

Community support critical to driving African entrepreneurship

By [James Maposa](#)

10 Nov 2016

A while back, I attended my brother and his partner's launch of their urban wear store. The event was an intimate affair, but it echoed an important message, the importance of community in entrepreneurship. At the launch, my brother's team had invited all of their friends and family to partake in this momentous occasion. I was impressed by the team's commitment to their cause and to turning something that was nothing, but a concept, into a reality.

Shangoo (www.shangoo.co.za) had gone from being an online store to having an actual physical presence. For the team, cutting the ribbon felt like they'd been officially invited to open a new high rise building! We shared in the joy, but we neglected the other and most important part of us being invited to the event: we didn't buy much. Only a few people walked away with trinkets that were being advertised in the store. This saddens me, because it could mean a few things.



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First, we don't understand how important it is for us to be invited to such events. Through the invitation we get exclusive exposure to the brand and the brand's entrepreneurial walk, asking them to comment about their journey, trials and tribulations and key successes and failures. We also get a chance to get advice on how to be successful in our own entrepreneurial endeavours. In light of this free consult, the least we can do is show our support through purchasing a few products on display and remember from a communal approach we're supporting a business to one day become so great that it will employ our children and, if we work hard enough, our children's children. An example is Adidas and Puma, larger than life organisations which all started from humble beginnings by the Dassler brothers in a small village in Bavaria. The town of Herzogenaurach, Germany is immortalised because of these two brothers and their formed companies. Our turn has come and, when invited to such events, attendance is half the support. Purchasing a product or two is the greatest support we can show.

Second is we're probably too broke to be able to afford to offer our support. This raises a lot of alarm bells. A lot of us attended the event dressed smart, driving cars that cost a pretty penny and work for top-tier employers. However, the poor uptake of product means that we're knee-deep in debt that we can't afford to support our up and coming businesses. If this is the case, African entrepreneurship will continue to grow and progress at a snail's pace. What we need to do is get as much money as we can away from the banks and financial services providers and invest it in building businesses in our local communities. The more money that goes around within our ecosystems, the more opportunities we create for ourselves with no financial services provider acting like our big brother. In the context of the entrepreneur, the least we can do is applaud them for sacrificing their hard earned income to bootstrap their own little venture. We celebrate our heroes

by making a sacrifice for their sacrifice. We need to start believing that we have the power and resources to make a difference in our own lives. Like Obama, we are the change that we need.

Lastly, we don't understand or don't really care about what entrepreneurship entails. Although subjective, a personal review of the continent's most successful entrepreneurs is limited to necessity driven enterprises. Even though I am all for the basics being adequately supplied in the market, I believe in balance. Balance that includes creating industries that address a want instead of a need. An example is the US film industry which encourages people to write comics, comics which are converted into screenplays, screenplays converted into films and films converted into series. An entire value chain that supports us to greatly address the continent's unemployment. This cannot be done without support from the community.

In conclusion, my own story is linked to [a book](#) I wrote with a friend. A book I'd like to use as a springboard to start my own publishing company. A publishing company committed to positively contributing to African poetry, short-story and full novel writing. We can't all have our dreams fulfilled by corporate employment. There are other ways to earn a living. We hope our society understands the importance of entrepreneurship. An understanding that will result in support - support that will contribute to the building and progression of Africa's next commercial giant.

ABOUT JAMES MAPOSA

Maposa is the founder and managing director of Birguid, a research and advisory company. Maposa has 15 years work experience, mostly spent in research and strategy consulting. Maposa is passionate about socio-economic development, business growth and continuity.

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