

'Be bold about what sets your soul on fire' - Sam Gqomo, Womandla Foundation

 By [Sindy Peters](#)

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This Women's Month, we chatted to Sam Gqomo, founding director of the Womandla Foundation, who shared with us more about the work that she does through the foundation and its impact so far, as well its third Women in STEAM Awards.



Sam Gqomo, founding director of the Womandla Foundation

The Womandla Foundation is a non-profit organisation that aims to bridge the gender gap in Africa through women empowerment.

Tell us a bit about yourself and your background.

I am a marketing communications and PR specialist by trade and run a PR and comms consultancy. I'm also the founder of the Womandla Foundation. I have recently been appointed as a global Youth Giving Summit ambassador representing South Africa, connecting with do-gooders around the world.

What does a typical workday look like for you?

Absolutely crazy! I wake up at 7am and do my devotions, get ready for work and get cracking on the admin between 8am-9am. Thereafter, I get to work, and this can look like meetings, follow-ups, doing the comms work and managing my team. I also attend many networking and fundraising events.



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📌 *Share with us more about the work that you do through the Womandla Foundation.*

Womandla Foundation is a non-profit company which seeks to bridge the gender gap by upskilling and training African women so they can further their own economic development and make bigger contributions to society. We are committed to providing sustainable, relevant programmes in all spheres within technology, media, skills development, mentorship, and every sector aimed to empower young girls to live out their destiny.

We operate with three key focus areas/pillars namely: entrepreneurship and development (E&D), mentorship and STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, mathematics).

E&D is where we encourage involvement in entrepreneurial activity from a young age, create opportunities and platforms of engagement with female role models in the field for learning and sharing, and drive females towards entrepreneurship through business masterclasses to spur job creation.

Mentorship is where we give young learners in Langa township our hand to hold through their educational journey to realise their full potential.

Lastly, we have STEAM. This pillar recognises the global movement that STEM is not mutually exclusive to arts. Through our STEAM committee, we have hosted coding workshops and career guidance events, and profiled dynamic young women in STEAM in the online series The STEAM Room and Womandla Women in STEM Awards, recognising local women trailblazing STEM fields.



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8 Aug 2022



📌 *What has been the measureable impact of the foundation so far?*

Our partnerships with other organisations have allowed for 20 women in Africa to receive bursaries through Mancosa to study any of their 21st Century Skills courses. With FEMNet and the Cape Town V&A Waterfront, we have raised global awareness on the plight of women in South Africa who cannot afford sanitary products. We hosted two educational campaigns with them and managed to collect sanitary products for 1,000 girls.

We've held career expos at two schools in Langa, Cape Town which exposed over 3,000 learners to various careers and funding opportunities like NSFAS.

■ ***The foundation is running its third Women in STEAM Awards this year. Why is this particular cause so important to you?***

Women make up only 28% of the workforce in science, technology, engineering, and maths (STEM), and men vastly outnumber women majoring in most STEM fields. The gender gaps are particularly high in some of the fastest-growing and highest-paid jobs of the future, like computer science and engineering.

Giving women equal opportunities to pursue — and thrive in — STEM careers helps narrow the gender pay gap, enhances women's economic security, ensures a diverse and talented STEM workforce and prevents biases in these fields and the products and services they produce. We are intentional about celebrating the unsung African women and role models in these fields who are changing the narrative.

■ ***As a thought leader, what do you see as the major challenges and opportunities ahead for women in STEAM?***

In our context, the greatest challenges are the unavailability of maths and science teachers in schools. This discourages students and has them choosing subjects that are available to them. Apartheid had also limited previous generations of women and Black people to enter STEM fields, and so a lack of role models also challenges this. However, things are changing and progressing with access to internet which opens a whole new world, narrative and allure to women in STEM-related fields.

This kind of exposure enables more young girls to take a keen interest in participating in extra-curricular activities in STEM, look for funding opportunities to study further and have positive role models to interact with and get mentored by.



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■ ***Where do you believe does the value lie in diversity and inclusivity, particularly in terms of female representation?***

Breaking the biases and traditional roles is important to how the world develops. The participation of women will strengthen the economy, develop nations and give women and girls a sense of purpose beyond what has been historically prescribed.

■ ***Who have been some of the inspirational female role models in your life?***

Phew! Quite a few from everyday entrepreneurs and changemakers but, more specifically, the likes of Oprah Winfrey and Dr Cindy Trimm.

■ ***Do you have any pearls of wisdom to share this Women's Month or words of encouragement?***

Fortune favours the bold, and I encourage women to be bold about what sets their souls on fire and wish for them to pursue their God-given destinies against all odds! True fortune is receiving the wealth of love, recognition, and celebration of living out your purpose and positively impacting others.

ABOUT SINDY PETERS

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