

ERNST & YOUNG WORLD ENTREPRENEUR AWARDS 2011

SOCIAL ENTREPRENEUR CATEGORY FINALIST:

CATHERINE WIJNBERG – Fetola Foundation

Catherine Wijnberg is a serial entrepreneur. All her life she has established, grown and sold businesses – across a numbers of sectors. But what's amazing about her approach is her ability to set up a business with little or no capital.

Wijnberg is the founder of Fetola, a Cape Town-based business development consultancy established in 2006, which now commands a national footprint.

Fetola, a South Sotho word meaning "change" or "changing", specialises in assisting emerging entrepreneurs, SMMEs and community-based organisations to attain new levels of success. It runs long-term enterprise development programmes and works directly with entrepreneurs and SMMEs on a needs-basis. Its offerings include mentoring, skills development and training, practical e-learning courses, systems development and strategic planning.

"I studied agriculture, and I realise there's something in me that likes growing things! I like growing plants; I like growing people; and I like growing businesses," she says.

Fetola provides a great case study for a business that was set up with very little capital. Wijnberg says the need to establish the organisation became apparent when she was working with the Cape Craft & Design Institute, putting together a market access project for Old Mutual.

"I realised that if I could make corporate social investment a more attractive business proposition to companies, they'd willingly put money into the development of communities,"

At the time, enterprise development was gaining traction in SA, with a particular focus on black entrepreneurs. Using her experience, Wijnberg developed a winning concept for results-driven, visible and successful enterprise development and pitched it to big businesses.

"The premise was that if a company would give me R100 000 to help a poor community, I could show that there was return over and above the R100 000; that it becomes a good business investment," she says.

Having developed a rapport with Old Mutual, the insurance giant became Wijnberg's first client, giving birth to Fetola's flagship enterprise development initiative, the Old Mutual-supported Legends Programme. The programme currently supports 65 enterprises in all nine provinces and has become one of the largest virtual incubator programmes in SA. Wijnberg says annual participant sales turnover increased from R690 000 (2007) to R2.4m (2010) – and the programme has more than tripled in size from supporting 350 direct beneficiaries in 2008 to around 1 500 in 2011.



Born and raised in Zambia, Wijnberg studied in Scotland, Australia and the UK. Her first job was as an agricultural economist for the agricultural farmers union in Zambia where, among other things, at the tender age of 26, she advised then President Kenneth Kaunda's cabinet on maize prices.

She came to SA in 1987 and started an import-export company with her husband. This expanded to include a large transportation company, and after the birth of her third daughter, an apartment hotel. A traumatic divorce put an end to all that and in 2000 she moved to Cape Town to start a new life as a single parent supporting three children.

Wijnberg says despite complex legislation, there's a wealth of business opportunities in SA.

"For me the key to success is confidence. Very often young people in SA lack confidence, and that lack of confidence is what holds them back," she says.

While Fetola helps entrepreneurs develop confidence by giving them training and mentoring support, Wijnberg says it's up to entrepreneurs to get the fundamentals right.

"The reality is that a business never stops developing, it never stops having challenges. It's like an onion, as you peel it, there are always more and more layers.

"It's important to get a sense of what the problem is. Sometimes entrepreneurs will come to us and say their problem is a lack of finance, when it's actually high production costs, chasing the wrong market, or a lack of suitable partners and distributors."