coming from, and how you see the world. But the principle of looking outwards, finding new perspectives, looking at what is on the margins has always been important for us. We've always had a curiosity about things, places and people that are less well known, and we like to connect usual and unusual suspects. But in the geopolitical environment we now operate in, it is more important to look at the world in new ways and broaden our world view and perspective.

The best examples don't necessarily come from 'the West' – there are dozens of new cities emerging, or less well known cities, which are experimenting with new approaches, and leapfrogging what is happening in North America and Europe which we can all learn from. That's why we hosted this event in Bloemfontein, not Cape Town or Johannesburg.

Edges don't only need to be geographical - it also means engaging with new thinking and ideas that come from new groups – children, young and older people, employees, marginalised and others who have been excluded from/outside of mainstream social innovation discussions. We will continue to put practice and learning from the ground at the centre of all of our work.
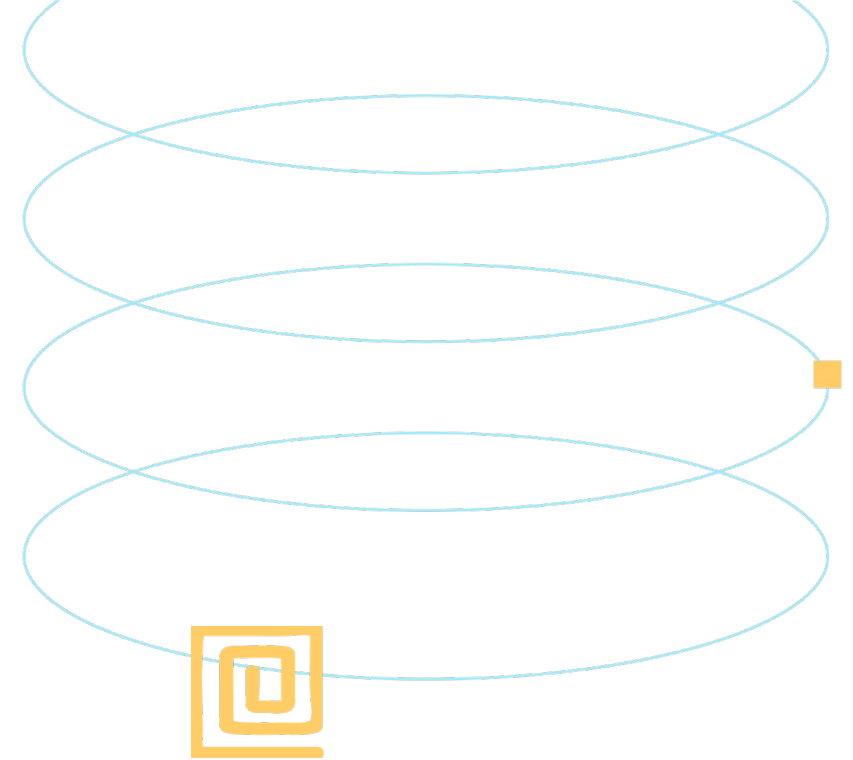
Universal Design for Learning emphasises that if you design learning for students on the margins, you include everyone. Perhaps the same applies to institutions, philanthropy, networks… We are designed for connection. Thank you to SIX for making that possible.

Francois Strydom, University of the Free State, South Africa

Why South Africa?

South Africa is best known for its vibrant and resilient society, collective action and commitment to justice. Throughout its complex history of colonialism and apartheid, people have come together to make change happen. It is because of the combination of history and culture that South Africa is a hotbed for social innovation - people developing the solutions, the services, the communities, the organising themselves.

Today, South Africa is also a microcosm of the challenges the world is facing, whether it's climate change, youth unemployment, inequality, obesity and malnutrition, how to bridge digital divides and so on.

A key challenge for the future, in a country where half of the current population were born after the Apartheid era, is how do we use the amazing people power, alongside the material resources, to accelerate growth in a way that includes everyone and how to transition from a resource-based economy.

As the first African hosts of the G20 in 2025, South Africa is playing an increasingly important role in the Continent, and the rest of the world, so it was the perfect place to host a global indaba on social innovation and people power.

Why Bloemfontein?

To some, Bloemfontein was a strange place to host an international event. It is a small, quiet city that sits in the centre of the country. It is most well known as the judicial capital of South Africa hosting the Supreme Court of Appeal. It is not an obvious destination for international visitors to South Africa, yet the State is host to one of South Africa's best kept secrets - the University of the Free State (UFS).

UFS is an inspiring university dedicated to innovation, social impact, social justice and human rights. It is also an anchor institution, acting as a lab for the city and bridging the university and its local communities in all of its work. Under the leadership of its former (until August 2024) Vice Chancellor Francis Peterson, UFS embraced his Vision 130. At the heart of this vision was the question of how universities can both grow the next generation of citizens and professionals, but also improve the lives of wider society. This means engaging with business, government and civil society beyond the walls of a university campus.

The challenges societies face today are complex and no one sector has the answers or resources alone to tackle them. We need collaborations between sectors more than ever, and this must include key knowledge and societal institutions such as universities. That's why we decided to host the event in collaboration with a university.
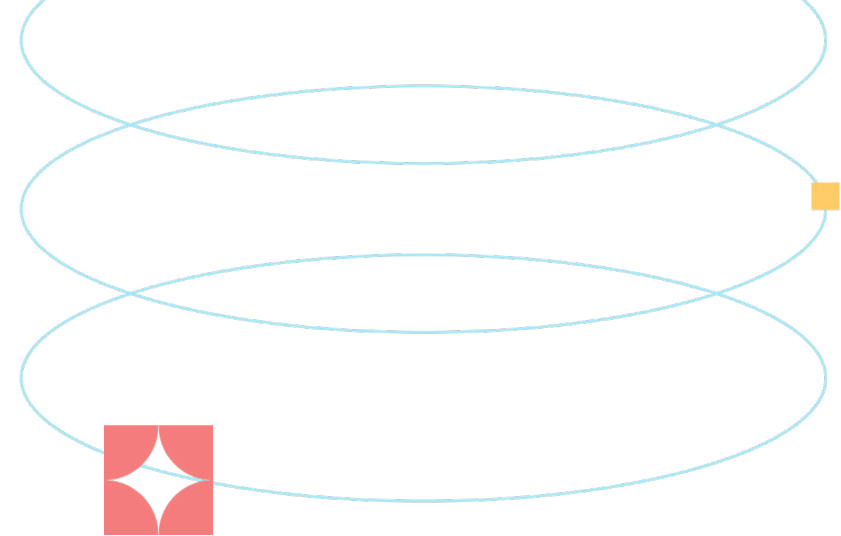
It is one thing to say that we are social change agents. And how are you doing it? That's a question that we continuously have to ask ourselves as universities. Because that to a certain extent, provides legitimacy of universities to exist.

Prof. Francis Petersen, Vice-Chancellor, University of the Free State, South Africa

Prof. Francis Petersen has since been appointed as Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the University of Pretoria (as of October 2024).

Part 2

Insights and lessons

New ways of seeing

Societies around the world are facing multiple crises that are urgent and global in nature. But in his talk at the Indaba, Geoff Mulgan pointed out another crisis that is critical to our future - the 'imaginary crisis' resulting from a deficit of social imagination. It's easy to picture the end of the world, but it is much harder to imagine a better society in the future.

For SIX, social innovation is about reframing things, challenging our assumptions and seeing things in a new way. There are many embedded ways of doing things from how we travel, to how we consume, to how we interact with institutions which we don't question, even if they mean living with inequality, the effects of climate change, and a general lack of hope. Yet, with the right tools and methods, it is possible to challenge the way we see things, imagine better futures, and start to develop ways to create them.

A key first step is to find inspiring examples of people and organisations who are approaching things in new ways. During the indaba, we found hope in imagining a world grounded in inspiration from nature, arts and our past. We saw hope in new ways of organising and collaborating across distance and difference.

The examples are below are inspired by some of the speakers at the Indaba:
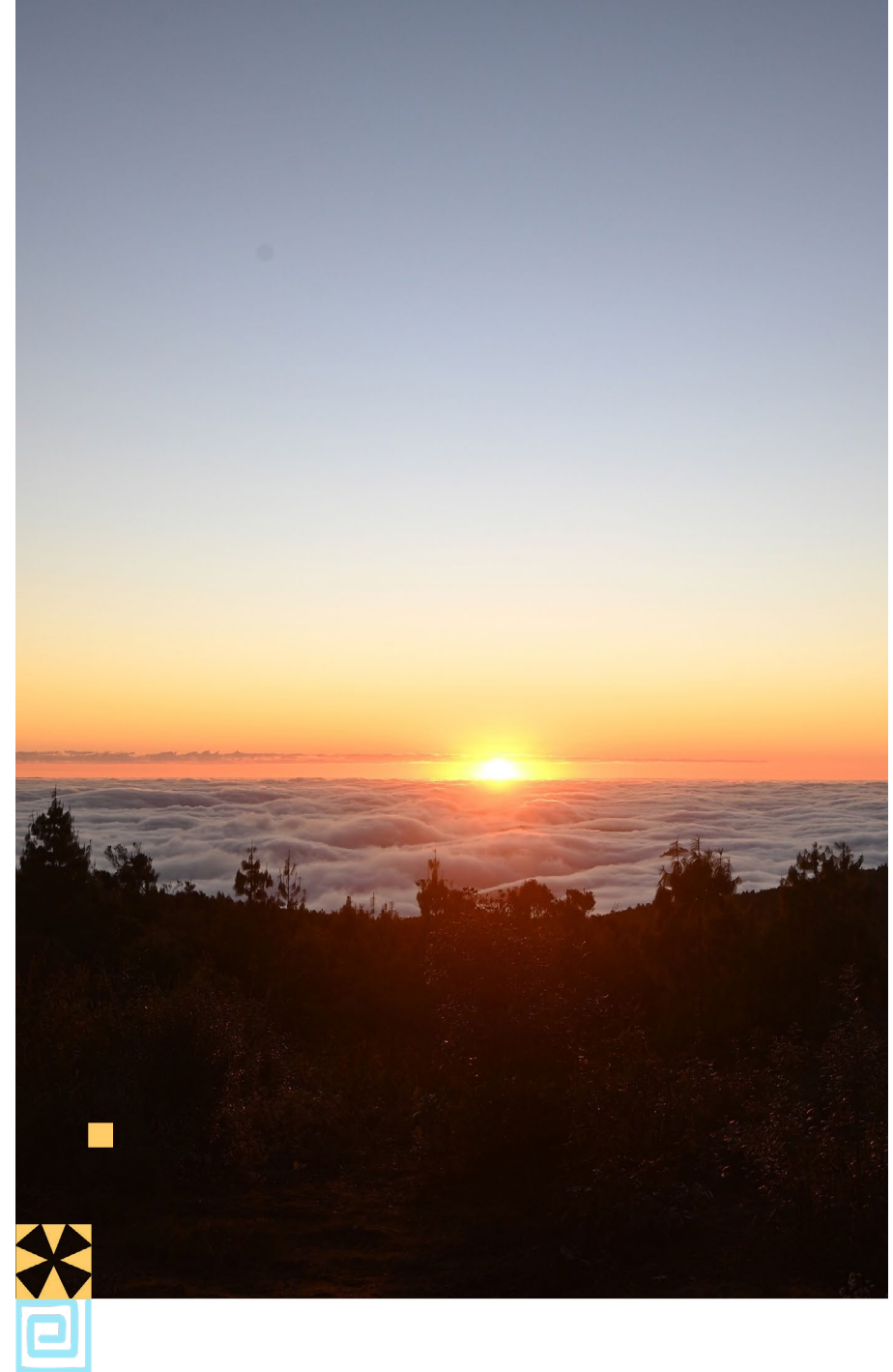
Credit: Afromontane Research Unit, UFS

Rethinking the value of labour

In her talk 'Unlocking the social value of labour', Dr. Kate Philip emphasised the importance of building a society that truly works for everyone. Employment matters too much to leave it to the markets alone.

Work is part of a social contract

In many places, the role of work has become disembedded from its social meaning and it takes the form of the employment relationship. The message from society therefore is that if your labour has no market value, you have no value.

We need to reframe this way of thinking. Even where labour has no market value, it has social value. Labour is one of societies' profound resources. It can create social, environmental and economic value. If society doesn't create mechanisms to tap into this incredible wealth and opportunity, we are wasting one of our most fundamental assets.

It's a design choice

In South Africa, 55% of young people are unemployed. This has economic, social and psychological costs. Addressing this huge challenge requires innovative thinking, starting by seeing the value of work differently. Public employment programmes do not have to be awful - that's a design choice. It's the result of a lack of imagination. How do we reimagine what public employment can be and can look like as a development instrument for unlocking the social value of labour?

A unique opportunity

By using a unique opportunity during the COVID-19 pandemic, Kate experimented with public sector instruments to build the capacity, agency, and social imagination at the local level and to engage people in work that serves the common good. It led to a wide range of local examples of creating social value from mobiles libraries to support for gender-based violence, early childhood development, community arts programmes, to employment for homeless people, to food security and biodiversity interventions.

There are many examples like this all over the world, but to make it work at scale, it requires us all to view labour and participation differently, and for us to review the social contract. This is going to become all the more important in a world in which markets are going to need labour less and less, but societies need instruments of participation and inclusion more and more.

Work should not be reduced to employment relationships but we need to unlock and re-imagine the social value of work.

Kate Philip, Presidential Employment Stimulus, South Africa
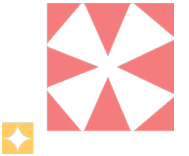
Law as a tool for social change

Since it was passed in 1996, South Africa's constitution is considered to be of the most progressive in the world. So there is no better context to discuss the foundational and formative role law plays in society.

Advocate Tembeka Ngcukaitobi, one of South Africa's most prominent lawyers recognised for his work on high-profile public and constitutional law cases, joined us at the Indaba and shared his perspective on the power and role law in South Africa from a contemporary historical approach. He has studied how black people have conceived of the system of human rights and the use of law for transformative purposes. As a constitutionalist, he emphasises the notions of equality, freedom and respect for dignity which is exactly what the black people have fought for.

Changing role of law in society

What is the role of law in society and how has it changed? What does it mean for different groups of people? How was law experienced by black people, white people, the indigenous people? What did it mean for them? To answer these questions, Tembeka took us back in time – to the encounter of the native people with colonialism. The law came with two faces in South Africa – with a face of justice and a face of violence. Native people experienced the violence of law in the beginning, but what was interesting about law was its ability to transform itself from violence to justice.

In the 18th and 19th century, many native people started embracing law – the children of Chiefs were sent to colonial schools, making the occupation acceptable to native people. They created 'black Englishmen'. Many of black thinkers and orators went to study in Oxford and in London (such as Pixley Ka Isaka Seme and Alfred Mangena) and they began questioning segregation, which led to the movement we know as the African National Congress (ANC). The foundation of this movement was respect for the law and harnessing the power of law in the hands of the colonised.

The introduction of constitutional law

Allowed for the recognition of customary law as another source of law in South Africa. But for Tembeka, the recognition of customary law is not about reconstructing the fossilised imaginary version of the world. The task is about reconstructing what was lost and putting it in a body of precedent. We have to ask ourselves what customs we are building and for whom and for what purpose. It's not about reconstructing the pre-colonial world. The struggle is about self-determination and creating the world of the future.

You can watch the conversation between Louise and Tembeka here.

The world we are trying to create is not the pre-colonial imaginary world, but it is the world of the future.

Advocate Tembeka Ngcukaitobi, South Africa

Mountains as the link between science and society

The Afromontane Research Unit (ARU) at UFS is a continental leader in global mountain research theory and practice. Based at the UFS's Qwaqwa campus and led by Professor Vincent Ralph Clarke, the ARU contributes to mountain-related policy and governance from an African perspective, thus balancing a predominance of mountain research driven from the Global North and the Northern Hemisphere.

The ARU value and care about their work within locally embedded contexts, creating partnerships with traditional authorities in the region, such as the relationship they have with the Bakoena Royal Council.

The Baquena people first came to the Drakensberg mountains in Qwaqwa 200 years ago seeking water, refuge and peace. They still live, work and operate in this region. South Africa recognises the role and status of traditional leadership such as the Bakoena Royal Council, according to customary law and in many cases, they have cooperative relationships with the municipalities.

We need to see mountains as social, economic and geopolitical systems, not just as biophysical systems.

Vincent Ralph Clarke, University of the Free State, South Africa

Credit: Afromontane Research Unit, UFS

Mountains as social bridges for diplomacy and cooperation.

Vincent emphasised the need to see African mountains as trans boundary systems. Colonialism has defined mountains through the lens of division and conflicts but they need to be considered as social bridges for diplomacy and cooperations. The traditional Royal Houses can play an active role as mountain ambassadors and as facilitators of the Sustainable Development Goals.

As custodians of the mountains, the traditional councils have a key role in constantly sharing their wisdom and finding novel ways to find a sustainable future for their own communities and beyond.

The inseparable relationship between mountains and community

The Chairperson of the Bakoena Royal Council, Morena Tsolo Mopeli, talked about the inseparable relationship the communities have with the mountains as a source of water, livelihood and identity. Tsolo also reflected on the role of the traditional leadership and the tensions and interactions between customary law and formal law. Traditionally, when a young man is of age, the community provided him with economic means by giving cattle and a site to build a family on.

Today, the traditional councils have less direct power – they are not in the position to offer jobs or economic opportunities for their community so they need to find ways to innovate their role, whilst not losing their tradition. They have an important role in creating a new future for the community by building new kinds of partnerships with different stakeholders.

Partnerships such as the collaboration between Baquena Royal Council and the ARU highlight their role in innovation and renewing their relationship with their own communities. They collaborate on conserving indigenous species of animals, on learning from indigenous knowledge systems such as traditional medicine practices, disaster management practices as controlled fire burning practices. These collaborations not only bring educational benefits of harnessing traditional knowledge but also provide the communities with training and employment opportunities to preserve the mountains.

I am convinced that Social Innovation is the new wheel, and that we cannot expect to transform beyond the vast challenges of this age without it.

Morena Tsolo Mopeli, Bakoena Royal Council, South Africa

Validating traditional forms of knowledge

Anamika Dey leads Gujarat Grassroots Innovation Augmentation Network (GIAN) in India, which is part of the Honey Bee Network, a collective that pursues innovation for and from the grassroots.

During the Indaba, Anamika challenged participants to think about whose knowledge we value in our societies. How do we validate the traditional and grassroots forms of knowledge and turn it into enterprises where communities can benefit from the value and proceeds?

Often, the grassroots innovators they find from different corners of villages in India, are not educated in formal science. However, through the process of validating their knowledge systems, their innovations are acknowledged and evidenced. The Honey Bee Network supports the grassroots innovators to turn their innovations into marketable products by connecting them to investment, network and resources. The grassroots innovators are recognised and are able to also get a share of the profit. With the prior consent of the knowledge holder, the grassroots innovations are also shared as open source so that other communities can learn and use them.

Minds on the margin are not marginal minds.
Anil Gupta, Honey Bee Network, India

Gujarat Grassroots Innovation Augmentation Network (GIAN) and the Honey Bee Network

GIAN is the first incubator of grassroots innovations. Set up in 1997, it is one of the main partner organisations representing the Honey Bee Network, a collective of organisations and volunteers that share information about grassroots innovations, sourced from villages throughout India.

Since 1998, they have documented and created a database of more than one million traditional knowledge and grassroots innovation practices. To discover innovation at the grassroots level, the Honey Bee Network organises Shodh Yatra where walkers (farmers, scientists and researchers) travel hundreds of miles across rural India to unearth traditional knowledge and grassroots innovations that have provided sustainable local solutions to local issues, from conservation of biodiversity to farm practices.

Inspiration from art

At SIX, we believe art has the power to change society - it can enable participation, challenge dominant narratives, bring people with diverse perspectives together, and drive innovation. We also include artists in our programming and we've always experimented with using art and creative techniques, and our Indaba was no different.

It was an honour to have Napo Masheane, a multi-award winning South African playwright, creative producer, artistic director, festival curator, poet, cultural activist, translator and acclaimed performer on both international and national stages with us at the Indaba.

Art as a way for storytelling and imagination

For Napo, art is intertwined with who we are and where we come from. In her work she explores the traditional stories – making them be heard, enacted and documented. She reminds us that we are rooted in rituals – rites of passage, festivities, folk celebration and cultural elements. African theatre has storyteller, audience and spectator and is like any other theatre, but it can happen anywhere, anytime. It doesn't belong in a black box.

The fact that art is intertwined with knowing who you are, where you come from and your state of mind for the immediate future enables you to imagine. You know you are here but you are able to dream. We are allowed to imagine the unimaginable through art.

Art as a dialogue and resistance

The social creative innovation tools that Napo uses also enables her to collaborate and co-create with others, to raise awareness and promote dialogue about social issues and provide a platform for marginalised voices and perspectives. Her work incorporates black women's stories that are undocumented — not just about struggle, resistance and pain but also about laughter, play and gossip. She uses art as a tool for resistance and challenging different knowledge systems.

Napo works with community norms, traditional views, and cultural stereotypes. These tools allow her to promote empathy by creating relatable characters across cultural divides. She is also able to challenge the status quo and challenge culture and tradition through her work.

By Napo Masheane

Enough space for all of us to shine

Our hearts know in silence
the secrets of the days and the nights,
there is enough space for all of us to shine
for me to take a stand,
for you to make that first step,
for him to finish his lines,
for her to run the race,
but for all of us to dance in flames with the stars

We are sparks of fire,
our dreams lie in the soft arms of life;
sometimes we hear the universe calling our
names
… coming without bells
our ears thirst for the sound of our future,
to know words, we've known in thought
and though our beauty is found in soul
magazines

the trees and flowers of the universe applaud us,
making our voices to unlock
windows of the sunset;
we fetch pails of water from the spring
to touch others with our gifts;

Do not shut your temple doors
for whatever you seek, seeks you.
Do not shut your temple doors
for whatever you want, wants you.
Do not shut your temple doors
for whatever you know, knows you.

Our truest being is safeguarded by light
and though at times our fears sports with time,
others' words are made flesh
to become lungs of inspiration,
leading us to streams of infinity,

telling us in the musical breeze.
Our hearts know in silence
the secrets of the days and the nights:
there is enough space for all of us to shine.
For me to take a stand,
for you to make that first step,
for him to finish his lines,
for her to run the race,
but most of all for us
to dance in flames with the stars.

Do not shut your temple doors
for whatever you seek, seeks you.
Do not shut your temple doors
for whatever you want, wants you.
Do not shut your temple doors
for whatever you know, knows you.
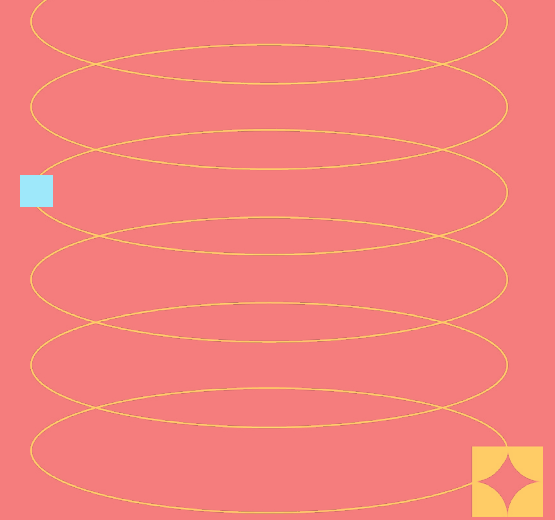
We shape our organisations and then they shape us. But of course the problem is that 'we' and the 'us' are usually different. How do we do this better when they are the same 'we' in both cases?

Professor Geoff Mulgan, UCL & TIAL, UK

New ways of doing

In order to explore new possibilities for our future, we must talk about our institutions. Do we have the right institutional forms and organisational structures that can reimagine different futures that we need? How do you better align organisations with our values on what we care about and the new ways of seeing things?

Harnessing people-power is at the heart of rethinking our organisations. As Geoff Mulgan noted in his talk, there have been many experiments in the last 200 years, from the cooperative movement, mutuals, trade unions and the history of movements. We are seeing much more horizontal, interlinked, organic organisational designs. Beyond the well known examples of distributed platforms (like Airbnb, Uber, TikTok and Wikipedia), there are many more ways that people are redesigning how they run their organisations all over the world.

In the section below, we highlight some of the examples organisations are doing things differently which were shared at the Indaba. They are innovating how they organise, make decisions, communicate, use data and collaborate.

Creating new types of governance models

New types of governance models were key in building new forms of organisations. Oxfam South Africa is working with informal waste pickers to build recycling cooperatives managed and governed by the waste pickers themselves. In Brazil, ICE is dedicated to strengthening the ecosystem of the impact economy in Brazil by working with 6 cities to create local impact governance ecosystems through the 'Coalition for impact' programme. The communities in Makers Valley, a neighbourhood in Johannesburg, are co-designing and co-implementing innovative place-making initiatives from the ground up.

Closing the data divide

We live in the data age. In her talk, Kriss Deiglmeier reminded us that whilst data has the potential to improve people's lives, not all parts of society are taking this opportunity and data is accelerating/exacerbating inequalities in society, rather than making a positive impact. Private companies are so good at using data to drive profit but we aren't good at using data for social and environmental challenges. Why are we not using data to solve climate change and the SDGs? It is crucial that we take action to close the date divide.

There are lots of examples of organisations, some governmental, or NGOs, or even for profit organisations using data for impact. Many are across the African continent: For example, the African Wildlife Foundation uses geospatial data to change decision making about where to allocate resources, where they can be more effective and meet needs of more people; Data Science Nigeria uses

AI for education delivery - they've developed a LLM which can deliver education in local languages and are tracking it to drive education in rural areas; and the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data is working on a broader scale, acting as a voice for using data as a tool. Ushahidi from Kenya empowers people through citizen-generated data to develop solutions that strengthen their communities.

Storytelling and movement building

Other examples engage with grassroots movements, protests and community action. In Kenya, the LAM Sisterhood, a creativity studio founded by three female theatre artists, engaged with the ongoing movement and protests and used theatre and storytelling to create intergenerational dialogue. Diana Ocholla from Bertha Centre explored the power of Community Action Networks and the role of public memory in building collective identity during the times of crisis (during the COVID pandemic).

How can data be used to solve societal and environmental challenges at the same speed and scale as it is being used to increase the profits of companies?

Kriss Deiglmeier, Splunk, USA

Building a robust philanthropic ecosystem that works across silos

Bridgit Evans from SAB Foundation urges the philanthropic sector to be more open and connected. We need a much more robust ecosystem in South Africa to ensure projects are funded at all stages, yet the funding chasm is still too big - on one end, we have small funds for projects and other, big impact investors looking for a deal. The result is that we are not able to scale innovations that can really transform society. We need to better connect the whole spectrum of finance more effectively, from the impact investors, to corporate philanthropy to the family and community foundations. But we still speak different languages, we go to different conferences and when we are in the same event, we sit in different rooms. This needs to change urgently.

We also need to think transformatively about how to solve issues, beyond the money. The work of E-Squared is a great example of this. They invest in pilots in collaboration with non profit partners to demonstrate how it is possible to tackle complex challenges, such as youth unemployment. Financing can be catalytic but it takes people to change the system and only people on the ground know how to deal with systemic issues on a day to day basis. Large scale change in the national level is possible, but only if governments, people and money work together and put effective and respectful partnerships in place. This will drive innovation.

Philanthropy is often associated with the past, but to make itself relevant in the future, we need to incorporate unusual voices and bring together unusual groups of people to have important conversations together, especially young people.

Designing universities for the 21st Century

What a privilege to be in a room full of changemakers and impact practitioners coming from different countries and continents. I am especially grateful for the opportunity to be part of the panel discussion on making our universities fit for future generations as a youth representative. How can universities as well as institutions continue to be a site for transformation by showing society at large what could be possible? And considering the state of affairs today, how can institutions bring about hope and empower people to create change?

Lydia Sung, a recent Masters graduate, Hong Kong/Germany

Universities can play a key role in society

Universities can play a key role in society. They are social change agents. Universities can play a key role in cross sector partnerships and collaborations and act as hubs for innovation and co-creation. There is at least one university in almost every city or town, and they have space and other resources which can be utilised. At their core, universities have the next generation of talent and academics who are experts in their fields, who have knowledge and skills which can be used as a platform for problem solving and innovation. They are institutions designed for learning, openness and debate, and they have a key role to play in catalysing social action, encouraging debate on current social and political issues, from different perspectives.

Yet, the majority of universities have not changed their models since they were created. They focus on tradition rather than embracing future thinking. They are associated with bureaucracy, rather than innovation. And they can be seen as inward looking ivory towers, disconnected from the cities and communities around them, often working on theoretical examples, rather than practical real life challenges.

There are dozens of institutions testing out models from challenge based universities, to the dozens of social innovation centres at Universities globally to those embracing the idea of 'civic university'. There is a global movement of design schools embedding social innovation through DESIS. The Collective Impact Center at Hanyang University, South Korea contributes to the development of the impact ecosystem through knowledge creation, dissemination and cross-sector partnerships. The London Interdisciplinary School (LIS) creates unique degrees focused on problem solving to real world problems. There are many more examples.

Being future ready

With their knowledge and innovation capabilities, universities can be a natural convener of government, philanthropy, businesses, communities and the innovation and entrepreneurship communities. At SIX, we'd love to see more universities leveraging their convening power, bringing students into their design processes, and taking the opportunity to be a platform for an impact ecosystem. We need universities to be future ready institutions, relevant for the 21st century.

I am of the firm belief that fostering collaboration is seminal to ensure transformation and preparedness of society for future generations. While universities' focus and influence are pivotal in this process, it is important that young people do not overlook their role in advancing the co-creation of knowledge and advocating for causes that will positively contribute to the holistic sustainability of this process. At the end of the day, it takes a concerted effort to advance humanity through transformative innovation.

Bonolo Lulu Makhalemele, PhD student, University of the Free State, South Africa
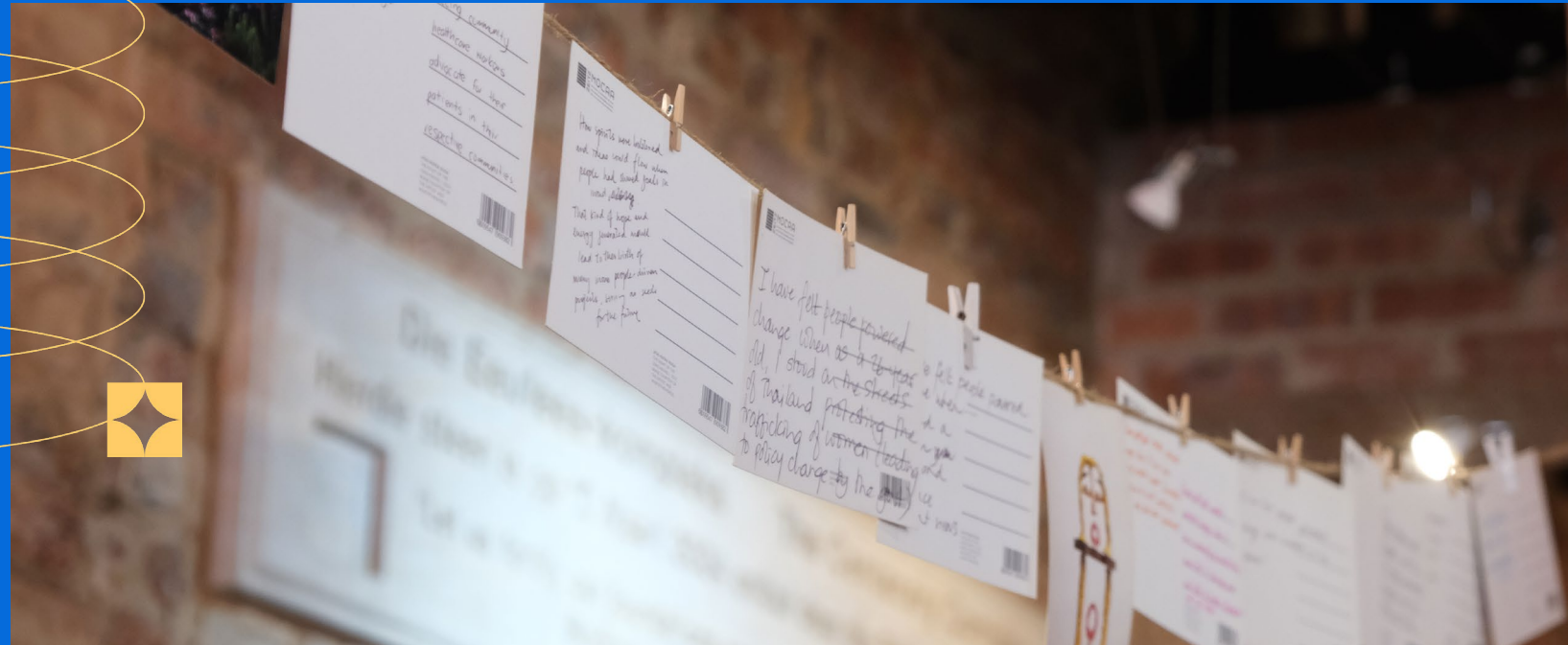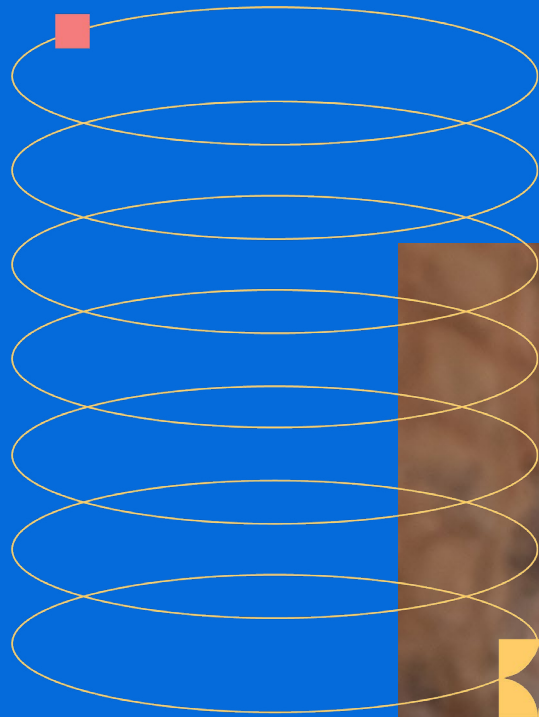
Looking to the future

Reframing social innovation for the global majority - power dynamics

The final discussion of the Indaba focussed on challenging global power dynamics. Whilst the theme of the Indaba was people powered change, there was also an intentional effort not to replicate global power imbalances that dominate the way we think about global exchange. How can we address the divide between the Global North and South?

After spending 2.5 days together, we'd developed a level of trust that enabled us to work through the complexity of this topic and these issues, with care. We invited a diverse group of people with very different perspectives to kick off the discussion. Thank you to Yogi Nambiar, Niara Advisory (South Africa), Elisabeth Makumbi, Bridgespan (South Africa), Michael Ngigi, Think Place Africa (Kenya), Taïna Mueth, Je suis Montréal (Canada), Markus Lux, Robert Bosch Stiftung (Germany) and Harvey Koh, Dalberg (UK) who facilitated this discussion.

We did not try to draw conclusions and answer any questions. A few pages of text cannot do justice to the richness of the discussion, but we've attempted to highlight some of the themes of the discussion below.

*How do we actually **shift the system** rather than **deal with the symptoms** of what that system has created?*

Ownership and language

Social innovation has been mainly discussed in the Global North, particularly in the European Union. It has not been as established in the Global South, according to much of the academic literature. The term came from the 16th and 17th from Europe but does that make it a European term?

Whose voice gets heard when we are thinking about the problems and challenges that we're facing and what to do about it? Who defines social innovation? Whilst there is an increasing recognition of the importance of indigenous knowledge in social innovation practice, we need to make sure this is included in academic studies. Indeed the whole body of international intelligence around social impact and social innovation needs to be more inclusive of different perspectives.

Social innovation is not new in the Global South - both the action and the term. It's a very human response to challenges that affect groups of people. There are so many examples of communities finding ways to do things for themselves when systems fail them. The more examples there are of innovations, the more we see there's a trend.

Michael Ngigi highlighted: "There's no need for those in the Global South to approach innovation with imposter syndrome. We've done it before. We can take the vocabulary and localise it. The thing about social innovation is that it belongs to nobody and everybody. It's very important for humanity and for this planet. Social innovation is historically embedded in our communities but we don't always have the ability to tap into it."

Language can be a systemic barrier. Whilst social innovation practices (whether in philanthropy, or design, or entrepreneurship), have a long history in the Global South, but there's been a lack of 'framing' of these terms to professionalise these sectors. How can we help build social innovation confidence in the Global South?

Just because an innovator is not educated in my language, it doesn't mean they don't have volition.

Anamika Dey, GIAN & Honey Bee Network, India

Getting there then getting heard

Global events are often hosted in the Global North. Whilst there are more efforts to bring people from other parts of the world, it is rare that there is even participation from the North and South. There is lots of South to South learning, but it doesn't include Europe/North America. Many collaborations and partnerships between the Global North and South still replicate global power dynamics and can be tokenistic. Global meetings like the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) exemplify this.

All organisations must share responsibility to change how things work. As hosts of the G20 next year, South Africa needs to ensure social innovation is on the agenda. There needs to be better representation from South Africa and across the African continent but the UNGA organisers need to do more to make this possible.

Global money flows and international development

There needs to be a redistribution of power across the whole value chain and redesign how international development and global philanthropy is structured - it doesn't work as it is currently set up. The gap between the person giving money and the organisations doing the execution is too wide. What are the mechanisms to bring funding closer to the people doing the work? What does the concept of localisation look like in practice?

The same issue around power dynamics is relevant in philanthropy in the Global North, but it is between the money and the grantees and how funding decisions get made. Who's at the table? Who makes decisions?

The question for all philanthropy everywhere in the world is how we share our responsibility - our financial resources, our human resources, but also our ideals and topics, themes with the people we are supposed to serve. We also need to consider the organisation's power internally too - not only the CEOs and the boards, but even between the staff - everyone is afraid to lose something if they share or shift power. Unlike companies and governments who are beholden to shareholders and the electorate respectively, grantmakers, foundations, philanthropists could do this power sharing, power shifting.

We could be risky. We could lose money. Maybe we could fail and then learn together with our partners. But we have to overcome the fear. We have to overcome the fear of losing. When we do, we can win. Our networks become broader if we share responsibilities. The impact could be better if others decide or co-create with us.

Markus Lux, Robert Bosch Stiftung, Germany

We are the people that have people power. And we need to make the decision for change.

Adelaide Sheik, University of Johannesburg, South Africa

The world has changed

We are having a conversation about global power dynamics in a new context. The world has changed. We live in a multi-polar world. Innovation is not a net export from the Global North. Our biggest challenges don't lie within national boundaries. Climate change, pandemics, the effects of technology/AI, distrust in authority, migration are global challenges and require global cooperation.

The rapid urbanisation, especially on the African continent, is shaping and changing social infrastructure. It's changing how people participate in the economy. It's changing the ecological context and the design of the world. And really it requires a sense of urgency and also a sense of a different way of talking about these subjects.

We all share the same global crises but the burden is most heavy on the people who do not have resources themselves. We have to change urgently and this is more possible than ever.

We are more globally connected than we ever have been. We need to take this opportunity and start genuinely connecting and learning across sectors.

Change is hard

Whilst we need to do things in new ways to keep up with the challenges we face in the world, change is hard. The deeper the crisis, the more uncertain the world, the bigger reluctance against change. And there's already a reluctance against the wording, change, innovation, and things. People want security. Nevertheless, there is a need to change. And we have to find new appropriate wordings for this, to bring along the people on the ground. Not only the investors, but also to societies to contribute, to take part in our international processes. We need people power.

Continuous learning

Continuous learning is in our DNA at SIX. Whilst there was lots to celebrate at the Indaba, there were also challenges and things we could have done better. Here we highlight some of our own learnings and reflections during the process so that you can learn from our mistakes and challenges.

■ *Working on the edge is hard*

Whilst we are committed to looking to well known places to find innovation and working with actors who are newer to the social innovation world, we need to acknowledge that working in this way is harder - it takes more time to bring people along, it is more costly to organise events in places with less infrastructure.

We are also asking people to challenge their assumptions, get out of their comfort zones and usual bubbles, see things differently, and invest more time and resources in travelling to places they don't usually go to that are less well connected.

■ *The cost of exchange*

As well as changing mindsets, North/South exchange is expensive. In the North, we take our ability to travel between countries for granted – we have multiple options, many routes, low cost, and ability to get visas. And whilst we know it is a long way to travel to Africa from outside of the continent, we didn't anticipate how challenging it is to connect people across the continent. If funders want to encourage global connection and challenge power dynamics, they need to invest in this.

■ *Universities as host*

It can be challenging for organisations with different cultures to work together. Universities are especially complex organisations. Whilst they are perfect hosts for events like the Indaba, with multiple layers of departments, hierarchies and decision-making within their complex ecosystems and completely different cultures, we work at different speeds.
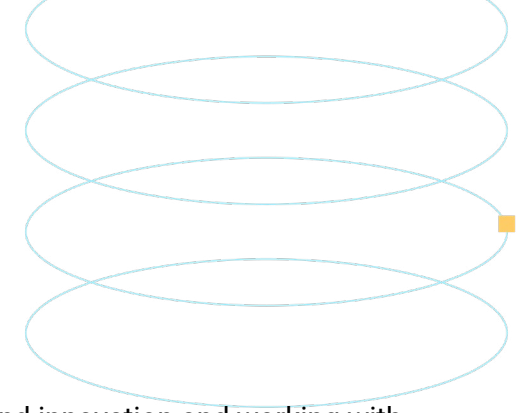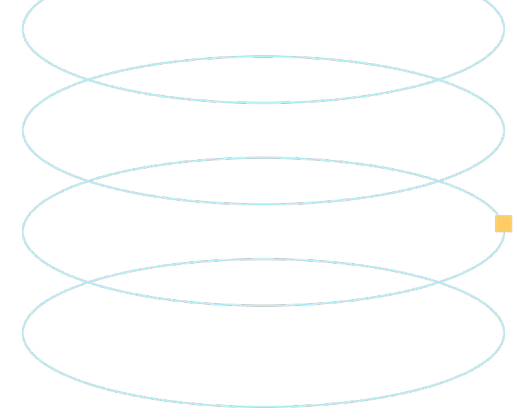
Creating long term impact in the whole institution was unrealistic expectation

A university is not a single entity. Whilst we never thought we would be able to create impact for the whole institution, we needed to be more realistic about the impact we could make. All institutions are made up of people, and universities are no different. There are several individuals and departments that have the drive and are already taking the work forward.

Working in partnership always takes more time than you think

We need to build in more time for building relationships in the beginning, especially when working with edge places who are not used to hosting global gatherings and for whom social innovation is new. There needs to be more investment in this, especially at the beginning.

Moving from talk and to action

At the Indaba, we had the amazing opportunity to discuss our imaginations, stories and challenges with a group of wonderful participants across sectors and geographies. Now we must move from talking to talk to walking the walk. We are already seeing many examples of collaboration – a South-South collaboration to ecosystem building work to bringing university and philanthropy together. We invite you to take the next step with us.

Strategic partners

Thank you to our strategic partners and funders who have supported and co-created this Social Innovation Indaba with us as critical friends and collaborators. We really appreciate your support and input to making this journey thoughtful and engaging.

Thank you to LOJIQ for funding four young people to come from Canada to South Africa for this experience.

Ce rassemblement m'a également permis de reconnecter avec l'histoire sud-africaine et de réfléchir à l'impact que nous pouvons avoir en tant que leaders. Cette phrase m'a fait réfléchir sur mon propre parcours avec BlackEstrie, un projet né d'un simple groupe Facebook en 2020, avec la vision de faire briller les communautés afro-descendantes dans ma région (Québec). Jamais je n'aurais pu imaginer à quel point cette initiative allait grandir et m'amener à des opportunités comme celle-ci.

Aïssé Touré, BlackEstrie, Canada

SIX

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