

A year of positive disruption

By [Kerryn Krige](#)

9 Jan 2017

Social entrepreneurs, doing good business that does good for society, are set to make a positive difference to South Africa and its people in the year ahead.

The year that was

From the defiant rise of Donald Trump to the breakaway vote of Brexit, from the ANC's election losses to the fury of #FeesMustFall, 2016 will go down in history as the year when disruption rattled the world.

There was civil war in Syria and terror in the heart of Europe, and in-between, millions of ordinary citizens, fearful, frustrated, and disillusioned, caught in the raging cross-currents of change.

Turning bold ideas into positive action

What happened to hope? What happened to heroism? What happened to the "better angels of our nature", to use the phrase famously coined by the cognitive scientist and author, Steven Pinker?

The good news is that they're still out there, fighting against the tide, making a meaningful difference by turning bold ideas into positive action.

At GIBS we call them "the disruptors" – social entrepreneurs who are reinventing business and society, by combining the profit motive with a quest to address social ills and make the world a better place. And all the signs tell us that 2017 is going to be their year of positive disruption.

Not just because we all need an antidote to the nihilism and narcissism that have characterised the last 12 months, but because we can no longer rely on politicians and public officials to carry the flag for democracy.

What have we learned, for instance, from the horror of Marikana? What have we learned from the deeply-entrenched layers of patronage and corruption that hold this nation in a State of Capture?

Working quietly to make SA work

The big lesson is that government alone cannot bring to fruition the well-worn election slogan of "A better life for all". But entrepreneurs, channelling business acumen into social and economic development, can pick up the slack and add value to

our society in more ways than one.

Operating in the middle of the spectrum, between government and civil society, the new wave of South African social entrepreneurs is working quietly to make South Africa work, in fields as diverse as education, healthcare, agriculture, technology, environmental sustainability, and early childhood development.

In Johannesburg, Yusuf Randera-Rees, a Harvard graduate and Rhodes Scholar, is nurturing young entrepreneurs through the [Awethu Project](#).

In Port Elizabeth, Neil Campher, a businessman and company director, is helping to transform a downtrodden community through the [Helenvale Recycling Initiative](#).

In Meqheleng in the Free State, Thandazile Mary Raletooane is working to change lives at the [Itekeng Centre for Orphaned and Vulnerable Children](#).

In his home city of Durban, and in 54 countries around the world, Kovin Naidoo, an optometrist-turned-entrepreneur, is fighting ocular disease and redefining contact lens technology through the [Brien Holden Vision Institute](#).

What these social entrepreneurs, and many more like them, have in common, is an ability to gaze into the eye of a crisis, and see opportunity staring back. Restless and relentless, in the classic entrepreneurial mould, they are driven not purely by commercial gain, but by a deeper impulse: to do good business, by doing good.

In 2017, we're going to be seeing a lot more of these idea-mongers, these innovators, these *boer-maak-'n-plan* disruptors, who have proved themselves to be quick, nimble thinkers with an equal penchant for taking the long view.

Preparing the entrepreneurs of tomorrow

Our Social Entrepreneurship Programme (SEP), the only one of its kind in the country, kick-started by former Reserve Bank governor Gill Marcus, is a highly popular point of entry for social entrepreneurs, and a catalyst of positive energy that offers a refreshing counterpoint to the gloom and doom that often clouds our view of our future as a nation.

From here, where the social entrepreneurs of tomorrow gather to sharpen their skills and share their thoughts and ideas, the future looks bright. And in that light, entrepreneurship will take centre-stage in 2017, when the Global Entrepreneurship Congress (GEC) comes to Johannesburg, bringing start-up champions and experts from more than 150 countries into our orbit.

Bustling with ideas

South Africa is bustling with ideas to make good money and do good for society, from [I Love Coffee](#), a trendy coffee shop run entirely by deaf or hard-of-hearing employees, to [Technovera](#), the winner of the GIBS Festival of Ideas, a startup that provides "smart lockers" for the speedy collection of chronic medication, to the [amaBhungane Centre for Investigative Journalism](#), an enterprising non-profit that has broken some of the country's most significant political stories.

But the biggest idea of all, and the one that will most be put to the test in 2017 and beyond, is that people who see the world differently, are very often the ones who are most capable of changing it for the better.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kerryn Krige is a social & environmental enterprise specialist at GIBS Business School Network for Social Entrepreneurs. She co-authored *The Disruptors: Social entrepreneurs reinventing business and society* with Gus Silber, which was published in 2016.

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