

Unilever uses the most powerful weapon to change the world

 By [Jessica Tennant](#)

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Unilever hosted a celebration of South African youth at Shine Studios in Braamfontein on Tuesday 5 July 2016, where CEO Peter Cowan revealed how they plan to tackle some of the tough challenges facing young learners.

Unilever's 'Brands with Purpose' have already touched the lives of millions of people across the globe. Locally, Domestos has reached over 480,000 South African scholars through the 'Cleaner Toilets, Brighter Future' and 'Germ Busters Club' programmes, and over 2m children and 10m South Africans through Lifebuoy's 'School of 5' programme.

However, it believes that there is still a long journey ahead that cannot be done alone. That is why it has partnered with UNICEF and the Department of Basic Education to launch a holistic schools programme that will integrate its portfolio of programmes, including a new oral hygiene programme from Pepsodent and the popular Omo Fast Kids Maths programme. Called the brightFuture Schools Programme, it will incorporate health and hygiene education, and maths skills.



Sibonile Dube

Sibonile Dube, corporate affairs director South and Central Africa at Unilever South Africa, unpacks the brightFuture campaign and Unilever's philosophy that 'when you bring people and brands together under the banner of purpose, ordinary people can achieve some extraordinary things'...

■ What are some of the challenges facing young learners in South Africa, and how does Unilever plan to tackle these?

We believe education is a huge contributor towards the continued success of South Africa and for Unilever, we see two areas where we can help to create a brighter future for all. The first area is in the actual environment that learning takes place in, specifically when it comes to health and hygiene.

Over the past five years, through the Domestos brand, Unilever has been embarking on its 'Cleaner Toilets, Brighter Future' project, which involves the refurbishment of toilets across schools in South Africa with the aim of providing better conditions for 1.4m learners by 2020. What we have seen in schools that have been involved with the programme is that diseases and infections related to sanitation have reduced by nearly 70%, with attendance increasing to around 80%. These are fantastic statistics, which show the opportunity for us to contribute in the education space and make a difference in the life of young learners through our brands.

The second area of opportunity is in the employability space. We know that youth unemployment is a major issue in South Africa and we think we can make a meaningful contribution in this space. There are three pillars to our youth employability strategy – providing skills; providing experience; and providing jobs.

- In the 'providing skills' pillar, we have begun to run youth employability workshops across South Africa, which gives learners the opportunity to engage with some of the company's world-class training materials in the areas of leadership development; digital capability and career development. This is supplemented by our Unilever Africa Idea Trophy student business competition, which is open to all university students across South Africa and provides them with access to Unilever case studies, mentors, the chance to learn from our partners such as Google and Facebook, as well as the opportunity to travel internationally.
- In 'providing experience', we are continuing to expand our internship programme, which trains students through robust and challenging business projects that allow them to develop a range of critical professional and leadership skills. We have also recently launched our new campus brand ambassador programme across six universities in South Africa and these provide students with continuous work experience opportunities throughout the year.
- Finally, in 'providing jobs', we are continuing to expand on our Future Leaders graduate programme with our largest intake of graduates this year. Furthermore, we continue to employ talented young South Africans through our external partnerships with Harambee and TSIBA (Tertiary School in Business Administration). In addition, we also invest in our own entrepreneurial initiatives such as the Ola Vendor Project, which has helped to create over 2,200 jobs to date.

■ **Unilever is committed to creating a brightFuture for all people, especially the future leaders of South Africa. What is the brightFuture initiative about, and why a specific focus on the youth?**

The purpose of the campaign is to create a bright future for future generations and show the possibilities of a better world. The brightFuture campaign gives people, especially the youth, the tools that will enable them to create that better world. Overall, we want to engage with our future leaders.

The campaign hopes to achieve the following objectives:

- Create a brighter future where every child in South Africa can grow up healthy and happy.
- Where healthy hearts are stimulated and confident minds flourish.
- Where no child goes to bed hungry and every parent has the opportunity to provide a warm meal.
- Where preventable diseases are prevented and every child lives past their 5th birthday.
- We believe we can live well without stealing resources from future generations.

We do not have all the answers, but we have started a journey and we invite everyone to join us.

■ **What do you mean by 'Brands with Purpose'? How are they making a difference externally (in South Africa and globally), and internally (in the business)?**

For the past five years, Unilever has been committed to growing its sustainable business practice. It has put some definition and measurement behind 'brands with purpose' – meaning brands that contribute to one or more of Unilever's Sustainable Living Plan goals and have a sustainable living purpose and has seen positive results in each of those markets.

Sustainable innovation is a key growth driver for Unilever. By putting sustainability at the heart of our brands, we are able to show that brands have integrated sustainability into our purpose and products by delivering strong and faster growth. This also makes our employees brand ambassadors as they feel like they are contributing towards creating a brighter future for all South Africans.

■ **What is the consumer's response to brands that contribute to society?**

Research shows that people are making a shift from focusing solely on their needs and their immediate family to caring more about the environment as well as the negative impacts facing the world today. The new generation do not just want brands to do no evil; they want them to do more good. Therefore, they are more likely to purchase products and support brands that embed a social purpose. This helps the youth feel that they are fulfilling a social responsibility and helping to reduce the effects of climate change.

■ **How do you plan to get others (consumers, businesses, etc.) on board?**

This year, Unilever has embarked on a drive for collective action from various stakeholders to help us support the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and make a tangible difference. At a recent business breakfast held in Johannesburg, nearly 200 leaders across business, national and local government, NGOs, academia, media and top local influencers gathered to discuss how implementation of meaningful sustainability measures could positively benefit business and society.

■ **Elaborate on Unilever's philosophy that 'when you bring people and brands together under the banner of purpose, ordinary people can achieve some extraordinary things'.**

We believe that brands have an incredible ability to change the way we live and change the world. Brands with purpose help drive society to move forward and it is for this reason that Unilever has put sustainability at the heart of its business.

Following the launch of the UN Sustainable Development Goals last year, to end extreme poverty, fight inequality and injustice and fix climate change, over seven days, seven billion people across the world were asked to [#TellEveryone](#) about the global goals.

We saw people around South Africa pledging their commitment towards any one of the 17 UN Sustainable Living Goals, which they identified with. By doing so, you could see how Unilever's philosophy of bringing people together under the banner of purpose motivates them to achieve extraordinary things.

■ **For Unilever, working towards a greater purpose revolves around sustainable living. Comment on the progress of the sustainability living plan created in 2010.**

Since the launch of the plan five years ago, Unilever is making great strides towards realising key commitments across the markets they operate in, including South Africa:

- **Local investments:** close to R4bn invested in new and refurbished manufacturing facilities in South Africa. These factories will enable Unilever to serve its consumers better with innovation and green technology, while simultaneously producing some of the company's brands with a social mission such as Lifebuoy and Domestos.
- **Improving health and wellbeing:** 483,000 South African schoolchildren reached through the Domestos 'Cleaner Toilets. Brighter Future' and germ-busters club programmes; 8.8m South Africans reached through the Lifebuoy 'School of 5' programme.
- **Reducing environmental impact:** the company's South African manufacturing operations have reduced CO₂ emissions from energy by 19%, water use by 30% and waste by 17%.
- **Enhancing livelihoods:** 2,200 jobs have been created through the OLA vending programme, which has positively affected the lives of over 8,800 South Africans and 2,500 South African jobs have been created through the Unilever and Wildlands partnership.

■ **What does Unilever SA have planned to celebrate Mandela Day this month?**

We have various community initiatives taking place pre and post Mandela Day – they do not only take place once a year; this ensures that the initiatives we drive are for the long-term, and that a real difference in these communities can be felt.

ABOUT JESSICA TENNANT

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