

Bent, but never broken. South Africa's resilience emerges after turmoil

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As civil unrest shook the country, it was everyday South Africans who united in solidarity to pick up the pieces, rebuild, and commit to a better future for all.



Time may be the great healer. But the consequences of the unrest across KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng will be with us, in our hearts, in our bodies, for decades. South Africa has faced a collective shock. The loss of livelihoods, food, homes, and lives is the direct result of a profoundly unequal and distraught country. We have been forced to face our failures – the egregious poverty, the hunger that afflicts thousands of people. Time will never heal this wound. In the wake of precarity and terror, it is everyday human beings who have stood up. It is our fellow South Africans who have begun to rebuild and restore. This nation will survive one of its darkest hours because of them.

As the fires dulled, and shouts quieted, South Africans exited the shelter of their homes. Amid the grief and trauma, they picked up brooms and gathered supplies. They sang the national anthem before sweeping up the debris. They cried. They danced. They shared bread and soup with their neighbours, community, and country. Trucks of food were sent to Durban. Taxi drivers forged barriers outside of stores in Mthatha. Everyday men and women took to the streets to patrol and support a struggling police service. Non-profits and NGOs mobilised to provide urgent resources. [Gift of the Givers](#), [The Angel Network](#), [30 Strong Voices of Alex](#), and [Humanitarian Development Alliance SA](#) are just a few who stepped in during this crisis. Thousands of other nameless individuals showed up for their communities, organised on social media, leant on each other, and forged ahead.

As her community was left with nothing, Riashri Moodley started her own campaign to get food and essential supplies for people along the KwaZulu-Natal South Coast. With drop off points in Johannesburg, she has coordinated a cross-country mission with businesses, churches, mosques, and organisations. “It can be the hardest of situations, but everybody is willing to share, everybody is willing to help,” she says. “I love South Africa. Even if we get torn down, we rebuild.”

In Umgeni Park, Mmatsetshweu Ruby Motaung’s non-profit for early childhood development, [TREE](#), was vandalised and

looted. In the aftermath, strangers gathered to help clean up the decades-old initiative. "I have tears of joy, of acknowledgement, of appreciation," Motaung says. "What we can do now is move forward in terms of making sure that we protect each other, we respect each other, we love each other, we care for each other."

One thousand kilometres away in Cape Town, Azraah Heuvel and Nasheetah Davids of [Baby Republic Clothing](#) joined Glynne Rosselli of [Bless-a-Baby](#) to create packages for moms and their children in KwaZulu-Natal, filled with baby clothes, soap, food, and nappies. "There are good people out there, and if we all work together and stand together we can empower those who need it the most," Heuvel says. "Bravery is about doing that which is right, which is about giving to the community."

There is little that can break the South African spirit. In a country where division is sowed into our history, we have learnt time and again what it means to come together. Because we understand that in order to move forward, we depend on each other. The suffering and losses of our neighbours is our own. The health and wellbeing of our neighbours is our own. Regardless of class, race, gender, or sexuality, tomorrow will only dawn if we are united.

Recovery will not happen overnight. The future depends on all levels of our nation working towards a more equal country for all. But in the space of a few days, South Africans demonstrated the resilience, grit, bravery, and compassion that brings us together in solidarity. We believe in this country. We believe in humanity. South Africa lies in the hands of its citizens, and for that we can be hopeful.

Footage and photographs courtesy of [Yuveer Karunchund](#), [Kierran Allen](#), [Junior De Rocka](#), [Mike Frew](#), [Tristan Frew](#), [Narina Exelby](#), the [Portia Ncwane Foundation](#), Nqobile Ndlovu, Busisiwe Shezi, and Anathi Gobení were used in the creation of this film.

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