

S'onqoba Vuba, Chief Partnerships Officer, NEXT176

Passion for empowering emerging economies and underserved communities

S'onqoba Vuba is making her mark as the Chief Partnerships Officer at NEXT176, a dynamic subsidiary of Old Mutual that is focused on creating shared value for emerging economies and underserved communities. With 13 years of experience spanning various financial services institutions, Vuba brings a wealth of insight to her leadership role.

Having worked in both large corporations and tech startups, Vuba understands the vital connection needed between the two to drive disruptive and sustainable growth, particularly for underserved customers.

"Our work at this forward-thinking workspace revolves around effective partnerships that bring out the best in both types of institutions, while prioritising the customer at the core. This approach allows us to address customer needs, ensure their financial security, and even anticipate their future requirements for timely provision of relevant and fit-for-purpose embedded financial services solutions".

Dedicated to their vision, the team at NEXT176 consistently seeks innovative ways to bring their purpose of building disruptive and sustainable businesses to positively impact one billion lives, to life in their daily operations.

"Analysing customer behaviour provides us with significant insights into the financial services and other needs we should strive to fulfil," Vuba explains. "For example, if a customer frequently shops at a particular retailer, we can enhance their experience by collaborating with that retailer to secure the best funding, savings and insurance deals for them. Customer data guides us in understanding their challenges and helps us offer appropriate solutions".

These needs can be conscious or subconscious, ranging from financial management to credit improvement within the context of the current cost-of-living crisis. NEXT176's partnerships are built on the strength of this knowledge, collaborating with sectors possessing different consumer data and bringing together our shared capabilities to solve consumer pain points.

"This is how we excel in proactively identifying gaps, responding to client and customer needs, and introducing solutions to address them," she enthusiastically adds.

Vuba is committed to supporting women on her team to overcome future challenges. While she acknowledges her own hurdles as a young, black woman from a disadvantaged background, she emphasises that her story is not unique in the South African context.

"Today, I am privileged to be where I am, and part of that privilege is the responsibility to give back. Alongside this, I'm committed to stepping up boldly to address the work needed now, so that fewer people in the future experience the challenges I've faced".

During Vuba's 13-year journey within the financial services industry, she's witnessed ground-breaking changes.

"Women are playing a powerful role in this space. Not only are we often the primary financial decision-makers in households, but we are also increasingly represented in senior organisational structures".

While acknowledging progress, Vuba believes that equity remains a frontier that needs attention.
"While equality ensures everyone receives the same treatment, equity asks: what does each individual require to achieve their full potential?"

Diversity holds immense value in the workplace, boosting productivity, wellbeing, and the bottom line. Vuba believes embracing diversity fosters more responsive solutions, particularly as Africa's diverse backdrop offers unique challenges and opportunities.

She passionately supports NEXT176's purpose to positively impact one billion lives through disruptive and sustainable ventures. However, she acknowledges the excitement and real challenge this ambitious goal brings.

The nexus between established corporations and dynamic startups holds the potential to establish sustainable businesses that bring about transformation at both the macro level, impacting the continent, and the micro level, touching the lives of ordinary individuals.

“Our work involves the hard task of including the excluded and serving the underserved. This is the mission the NEXT176 team has embraced”.

Collaboration is a central tenet of their approach, reimagining possibilities to truly impact a billion lives. Vuba believes that everyone brings something to the table, and only through collaborative efforts can new horizons be explored.

“As long as some are underserved or excluded from financial services, our role is to bridge those gaps and help those communities to also flourish. Our work extends beyond fintech solutions, to education, healthcare, environmental sustainability, jobs, debt management and small business development”.

Self-care, Vuba believes, is an ongoing journey and not a destination. She advocates for women to prioritise their wellbeing, as it directly impacts their ability to excel in various roles.

While celebrating the strengths of women, she encourages them not to overlook self-care. Vuba finds herself having tougher conversations around wellbeing with women, which she believes is vital for them to perform at their best in all aspects of life.

Vuba’s previous involvement in the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) national plan, through the Presidential Commission on 4IR, excites her. She stresses the need to embrace technological solutions to address challenges and leverage technology's potential, while ensuring we bridge the skills divide.

As a wife, mother, and professional, Vuba navigates the challenges of balancing various roles. She acknowledges the importance of support systems in filling gaps and enabling her to strive for her version of success.

Vuba looks forward to guiding her son and his generation towards an inclusive and equitable society. She emphasises that a society's success lies in harnessing diverse strengths and differences.

In the end, Vuba's mission is to ensure everyone's voice is heard at the table, driving positive change for a billion lives.

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