

Yokesh Maharaj to advance Mondelez's growth in Sub-Saharan Africa

 By [Lauren Hartzenberg](#)

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Yokesh Maharaj has joined multinational confectionery company Mondelez International as president of its Sub-Saharan Africa business unit, effective from 1 April.



Yokesh Maharaj

With a portfolio of household brands including Oreo, Cadbury Dairy Milk, Toblerone, Clorets, Halls and Tucs, Mondelez has a presence in over 150 countries around the world. Maharaj, who is based in the company's Johannesburg office, is tasked with accelerating the snack food giant's growth agenda in the Sub-Saharan Africa region by unlocking new opportunities.

Maharaj brings to Mondelez extensive experience in consumer-packaged goods, having been chief growth officer: consumer brands at Tiger Brands in South Africa. In addition, he has vast knowledge of the rest of Africa, as he previously managed the African operations for Tiger Brands and occupied the role of managing director Africa for Distell.

Prior to this, Maharaj spent 18 years at the South African Breweries (SAB) where he held several senior management positions, including business unit president, executive director sales and distribution, and executive director for human resources.

As we acknowledge Africa Month this May, Maharaj shares more about his new appointment and mapping the Mondelez growth strategy in Africa.

■ ***Congratulations on your appointment as Mondelez International's president for Sub-Saharan Africa. What attracted you to this role?***

Thank you. I was enticed by the power of the great brands within the Mondelez portfolio and the ability to leverage these brands into the broader Sub-Saharan markets.

■ ***What's at the top of your to-do list in your new position?***

We are currently undertaking a strategy refresh to unlock the growth potential across the broader continent and getting a better appreciation of the categories that will present long-term growth.

I am also getting to know the people in Mondelez and spending time with them to have a better appreciation of their vision and outlook for the company as well as some of the challenges they face.



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■ ***What do you enjoy most about working in the FMCG industry, and in Africa specifically?***

I love the ever-changing dynamics, especially across the broader African continent. No two days are similar, which really energises me.

The various countries and markets are very unique, which presents challenges that allow you to stretch your thinking and grow as an individual. You learn every day!

■ ***How do you see the Covid-19 pandemic impacting your industry in the short- to medium-term?***

There has been a shift in consumer and shopper behaviour which we need to be very mindful of and adapt our short terms plans accordingly. There is also increased focus on how we manage our supply chain to ensure continuity of supply.

In my view the industry and shopper dynamics would not return to pre-covid-19 norms, so for the medium term we have to evolve our strategy to meet these changing needs.



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■ ***You've been tasked with helping to unlock business opportunities across the Sub-Saharan African region. Outside of South Africa, which African markets are of particular importance to the Mondelez business?***

Markets in southern Africa are an obvious opportunity, but I believe the opportunity that East Africa offers Mondelez is very attractive, and we are focusing our energy in this geography in the short term.

We also have established businesses in West Africa and we will look at leveraging these operations to expand into other markets in West Africa as our brands carry equity across the region

■ ***Could you pinpoint a few of the growth opportunities you think exists for Mondelez International in Sub-Saharan Africa?***

I believe that there is a massive opportunity to grow our core brands and packs. We have by no means extinguished the opportunity here, in fact, I think we are just getting started!

Over and above the core, we have opportunities to expand our portfolio, grow in adjacencies and harness brand extensions through deliberate innovation.

■ ***Anything in particular you're currently reading or listening to for work inspiration?***

Lead from the Future – Mark Johnson and Josh Suskewicz

■ ***Could you leave us with some valuable career advice?***

What you put in is what you get out! It is also critical to harness the power of your team, and try to have some fun!

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