

Entrepreneur has high hopes for castor oil producing company in Africa

 By [Cari Coetzee](#)

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Old Mutual Foundation in partnership with Red Bull recently announced Thabang Mabapa, who impressed the judges with his Selokong Sa Dimelana project, as the winner of their "business pitch challenge", winning R100,000 enterprise development funding to grow his business. The Limpopo-based project engages with small-scale local farmers to grow castor seed crops for the commercial production of castor seed oil as an alternative biofuel. We wanted to find out a bit more about this inspiring young entrepreneur.



Entrepreneur scoops Old Mutual funding to develop biofuel enterprise

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Tell us a bit about yourself and what motivates you

I was born and raised in Soweto. I enjoy learning from people. I have a passion for agriculture and entrepreneurship. I get motivated by my team members, their dedication and contribution to Selokong Sa Dimelana have been immeasurable.



Thabang Mabapa. Source: [YouTube](#), [Red Bull Amaphiko](#)

Tell us about your project Selokong Sa Dimelana

We use the idle and marginal land to farm castor seeds and process them to castor oil and biodiesel. We address rural brain drain, a social problem facing Muila village, where out of those that are left seven out of 10 young people are unemployed. Our business is in the agricultural sector, yet plays a role in a number of industries including energy. Our farm is in Muila village, and our aim is to use up all the land that we have access to in the near future.

What led you to start the project?

It all started when I went to clean the community church and a friend of mine gave me tree spikes to throw away. I didn't throw them away, I put them in my bag but didn't know what they were at the time. So when I got home I crushed the spikes

and found these attractive brown seeds inside. Out of curiosity, I did research on the seeds and that's when I found out what they could produce. I found out that they were castor seeds.

These are oilseeds with high oil content. After gathering research about castor oil, I went on to approach a professor who specialises in chemical engineering to help me extract the oil from the seeds. He agreed to help me produce samples of the oil. But prior to mechanic extraction, I cooked the seeds and then crushed them using a spoon to extract the oil. I called it manual extraction.

■ ***What challenges did you face when starting the project and how did you overcome them?***

The challenges we faced when starting, like any other startup in South Africa, was funding which we still need to scale our business. We needed funding to develop a pilot farm. Another challenge was access to the biodiesel market.

■ ***Tell us about the work that you do with the local small-scale farmers***

We engage in a business model that cuts prices to gain an industry share. We are targeting the biodiesel market and markets that use castor oil as a starting material. We also collaborate with small-scale farmers through contract farming, where we supply farmers with castor cake (organic fertiliser) for free in exchange that the farmer dedicates one or more hectares of their land to castor seed farming, and then we buy castor seeds from them. We also sell our biodiesel to farmers to use on their tractors.



Source: [YouTube, Red Bull Amaphiko](#)

■ ***What are your hopes for the future of the project?***

Our hopes for the future is to duplicate our business model in other villages and to be a leading castor oil producing company in Africa.

■ ***Any words of advice for other young entrepreneurs who want to make a difference?***

Young people should never be afraid to ask, be it for mentorship, funding or any activity that will put them in a position to make a difference and in the process, learn.

ABOUT CARI COETZEE

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

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