

How Kgaugelo Mogapi is paying it forward through Kele Engineering and Construction

 By [Sindy Peters](#)

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After almost 20 years of work experience in leading and growing organisations in the mining and engineering industries, Kgaugelo Mogapi decided to establish her own business in Mogalakwena, Limpopo. Together with her business partner Nkosinathi Tshuma, who provides the technical engineering expertise, Mogapi launched Kele Engineering and Construction (KEC), as part of Anglo American Platinum's inclusive procurement programme.



Kgaugelo Mogapi, founder and MD of Kele Engineering and Construction

From the outset, she was determined to share any success the company achieved with the surrounding community. Since securing their first major contract with the Anglo American Platinum Mogalakwena mine in 2019, the company has grown rapidly to a crew of 18 people that maintains and repairs air-conditioning systems in mobile equipment across the site.

Now KEC is on the brink of establishing its own training academy for previously disadvantaged people in the communities around the mine.

“When we founded the company, we made it our purpose and mission as a business to assist people from previously disadvantaged backgrounds who are jobless, financially constrained, or simply cannot access the job market. We have vigorously always strived to give back, empower and pay it forward wherever possible. If you have the means and the resources, you should help,” said Mogapi.

Mogapi shared with us KEC's startup story, what she loves most about what she does, and more about the soon-to-be-established training academy.

 **Share with us your startup story.**

Kgaugelo Mogapi: Kele Engineering and Construction was founded in 2018 to provide engineering and construction services to mining clients and secured its first five-year mining vehicles air conditioning maintenance contract with Anglo American Platinum's Mogalakwena mine in late 2019. I have extensive working experience in human capital in the mining and engineering industries and my business partner Nkosinathi Tshuma has extensive working experience as a professional mechanical engineer in the mining industry. We have a staff complement of 18 employees at Mogalakwena

mine who all come from the local communities.



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■ Tell us more about Kele Engineering and Construction - what's your business about?

Mogapi: Kele Engineering and Construction is an engineering procurement construction management (EPCM) company that provides a variety of services to clients in the mining sector. It's a Level 1 B-BBEE (Broad-based Black Economic Empowerment) local company with 80% Black female-ownership and based in Mogalakwena. The company focuses on services including construction, repairs and maintenance of production equipment. We also possess expertise to facilitate engineering, procurement and construction management as per clients' requirements. We design and construct mine infrastructure, steel structures, piping, conveyer belts and more.

■ How has the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic affected your business?

Mogapi: The impact has been very minimal, it has been business as usual due the nature of our core business. Our services are classified as essential services so we continued to work and generate revenue, enabling us to continue to pay salaries and as a result we were able to stay afloat and retain our staff.



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■ What do you love most about what you do?

Mogapi: I think job creation and making sure that our Black people are employed, able to put bread on the table, have a roof over their heads and are able to turn their living situation around. That is the key reason why I love what I do.

■ Why is mentorship so important to you?

Mogapi: Mentorship is my biggest sense of purpose. From where I am sitting, it's all about making a tangible difference in our society, giving back and paying it forward, it's bigger than what I do for a living. I am passionate about mentoring young people, I am big on empowerment and people development. I have an eye for talent and I love assisting young people to discover who they are so they can use all their God-given talents to the best of their ability. The only way that we are going to curb and alleviate the unrelenting and persistent high youth unemployment in this country - which is now sitting at 63% amongst other things - is to empower and mentor young people to be able to sustain themselves going forward.

■ Tell us more about the soon-to-be-established training academy.

Mogapi: The concept around the training academy was established amidst the hard lockdown when we witnessed the rather disturbing and escalating high levels of unemployment - which is now sitting at 11.1 million - recurring job losses and retrenchments. What dropped in my head at the time was "what is it that we can do as a business to assist in alleviating the high levels of unemployment".

We spent an inordinate amount of time working on a business model for the upcoming training academy. We identified three categories of previously disadvantaged beneficiaries who are locally based:

- The first category is the youth that have completed their matric and are passionate about artisanship,
- The second category is young people who have obtained an N6 qualification and are financially constrained. We will assist them by taking them through trade tests and obtaining red tickets to qualify as artisans, and
- The third category is qualified artisans who are struggling to access the job market - we will be assisting them through internships.

From June and December 2021, we will be busy with strategy finalisation, signing off and the implementation plan. January to March 2022, we will identify beneficiaries and accredited vocational training centres around Polokwane. Commencing April 2022, the training academy should be up and running.



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What are some of the most important lessons that you've learnt as an entrepreneur so far?

Mogapi: Entrepreneurship is not for the faint-hearted, it's no walk in the park. If you cannot persevere, are pessimistic in your way of thinking, and you are not prepared to make short-term sacrifices to grow your business in the long haul, your business might not succeed.

You need to keep abreast with what is happening in your surroundings to maintain a competitive edge, which will single you out from your competitors.

“ You need to chase your passion and fulfil your purpose instead of chasing money. If you cannot do this, then chances are you are not cut out to be an entrepreneur. ”

What would you like to see change in the South African entrepreneurship landscape?

Mogapi: I would like to see more Black women participate in the engineering space. Access to financing from financial institutions for Black entrepreneurs remains a challenge and we need to create a conducive environment and ecosystem that will enable entrepreneurs to soar and sustain themselves.



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What does the future hold for Kele Engineering and Construction?

Mogapi: Expansion beyond our borders to our neighbouring and other African countries. I see Kele Engineering and Construction expanding to be amongst the top engineering service providers of choice to our clientele and an employer of choice. This because the company is strategising on strong future growth prospects founded on the premise of continued provision of rendering exceptional quality and safety-compliant, reliable services to meet and exceed client expectations.

ABOUT SINDY PETERS

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