



YOUNG LEADER



Bulelwa Makalima-Ngewana

Creating Spaces to be Proud of

Bulelwa Makalima-Ngewana, CEO of the Cape Town Partnership, is a town planner with vast experience in managing and coordinating public-private partnerships. She has spent 12 years in senior positions at the Cape Town Partnership, including two years at the helm, working towards making Cape Town's Central City a liveable, creative and vibrant place.

Bulelwa Makalima-Ngewana on...

🗨️ Your biggest takeaway from your 12 years at the Cape Town Partnership

The Cape Town Partnership was formed in 1999 as a public-private partnership, so collaboration is part of our DNA. Sixteen years later, this ethos remains integral to our success. I've learned the value of talking to people and asking them their opinions. I engage with everyone—from students to CEOs—and attempt to really listen to what is being said even if it is not always palatable to hear, and also to listen to what is not said. I've learned the importance of having global as well as local partners, especially in the World Cities Summit Young Leaders programme. The networking experience is simply invaluable.

🗨️ An example of an innovation that inspires you

Our very own Creative Cape Town mobile app inspires me. Creative Cape Town, which strives to realise the potential of the creative economy and to ensure that the city continues to evolve as a creative capital and a centre of knowledge and innovation globally, is the longest-running programme of the Cape Town Partnership. Developed in partnership with Domino Digital, the app aims to connect creatives to clients and to each other, while helping to broaden public access to creative events and industries. Registered users can showcase their work by uploading mini-portfolios. The potential for expanding the geographical reach of this app, and adapting it to other industries and projects, excites and inspires me.

🗨️ The most exciting thing that you are working on now

We are in the process of rolling out our Placemaking for Equity campaign. By placemaking, we mean creating places where people want to be—places that are welcoming, comfortable and secure—and that lead to emotionally connecting spaces. Our short-term objectives include the establishment of three new pilot programmes in neighbourhoods with different demographics in the first year of study. The intention is to stimulate economic development and job creation

especially within the informal economy; to bridge divides between different ethnic, racial and socio-economic groups; and to repurpose underutilised space that will result in safer, attractive and more vibrant public spaces. Ultimately, we see this as facilitating active citizenry and enhancing civic pride. A more important goal of this project is to help reverse the apartheid city design and to bridge the social and economic gap between citizens.

🗨️ A typical day in your shoes

I can't say that any day is typical. With my invaluable assistant, Mandy, I try to plan ahead as much as possible. That being said, I aim to be flexible and accessible to individuals and organisations working in Cape Town, and in the area of public space. Hence, my diary is pretty packed with meetings. With the support of my executive team, my day moves seamlessly between strategy and operations, leading to an effective implementation of organisational strategy in an innovative yet structured way.

🗨️ Your ideal city

Other than Cape Town—which will always be the city closest to my ideal city—San Francisco is one I admire immensely. It's an accepting city, welcoming of all individual and collective identities. As far as I observed when I visited, very little was frowned upon and I loved the uniqueness of each neighbourhood. Still, I love a number of cities, and Singapore is one of them. I especially love the culture and the cuisine, and of course, Singapore's housing programme is the best in the world and a model for so many cities, particularly Cape Town, which has similar issues of division and affordability that Singapore grappled with years ago.

In my opinion, the best thing that Cape Town has to offer is its diversity. Our mistakes and challenges are in your face so there's a sense of wanting to address these challenges. We know them, we live them. Above all, we want to change them, and so build a better city for everyone who calls Cape Town home. ○