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UCT student presents solution to food waste

A UCT masters student and her team have won an international innovation competition after creating a solution to minimise food waste through a mobile app. This app, known as Bagzielicous, allows consumers to track the expiry date of perishable items they have purchased to avoid waste.

Maryjane Mokgethi (25) says: "The system is focused on developed countries in particular, where food waste is more prevalent. The intention is to create awareness around food waste and to change consumer behaviour. Some people are not conscious of food waste, and we hope to change this. Many people are socially conscious, but with busy schedules and modern life their behaviour and purchasing patterns lead to waste."

Mokgethi, a MCom student at UCT, has just returned from the UN Global Compact Leaders Summit, which took place in the iconic Midtown Manhattan in September. Earlier this year, she entered the UN Global Compact's Breakthrough Innovation Challenge, which aims to bring together "young entrepreneurs from leading companies to design future sustainable business models powered by disruptive technologies".

Her team is comprised of two other master's graduates, Bridget Fundikwa and Wadzanani Nyabeze from UCT's Department of Chemical Engineering. She says: "The app is in its final stages of development, and I am excited to witness its success when [it is] launched in 2018".

It was no small task, but Mokgethi and her team were up for the challenge. The competition posed eight questions and students were invited to submit a solution to any one of them.

"We worked on a challenge posed by Nestlé: 'to enable exponential consumer engagement and behaviour change to contribute towards Nestlé's strategy to prevent and minimise food waste along the value chain'.

"We won, and the prize for the winning solution was a trip to New York to attend the summit and present our solution alongside Nestlé," she explains.

After the presentation, the team was awarded a certificate of excellence for an outstanding performance and a lasting contribution to the Breakthrough Innovation Challenge.

“It was heart-warming to be acknowledged, and I will always hold on to that moment,” she says.

Mokgethi is currently completing her master’s degree through the African Institute of Financial Markets and Risk Management (AIFMRM) in the Faculty of Commerce. She has an undergraduate degree in economics and finance, and an honours in financial analysis and portfolio management, both from UCT.

“UCT really opened my eyes, and when I worked for a year as an investment manager, I realised that you have to be a well-rounded person, not just good at numbers. You need to be true to yourself. Be socially conscious. Yes, I am studying finance, but at the same time, I want to have a social impact. That is what drew me to AIFMRM,” she says.

AIFMRM sponsored Mokgethi’s New York trip. “It is not every day that one of our own embarks on an exciting adventure like this,” comments Co-Pierre Georg, director of the UCT Financial Innovation Lab at AIFMRM.

When asked if she has advice for young women pursuing their dreams, she says: “My story certainly shows that anything can happen! Be daring. Try. Go out of your way to have a well-rounded university experience and life experience. Be socially conscious and engage with people or join university societies that you may not have been exposed to before.”

In the long run, Mokgethi hopes that other, similar apps can be implemented in South Africa. “As our country becomes more developed, we need to establish sound social awareness around food waste and food security. It will lead to a better South Africa in the future,” she explains.

“The words of the global leaders will remain with me for years to come,” she says of this life-changing experience.

“I am looking forward to the future and aspire to be identified as a global leader who pushes beyond the boundaries of technology and creates disruptive change through the face of sustainable business conduct.”

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