

JFAC Ep 6_Celebrating the Bertha Centre: 10 years of...and more_Transcript

[00:00:00] **Kentse Radebe**: Welcome to season 2 of the **Just for a change** podcast, powered by the Bertha Centre for Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship. We love hearing and sharing stories about social innovation happening both locally and outside our borders in the global south. In season 2 we put the spotlight on the changemakers behind some incredibly innovative approaches and solutions who are creating systemic change. And - we're also curious to find out what keeps them going. Join us as we discover how these changemakers are changing the way we're changing the world.

Welcome to season 2 of the **Just for a change podcast** with me, Kentse Radebe. Joining me today is my colleague Simnikiwe Xanga. I'm really looking forward to this episode. We're coming up on 10 years of celebrating the Bertha Centre and that work that we've been doing and really looking forward to diving into the topics and conversations and the guests that we'll be chatting

[00:00:53] **Simnikiwe Xanga** : with. Indeed, Kentse, I'm also looking forward to this episode and today's a special episode for us. It's just for a change. Um, refocusing slightly more inward and We will be showcasing and celebrating the Bertha Centre – a small but remarkable academic hub at the bottom of the African continent with activism in its soul. We are no doubt biased, however, we hope this discussion will inspire you and excite you as much as it does us.

[00:01:25] **Kentse Radebe**: I really think it will Simni. I think I joined the Bertha center what, two years ago, and every time I speak to Bertha staff members about the work that we're doing across a variety of portfolio its always about like pushing the boundaries, being change-makers. And I think for me, what I'm really looking forward to today as well is chatting to Dr Francois Bonnici. who was the founding director of the center, because whether I'm chatting to Louise and the education portfolio or Solange, our director, they always speak about the immense influence that he

had in shaping our works. I'm really, really looking forward to that, but I'm also really looking forward [00:02:00] to chatting to others, hearing the voices actually of other staff members, as they reflect on their own experiences of being part of this journey.

[00:02:08] The story of Bertha Centre starts in 2011 when Dr François Bonnici, the founding director of the Centre, was presented with the opportunity to facilitate the meeting of two complementary visions - that of the Bertha Foundation and that of UCT's Graduate School of Business - also known as the UCT GSB.

His interest in social innovation and practices that tap into the ingenuity and energy of *local* role players to solve *local* challenges, led him to cross paths with the Bertha Foundation. Around the same time, he had also been talking with the new dean of the UCT GSB and Dr Eliada Wosu Griffin-El, who were interested in exploring ways of infusing social innovation into the business school curriculum.

[00:02:51] **Simnikiwe Xanga** : So Kentse looking at the relationship that exists between the Bertha Center and the UCT School of Business, but the Bertha foundation and the UCT, Graduate School of Business, share a strong desire to create social and economy change. And we're prepared to take an unconventional route to achieve it.

[00:03:09] Connecting the Bertha Foundation - a young, radical family foundation focused on social justice - with the UCT Graduate School of Business - a formal business school at one of the continent's oldest, most established universities - may have seemed paradoxical, but these are precisely the kinds of divides we need to bridge for our collective futures. And so, in November 2011, the Bertha Centre for Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship was established.

[00:03:40] **Kentse Radebe**: .And you know what Simni, I think what's really important to emphasize is that Dr. Francois Bonnici wanted, she really had this vision where the Bertha center would be a

space there'll be welcoming to both change makers and innovators.

[00:03:53] **Simnikiwe Xanga** : I like . What you mentioned there Kentse, because that will be a space to ask questions [00:04:00] and explore new pathways regarding how changing needs to happen.

[00:04:04] **Kentse Radebe**: And I think it's safe to say that we've actually achieved that at the Bertha Center because that vision has now become a reality.

[00:04:11] **Simnikiwe Xanga** : he Bertha team now consists of a great office space that can accommodate its 17 full-time staff members... but in 2011 it started out in a single office with just four people. Can you imagine just for people to how it's now grown.

[00:04:28] We asked a few of the very first staff members including Nicolette Laubscher, Warren Nillson and Gloria Muhoro, one of the first Bertha scholars to reflect on the early days. Here's what they had to say...

[00:04:41] **Ntombini Marrengane**: what they had to say.

[00:04:43] **voice notes**: In the early days at the Bertha center. Uh, I would often hear, I don't know, how are we going to proceed with this project or how are we going to handle it and just seeing a seed being planted [00:05:00] off the new idea of how to do things and how that seed developed into a tree was absolutely amazing.

[00:05:09] I am the director of the infill inclusive innovation program at the GSB, the UCT GSB. And, uh, I'm thinking back to when the Bertha of center was first founded, about 10 years ago, I started at the GSB right at the same time as the Bertha of center. And it was a really thrilling moment for me personally. And I think for the school and, uh, and the world of social innovation, there was something about trying to bring a focused inquiry. And really radical exploration of social innovation into an academic institution. Like the GSB. That really catalyzed our thinking in a

number of ways, one of the most profound ways, uh, for me, was that rather than thinking of social innovation as something that you would do kind of on the side, or that was the pursuit of, for just certain kinds of people, certain activists or certain sorts of entrepreneurs, as we explored it [00:06:00] within the early days of the birth of center and started bringing different kinds of consultants in different kinds of teachers and practitioners into the center, we quickly grew to understand that uh, there was no one platform through which you could do social innovation. We became very platform agnostic. We used to call it. We recognize you could do it through business. You could do it through social, uh, the social sector. You could do it through government. You could do it through informal community networks, social movements, um,

[00:06:26] and this greatly expanded our understanding of what social innovation is and how embedded the possibility for social innovation is in the day-to-day of all of our lives. Everybody.

[00:06:36] I was actually a part of the first cohorts of the M Phil Inclusive Innovation. And what I appreciated about it was the innovative and entrepreneurial approach that they took in the course, such that we'll launch practically how to apply things like systems thinking, business model innovation and human centered design to social problems and to business problems. And I get to apply all of the skills in my career today.

[00:06:59] **Kentse Radebe:** Often, great achievements start small... With many highs and many lows, much sweat and tears, but also lots of joy, the Bertha Centre has come far. This can definitely be attributed to constant innovative thinking, perseverance, and most importantly, to the people who caught the heart and vision behind the Centre.

[00:07:21] With us today is Bertha Centre founder, Dr Bonnici and we'll also hear from the current Bertha Centre director, Dr Solange Rosa a little later on. [00:07:30] Welcome to the show Francois. Thanks for joining us today to reflect on the past 10 years of the Bertha Centre and how far it is. Francois, thank you for joining us today and welcome to the show. We're so delighted that you're

able to join us whilst we reflect on the past 10 years of the Bertha Centre and how far we've come.

[00:07:50] Welcome to the podcast.

[00:07:52] **Dr Francois Bonnici:** Thank you so much Kentse. lovely to be here.

[00:07:54] **Kentse Radebe:** Francois. So we'd actually like to start reflecting sort of right at the beginning. And I remember you've shared this [00:08:00] story with a couple of us, but I think it will be so brilliant to have our listeners hear some of the background around how you were able to come together and form the Bertha Center.

[00:08:08] Can you give us a personal overview of what the initial aim and vision was of the Bertha Center and why you felt it was so important to actually start something like this?

[00:08:18] **Dr Francois Bonnici:** Thanks. And it's a privilege to be here to celebrate 10 years. The very beginning. Um, I think it was a recognition that the country is filled with just incredible people, developing their own solutions and incredible change makers.

[00:08:33] Uh, and there was very, very few opportunities to really showcase that, understand that support. And it felt that a university platform was potentially a very powerful platform to bring legitimacy, to, um, change makers, to social entrepreneurs, to social innovators, wherever they might find themselves. And there was an inspiration from, I guess, this movement academically, which was following the work of practice around the [00:09:00] world.

[00:09:01] You know, there was Yale and Harvard and Stanford and Oxford all flying to South Africa, looking at what amazing things were happening in South Africa. And very few of our own institutions were set up to do that. And so that, I guess was the initial inspiration was actually, you know, the people and innovators of South Africa itself that, that already existed long before the Bertha of center.

[00:09:20] Um, and the opportunity to bring the Bertha Center into being was the arrival of a new Dean and an aspiration of the university to have a business school that was more responsible, um, in what the role of business was and what the role of, of, of growing leaders and management was. Um, and within two weeks of the new Dean arriving Walter Bates, I had randomly written an email and said, I sounds like I'm interested in your vision.

[00:09:50] I'm a UCT alumnus. I think this is something, um, in that that university could really pay attention to. Um, and several [00:10:00] months later, um, I had helped the Dean and Dr. ... to develop a concept note for what the university might do. Uh, and at the same time I had met, uh, a young person, uh, who had just established the south African office of the Bertha of foundation, uh, at a talk that I gave in Johannesburg.

[00:10:22] Um, and I think the talk was called. It was something about madness, but it was something really about focusing about, you know, the, the, the, the, the, the, the radical ideas that, um, young people and change makers have in South Africa about our future. Um, and that there was an opportunity to do something. And this young person came up to me, um, uh, , her name was Laura Tabachnick, um, and said, well, we've just started the family foundation, you know, can you help us think about, um, this field of social entrepreneurship and social innovation and what we might do.

[00:10:55] And I said, well, great, let's meet when you're down in Cape Town. And she came prepared to the [00:11:00] meeting. And the second thing on her list of things the foundation wanted to do was support an academic center. And I said, well, you know, actually the university are thinking of doing something like this, so why don't we, uh, put that together?

[00:11:11] Um, and Tony Tabachnick. , her father met with the Dean and the vice chancellor of the university. And in one meeting essentially decided, well, you know, have this vision, let's put it together. And, uh, ultimately I was privileged to be at a time to help facilitate and put that partnership together and then be appointed into the, into the role as the first director.

[00:11:33] I was at the time, um, working at red cross children's hospital. And working on social innovation on the sideline, um, and, uh, then had to drop out of specializing in pediatrics for the second time in my life to come and take up the Bertha Center, which was an amazing privilege. And it started really as an, as an inspiration and with the idea and the intention to, to [00:12:00] shine a light on what was happening and to you know, support the next generation of people who wanted to be involved in establishing businesses and becoming leaders in establishing nonprofit organizations and social enterprises. To have the tools, to, to create, uh, organizations that would actually address our inclusive future.

[00:12:20] **Simnikiwe Xanga** : So Francoise for me, I reflected many times countless times when the work of the Bertha Center. And what stands out to me is the speed and agility with which the Bertha center grew. Could you perhaps share with us, uh, what were some of the big milestones in terms of growth in the early days?

[00:12:40] **Dr Francois Bonnici**: I think urgency, I think we still feel that urgency today. Things need to change. Things need to change quickly. And that, I guess the, the, the parts of that sense of urgency also was mobilized by my reaching out and creating a community of people beyond, I guess, what traditionally [00:13:00] might have been done in an academic setting. And so I think from very early on, we opened up the business school space to different organizations to say, you know, I, I had a small budget because we had to, every time book a room, it costs something, but i said to any non-profit organization, any social impressive. You want to hold your meeting here? Come hold it at the school. And it was an, and that was a way of bringing different kinds of people in. Spaces that felt too many people was quite oppressive and was actually not for them. Um, whether they were in government, where they were working in grassroots organizations, where they were working in the townships around Cape town, where there were non-profits that didn't feel the business school was for them.

[00:13:34] That was the one kind of let's build them community and a movement of people. The other was really the Bertha scholars, I

think was a big part of, of bringing a new energy into the space. And so the energy very much came from you know, creating a network of people, uh, uh, and giving space and home for different discussions in a, in a business school, which at the time was really well known for corporate finance.

[00:13:58] You know, that's what it was really well [00:14:00] famous for. Um, at the time Ralph Harmon was starting to grow the sustainability practice. There were other, you know, important lecturers doing work, but what it was famous for was, you know, for being experts in finance. And I think. The sense was that we wanted to also give the school or a reputation for being, thinking very deeply about societal issues and the role of managers and leaders in, in those and that to equip every single student, um, with the tools and the mindset that no matter what role they ended up in, uh, that they could be part of, um, of building an inclusive future for the country.

[00:14:38] **Kentse Radebe:** Francois, I think it's so important. How you speak about the support that you had from the graduate school of business, from the birth of foundation, which really sort of created that environment that allowed the center to succeed. And now we're coming up on this 10 year celebration. I think it might be interesting to pivot and maybe explore some of the challenges that you experienced during this time of growth that you think informed the [00:15:00] ways that we continue to work today. And maybe also just shine the light on what it's like to build something like this one.

[00:15:06] **Dr Francois Bonnici:** Thanks. We had great institutional support but that didn't necessarily mean that we, everyone accepted what we were doing, uh, at the time, you know, there was a group of people, certainly within a school of thought, uh, that said, well, this doesn't belong in a business school.

[00:15:24] And there was a school of thought that said, well, we're already doing responsible business, so why do we need. And then, you know, when we made the, you know, it was really a mission to make the social innovation curriculum compulsory for all MBAs. Uh, and that was a journey as well. And in terms of resistance, like, I

didn't choose to do this and not when I did my MBA in the end, it's become, you know, a very significant part of why students and MBA students, um, choose the GSB because of that, that kind of curriculum, because of what's on offer.

[00:15:54] So some of the first challenges were, uh, somewhat, you know, does this fit here? [00:16:00] And where is this dance between, you know, a foundation that is really kind of geared, uh, its mission towards social justice and a business school that is clearly about, you know, developing leaders for the economy and where, you know, there, there is, there is tension and there's paradox in all of that.

[00:16:18] And so it is about, it was about navigating some of that territory. Um, and then. Um, you know, I think we did have, again, challenges in presenting that to the outside world. If we said we want it to be working with government, we want it to be working with the nonprofit sector and being at a business school what did that represent? Being UCT what did that represent? Um, And, you know, did we have a right and a legitimacy and a mandate to be actually working on some of these issues. Then also recognizing along with that, we were sitting at the waterfront. All right. And sitting at the waterfront, talking about these issues is one of the kind of wealthiest real estate on the continent.

[00:16:58] And so [00:17:00] we started. You know, going and working with partners in, uh, in Philippi, in, in Khayelitsha, uh, in, uh Athlone and out of that actually came the seeds for the, the work, uh, around the business hub, on the Philippi campus. Um, but that was actually several years of work before that building got constructed.

[00:17:22] Um, and then of course, you know, along the way, we were also challenged in, in, you know, Naive thinking, um, and also challenged with the context and the time. So the first part, I think, thinking that, you know, relatively straightforward models or, um, business models of social entrepreneurship would solve like the deep rooted challenges of the country.

[00:17:46] Um, so I, you know, I go back to the original concept of the Bertha Center and it's something I wouldn't necessarily want to share because it is quite naive in its thinking, but you've got to start somewhere. Um, but the, the reality was we learned from our [00:18:00] partners that we learned from our students who. You know, who provoked us, who criticized us, who, uh, presented a mirror to say, okay, that's all well, and good. You want to do these things, but the realities of the countries are X, Y, and Z. I mean, this is the history of our country. We've had like 400 years of colonialism. We have, you know, a century or two of institutionalized apartheid, you know, we're not going to solve these things with acute, uh, impact bond or something, you know, or a great little business model. It was important work to explore, but I think we were continually, um, guided and steered by, uh, by this network of partners and students and staff. Um, and then of course the challenges that fees must fall abroad to the entire institution, played out both for you know, the university for the business school and for the Bertha Center itself. And I think, you know, that was a really important journey and it's a journey [00:19:00] that continues, uh, to think about. Well, w and for me personally, it was to say, okay, well, what, what am I institutionally responsible for? What am I personally responsible for?

[00:19:11] Uh, and, and walking that journey and recognizing the mistakes that we made, recognizing what we needed to do continue to think about what was our contribution to perpetuating some of the biases of the past. What was our contribution to perpetuating, uh, the biases and systemic structures of the university?

[00:19:31] What was our responsibility to the individual way we had worked with our colleagues, and I think that journey was an important way. And a critical one, um, that we walked, you know, and I think the, the, the center continues to walk because I think if one is dedicated to issues of social progress and issues of social justice, you know, it needs to start, it needs to start at home and it needs to start, um, you know, with, with honest conversations, uh, [00:20:00] in the institution itself.

[00:20:01] But I think there were. It w it was part of my whole kind of journey personally, of, of learning. And I think part of the center evolving, um, in the context of the time.

[00:20:13] **Kentse Radebe:** Francois, what what's really interesting in the story that you told of the birth of center and a theme that just keeps coming up again, is this idea of collaboration and partnership.

[00:20:22] Could you talk about the importance of partnerships and what have been some of the most significant partnerships for the Bertha Center over the years?

[00:20:31] **Dr Francois Bonnici:** There has been some, you know, quite a lot of fluid lines between the people that we've worked with. So, you know, I don't think we distinguished always too much between, you know, who was a staff member, who was a fellow, consultant who was working in another organization as our partner, but really creating spaces for people to come together, leave a bit of their agendas and their institutional titles at the door. And actually let's figure out what the problems are that we need to work on and then say, okay, well, whatever [00:21:00] institutions I'm in, how do I, how do I approach the problems we have and how do we use the tools of our different institutions? Um, and so, you know, what have been the most significant partnerships?

[00:21:11] I mean, it goes without saying obviously the Bertha foundation were an incredible partner to work with number one, because they trusted us to do what we thought was right in the context and didn't impose their own mandate, but at the same time, continued to challenge and provoke us to say, you know, are you going to, particularly with a view on justice?

[00:21:29] Like, are you going far enough? You know, can you be more radical in the spaces you're in? So I, you know, always valued that partnership. Um, of course, uh, we had quite a few partnerships with both national and provincial governments, which I think were, were really. At the time, quite unique for a center for social innovation.

[00:21:50] And I think also for the business school was welcome. I mean, I think a few people had good partnerships with government departments, but I think we really had long-term partnerships. [00:22:00] I think the, probably the ones that we learnt the most from were the partnerships that we had with a few of the amazing organizations we worked with over the years, R-labs Silulo Ulutho Technologies.

[00:22:14] Um, a number of others, um, that I can, uh, I can think of that we worked with over the years. And part of our, um, idea at the time was not to try and help and work with every single social enterprise in South Africa. We just wouldn't have capacity for it, but, you know, create spaces for, for, for learning, for anyone.

[00:22:35] So online courses, you know, conferences, et cetera, but work deeply with a number of them over. Uh, over a number of years and actually, you know, I think we learnt so much from those organizations. that we had the privilege to work with over, over longer periods. Uh, mothers to mothers is another one. Um, and I think, you know, those were probably the most valued because I think we learned more from them than we [00:23:00] did the academic texts on social innovation.

[00:23:02] I think we learned a lot and we're able to surface that and then contribute that back into the global conversation about social innovation that. The way that, that some of the approaches were in South Africa were addressed addressing deeper issues in a way that wasn't really discussed in the global conversation. And we can talk a bit about that. You know, when we thinking about the, the more systemic dimensions of social innovation

[00:23:26] **Kentse Radebe:** Francios. So we've actually come to the tail end of, of our, of our interview. And maybe just as a, as a wrap up in a close, any sort of reflections that you'd like to leave with us as we celebrate the 10 years and think about the way that the center has influenced social innovation on the continent and in the rest of the world.

[00:23:43] **Dr Francois Bonnici:** Yeah, I think my one, my one vision or my one bugbear was always, you know, if Harvard says

something about social innovation or Oxford do, or they put out a research paper or they make, you know, have an opinion, everyone thinks that's globally relevant. And if someone puts out, you know, if us in South Africa, [00:24:00] uh, do the same, or if someone in Mexico desert, or if someone in India does it, you know, the perception is that that's only locally relevant.

[00:24:08] Uh, and you know, one of my aspirations was the center would be globally relevant and actually in a way, South Africa is more a reflection of the world than. Then a USA. England is because actually the world is a very unequal place. It is, uh, you know, has, um, uh, all these challenges of youth unemployment and climate change, but also is, you know, hugely resourceful and, and, uh, an innovative, and I think, you know, for me, South Africa was always a microcosm of the world and I felt that actually the work that we reflected of what Changemakers in South Africa doing was globally relevant.

[00:24:47] And so I think that is something that I'm quite proud of the position that it has and the influence that it has developed over time. [00:25:00] Um, the other reflection is that it is really a combination of all the people that are, have been through it over the years, you know, and that's really exciting to see. And so while I have the privilege of being on this podcast and telling some stories that it's, you know, so many people's stories, um, that have shaped it into what it's become.

[00:25:18] **Kentse Radebe:** Francois. Well, thank you so much for joining us on the podcast today. It was lovely to have you, and to hear the story of how the Bertha center was started.

[00:25:27] **Dr Francois Bonnici:** Thanks so much. Kentse Simni was such a treat to be with you both.

[00:25:32] **Simnikiwe Xanga :** We also wanted to hear from our current Director, Dr. Solange Rosa, who served as a consultant to the Bertha Center before becoming the Director in 2020. And so we asked Solange to share some of her highlights since joining the birth.

[00:25:49] **Dr Solange Rosa:** My highlights would definitely be, uh, starting off building a team at the birth center. So I think it's really important to [00:26:00] ensure that there's psychological safety within. The team that you work with and to ensure that there's diverse set of people who are able to bring their full selves to the team to realize their potential and to feel respected and dignified.

[00:26:20] So building a team was definitely the first priority that I had. And then I think, you know, highlights during the COVID pandemic. I started as Director of the Bertha Center on the 1st of July, I don't know, 2020, I don't know what level of lockdown we were in, but it was a high level. And, and so, um, highlights in this particular pandemic have meant a lot of, uh, engaging with the public through webinars. Being able to, uh, engage on various topics, uh, [00:27:00] from our classrooms for change to our innovative finance webinars, um, to our brown bag. Uh, lunches. So being able to still be isolated, but still be able to reach out and engage with the community that we try to support that we're trying to raise awareness amongst.

[00:27:25] Um, so, so we've had some wonderful engagements, um, over the, the webinars as well. And then the final highlight is really the five-year strategy, which takes us from 2022 to 2026. So building on the foundation of it, an organization that is stable and secure and that has a vision for what it wants to achieve for the next five years.

[00:27:55] **Simnikiwe Xanga :** To wrap up the section of the podcast, we ask Solange to give us a [00:28:00] few of the milestones that have been achieved by the various portfolios at the Bertha Center over the last 10 years.

[00:28:07] **Dr Solange Rosa:** The Bertha Center opens its stores on UCT graduate school of business campus in 2011 and November. Of 2011. So that was a big milestone in and of itself. The Bertha Center received funding from the birth of foundation as core funding for five years. And this enabled it to establish a number of projects that really put the Bertha center on the maps.

[00:28:38] One of those projects was to embed social innovation and entrepreneurship into the MBA curriculum. Um, as one of the first business schools to have a core component of the MBA focused on social innovation and entrepreneurship. And this happened from [00:29:00] 2016, the MPhil in Inclusive Innovation was also developed.

[00:29:06] Uh, based on the funding received. And at during this period, the infill is located also at the Graduate school Of Business. And this for people specifically focused on doing social innovation work. Um, another milestone was that the, uh, Groote Schuur to hospital has. A innovation hub, which was launched in 2015.

[00:29:33] And that was the health innovation portfolio that initiated that together with the department of health and, um, allowed a number of different innovations within the hospital environment to, to ideate, to develop into flourish. The other milestone in 2015, which the innovative finance team was pod of was the [00:30:00] first impact investing in Africa, executive education course, which we have held every year since 2015.

[00:30:08] Um, we also then partnered in 2016 to establish the Philippine village campus, which, um, is a collaboration between. The vice chancellor strategic fund and the GSP and, um, the, both the center together to have a space with the solution space, um, managing that space in order to have entrepreneurs and township entrepreneurial.

[00:30:37] Uh, working in a space and learning how to be a better entrepreneurs and set up the enterprises and then a systems change portfolio launched their executive education course in around 2016. And that's a course that we've also held every year since then. And it's focused on. [00:31:00] How organizations can look more at the systems that they work in and how they can influence and effect those systems.

[00:31:08] Then in terms of the youth portfolio in 2019, the Changemakers program was launched at Philippine village, where we support young people who are not in education, employment, or training to go through. Program that enables

them to be social entrepreneurs and also supports their psychosocial development.

[00:31:33] And then, um, in terms of the innovative finance portfolio, again, In 2020, they launched a green outcomes fund, which is in collaboration with the jobs fund and with green Cape, trying to support small, medium sized enterprises in, uh, in the green and renewable energy areas to be able to get. [00:32:00] Funding and investment in order to grow their enterprises.

[00:32:04] So this is a, um, a collaboration that took many years to establish and, um, and has been in operation since 2020, finally, for the education portfolio, I'd like to highlight the classrooms for change program that happened, uh, this year and last year, um, which is trying to. Creates awareness amongst teachers who, uh, who work with learners around understanding our history, understanding issues of transformation and diversity and inclusion and being a.

[00:32:41] To uh, to discuss those issues, to unpack them and to create a sense of social justice in our, um, in our learners, through teacher development. And then an overarching highlight I would say is that the Bertha center was [00:33:00] recognized by the Bridgespan Group as one of the top five academic centers in the world and the area of social impact. So that was, um, really quite an achievement. Um, in 2017, 2018, when a number of different impact centers around the world at business schools were reviewed and the Bertha center was highlighted as one of the top five.

[00:33:28] **Simnikiwe Xanga** : The Bertha Centre has made a big impact over the last decade... but the work is not done. The Centre is looking towards its next ten years and working to establish how it can stay relevant and keep pushing the boundaries of what is possible for social change

[00:33:46] We asked a current staff member, *and* a current Bertha scholar what they are looking forward to as the Bertha Centre turns the page to the next chapter.

[00:33:59] **voice notes:** [00:34:00] Looking ahead to the next five years for the Bertha center, I'm particularly excited that we're going to continue to do the great work that we've been doing for the last 10 years, but deepen it and strengthen it in ways that reflect our current environment. And, um, the current challenges that we're facing that the pandemic has, um, accelerated and that create even more pressure for us to. Uh, apply our research, our, uh, thought leadership, our convening power to address these intractable vexing problems, health inequity, that's been laid bare by COVID. Financial access and inclusion, education opportunities. Um, And I love that we're deepening our focus and perspective on the climate change and climate justice and understanding that that runs [00:35:00] across all of our, um, priority areas and affects all of our lives and our work in, in deep ways.

[00:35:09] So what excites me about being a Bertha scholar is the amazing community of diverse change-makers who are passionate about inclusivity, equity and diversity, um, at the grassroots level, at the national level and international level I believe in the next five years, the Bertha Center would be African pan African and world class center of excellence in social entrepreneurship, and innovation by raising change-makers, who will be at the helm of affairs and changing the narrative about Africa, bringing the authentic stories to bear while it's influencing systems change at the core and grassroots level of the various economies.

[00:35:58] **Kentse Radebe:** It's easy to get caught up in the news headlines and feel overwhelmed by the task ahead of us in terms of social change... but with a good strategy in place and people who are willing to help carry the load, who are committed to thinking outside of the box, and who can see opportunity where others see challenges, there is no doubt lots to be excited about!

[00:36:18] **Simnikiwe Xanga :** With an inspiring 10-year background of the Bertha Centre fresh in our minds, we now take a peek into the upcoming five years with Bertha Centre Senior manager Ntombini Marrengane. Welcome, Ntombini!

Ntombini, could you tell us, why do you think the work of the Bertha Center is still or perhaps even more crucial now?

[00:36:38] **Ntombini Marrengane:** I think the work of the Bertha Center is actually a more crucial than it's ever been before we live in an increasingly fragmented world with greater inequality and we face new unprecedented challenges. such as is COVID-19 yet at the same time, this is also a period of tremendous opportunity as we all become more socially conscious, socially aware, and we're more connected than ever [00:37:00] before. We have the chance to come together and strategize about new ways to address our social ills.

[00:37:05] **Kentse Radebe:** So Ntombini, if we can delve a little bit deeper into the work, the Bertha Center does acknowledging exactly what you were saying about how crucial and important it is. Can you tell us a little bit more about where the Bertha Center gains its inspiration to do its work?

[00:37:19] **Ntombini Marrengane:** That's a really big question. Kentse. I think the inspiration comes from being a community of storytellers, a community of activists and a community of people who really believe in social justice. And I think. We all believe that in some small way, in our particular corner of the world, we can make a difference. And I think collectively when you bring that kind of energy and purpose together, some really amazing things start to happen.

[00:37:46] **Simnikiwe Xanga :** And on that note Ntombini. I'm just curious. Everything that's happened. How did you approach this five-year strategy?

[00:37:54] **Ntombini Marrengane:** The work of developing the five-year strategy was actually a lot of fun because we are a [00:38:00] mixed team, some veterans, but also quite a number of new staff, including myself. And so it was a really nice opportunity to take a look back at the many accomplishments of the Bertha Center since its fine. 10 years ago, but also for us to dream a little bit about what we see Bertha doing in the next five years. And we

did a lot of brainstorming and dreaming as a team. And I think we came up with some really amazing ideas.

[00:38:28] And I think most importantly, I think the entrepreneurial mindset that really forms the bedrock of Bertha Center approach to its work is very much alive and it sparked a lot of new ideas, which was quite exciting.

[00:38:41] **Kentse Radebe:** I really liked the fact that you spoke about how doing that strategy work was actually a lot of fun because I think even for me as like a, Bertha team member, I really enjoyed participating in that process. I'm curious, what was some of the major learnings that came out of that process as you were planning?

[00:38:58] **Ntombini Marrengane:** I think for me, [00:39:00] the primary learning was just because we started in a particular place doesn't mean we'll end up in that same place five years from now. And it's about understanding that our approach, um, needs to be fluid. It needs to be, uh, demand-driven and responsive, not just supply driven as many, um, development projects or development programs are. Ah, focusing on what the program designer has to offer rather than what the program recipient actually wants or needs. So I think that's a very important part of it. Um, and I also think. We, we, we didn't, um, confine ourselves to say these six areas. This is where we're working. And this is, this is Bertha territory we actually thought. How do we think creatively about problem solving around the issues of social inequality and the need to uplift. You know, the, the people who are suffering the most in our society.

[00:39:57] And so with sort of that lens, we came up with [00:40:00] some really interesting ideas. Most of which happened to fit in the same buckets that we started with. Um, but there were a few new ones and we're really excited to pursue them in the next five years. Um,

[00:40:09] **Simnikiwe Xanga :** You've touched on a point around creative thinking and I'm also just curious to hear what's in the

pipeline for the next five years. And what are some of the big milestones? Um, you are aiming for?

[00:40:24] **Ntombini Marrengane:** I think one of the most important things that we want to focus on is sort of to consolidate the work that Bertha has been doing with the public sector and to really shine a light on what are our learnings and what potentially can we, can we still learn from pushing innovation within that space?

[00:40:42] Because I think a lot of times policy makers. Um, and officials, they're so busy trying to fix a problem. They don't actually recognize when they're doing something innovative, whether it's become, because they have limited resources or they have access to new talent or a particular skill set that they have [00:41:00] had in the past.

[00:41:01] Um, so I think it's really important for us to examine that, um, because there are some remarkable things happening on the ground and just because they're not being, um, Bandied about as innovative doesn't mean that they're not. So that's, that's the one piece. And then I think the other area for us really, to focus on and it's one of the most pressing issues of our time is of course climate change and climate justice.

[00:41:25] We're just now seeing the end of Cop 26. Um, and I think that along with the general thinking at Bertha has helped shaped our, our plans around developing a portfolio dedicated to this issue because. Impact a lot on people who are already suffering without access to resources, material, and otherwise, um, it's making the situation worse. And since we're about social justice, we need to keep an eye on that.

[00:41:54] **Kentse Radebe:** Ntombini, I think, um, I don't know if you'll remember when you first joined Bertha Center and obviously we were all it was during the pandemic. We couldn't see [00:42:00] each other. I think for me, one of the things that I remember was getting emails from you about collaborating and partnering with other organizations that were doing really interesting work on the continent. So on this theme of like partnership, I'd really like to gain your perspective on what are

some of the significant partnerships that you see on the horizon for the Bertha Center.

[00:42:19] **Ntombini Marrengane:** I think for me first and foremost, um, we need to become more connected to other organizations on the continent. You see we're located at UCT and we have, uh, a very famous brand and reputation.

[00:42:33] Um, but I think it's really important that we remember that we're not the only ones, um, in South Africa for that matter. Or on the continent. And it's really important that we make an effort and invest time and energy into building those relationships with our partners in other countries in SADEC and on the continent, more widely part of that can be done through using existing mechanisms.

[00:42:59] So for [00:43:00] example, the UCT is a member of ARUA, the African Research University Alliance, and a number number of other consortia related to knowledge production. And I think we need to capitalize on that as the Bertha Center, we need to reach out and find out who are the other business schools, who are the other universities who are focused on social enterprise, who are focused on inclusive innovation and who are looking in their contexts that trying to marry the two. And I think there's a lot for us to learn and a lot for us to share.

[00:43:33] **Simnikiwe Xanga :** Now let's look back Ntombini to 2020. You arrived in quite an innovative. With your fresh perspective. Could you tell us what excites you most about the future of the Bertha Center

[00:43:46] **Ntombini Marrengane:** I think two things excite me about the future of the Bertha center first. Um, from an internal perspective, it's working with an incredible team, a dynamic team, really committed to the work that we're doing and [00:44:00] excited about finding new ways to contribute to the world that excites me a lot. Um, and then secondly, I think the. As I said mentioned before the entrepreneurial outlook of the center, the fact that really there are no limits on what we can do, and it's

about trying sometimes failing, but always learning. And that excites me as well.

[00:44:21] **Kentse Radebe:** With a focus on five specific areas including seeding, developing and diffusing alternatives with a transformative impact; connecting the dots to foster radical innovation in health; using finance to build the world we all want to live in; seeking real change for youth, and putting the power to change in the hands of schools...the Bertha Centre for Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship continues to build on a solid foundation and looks forward to how we can impact the world around us... empowering and equipping more changemakers to bring about upliftment, equality and lasting change.

Thank you for tuning in to season 2 of the **Just for a change**, powered by the Bertha Centre for Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship. If you're curious about what innovation is happening in Africa and the global south and who the movers and shakers behind these initiatives are, then make sure you subscribe so that you don't miss any of our upcoming episodes!