

# UCT centre recognised for pioneering work in creating social impact

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The Bertha Centre for Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship, a specialised unit at the UCT Graduate School of Business (GSB), has recently been awarded two prestigious awards for its work in creating social change.

The Bertha Centre, comprising its staff and Bertha Scholars, has been awarded the [UCT Vice-Chancellor's Social Responsiveness Award](#) for 2015. The award, established in 2009, recognises UCT academics who demonstrate that social engagement has enhanced the teaching and learning process. This is one of the university's priorities, and one of the highest honours it has to confer.

The centre was chosen for its engaged research and innovative response to social challenges across several critical sectors. Since its launch in 2011, it has established numerous programmes and initiatives that are creating inclusive business opportunities and advancing social justice in the country and continent.

According to Walter Baets, director of the GSB, the work of the Bertha Centre plays a central role in advancing the GSB's agenda to be a relevant and excellent emerging market business school. "They demonstrate that 'business as usual' can and must make way for new ways of doing things that make a positive difference to society," he said.

The Bertha team has uncovered over 300 innovative models and solutions in education, health and other social impact fields; convened over 5,000 citizens and practitioners across sectors; tested the feasibility of innovative social solutions; and produced over 12 formal knowledge outputs from this work in publicly available reports and journal articles, in addition to numerous student theses and media articles.

"Social innovation is an emerging academic, trans-disciplinary field that is rooted in practice, which seeks to apply innovative thinking and business acumen towards accelerating social outcomes. It is a complex human-centered process," said dr François Bonnici, the founding director of the Bertha Centre.

Bonnici, a UCT medical school alumnus has also this month been awarded the Social Innovation Leadership Award by the [Africa Leadership Awards](#) organisation. This is the first year the organisation has conferred the award. Part of the criteria to be nominated and considered for this award includes: the generation of new ways of thinking; the creation, development, adoption, and integration of new concepts and displaying an understanding that there is no simple recipe for success. This is the second pan-African award for Bonnici, who in 2013 was also recognised as an Archbishop Tutu African Leadership Fellow.

Marlon Parker, founder of R-Labs, a social enterprise that works in marginalised communities and townships, endorsed the Bertha Centre's achievements. Parker said the centre had been instrumental in the work of RLabs and many other social enterprises across South Africa. "We realised that in order for us to increase social impact, that it would be important to find likeminded organisations with the same mission to drive social change. This is where the Bertha Centre plays a big role," he said.

"Social innovation is not about individuals developing new ideas, but rather exploring how to organise ourselves for collective action and good; around a shared, inclusive, sustainable future," Bonnici said.

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