

Nizenande Machi, co-founder of Lucha Lunako



By [Evan-Lee Courie](#)

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Nizenande Machi, affectionately known as Niz, is a bundle of energy with a spark for life. She's opinionated and sassy, and hell bent on changing negative opinions on SA youth and uplifting South Africa's youth culture. In addition to co-founder of youth development lab, [Lucha Lunako](#), Machi is a learning and development specialist with a particular interest in creating content for African entrepreneurial and leadership development.



■ ***You're a co-founder of a youth development lab called Lucha Lunako. Could you briefly explain what your role entails?***

[Lucha Lunako](#) is a youth development lab that builds pathways to decent work through partnership, collaboration, and innovation.

Anchoring in the philosophy of our 'Youth Have It' framework which we developed, we provide scaled solutions to youth development to create and measure impact in the youth sector. Our focus areas include thought leadership, youth impact measurement, and youth development implementation.

As the co-founder in curriculum strategy, my role entails working with a team to transform the 'Youth Have It' framework into an open-source, understandable curriculum that youth development practitioners can use to build foundations (i.e. character, confidence, connection, caring and competence) in their youth beneficiaries.

I also devote much of my time to the youth advocacy and thought leadership interventions that Lucha Lunako gets involved in.

▀ ***What excites you about your job?***

I work with a young team, 80% below the age of 30 years, and 20% of them below the age of 35, with myself included. Of course, the team environment is all the things that are associated with young people – vibrant, high-energy, and fast-paced – but, it is also more than that. It is deeply reflective, vulnerable, devoted and representative.

The team is creating curriculum, processes and thought leadership vehicles that represent their interests and desires for themselves as participants in the youth development sector. As a result, the majority of my work feels impactful not only in the outputs and outcomes; but also, during the process of producing said deliverables.

Developing and piloting the curriculum stretches me, but it is so exciting to work on something you truly believe is innovative and can create structural changes within the sector!

▀ ***What are the challenges and the joys of your job?***

The challenges of my job are that we have a lot of work to do ‘on the daily’ and get more to do still every day.

“ *It is a mammoth undertaking to create an accessible, representative, and relevant learning curriculum that can be made accessible at scale.* ”

It requires a level of thinking, engagement, and creativity that I feel I am only starting to meet in myself right now, which sometimes makes me feel like I am in over my head!

▀ ***Growing up, what did you want to be?***

Before I became a teenager, I wanted to be an angel, like the ones in American drama series of the mid-1990's, *Touched by An Angel*. As I grew up, I quickly realised that that would be difficult to do while I stayed alive, so the early part of my teenage years I spent wanting to be an actor, and a global speaker and strategist. Not much has changed since then, I still have dreams of delivering a TED Talk one day, and also to work with high-stakes teams in having crucial conversations in high-pressure situations to drive strategic progress.

▣ ***What's really behind your mask - literally and figuratively speaking?***

What a bizarre question! Behind my mask is literally a big smile, a beautiful and cheerful face, and a mouth full of teeth - except one that I took out before I was 16 years old.

Figuratively, I'd like to believe I don't wear a mask. I have spent a lot of time and years healing, growing, and developing as a person, so that I can be fully present for all the hats I wear in my daily life. The weight of a mask can lead to a whole lot of loneliness and being estranged from the love one is surrounded by, especially during this Covid-19 global pandemic. So, I value vulnerability, connection, and intimacy over the safety of any veil, even if it is a meagre mask.

▣ ***What's a typical work day routine?***

I really don't have a typical routine daily, my days change so much. Let me attempt one...

I wake up at 6:30am, never by alarm, often by a happily screaming baby in a monitor, or a toddler jumping into my bed. I spend some quiet writing and reflecting, off to gym and then straight into meetings for the first half of the day. After lunchtime, I then sit in front of my laptop and get work done. This is for two days in the week, and I think these are my most routinised days.

Then there is another day when I am completely unavailable to anybody, and it is just me and my laptop, also updating my knowledge about the sector, journaling and doing some non-priority work. I go to the Lucha Lunako office once a week with the team, and that is often a busy day of hubbub and activity. Then there is often a day when I am in meetings all day long.

What is definitely typical of my workday routine is it is busy!

▣ ***When you're not busy working, what do you do? How do you socialise these days?***

I spend time with my family. I have a toddler and a baby less than a year old. My husband and I often spend time playing with them, moving them around for swimming lessons and bike riding, or taking turns to have the family participate in something the parents enjoy doing.

I also really enjoy chatting to close friends, I try to catch up with two to three friends within a week; just to have a really good wholesome conversations, in person – when Covid-19 cases are low, or over the phone otherwise.

▣ ***Are you watching any series? Reading any books at the moment?***

I am always reading books; I think I am currently reading three at the same time: *Why Love Matters* by Sue Gerhardt, it is about the healthy cognitive benefits of love for growing healthily developed children. *Black Dignity in a World Made for Whiteness* by Austin Channing Brown, this one is self-explanatory. *Rediscovering the Kingdom* by Myles Munroe, a faith-based book.

I don't watch a lot of TV in general. I use it mainly for movies that I'm interested in. I recently watched *Moana* for the first time and I loved it!

▣ ***What's next for you?***

Next is having this curriculum go live, be downloadable and usable within the youth development ecosystem. And getting the

Covid-19 vaccine. Beyond that, that's for me to actualise and for you (all) to experience!

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