



# Bright is talking the talk and walking the walk

Bright Hlongwane was never an ordinary student. Right from his early days at MUT, he never underestimated the power within himself. Always out and about advocating for the wellness of his fellow students, Bright would knock on any door, regardless of hierarchy, if it was to benefit his peers.

**B**right is a selfless advocate for youth empowerment and a strong believer in human dignity. During the Durban floods in 2017, he rolled up his sleeves and went from door to door checking up on fellow students residing in rented accommodation near campus. They were hard hit by the floods and many lost almost everything. It was not just a fact-finding exercise; Bright rang the alarm bells and sent funding proposals to corporates to come to the aid of the students. This was just one of many programmes that Bright drove during his time as an MUT student, even though he never contested for formal student leadership positions. Both then and now, his efforts have always been less about himself than the young people of South Africa.

The voice of Bright Hlongwane has been heard on many international platforms in recent years, including an historic occasion when Bright addressed the United Nations Economic and Social Council Youth Forum in 2019, as well as recently at the World Youth Forum in Egypt. He is loud and may never be silenced in his belief that youth participation in economic decision-making could be the solution for government to curb youth unemployment. This is a message he declares through his famous mantra: “Nothing for us, without us.”

At home Bright has built a strong personal brand of a young boy born and bred in Umlazi Township, with strong views on youth entrepreneurship. He is not afraid to challenge

the status quo and has explored all avenues to reach out to decision-makers to take the voice of youth into consideration. Bright has written an open letter to President Cyril Ramaphosa and begs the ANC NEC to “give young people a chance at leading.” He has spoken at many other forums including radio and television interviews, carrying the message that “the youth is capable, give them a chance.”

Delivering a keynote address at the 2021 Youth Business Indaba, Bright called for effective implementation of transformative entrepreneurship interventions in South Africa to address the challenges of chronic youth unemployment, inequality and poverty. “There is a need to start creating employment for the youth through entrepreneurial activity because the problem of youth unemployment is frightening. The whole country is sitting on a keg of gun powder which might explode anytime. To avert this calamity, government must start rolling out a plan to create jobs immediately,” Bright said.

When he was just 22, Bright founded Isimangaliso Group (Pty) Ltd, a diverse company with interests in branding, media and marketing communications, transportation, logistics and construction. He is also secretary-general of Youth in Business South Africa (YIBSA), a non-profit organisation whose sole purpose is acceleration of youth employment. Within a space of just eight years, Bright has grown in leaps and bounds as an entrepreneur, public speaker and youth activist.