

Breaking through invisible barriers in the mining space

 By [Nicci Botha](#)

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After years in the fast-paced world of IT, Modise Sikhosana decided he needed more stability, so he and his wife started [Yonke Konke](#) in 2015, which supplies road safety and traffic control equipment, tools and general industrial supplies to the mining and construction industries.



Modise Sikhosana

■ Tell us a little about your business. Why did you choose this sector? How did you get started?

I chose this sector because I saw the potential for growth and expansion, and a good opportunity presented itself. Yonke Konke is a Limpopo-based business that is determined to add value and do business on merit rather than empowerment credentials. As far as we know, there aren't currently any other black female-owned businesses in the road safety supplies sector, and most definitely not in Limpopo. My wife and I saw an opportunity to play in this space, which is dominated mostly by Gauteng-based corporates.

Our idea is to keep the money within Limpopo for as long as possible. De Beers Venetia mine supported us and allowed us to bring this idea to life, proving their commitment to local business by giving us a contract for the supply of road safety products like traffic cones, delineators, water-filled barriers, and others. Some of our major clients include the Thulamela municipality (Thohoyandou) in Limpopo, Khabokedi Waste Management and Umeme Africa Engineering (an Eskom partner).

We have a staff complement of 11 employees and in turn financially support local community initiatives, like Pfulufelo, a local NPO that operates in rural communities, a project that provides sanitary pads to disadvantaged schoolgirls in rural communities, and we also sponsor the local Vhembe Chamber of Commerce.

■ What has been your biggest challenge?

The biggest challenge we have faced is the invisible barrier that exists in the mining community that makes it difficult for businesses like ours to access genuine opportunities, like the one given to us by De Beers.

Despite legislation and what many mining houses promise on paper, small businesses must deal with a lot of subtle institutionalised barriers to entry. These barriers deny competent businesses the opportunities that are easily accessible to more established suppliers.

The Anglo American Zimele Supplier Development programme is arguably one of the best enterprise programmes in the country and we were fortunate to be enrolled on it. If it were not for it, we would not be the business that we are today which proudly supports the rural communities in and around where we operate.

■ ***Do you have a mentor and what is the most valuable piece of advice they have given you?***

Yes, I do. The most valuable piece of advice he has ever given me is to delay our need for material gratification while we build the business.

■ ***What piece of advice would you give to any young entrepreneurs starting out?***

In business, karma is ruthlessly swift - so be honest. The key lesson I got from the Anglo American Zimele Supplier Development Programme is that it takes patience and discipline to build a sustainable business.

■ ***What do you do to relax?***

I spend time with my beautiful wife and my two handsome boys.

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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