

Ifa Lethu Promotes Green Issues

Ifa Lethu's Creative Entrepreneur Development programmes are heavily invested in recycling and using natural resources to alleviate poverty in South African rural communities.

How can a heritage foundation include green issues in their repatriation efforts of restoring South Africa's lost struggle-era artworks to the country, and run a successful development programme with these issues in mind? This question was put to Ifa Lethu CEO Dr Narissa Ramdhani by COP 17 delegates in Durban.

Internationally renowned and already knowing Ifa Lethu as a force in the heritage sector, it may come as a surprise that green and environmental issues play a critical role in the activities of the foundation.

Ramdhani explains: "Climate change, rising sea levels and the resultant scramble for limited resources pose a serious threat to the cultural sector globally and nationally. Given this scenario, there is an urgent need for South African's cultural heritage to be well protected for posterity. This will be the legacy we leave to our youth who will ultimately become the stewards of such heritage. The very fact that we are repatriating lost heritage back to our country is but one factor of our core business, and I like to think of this aspect as being in line with international environmental concerns. These heritage works play an important role in the training and transfer of indigenous skills from older South African artists to the youth and communities we develop.

"Our development programmes, over the past four years, are devoted to poverty alleviation and economic sustainability and have focused on taking these skills to rural communities where poverty is rampant. The key component of these programmes focuses on teaching rural youth and communities about the importance of environmental responsibility. Since we aimed to create sustainable programmes and not those that leave participants with resource challenges in the future, we focused on using locally available materials – either natural or recycled – and that took skills to create market-ready products. These included the use of clay, wood from fallen trees, recycled telephone wire, and recycled glass beads from beer bottles, which in turn were fashioned into highly desirable jewellery. We have introduced our groups to the use of discarded fabrics for the production of a children's range of clothing, and developed a range of much sought after products made from old vanilla essence bottles and custard jars. The latter have been fashioned into contemporary bead and woven Ifa Lethu Angels of Hope and other high-quality items for the tourist and retail markets. Many of the fossil products have been created for COP 17 in Durban in November 2011.

"These programmes are conducted initially from our mobile workshop which travels deep into the rural area of South Africa. Areas covered are located deep in the provinces of KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo, Gauteng, the Northwest, Mpumalanga and the Free State. Once we have trained groups to make desirable items, we have established business incubators which we manage to provide the community with a safe and comfortable place to create their products for trade and export. We also provide them with business training so their efforts truly become sustainable and support their families."

Ifa Lethu is providing new means for needy families to secure incomes that will alleviate their poverty, and the giving them skills to manage their businesses to keep them financially secure, as well as contribute to the country's economy. More importantly, the people are being taught about environmental issues and the need for them to contribute towards the Green Economy.

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About Ifa Lethu Foundation: Empowering the Nation's Soul

Dr Narissa Ramdhani is the CEO of the Ifa Lethu Foundation. Ifa Lethu, a nonprofit Foundation based in Tshwane, South Africa is devoted to the national development and economic growth of the creative sectors in the country.

Ifa Lethu today manages the largest heritage repatriation and creative entrepreneurial development effort in South Africa with collections having been repatriated from countries such as the United States of America, Canada, France, Australia, Spain, Holland, the United Kingdom and Germany. Further collections have been identified across the globe and every endeavour is made by Ifa Lethu to facilitate their repatriation to their home country.

Recent activities marked a rapid growth and an extension of our mandate, which has resulted in the Foundation focusing on the provision of skills for creative practitioners so they may become successful entrepreneurs. This extension has allowed the Foundation to align its work with the national priorities of poverty alleviation and community upliftment and the Millennium goals. Creative Entrepreneurship training initiatives are ongoing in the visual arts, fashion design and small business skills. In addition Ifa Lethu's is committed to its education of the public and specific local and international communities through their extensive programme of exhibitions, workshops and conferences.

Ifa Lethu is headed by CEO Dr. Narissa Ramdhani and Chaired by Amb Dr. Lindiwe Mabuza.

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