TSEBO



# **Growing together:** Tsebo celebrates women, leadership and meaningful impact

A bright and charming garden affair at Shepstone Gardens on 16 October 2026 set the scene for Tsebo's Women's Day celebration, bringing women together for a day of connection, reflection and inspiring conversation.

Host Nokwanda Shabalala, Group Chief Sales and Marketing Officer at Tsebo Solutions Group, opened the celebration with a warm welcome and a clear purpose: to give women time to step away from their everyday responsibilities, celebrate their contributions and connect with one another.

Shabalala explained that the programme had deliberately been kept light on speeches, leaving guests time to wander through the gardens, enjoy the art, wine and bubbles, and spend time together. She paid tribute to Buskaid's musicians, highlighting the Soweto ensemble's long history and the performers who now teach a younger generation. Her welcome set the tone for a day of shared enjoyment, conversation and mutual support.



**Nokwanda Shabalala**
Chief Sales & Marketing Officer, Tsebo

Guest speaker Yolanda Cuba CA(SA), Deputy CEO of MTN South Africa and a World Economic Forum Young Global Leader, brought warmth, humour and candour to the conversation. Drawing on her leadership journey, she encouraged women to recognise their capabilities, make their ambitions known and take an active role in shaping the environments around them.

Cuba's central message was that stepping into a bigger role brings a new level of incompetence: unfamiliar responsibilities and skills that still need to be developed. Women should embrace that learning curve and put their hands up for greater responsibility, even before they feel fully ready.

She encouraged women not to wait until they know everything or tick every box a higher role requires. Having something new to learn should not deter them from pursuing it. Growth depends on being willing to enter unfamiliar territory and develop the capabilities the next role demands.

Reflecting on entering leadership spaces where few people looked like her, she spoke about recognising that others had seen her potential and trusted her to contribute. Her advice was practical: acknowledge what you already bring, be willing to learn and speak openly about where you want to go.

Making ambitions visible matters, too. People who could offer guidance, support or opportunities need to understand what someone hopes to achieve. Cuba also invited an honest conversation about boundaries and wellbeing.

Her reflections challenged the expectation that women should absorb pressure, tolerate inappropriate behaviour or continually put their own needs last. She encouraged women to recognise when a boundary has been crossed and communicate how they expect to be treated.



**Jackie Mehlomakhulu** - Group Transformation Executive Human Resources, Tsebo & **Yolanda Cuba** - Deputy CEO MTN SA







That responsibility extends to the way women speak to themselves. Recognising personal worth, questioning harsh self-judgement and acknowledging the need for support all form part of sustaining a fulfilling career. She also highlighted the importance of speaking more openly about experiences such as pregnancy, recovery and menopause. Greater understanding begins when these realities can be discussed with honesty and respect.

The conversation around boundaries and wellbeing was complemented by Mamongae Mahlare, a seasoned board director and executive coach with extensive leadership experience across Africa. A former Group CEO and Executive Chairperson of Takealot Group and former Managing Director of Illovo Sugar South Africa, Mahlare has also held senior roles at SABMiller, Bain & Company and Unilever. She serves on the boards of OUTsurance, The Foschini Group and Oceana Group, among others, and is a member of the Harvard Business School Africa Advisory Board.



**Elanie Kruger** - Chief Human Resources Officer, Tsebo & **Mamongae Mahlare** - Independent Non-Executive Director & Executive Coach









Today, Mahlare supports senior leaders and emerging talent in balancing high performance with personal wellbeing and fulfilment. In her talk, “Resilience with Mamongae Mahlare”, she drew on this experience to explore courageous and authentic ways of overcoming barriers in business and life, including the importance of staying true to personal values in the workplace.

For Mahlare, authenticity means being clear about who you are, what matters to you and the lines you are not willing to cross. It also means being intentional about how you spend your time and energy, rather than allowing external expectations to dictate what success should look like.

Drawing on the four-burner theory, which uses the analogy of a stove to represent family, friends, health and work, Mahlare highlighted the reality that time and energy are finite. Each area of life requires attention, and prioritising one can mean making trade-offs in another. The theory presents an uncomfortable but important question: can we give equal attention to every part of our lives, all the time?

Rather than striving for an idealised version of balance, the challenge is to recognise what matters most at different stages of life and make conscious decisions about where to focus. This requires an honest understanding of personal priorities, as well as the confidence to make choices that may not always align with other people’s expectations.

As Mahlare encouraged women: “Go for your best life, regardless of what others think.”

For women navigating demanding careers alongside personal responsibilities, this perspective offers an important reminder: prioritisation is not a failure. It is an active choice about the life you want to lead. Defining success







on your own terms means recognising that you cannot always be everything to everyone, and that staying true to your values is just as important as achieving your ambitions.

Throughout the gathering, beautiful violin and string sounds from the Buskaid Soweto String Ensemble serenaded guests. Their Bridgerton-inspired repertoire completed the garden experience. Based in Diepkloof, Soweto, the

Buskaid Soweto String Project marks its 30th anniversary in 2027. For nearly three decades, it has quietly nurtured young violinists and other string players, creating opportunities through music. It was an honour for Tsebo to have these musicians grace the celebration.

Another powerful thread in Cuba's conversation was the relationship between personal experience and workplace culture.

Cuba reflected on how people's histories shape their values, decisions and responses. Understanding those experiences can help colleagues approach one another with greater empathy and make sense of behaviour they might otherwise misinterpret.

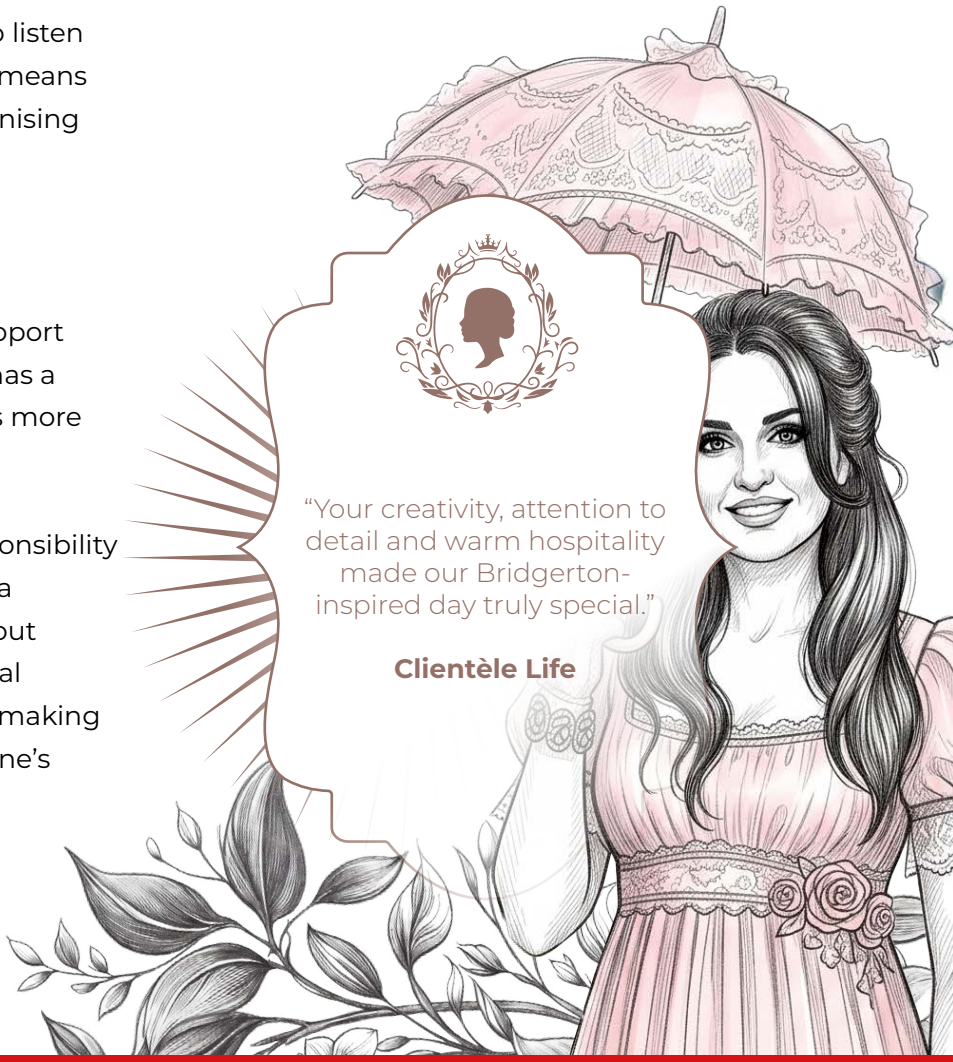
For leaders, this means creating space to listen and asking thoughtful questions. It also means reflecting on their own habits and recognising how those habits affect others.

Culture takes shape through everyday interactions: how people respond under pressure, handle disagreement, offer support and demonstrate respect. Each person has a part to play in making those interactions more constructive.

The conversation also turned to the responsibility of creating opportunities for others. Cuba encouraged women to be deliberate about supporting one another through practical action: showing up, sharing knowledge, making introductions and advocating for someone's potential.

These gestures can have a lasting effect. An encouraging conversation may help someone pursue a new role. An introduction may create access to an opportunity. Visible support can give another woman the confidence to keep going.

Meaningful impact grows when women use their experience and influence to help others progress. Tsebo's Women's Day celebration fulfilled the invitation in Shabalala's welcome: time to pause, enjoy good company and connect. Alongside the joy of a beautiful garden gathering, Cuba and Mahlare offered women encouragement to recognise their worth, communicate their ambitions, protect their wellbeing and define success on their own terms, while helping other women take their next steps.




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