

Business and Arts SA Africa Breakfast talks collaboration, co-creativity and cooperation

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A trio of heavyweight speakers made a powerful call for unity across the continent and closer collaboration between African business and the arts at the third BASA Africa Business Breakfast, supported by Standard Bank in partnership with the department of Arts and Culture as part of the Mzanzi Golden Economy.



Hosted by Business and Arts South Africa at The Orbit in Braamfontein, Johannesburg on 26 May 2015, BASA members were addressed by Minister Nathi Mthethwa, Minister of Arts and Culture and Acting Minister of Public Service and Administration of the Republic of South Africa as well as Ghanaian Samuel Mensah, the founder and CEO of the innovative digital fashion platform, KISUA, and BASA CEO, Michelle Constant.

Taking place a day after Africa Day, the theme running through all three speaker's presentations was how art can create the environment for collaboration, co-creativity and cooperation across the continent - especially within the current challenges of xenophobia and Afro-phobia.

"As we acknowledge and recognise the value of the partnership between business and the arts, let us recommit ourselves to using the sector as an instrument to boldly assert our African identity," Minister Mthethwa implored.

The Minister revealed that, in 2014, the Arts and Culture sector contributed R9.5 billion to the GDP in South Africa, making the need for upliftment of the sector an important one. To this end, among the steps being taken by the Department of Arts and Culture is the launch of creative incubators, the launch of Venture Capital Fund Initiative and, as supported by BASA, providing Tax Incentives for business contribute to the arts.

"Let us encourage our artists in all genres to use their talent and skills to promote peace and friendship from Cape to Cairo. Whatever we do and wherever we are, let us provide the material resources to encourage and affirm the arts sector. They are the custodians of the nation's soul."

Constant spoke about the difference between emotional intelligence and cultural intelligence. "Cultural intelligence is about stepping into the shoes of another person to understand their culture. We are all 'other' in certain places or at some point in our lives. It is our cultural intelligence that can play an enormous role in eliminating the xenophobia that arises when communities turn on a perceived 'other'."

Describing the arts as a progressive enabler that creates cross community engagement, the BASA CEO detailed BASA's work with partners in Mozambique, and Zambia. This is aimed at assisting the arts sector in those spaces and sharing knowledge on how to market the arts as well as forge partnerships with businesses in particular territories.

Mensah used his experience at KISUA to highlight what it means to be Ghanaian, what it means to be an African and the challenges faced by businessmen in the African continent. Currently KISUA showcases' exclusive contemporary African fashion online and also hosts a distinctly Afropolitan digital magazine.

Referencing the 1969 events that saw Nigerians expelled from Ghana, and the consequences of that event more than a decade later, Mensah described Afro-phobia and Xenophobia as taking root across the whole continent - and contrary to the vision of Kwame Nkrumah of a borderless continent.

"Colonialism was a great disservice to Africa as it created divisions in the continent and Africa embraced these invisible lines," explained Mensah. Pointing out that Africa should be sharing cultural assets, from stories to food, the entrepreneur and innovator highlighted the fact that there is no single, powerful African brand. Instead, European brands use Africa's resources for their work.

"Businesses have a role to play in exposing African work to the rest of the world and that is what KISUA.com is doing for African fashion: taking African materials and designers to the world," concluded Mensah.

A highlight of a morning full of thought-provoking and stimulating discussion was when Constant invited Minister Mthethwa to play the bass - and he enthusiastically took up the challenge.

About BASA (NPC):

Business and Arts South Africa (NPC) is an internationally recognised South African development agency with a suite of integrated programmes implemented nationally and internationally. Business and Arts South Africa (NPC) encourages mutually beneficial partnerships between business and the arts, contributing to corporate success and securing the future development of the arts sector in South Africa. Business and Arts South Africa (NPC) was founded in 1997 as a joint initiative of the Department of Arts and Culture and the business sector as a public/private partnership.

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