

How online grocery store Kuloola is simplifying rural life

 By [Ntandokazi Ntozakhe](#)

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South Africa's rural areas are often overlooked when it comes to innovative services like grocery delivery apps. Spotting this unmet need, Siyanda Mthethwa founded mobile app [Kuloola](#) to improve the lives of people in rural areas and create employment opportunities for youth.



Siyanda Mthethwa, Kuloola founder. Source: Supplied

Kuloola is South Africa's first online rural grocery store with a sophisticated navigation app that maps rural households and provides delivery services to households and tuckshops in underserved rural areas. Households, tuckshops, churches and other groups can order groceries online, SMS, WhatsApp or phone call. Groceries are delivered within 24 hours.

Prices are competitive and delivery fees are five times lower than the cost most pay for transportation to the city.



Source: Supplied

In recognition of his work, Mthethwa made it onto the *Mail & Guardian* [200 Young South Africans 2020](#) list, he was an Accenture Rising Star Award winner, and most recently scooped the SAB Foundation [Social Innovation Award](#).

Find out more about the Kuloola mobile app and the entrepreneur's journey as we chat with Mthethwa.

■ ***What led to the creation of the Kuloola app?***

I grew up in a rural community where my grandmother owned the village spaza shop. I noticed from a young age how expensive and challenging it was for her to get stock from the nearest town. Secondly, we lived opposite a bus stop and I would always see community members, especially elderly women carrying heavy bags of maize meal, rice, potatoes on their heads after being dropped off by taxis.

I guess it never sat right with me, and it has always stayed in my subconscious. My grandmother and many members of her community represent millions of rural South Africans who, for decades, have been grossly underserved. These challenges inspired us to bring about the necessary solution, which is Kuloola.

■ ***What are some of the challenges that you have faced since starting out?***

Pioneering a new type of innovation without a benchmark is extremely difficult. There has been a serious amount of learnings, adaptations and pivots. Creating a great workplace culture is perhaps the hardest and most important challenge, as we have a team from different walks of life and getting that right has been difficult.

■ ***How has winning the SAB Foundation Social Innovation Award impacted your business?***

Winning the SAB Foundation Social Innovation Award is not only a great validation of our work, but has also led to companies in the FMCG space taking us very seriously. We have received numerous requests for collaboration and partnerships over the past three months.

We plan to use the R1.3m that we were awarded in grant funding to optimise our tech navigation app and online store so that we can expand into more areas. We will also create five additional jobs.

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■ ***How many people have gained employment through this app?***

We currently employ 18 people - 11 females and seven males. All of our team members are from rural areas and the average age group at Kuloola is 32 years old.

■ ***As someone from a rural area, what efforts are you making to ensure that the local youth are aware of technology and the many career possibilities in this field?***

Rural youth are relatively tech-savvy and we already see a 90% smartphone penetration rate amongst those between the ages of 18-35 years. As data costs continue to decrease, our efforts are directed at creating 'enablers'. For example, a mobile application that can enable access to products and services for rural youth.

■ ***What qualities do you believe entrepreneurs must possess in order to succeed?***

I believe that anyone who fully commits to entrepreneurship can be an entrepreneur. Many aspects of entrepreneurship can be learned and anyone who is willing and flexible enough can adapt. Many qualities like focus, understanding numbers and persistence can be learned along the way.



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■ ***What advice would you give to someone aspiring to be an entrepreneur?***

Be persistent. Entrepreneurship can be a difficult and lonely journey. Rejection and disappointment are something you will often experience. Stay the course and remain focused. Never give up!

■ ***How do you envision Kuloola five years from now?***

We want to see Kuloola as Southern Africa's most preferred last-mile delivery solution for rural and township communities in both FMCG and e-commerce.

ABOUT NTANDOKAZI NTOZAKHE

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