GRAÇA MACHEL TRUST



Fair for All Project

The Soil Remembers Her Hands

Stories of women cultivating change, land, and legacy in South Africa

FAIR FOR ALL PROJECT



Preface

The Soil Remembers Her Hands brings to life the stories of 14 women from different parts of South Africa who are rewriting the future of agriculture from the ground up In spaces marked by poverty, exclusion, and climate uncertainty, these women cultivate more than crops—they cultivate dignity, employment, and generational change.

Their stories illustrate systems-building from the ground up: both formal and informal job creation, mentorship for young people, ownership of land and businesses, and climate-smart agriculture.

This collection celebrates and reminds us that equitable economies take root when we trust, fund, support and follow women's leadership.

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Introduction

Across South Africa's landscapes—from the rural villages of the Eastern Cape to the slopes of Stellenbosch's vineyards—a quiet revolution is underway, led by women who nurture the soil, build businesses, and uplift entire communities. This document collects the inspiring stories of women entrepreneurs who grow crops, craft wine, and cultivate opportunities, equity, and hope.

These women—many of whom launched their ventures after the age of 45—are more than just farmers or founders. They serve as community anchors, mentors, and changemakers. Their achievements include exporting wine to global markets, supplying fresh produce to major retailers, winning international awards, founding agri-cooperatives from backyard gardens, and acquiring farmland through sheer determination and vision. Additionally, some have pioneered agro-tourism sites, received national recognition for innovation, and have become role models within their communities.

The Fair for All Project

The Fair for All project has been instrumental in elevating their journeys. Through access to training, linkages to markets and networks, the initiative has not only provided practical tools; it has also restored visibility and dignity. Fair for All affirms what these women have long understood: that fairness is not charity; it is justice.

This document, featuring remarkable stories of women, does not merely celebrate achievements; it honours pain, persistence, and purpose. It invites readers to bear witness to women who are growing more than crops—they are cultivating futures, transforming systems, and laying the groundwork for a more just economy, one enterprise and one mentee at a time.

The Fair for All project is reshaping South Africa's agricultural value chains to be more inclusive and sustainable, with women playing a central role. Led by the Graça Machel Trust (GMT), in partnership with Oxfam South Africa (OZA), Women on Farms Project (WFP), and the Centre for Competition, Regulation and Economic Development (CCRED), it brings civil society, research, and advocacy together for lasting change.

Launched in 2021, Fair for All emerged in response to persistent challenges faced by women in agriculture—limited land access, market barriers, and exclusion from leadership. It promotes fairer business practices, stronger policy frameworks, and more equitable trade and finance systems. The project reflects GMT's mission to amplify women's voices, advance economic justice, and build transformative networks.

> *"Fair for All is not just a project. It is a movement to unlock the potential of women in agriculture and ensure that they are recognised, rewarded, and respected as key drivers of Africa's food systems." - Shiphra Chisha, GMT's Director of Programmes*

Building on this vision, **Mandisa Dyantji** from Oxfam South Africa adds, "Women are the backbone of rural economies, yet they are consistently marginalised. Through Fair for All, we are committed to challenging this reality and driving meaningful change in trade, finance, and governance."

Together, their voices reflect the heart of the Fair for All Project: a collective determination to reshape value chains so that women are no longer sidelined, but are placed at the centre of Africa's agricultural future.

The numbers behind the stories

Together, the fourteen women featured in this document directly employ over hundred and fifteen people across farms, agri-processing facilities, marketing operations, and wine production sites. Most of these workers are Black women and youth—many are entering the formal economy for the first time. Their enterprises also provide support for indirect employment through seasonal work, packaging suppliers, transporters, and professional services.

Over 75 individuals have been mentored, trained, or supported through internships, school outreach programmes, and community learning initiatives by our 14 participants. For these women, mentoring is not merely a side activity—it is intricately woven into the very fabric of their work. They actively pass on their hard-earned knowledge to the next generation.

The downstream impact is equally significant. Several businesses provide vegetables to local schools, early childhood centres, and nutrition programmes, while others support neighbouring cooperatives and smallholder producers. These initiatives are not merely farms or businesses—they are essential lifelines.

These figures reveal that each entrepreneur is not only building a business but also actively creating employment and nurturing others. They demonstrate the ripple effect of uplifting women entrepreneurs: they become catalysts for broader economic participation and community upliftment. It also affirms the Fair for All project's theory of change that supporting women in agribusiness unlocks both social and economic value across communities.

Behind these successes lie profound personal sacrifices. Some women have sold their houses to finance their first bottling run. Others have encountered rejection, loss, or exhaustion—struggling through divorce, bereavement, and burnout. One woman lost both her home and business in a single year.

Through all this, they persist. These women continue to support others while also rebuilding themselves. Intergenerational skills transfer is a defining aspect of their work. Many are preparing their daughters and sons to take the baton—training them in the fields, in boardrooms, and at markets.

In a world facing climate uncertainty, these entrepreneurs are adapting as well. They are using indigenous seed varieties, adjusting planting schedules, and investing in sustainable farming practices. For them, climate resilience is not just an abstract policy—it is a matter of survival.

Ownership is a thread woven through every story. These women are not merely participants in agriculture—they are transforming its structures. They are reclaiming land, creating under their brands, and asserting their right to be visible and heard in boardrooms, markets, and policy spaces.



Nondumiso Pikashe

Trumpeting African renaissance through the vines



"I realised wine wasn't just a drink — it represented heritage, culture, and business.
And it was time we claimed our place at the table."

*Nondumiso Pikashe, 57, is the founder and CEO of **Ses'fikile Wines**, a Black woman-owned wine brand based in Cape Town, South Africa. Born in Gugulethu and raised between Gugulethu and Langa townships, Nondumiso started her career as a teacher after obtaining her qualifications from University of Western Cape and University of Cape Town. At the dawn of democracy, she was exposed to the wine industry through a government-supported initiative. She quickly became passionate about wine as both a cultural heritage and an economic opportunity. In 2005, she founded Ses'fikile Wines, meaning "We Have Arrived," a name symbolising the rightful claim of Black women in the industry. Despite barriers like limited access to markets and capital, she has remained committed to creating a successful brand, educating young people about responsible alcohol consumption and the many career opportunities within the wine sector. Through mentorship and advocacy, Nondumiso continues challenging an industry historically closed to people like her.*

"When the curtain of apartheid lifted, I saw how much had been kept from us".

The classroom walls of Khayelitsha High School still echo in Nondumiso Pikashe's memory. For years, she shaped young minds as a dedicated teacher, her chalk-stained fingers guiding students through lessons. But today, those same hands cradle a glass of deep ruby Cabernet from her own label, Ses'fikile Wines.

The journey from chalk dust to vineyards feels like a rebellion that challenges an entire industry to change. Nondumiso's awakening came with democracy. "When the curtain of apartheid lifted, I saw how much had been kept from us," she reflects, swirling the wine in her glass. Her journey into the world of wine was not accidental. She was introduced to this realm through a group focused on strengthening Black South Africans in underrepresented sectors. Initially sceptical, viewing wine merely as a symbol of elitism, she soon uncovered its depth — its heritage, culture, and craft. "Wine wasn't just a drink —it represented heritage, culture, and business. And it was time we claimed our place at the table," she declares.

Growing up in Gugulethu, Nondumiso was no stranger to the daily grind of survival. Like many townships on the Cape Flats, Gugulethu is a community marked by resilience, high unemployment, and limited economic prospects. Opportunities for wealth creation were scarce, and entrepreneurship often arose out of necessity rather than choice. Yet amidst the challenges, Gugulethu pulses with creativity, informal enterprise, and an unbreakable sense of community. This environment shaped Nondumiso's drive to survive, thrive, and create spaces of dignity and prosperity.

"This name carries our story of arrival, of taking space that's rightfully ours. I'll wait a hundred years for the profits, but I won't change what it represents."

Beyond her own business, Nondumiso has been a powerful advocate for change in the South African wine industry. Since the early 2000s, she has actively engaged in advocacy, tirelessly challenging both the private sector and government to recognise the contributions and rights of Black women in the wine value chain. As a founding member of several industry forums and advocacy platforms, she has fought for inclusive procurement, land reform, and fair representation. Her voice resonated in boardrooms and conferences, calling for meaningful policy implementation, not lip service. "We've been discussing transformation for over twenty years — it's time for action," she insists. Her advocacy work aims not only for recognition but also for addressing the structural inequalities that have long excluded women, particularly Black women, from ownership and decision-making roles in the industry.

The name Ses'fikile, meaning "We Have Arrived" drew criticism from unexpected sources. "Even my own community questioned it," she recalls. A caller on a popular radio show scoffed, "This sounds like some NGO project, not a proper wine." But Nondumiso stood firm. "This name carries our story of arrival, of taking space that's rightfully ours. I'll wait a hundred years for the profits, but I won't change what it represents."

"They loved my story just not enough to actually stock my wine."

The resistance grew fiercer as she knocked on retailers' doors. The responses still sting: "Black brands don't sell." Your market doesn't exist." Corporate mentorship programmes would wine and dine her, only to vanish without placing orders. A promising deal with a UK retailer collapsed when they discovered she didn't own vineyards. "They loved my story," she says, the irony not lost on her, "just not enough to actually stock my wine."



Yet in the face of these barriers, Nondumiso's wines began to speak for themselves. When the American company Go There Wines discovered her story, they flew her to Los Angeles for a launch, which landed her coverage in the Washington Post The bronze medal from the London Wine Competition now sits proudly in her modest Cape Town office, proving that her wines can compete globally.

For this teacher-turned-vintner, success has never solely been about awards. In the townships where she grew up, Nondumiso now conducts workshops that use wine as a tool to combat alcohol abuse. "We teach young people to engage with what they drink — understanding alcohol percentages, origins, and the craft behind it." She has also become a mentor, guiding Black girls toward career paths in an industry that still seems foreign to many.

"I want them to inherit more than a business — I want them to inherit confidence, pride, and the knowledge that they belong wherever they choose to be."

The involvement of her three children — two daughters and one son — is deeply personal to Nondumiso. By embarking on this journey with them, she believes she is not only building a wine brand but also creating a legacy. "I want them to inherit more than a business — I want them to inherit confidence, pride, and the knowledge that they belong wherever they choose to be," she says. In a sector that has historically excluded Black people, passing this vision on to her children means she is opening doors not just for them but for future generations.

"It's not just about my success. Every bottle we sell is about expanding access and creating wealth."

At 52 years old, Nondumiso demonstrates that it's never too late to reinvent oneself and make a meaningful impact. Today, Ses'fikile Wines directly employs eight people, most of whom are women, who work in packaging, distribution, logistics, and promotional events. Through these jobs, the business supports household incomes and stimulates economic activity within her community. "It's not just about my success," she says. "Every bottle we sell expands access and creates wealth."

Her progress has also been supported by initiatives like the Fair for All project, which has partnered with women entrepreneurs such as Nondumiso to enhance gender-inclusive value chains. Through training, visibility, and advocacy, Fair for All has helped amplify her voice and ensure that the wine industry becomes more inclusive. Nondumiso credits these partnerships not only for affirming the work she is already doing but also for creating pathways for others like her to enter and thrive in the sector.

As a Black woman leading in a traditionally male-dominated and white-controlled space, Nondumiso's journey is not just entrepreneurial; it represents a form of economic activism. By overcoming systemic resistance, she is redefining Black excellence and leadership in the South African wine industry. She is, quite literally, helping to build the nation one glass at a time.

The dream now is land—her own vineyards where she can fully express her vision. "Imagine a wine farm celebrating African heritage," she says, her voice gaining energy. Where we pair wines with indigenous foods and where tourism tells our story." She's already in talks with investors, determined to create South Africa's first truly indigenous wine farm.

As our conversation ends, Nondumiso concludes by asserting, "This isn't just wine," she says, every bottle is proof that we belong here. It shows that we can take what was kept from us and make it our own."

In Nondumiso's hands, wine has become more than a drink — it's liquid revolution. And the industry, whether ready or not, will never taste the same again.

"With every delectable pour, embrace the warmth of the people, the rich soils of the continent, the ocean breeze, and the captivating landscapes of the Cape Winelands."

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