

S3, Ep. 2: Social innovation, a dive into the mind of a change-maker

[00:00:00] **Ntombini Marrengane:** How did you get to work today? Or if you're still in work-from-home mode, how did you take your kids to school or get to the grocery store? And when you stopped at a traffic light - do you ever think about who invented it? What about the coffee grinder you used to get your caffeine fix this morning?

[00:00:23] These are not things I think about too often. Still, the fact that most of us used at least one of these things this morning shows that we're surrounded by many innovations - many of which have become commonplace to us and may not even be considered the innovations they once were. What drives innovation? And something that interests me more particularly - what drives innovation that has a positive social impact? And the people behind these innovations? How do their minds work?

[00:00:57] Welcome, I am Ntombini Marrengane. In season three of the *Just for a Change* podcast I have conversations with change-makers, from South Africa and further afield. We hear from innovators, social entrepreneurs, industry leaders, activists and more about the work they do, and what makes them tick. We'll find out how they keep the fire burning when it comes to tackling some of the most - to use a systems change term - wicked problems - facing the world today. In an article published in the Financial Times in 2016 titled 'What makes inventors tick',

[00:01:38] two qualities are outlined, and I quote "— thinking beyond normal boundaries — and cognitive flexibility, which is the capacity to restructure ideas and see connections that others miss". Not everyone is wired this way, but those who are are often the ones driving society forward. I was reading recently about an incredible innovation by Kenyan Roy Allela.

[00:02:04] His niece was born deaf and the family found it challenging to communicate with her as none of them knew sign language. To address this he invented a set of smart gloves that convert sign language movements into audio speech. Individuals who channel this creative and divergent thinking to find novel solutions to social issues

[00:02:25] well, in my view, they are worth their weight in gold. Tracey Gilmore is one such person and a true social innovator. Amongst other things, she co-founded The Clothing Bank in 2010. Their mission at The Clothing Bank is to empower unemployed South Africans to become financially and socially independent, by nurturing and supporting them to start sustainable businesses.

[00:02:49] The Clothing Bank has recently been rebranded to Taking Care of Business and no doubt we'll hear why in the next little while. Tracey is the change-maker joining me for today's conversation. and it's a great privilege for me to welcome her.

[00:03:05] **Tracey Gilmore:** Hi Ntombini, thank you very much. It's lovely to be here.

[00:03:09] **Ntombini Marrengane:** Thank you so much for joining me today. You're the co-founder of The Clothing Bank, now known as Taking Care of Business and you're a director of the African Centre for a Green Economy - wow, this must all keep you fairly busy!

[00:03:22] **Tracey Gilmore:** It does. Life is very busy and that river keeps flowing under my feet.

[00:03:28] **Ntombini Marrengane:** Awesome. You've worked with the World Economic Forum as well as the Women's Economic Forum and you received a Social Entrepreneur award from the Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship in 2016 as well as the Western Cape Premier's award in 2017. An incredibly impressive resume and I'm so excited to find out more about your work,

[00:03:48] where it started and as the title of this podcast suggests - to find out more about how you think and what makes you tick. Let's dive in. Tracey, take me back to where it all started. What

were you like as a child? Did you have a big imagination? And what did you daydream about?

[00:04:06] **Tracey Gilmore:** Yes. You know, I grew up in a very stable, safe home with very kind parents. [00:04:13] So it was, it was amazing journey actually in my childhood. I did find school quite intimidating cuz you know, teachers can be quite strict and I found it a bit overwhelming, particularly in junior school. And um, in high school I met a teacher of ours called John Gilmore, spelt differently to me, and he taught geography. And he would close the door and he cracked us into consciousness in the eighties.

[00:04:35] And he told us the truth about the country that we were living in and how we needed to make radical change. And that's really how my journey started is with John Gilmore being this incredible role model and our hero.

[00:04:47] **Ntombini Marrengane:** That's amazing. How did you react as a young student hearing the truth about what was going on in South Africa?

[00:04:53] **Tracey Gilmore:** It was a little overwhelming and a little bit like, you know, um, when we, and when we look at the big circle of concern, we don't realize we could have any [00:05:00] influence there. So as, as time went on, as I got older and started to work and started to see things that were also happening in the corporate industry that also made me uncomfortable.

[00:05:11] Then I started to really think, what could we do? How could we help unemployed south Africans just in general? How can we sort of start empowering people or just connecting people to opportunities really? And, um, I started a small business, a hand-weaving business. I had 12 women weaving rugs. We used to, we used off cuts of, of t-shirts.

[00:05:31] And I was in my early cities at that stage. And I actually didn't know what I didn't know, and I couldn't make the business work. So I had to close it down and I was hoping to try and connect our weavers with other job opportunities. And that's also where I realized that unemployment problem is structural.

[00:05:47] And how I couldn't connect women with, with jobs so, or interviews. So I started to collect clothing for people to go to job interviews, and then I realized, oh my goodness, there's a huge amount of clothing out there. And how could we use this [00:06:00] clothing as an empowerment tool for women to start running a business?

[00:06:03] And that's when I met my partner, Tracy Chambers.

[00:06:07] **Ntombini Marrengane:** Fantastic. You say you didn't know what you didn't know. So what kept you from getting frustrated when you were trying to, to, to push your, your carpet business?

[00:06:15] **Tracey Gilmore:** I was trying to market the business and trying to negotiate. I didn't have great negotiation skills and I also didn't have enough of a, of a financial background on how to make it work.

[00:06:26] So that's where I really, and I, I didn't also know who to reach out to. And being a young mom with three children, I was also feeling a bit stressed. Like I needed to just generate some kind of a revenue or income and get a job.

[00:06:38] **Ntombini Marrengane:** I just wanted just, just to go back, um, because it, so this car, this rug business, wasn't just a side project. [00:06:48] Or how can I give back project? It was actually your main income?

[00:06:52] **Tracey Gilmore:** Yes, it was a business at that point.

[00:06:58] **Ntombini Marrengane:** So why did you naturally decide to include other people? Why didn't you do something else?

[00:07:00] **Tracey Gilmore:** I've absolutely always wanted to make things inclusive. How do we connect everybody?

[00:07:05] And I had done a course called the adventures of living, and that course was the most powerful course I've ever been on. It was really helping you to figure out what your purpose was and

how do you get that passion and how do you just have trust and faith that you can make things happen? It was an incredible course.

[00:07:24] **Ntombini Marrengane:** I read this about you online - "Tracey's life's passion has been to participate fully, be present and available to help South Africa build an inclusive society that encourages equal access to opportunities and financial freedom for all. She is an ideas person and has started various small businesses with varied success" - now to me, that is the definition of a changemaker. Tell me about your work as a changemaker in South Africa and what moves you to do the work you do?

[00:07:55] **Tracey Gilmore:** You know, there's always, always incidences or, or experiences that you [00:08:00] have along the journey. And one of the most powerful experiences that I've had is when we first set up the clothing bank, we would often get students coming over from Stanford University to volunteer, and they would volunteer in various different organizations.

[00:08:13] And obviously they were all staying together and kind of all friends. And at one time we had, uh, two young women working with us as volunteers, and we had two young men working at an ECD centre in Kayelitsha and this young man started to write a book about the children. And, you know, the best thing is to ask children because children speak the truth.

[00:08:30] So he started asking these questions. And one of the questions that like really was such an aha moment for me was saying to children, oh, what is it like living in Cape Town? And their response was, oh, no, well, we don't live in Cape Town, we live in Kayelitsha. And that was like, wow, how profound is that? Cuz the children are not feeling connected to the city that gave their birth.

[00:08:52] You know, so that also kept me, kept me really thinking about how do we open up opportunities for people and the, [00:09:00] household at the core of our economy? So we need to support people. Mom's, dad's, children. So we're always saying to

ourselves that our, our, our purpose is to empower and support people who are raising the next generation.

[00:09:14] **Ntombini Marrengane:** On the TCB website, it says “Innovation to create social change is deliberate”. Talk to me about this and also, what do you think it means to build an inclusive society?

[00:09:27] **Tracey Gilmore:** So for us, it's very much, we talk about everything, everyone being pieces in a puzzle. So we are all human beings and we are all under construction.

[00:09:37] So how do we work together to get to our end result? And do we know what that end result is? So it's very important for us. We met a woman called Vivian Schultz about 10 years ago, and we were feeling very overwhelmed cuz we were working so hard and just about to be exhausted and fortunately Tracy and I were having bad days on different days so we could carry each other through the process.

[00:09:57] And Vivian basically looked at us and said, you know what, [00:10:00] guys, you are the flies in the ointment because you're not empowering anybody. You are disempowering people because what you're doing is you're saying, oh, don't worry, “I'll do that for.” So you're not building a program that has ‘I CAN’ moments. And that was another aha moment found change that we had.

[00:10:16] And we understood that we had to structure our program that actually met people where they're at. And then we moved forward just a little bit out of comfort zone and, and you see over a two year period, you see so much happening internally, but we had to do the self work first. It was so, so important to do.

[00:10:34] **Ntombini Marrengane:** ‘I CAN’ moments sound very powerful. And I think it probably pulls against the temptation. Um, as your colleague pointed out to you to overcompensate and over-help in a way, how did you start teaching yourself to pull back?

[00:10:48] **Tracey Gilmore:** It was tricky. So I had to, I had to be intentional about it and stop myself from wanting to rescue everything all the time.

[00:10:57] **Ntombini Marrengane:** And did you then see a greater level [00:11:00] of commitment from the people you were working with because you were, you were taking your hands off to a certain extent? Were they able then to move closer and help themselves?

[00:11:08] **Tracey Gilmore:** Absolutely. There was so much change then, and you just saw people responding so much to opportunities and to challenges.

[00:11:15] So everything's about becoming response-able we say, so that you could see the change happening there very, very fast.

[00:11:23] **Ntombini Marrengane:** Yeah, I would imagine it must be really amazing to watch a transformation in a person who comes feeling like they've, they've got all these barriers in front of them, and then you sort of point them in the right direction and they start. [00:11:35] Um, walking on their own and get much further than they ever thought they could be.

[00:11:40] **Tracey Gilmore:** Absolutely. It's about putting the tools down. It's about creating a holistic program. So we're very much focus on the coaching so that that's the personal development and as you were talking about the barriers, how do I overcome them?

[00:11:53] Then the mentoring more focuses on your basic business skills. Cause record-keeping can always be quite a challenge and, and running businesses. So we focus [00:12:00] on that and then we do a proper structured program, which is about financial and, and business training as well as life skills training. But even, even with all of that, the most powerful component is building relationships with each other.

[00:12:15] It's creating friendships. So those, those safe social spaces where people are meeting new people, having a cup of tea

together, having conversations together, I might be really good at keeping records. You might be really good at selling. So it's that collaborating and sharing. I find that the social space is so, so important and it's very, very critical to create an ecosystem where people can heal. [00:12:37] It's a safe environment with structure.

[00:12:40] **Ntombini Marrengane:** I think, I think you've really touched on something very important there. The, the access to social capital that comes with these opportunities is not something that's often measured in entrepreneurship programs, right? But without the social capital, you actually don't make progress. [00:12:57] Um, can I ask you what you've learned from [00:13:00] all the different small businesses you've started?

[00:13:01] **Tracey Gilmore:** I've learned a lot about collaboration and those power partnerships that we form are so powerful and people are actually very willing to share their knowledge. So that's what has also been an incredible journey that we've seen.

[00:13:17] Um, so we reach out cuz you don't know everything and we can't all go. We, we have to, we all, we all make mistakes. So we can learn from each other cuz we can't all make the same mistakes over and over again. It's not enough time for that. We've gotta get moving. We've just gotta share. We always say like it's so good.

[00:13:34] Fail fast and fail forward quickly and cheaply.

[00:13:39] **Ntombini Marrengane:** Exactly. So maybe you can share with us now how The Clothing Bank started? And perhaps also give us a snapshot of the journey from that to your new rebranded identity - Taking Care of Business.

[00:13:52] **Tracey Gilmore:** Yes, thank you for that. So, so the clothing bank was set up in February, 2010 when I had partnered with Tracy Chambers and her background [00:14:00] is a financial background.

[00:14:01] She was actually the head of finance for Woolworths. So she's a systems person. A very, very strong woman. And I used to

meet her at a, at social spaces and I always used to go and pick her brains. Cuz I knew that she had so much to offer and eventually she said, okay, we'll go for a cup of coffee. So we had a cup of coffee and I sort of shared.

[00:14:19] My passion with her and the understanding of, oh, there's this excess stock in the retail supply chain. And of course, Tracy. How much stock there was because she'd worked with one of the big retailers and we started to discuss how we could use this as this opportunity for unemployed women to start trading businesses.

[00:14:38] So very quickly, Woolworths came on board straight away. It was a very good relationship that, that we have with them ever since 2010. And we just recruited 20 women into our program. And the city of Cape Town gave us some space at the back of a children's home, like a, like a triple garage. So, okay, here we go.

[00:14:54] We've got some space and some stuff, and we recruited 20 women through the volunteer centre, [00:15:00] and then that's how the journeys began. And so quickly, all other doors started to open. People, came and volunteered to coach, people volunteered to mentor, people volunteer to create the learning content. So over time, that's, what's how it's kind of expanded over time.

[00:15:15] And then we started to get some funding and Edgars asked us to open a branch in Johannesburg. Mr. Price asked us to open a, a branch in Durban, and that's how we managed, managed to scale the program. So now we are at the point where we can support a thousand women at any given time through our two-year journey.

[00:15:32] And we have about 500 active graduates who are very active, still in the trading business. There are other graduates who are now running completely different businesses. Who've got a lady in Johannesburg who owns a tipper truck. Who've got someone else who started a beauty salon cuz the skills that you're learning you can put into any business.

[00:15:49] So that was part, part of the journey is how we've grown. And then over time we started to get other, other retail waste. For example, we are getting appliances from the Clicks [00:16:00] Group and then we decided to recruit men into our program and give them the same core program as the clothing bank, but adding on the technical skills and how do I repair an appliance?

[00:16:11] So anything from a kettle all the way to a fridge, we don't do the gassing of the fridge, but all the way to a fridge and how can we help men? And that's become an, an absolute passion project of mine because the men need their dignity restored. And the minute your anxiety drops, you start making healthy decisions and it's such a powerful program.

[00:16:30] And then we started to get excess fabric as well. So now we've started a program where we can recruit seamstresses and give them access to nice cheap, raw materials and focus a little bit on micro manufacturing businesses there. So the whole thing is about extending the life of, of, of dead stock. Really.

[00:16:47] That's what we are kind of. So the name, the clothing bank was actually kind of limiting us. So that's where we needed to change it to taking care of business.

[00:16:55] **Ntombini Marrengane:** Many times people tend to separate the more 'more profit'/capitalist economy from social impact work - but I think you see this differently. Can you talk to me about business as a tool in the social economy?

[00:17:07] **Tracey Gilmore:** Yes. So we really do feel that if we look at our theory of change, it'd be focusing on the personal growth, the professional development, and we really do want financial independence to happen. So capitalism is a, is the solution there, and self-employment is definitely a solution to our unemployment crisis, but can we find a way to work in a regenerative economy?

[00:17:30] Not constantly extracting, extracting, and possibly we've gotta be a little bit like what Kate Raworth talks about is being agnostic about growth, focus, more on being sustainable. And

I mean, Kate Raworth is a massive hero of mine. She's got that Doughnut economics and she talks about creating this safe space for people to, to live in so that we are not, we, we, so we sort of plugging the gaps in the social foundation and we are not keeping on extending the social, the, the, the planetary boundaries.

[00:17:59] She talks [00:18:00] about that, and it just makes so much sense. Everything that she's sort of talks about.

[00:18:05] **Ntombini Marrengane:** And what has been the feedback when you first started, for example, going beyond clothing, um, into these other, into these other retail sectors? Was there a lot of appetite at first? How was that transition?

[00:18:18] **Tracey Gilmore:** We haven't, um, you know, we are obviously very reliant on feeder stock and with the appliance sector, it's not as easy to get the same level of stock as we can within the, the clothing sector.

[00:18:29] So it is a bit limited and we are always looking at how can we scale that program because it's a real repair skill now. So we're trying to empower the guys to understand that it's not just about trading. It's also about repairing. So that's where we're trying to focus on there. So it, it does just constrain us a little bit, which has now made us understand that we've gotta start thinking about how do we pivot? How do we start finding other opportunities to connect people to?

[00:18:53] **Ntombini Marrengane:** Absolutely. Many times it's hard not to be overwhelmed when looking at all the challenges we face both at home and internationally - but it seems to me that where others see challenges, you see opportunity. Can you tell me a little bit more about that?

[00:19:07] **Tracey Gilmore:** Yes. You know, we've gotta look at solutions. So we are very solution-focused, um, and in listening to ideas and being open to hearing ideas, and sometimes an idea might sound, 'oh, it's crazy.'

[00:19:22] But 10% of that idea has got something in it. So just being open to, to listening and capitalizing on what people are contributing. So we are very much open to we've got incredible branch managers, incredible program managers who are always coming. They're on the ground. They're hearing they're listening on the ground and that's the thing is just engaging all the time is very important.

[00:19:45] **Ntombini Marrengane:** And what's that process been like finding those people to, to man the stations on the ground while you and your partner do more strategic level work?

[00:19:53] **Tracey Gilmore:** Yeah, we've actually been so fortunate in that space. Very passionate people are working with us. [00:20:00] So, um, we, we have strong retention rates. We, we have, you know, our staff members have been with us for almost 10, 12 years. [00:20:08] Most of our management team have.

[00:20:10] **Ntombini Marrengane:** Are they also coming from the private sector or are they coming from the social economic sector?

[00:20:14] **Tracey Gilmore:** It's different. So some have come from private sector and some are, are from social economy. Yes. It's quite diverse. It's a nice, diverse team.

[00:20:25] **Ntombini Marrengane:** Hmm How has your thinking about social innovation and social justice developed and changed over the past years?

[00:20:32] **Tracey Gilmore:** You know, sometimes it can be overwhelming and it can be intimidating, uh, to be part of the world economic forum conversations and that kind of thing. It can, you can't feel a bit vulnerable in that space, but I think it's to allow yourself to be vulnerable is, is actually very important because you learn so much from other people.

[00:20:49] Um, so it's critical to do that and just being open, you know, um, we, we need to, also, as I mentioned earlier, we all pieces in the puzzle, so we've got to really listen properly.

[00:21:00] It's not just about us saying this is what needs to happen. I mean, I can give you an example of that. We're having a, a conversation the other day with a whole lot ladies thinking, okay, what else can we do?

[00:21:08] So I said, well, if there's other revenue streams, why don't we go and get someone in to come and show us how to do pickled onions? And they were like, Tracey, we don't eat pickled onions. so, you know, you've got you. Okay. You've got to listen.

[00:21:26] **Ntombini Marrengane:** But it sounds like what makes it work is this willingness is to, um, constantly question um, and as you say, listen, and hear back the answer, even when it's not exactly what you were hoping for.

[00:21:40] **Tracey Gilmore: Yes, exactly.**

[00:21:43] **Ntombini Marrengane:** What have been the pivotal mindsets or approaches that you've needed to engage with to build what you've done so far?

[00:21:50] **Tracey Gilmore:** [00:21:51] So I would say definitely Vivian Schultz, who helped us really do a lot of self-reflection and now we've been able to scale that whole program out. So [00:22:00] we've, it starts like from our selection process right through the two year journey and all of our staff members, all of our management team, all of our beneficiaries, we're all involved in that journey together, which is a very powerful, and then another person who also really helped us understand a lot was a chap called [inaudible] and he talks about care and growth.

[00:22:21] And sometimes when you're working in the environment that we are working in, it's easy to care and when you're working in a corporate, it's easy to grow, but if you're not growing, are you caring? So he kind of also challenged us there. So that was also really very insightful for us to understand the balance between care and growth and everything is about having a balance because we also also gotta have boundaries in place.

[00:22:42] **Ntombini Marrengane:** That's a really powerful idea because it is quite easy to just focus on growth. Um, And not put the same level of effort into the care agenda as there is in the growth agenda. The Clothing Bank is a member of the African Circular Economy Network. Can you tell me more about the circular economy and how it links to creating sustainable, equitable and just systems?

[00:23:06] **Tracey Gilmore:** Yes. So the Africa circular economy network is actually quite amazing. It's a network of people all over Africa, also trying to support the planet and people at the same time. So it's creating this kind of knowledge commons and sharing ideas with each other. I actually only joined them a year ago, so it's still is an early journey, but they really also understand that in Africa, circularity has been around for decades and we, we must accept that and acknowledge that.

[00:23:36] Because, you know, sometimes we are coming in with all these different solutions and people have been repurposing products for decades and don't underestimate that. And we must make sure that the social everyone's involved, that the society is involved in this journey. And we are at a place now, like at a point where we need with climate change happening, we need to make a decision what we're gonna do.

[00:23:57] And we can't keep doing the same thing over and over
[00:24:00] again. We've gotta make changes, but it's not easy. It's not easy, especially when you're sitting in developing countries that need revenue coming in. So it is really hard. So it's nice working with everybody on the same page and really, as I said, just sharing ideas and being very, very much open to seeing what these opportunities are.

[00:24:17] **Ntombini Marrengane:** Where does fast fashion fit into the picture. And how do you at TCB think about this industry?

[00:24:26] **Tracey Gilmore:** Yes. So we've always obviously been involved with extending the life of products that we have, we get from our retail partners. And that's been a great journey, but also over the years, we've noticed now that, you know, in South Africa,

there's a lot of stock sitting in, in our SARS warehouses that has been confiscated from our harbors, like hundreds of tons of merchandise sitting there.

[00:24:50] So stock is sneaking through our borders and getting dumped here. And it's quite that that's actually quite scary. So I very much want us to focus [00:25:00] on South African products and what's happening here. Cause a lot of our retailers are also now going and setting up their own CMT factories in South Africa, which is creating jobs.

[00:25:10] So I feel very strongly about supporting that sector cause it is job creation. I mean, if we think about, um, Checkers and how they've created 2000 jobs for the, for the men that are delivering on their 60/60. It's incredible. So I have respect for our retail partners. I really, really do because they're looking for solutions, but we've gotta be careful about importing stock into South Africa.

[00:25:35] It's can be a bit scary if you look at what's happened in Ghana and the dump site that it's become. All the textiles is actually quite overwhelming. So there are organizations that are trying to, um, repurpose these textile waste into Yarn. So they can start making further fabrics, but it isn't, it's not easy.

[00:25:55] You know, if it was cotton, it's fine, you can do it. But because it's half of us are wearing [00:26:00] plastic most of the time now, not textiles. Um, it's not, it's, it's not easy to do it that way. So people are looking for solutions. Um, and lots of people are making bedding and things out of, out of textile waste by crushing it. [00:26:14] And making mattresses and that kind of thing.

[00:26:16] **Ntombini Marrengane:** I think it's really interesting because you're saying that the South African manufacturers are now wanting to put, uh, bring textile production back to South Africa, which is great, but we still have to solve the problem that you've identified. Um, and with stock sitting in harbors, and the stock of South African retailers not moving, um, at the pace that they'd like, sounds like there's a huge opportunity there for the right person or group of people.

[00:26:49] So you're a pioneer in this field and there are so many layers, but what I'm really keen to hear about is your experience as a woman in business and [00:27:00] leadership. You've come with these really interesting and creative ideas. And how have you been received? What's been your experience when you go to speak to, um, the Clicks Group or the Woolworth group [00:27:13] Um, and you find yourself in front of a boardroom of men?

[00:27:16] **Tracey Gilmore:** Yes, you've got to be very resilient. And, and, and keep trying to build relationships, cuz it does not happen overnight. You have to just have the tenacity to keep, you know, even if you're sending an email every three months, just keep doing that.

[00:27:35] So it's building relationships and over the last two years, it has been tricky because things have gone very much online. And I really feel in person relationships much. Because you can connect at a deeper level. So it's very, but it is important to just keep, keep your grit and like keep going and just really believe in what you're doing.

[00:27:55] And people will respond, cuz people are busy. So we also judge ourselves a [00:28:00] lot. We judge, judge, judge ourselves, and then we judge other people. We judge situations and it's like managing that judge. That's important. Manage that judge. And then you can start building those relationships.

[00:28:10] **Ntombini Marrengane:** That's something that's really important and probably an underplayed part of business. [00:28:15] Right? We always think of having the really solid business plan, the very, um, attractive financials, but we don't think about building the relationship and getting someone not only to believe in your idea, but believe in their contribution towards your idea.

[00:28:34] **Tracey Gilmore:** Absolutely. So it's, it's having that, the ambassador in the organizations that you're partnering with that really pushes your agenda for you because you you've got shared values. That's so important.

[00:28:46] **Ntombini Marrengane:** I think the one word that keeps coming into my mind is when I'm thinking about your story is tenacity. Because it sounds like not only are you introducing new ideas into these corporate [00:29:00] spaces, but like you've said, you've gotta take it step by step to build a relationship. And that requires a lot of staying power. [00:29:09] In addition to business knowledge and passion for the idea.

[00:29:12] **Tracey Gilmore:** You also have to find a win-win solutions. So you also need to understand the landscape and how can you support them. So, for example, with group reverse logistics, so we were able to go and collect their waste merchandise within 48 hours from their warehouse or from back of store wherever.

[00:29:30] So it's also that win-win so. And obviously this whole circular economy conversation is happening and with a broad based economic empowerment, that's also critical for people to adhere to certain things. So we can do that win-win relationship.

[00:29:46] **Ntombini Marrengane:** So how did you find out what was gonna be a win for them?

[00:29:51] **Tracey Gilmore:** Yeah, that's, that's all about exploring. So that is like, you can see the bigger picture, but you need to have context around everything that you're wanting to achieve, you [00:30:00] need to have context. Yeah.

[00:30:01] **Ntombini Marrengane:** I think when you, when you, when you hit on that formula, you really, you really do something remarkable. So in the example you're giving the retailer wanted the stock gone, [00:30:12] You wanted the stock, and so you were both able to get what you wanted.

[00:30:18] **Tracey Gilmore:** Um, and I think our retail partners also understand that we need to grow our country. We need to, if they want to grow their businesses, we've gotta grow our country. We need to grow economy. Yeah. And if you think about South Africa, retailers, international retailers, don't do what they do.

[00:30:33] I mean, it's very generous. The amount of stock they're giving us, we do have to rebrand the stock, but we've just gotta cut through the label. So it's still going out into the market to be traded and a lot of big retailers in the clothing industry internationally don't want that to happen.

[00:30:47] **Ntombini Marrengane:** Wow. So south African retailers are actually pioneering along with you and what you do and taking care of business.

[00:30:54] That that's amazing. I didn't know that. I'd love for you to [00:31:00] share any encouragement or advice you may have for aspiring social innovators out there, or anyone who longs to make some sort of positive impact on the world around them. What, what words would you give them?

[00:31:13] **Tracey Gilmore:** Um, I, I always say, do do your research. I mean, Google's got so many answers on it. [00:31:19] Um, and then of course it's about having a clear vision of what your end result is. And then understanding that change is gonna happen. It's like we have to adapt to that. So it's just, it's, it's seeing that bigger picture, understanding the context, having a clear vision of what you want to achieve and then building your vision and mission into that.

[00:31:40] And you don't have to have a theory of change straight away when you set up, we've only developed our theory of change over the about eight years. We decided on what that was. So it's not something you just have to have straight away because you, we have to adapt. And, and grow our networks.

[00:31:55] **Ntombini Marrengane:** Tracey, thank you so much for your time today and the way you've shared your story and your work.[00:32:00] [00:32:00] Um, it's really been insightful.

[00:32:02] **Tracey Gilmore:** No, it's an absolute pleasure. Thank you so much. It's been a great.

[00:32:07] **Ntombini Marrengane:** We're closing out this episode, hearing from some of the men and women who are beneficiaries

of taking care of business. We ask them how TCB has impacted their lives and what it's enabled them to do.

[00:32:22] **Voice Note 1:** TCB has impacted me in a, in a huge way, in a positive way. [00:32:26] Uh, in a sense that, uh, before joining TCB, I was, uh, busy doing piece jobs. Uh, I didn't have a steady job, so my life, uh, was upside down, was going up and down because the piece jobs would come and not come. But now I have, uh, a steady income. Uh, my life is much better. We have the, all our needs covered at my house. [00:32:56] My children have clothing. Uh, they have food, [00:33:00] uh, my life is, uh, is, is well. It's it's okay now I'm okay now.

[00:33:15] **Voice Note 2:** Cause when I started I was in a state whereby from here to zero. I was depressed. I had no hope. And then TCB gave me back the Lindiwe that died for a couple of years. So it made me stronger to know what I want and go for what I want especially financially, cause now I'm financially independent.

[00:33:21] **Voice Note 3:** Before I joined TCB, it was a difficult, uh, to me because I was, uh, before I was working before, before I left my job, it was, uh, difficult when, uh, I go to work, I have to borrow the money to go to work. And then at the end of the month, I pay the, the money back and then I left with nothing. But since I joined TCB, [00:34:00] eh, I'm doing many things myself and I'm not depending to anyone and I didn't borrow the money since I joined TCB. If I borrow the money, I borrow the money in, uh, to increasing, uh, the bill of my business.

[00:34:14] **Ntombini Marrengane:** Thank you for tuning in to season 3 of the **Just for a change** podcast, powered by the Bertha Centre for Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship. If you're interested in hearing more conversations with change-makers, then make sure you subscribe to this podcast so that you don't miss any of our upcoming episodes! If you've enjoyed this content, I'd also like to invite you to rate and review it wherever you listen to your podcasts and feel free to share it with your friends, family and colleagues. Let's stay inspired and keep changing the way we're changing the world.

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