

BusinessDay

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The background features a large, abstract graphic composed of numerous thin, wavy lines in shades of red and white. These lines flow and curve across the page, creating a sense of movement and depth. The lines are set against a solid dark blue background. The overall effect is a complex, layered pattern that frames the central text.

EMPOWERMENT

**Navigating
a new course**

SETTING STANDARDS

Dr Chris Jardine, Group CEO of Tsebo Solutions Group, Africa's leading integrated workplace management solutions provider, on how the real value of his organisation comes from upskilling its people.



Q: What are the unique challenges in Africa, for those using an array of your services?

A: We've long learnt that we can't think about the continent as a monolith. The markets for our services are at different levels of development and maturity, and they have different regulatory regimes and talent pools. We can't, therefore, take a cookie-cutter approach that works in SA, Kenya or Nigeria and apply that blindly in other markets.

Our solutions approach is valid for all aspects of business, from sales to people development, investments and cash management. So while each country may have unique challenges, we appreciate and navigate the potential maze of complexity to deliver a robust service.

Q: What are the services that are most in need or demand?

A: Our multinational corporate clients are mostly looking for a single partner to seamlessly manage a basket of services for them across multiple countries. These span our services spectrum in facilities management, including engineering and maintenance.

The main soft services we see demand for are security, cleaning, hygiene and catering. The current commodities boom has also led to an increase in demand for our remote-site services business.

Q: How important is transformation of this sector?

A: We are a people business. Almost all our services and client support is delivered through our people. All-encompassing transformation is therefore vital.

We know that a diverse workforce means we have the ability to learn, innovate and grow quickly. In our sector, transformation promotes growth, mobilises investment, creates jobs and empowers people in the local communities in which we operate. It's one of the essential building blocks to achieving sustainable growth.

Tsebo's transformation efforts date back to the 1980s when the company was among the first to embrace an employment-equity policy in SA. Over the years, this has evolved into a localisation approach in all of our markets. However, the original objective remains – we want to build a sustainable business that contributes meaningfully to the communities and countries where we have a presence.

Q: What leadership role does Tsebo play in terms of transformation and local development?

A: From 1983, when we adopted our first affirmative action programme to our current Level 1 BEE status, Tsebo has been a development partner with a transformation ethos that guides us to ensure we develop, employ, capacitate and partner to benefit our local communities.

The end goal is to ensure small businesses are sustainable, profitable, and trained to the highest-quality standards.

For example, in 2020, more than 940 local suppliers across Africa were uplifted by our enterprise-development initiatives and, in SA, we achieved full marks for our ESD score.

The ultimate test of leadership lies in the trust that our clients place in us, and our ability to create a better future for all.

Q: What transformation efforts are the most important to Tsebo and why?

A: This is where the rubber hits the road for us. In our over 50-year-strong quest to build a brighter future for all, we continue to invest heavily in skills development, youth

empowerment, community upliftment, job creation, SMMEs and rural enterprise-development efforts.

We believe these key focus areas enable people to support themselves, employ others, create economic stability and develop communities.

Our focus areas also align with our group purpose statement of developing people, to serve people to uplift society.

Q: How do you develop and train local resources to the Tsebo standard?

A: Our in-house Tsebo Learning and Development Academy has the goal of equipping our people with the necessary skills and knowledge to deliver the highest-quality services to our clients.

Our skills-development initiatives include a range of accredited training programmes aligned with the National Qualifications Framework and registered with the South African Qualifications Authority.

Tsebo has a total of over 70 training modules, with a further 197 on our cloud-based e-learning platform, ranging from compliance refresher modules to a full management-development online course.

Tsebo also trains our partners in the communities in which we are active. The Tsebo enterprise and supplier development (ESD) programme focuses on providing small businesses with the skills needed to enable growth, viability, and financially sound SMMEs.

We recruit and train previously unemployed people from local communities and upskill them for formal employment while also providing them with hands-on work experience.

Q: How many people have been trained by Tsebo, and how are your services marketed?

A: On average, Tsebo trains more than 30 000 people annually across the continent. One such intervention in 2019 saw in-country training sessions conducted in Mozambique, Kenya, Ghana, and Côte d'Ivoire that

impacted and upskilled in excess of 7 000 employees on customer service, communication and hygiene-management skills.

Another 20 000 completed Tsebo skilling programmes in 2020, despite the COVID-19 pandemic.

Tsebo has an online recruitment portal where we advertise vacancies and learnerships. To be fully inclusive and bridge the digital divide, you must engage your communities on a more personal level to gain trust. Therefore, Tsebo also works directly with local schools, where we meet with matriculants and parents to recruit for learnerships.

We find community suppliers that we can work with, upskill, and train to meet the Tsebo standards.

Q: Tsebo's Community Engagement Relations is active in socio-economic development. What aspects are the most transformational?

A: Tsebo supports a host of community enablement initiatives aimed at developing and supporting the growth of small businesses.

Our highly impactful enterprise-development approach includes identifying SMMEs in our operational areas and which are linked to our client sites. The goal is to support local-to-local SMME development through capacity building, grant funding and mentorship.

Examples of success stories include our support for the Naledi Farmers' Co-operative and Earthrise Trust, Elevated Hygiene Services and Phelang.

We have similar initiatives in other countries, including our pan-African legacy projects, which use a participative approach to harness community potential by integrating them into our Allterrain Services business value chain.

This includes our Fasenda Mizimo Farm Project in Mozambique, which has trained more than 600 farmers and small growers in effective farming methods.