

# Achieving social change in South Africa during the 'great reset'

By [Ashley Roman](#)

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Futurists and market researchers are calling this pandemic the 'great reset' of our society and an opportunity to reimagine a different world. What is the social change that we can realistically imagine in South Africa, despite our dire economic circumstances, and increased joblessness and poverty due to Covid-19 and the mismanagement of resources?



Ashley Roman, national programme manager, Activate! Change Drivers

In a time of exponential change, where the unemployment rate is projected to be at 50% by the end of the year (20% up from our current unemployment rate), where food security and social welfare are becoming an increasing concern, and the provincial government's maladministration in Eastern Cape is collapsing, our socio-political challenges can all seem insurmountable and unrealistic.

## Youth, a key ingredient for change

We have to find the appropriate levers for change. But after identifying potential levers, we need to also ask ourselves which of these levers are most likely to yield the desired outcome for social change. For us at Activate Change Drivers, a key ingredient for change was to invest in the intellectual capital of young people, our 'social engineers'. We have consistently sought out young people between the ages of 20 and 30 years who were already engaged in social change activities in their communities and had a passion to create meaningful impact. These were the right people.

But, the right people needed to get in touch with other 'right people' who were also doing the right job across the country. Not only that, but they needed tools

to support them on this journey to right the wrongs in our society. We need people in the right positions and we need to sharpen the 'toolkits' of those with potential. We have taken our young activators in our youth network through leadership and social enterprise programmes to strengthen their skills so that they can have impact in their own communities. This has never been more important than with the social issues created by the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown.



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26 Aug 2020



## Need a different mindset

Herein is the lesson I hope that the rest of South Africa could take heed of: To address the critical challenges, we are going to need a different mindset from the mindset that created the problem. We need creative, critical thinking, problem-solving, innovative leadership skills. An infinite mindset that could unpack these critical issues we face today and design meaningful solutions for the future. So the 'right people' are also the people who have the tools to outthink the critical challenge and not regurgitate conventional solutions.

During the past eight years, holding this space at Activate Change Drivers, we have seen young people with this mindset

design solutions that could address the myriad of challenges across our country - from shared community gardens to drone mapping of violence hotspots, the creation of rural food security networks, and speed train services to solve our transportation problems. The list goes on. Our network of young people now numbers 4,500.

As I've illustrated here, when the right people are given the right tools and are placed in the right position, they will do the right thing. Change is not new, we have been changing as a society for many decades - how we allocate resources to this changing reality will ultimately shift this reality.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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