

Linsen Nambi makes waves in maritime scene

Owners of Linsen Nambi, Durand Naidoo and Thuso Mhlambi have realised a lifelong ambition by becoming the first 100% black-owned ship-owners in South Africa.



L to R President Cyril Ramaphosa, Durand Naidoo and Thuso Mhlambi

The 33-year-old owners of Linsen Nambi, the company they started in 2012, made maritime history as youth owners when they bought Grindrod's Unicorn Bunker Services.

With their female empowerment partners, Women in Oil and Energy (WOESA), they became the role model for the government's initiative to unlock transformation in the maritime – and liquid fuels – industries.

Says founding member of Linsen Nambi, Durand Naidoo, "Linsen Nambi is a 100% black youth owned shipping company with highly skilled maritime professionals, strong customer relationships and owns its own ships. Therefore we are well placed for strategic acquisitions and organic growth to develop our infrastructure further."

He says the deal took a "concerted effort" from the private sector (Grindrod), government (IDC) and oil majors (BP, Engen and Chevron).

"It is unbelievable that it took this long, but is a first win for the recently legislated Combined Maritime Transport Policy,

which calls for black ownership in shipping.”

Linsen Nambi’s other founding member, Thuso Mhlambi said there was a great need for the private sector and the funding institutions to “better align themselves to Governments Development Plans to unlock more deals like ours”.

He added, “I would like to see the private sector opening up this space to new entrants, something that will facilitate the creation of employment.”

Future goals

Naidoo and Mhlambi have set a goal; to become the leading African shipping company with a global presence. They already employ 110 people, a number they hope to increase significantly as they grow the business.

Since the inception of Linsen Nambi six years ago, the company has bought three bunker vessels in the ports of Durban and Cape Town. These bunkers supply fuel to vessels.

Mhlambi says they are proud of their transformation successes: Seven out of 12 masters are black, all 12 chief officers and all 12 chief engineers in the company are black.

Initially, shipping company Linsen Nambi offered ship broking, marine surveying and consulting services.

Naidoo says he conducted shipping business across the African continent, visiting places that included Uganda, Sudan, Mozambique, Namibia and Zimbabwe.

“We were a service orientated business and as such we could not scale our business as we did not have assets and could not build a balance sheet.

“In 2014 Thuso and I took the decision to pivot our business model to become asset-based.” The business took off.

The South African shipping landscape

The men are in agreement that there is much work that needs to be done within the South African shipping landscape.

They feel it “severely lacks meaningful transformation and the economic inclusion of black people is minimal”. It is something they are determined to address within their company and work towards within the industry.

“During my career working for maritime companies, I observed that there were a handful of blacks (managers and employees), in positions with decision-making authority. I knew that I wouldn’t be able to fulfil my ambitions working for a shipping company,” says Naidoo.

Their disappointment stems from the fact that South Africa is among the top maritime nations in the world, in terms of the cargo volumes that move across seas.



New SA body established to manage marine pollution

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Mhlambi comments, “The Port of Durban is the busiest container port in Africa; the Port of Richard’s Bay is the busiest coal terminal in the world. You have only to consider the effect of mining commodities on the GDP, that can only be transported by sea, to understand how much of cargo moves across South Africa.”

Naidoo adds, "There is a saying in shipping that cargo is king. However, in South Africa, even though we have the lion's share of cargo, we do not have South African owned ships. China, Japan, Britain and India are examples of other maritime nations in the world with cargo movements such as ours, but which have ships registered in their country."

"South Africa is dominated by foreign-owned shipping companies which carry our cargo, resulting in a loss of GDP to our country."

Their vision is sweeping and includes the beneficiation of South Africa's long coastline.

"The oceans can feed us and provide us with a livelihood, yet it remains locked with high barriers of entry for new entrants to participate.

"South Africa suffers from a high unemployment rate, yet most black people have never considered working at sea onboard vessels, because most of these positions are not advertised in South Africa," Naidoo said.



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He added that efforts are afoot to change this and that government has launched initiatives, including Operation Phakisa, to kick start the oceans economy. It is estimated that the oceans can contribute R177bnn to the South African GDP.

The men call their partnership with the women-owned WOESA "amazing."

"They give us the support and trust that we need to run the business. We selected WOESA as our partner on this deal because like ourselves – as black youth – black women have been marginalised in the South African economy. Therefore it was easy to sell them on the vision of reforming a sector that has been slow to change." says Mhlambi.

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