

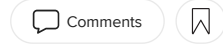
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Forget about loans - crowdfunding is a new stokvel solution

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Cayleigh Bright



After triathlete Mhlengi Gwala survived a gruesome attack, his treatment was funded by fellow athletes and supporters.

Earlier this year Beyond Bars Akademia, an organisation that upsills formerly incarcerated women to begin careers in hospitality, recently gained funds and new supporters with their crowdfunding campaign.

The Labia Theatre, a nostalgia-heavy favourite among Cape Town cinemagoers, was saved from closing when its fans raised enough for upgrades and repairs necessary to keep it running.

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For the uninitiated, a crowdfund is an online cash pool, which can be set up for direct payments by anyone on sites like Thundafund, Kickstarter, StartMe or GoFundMe. There are few restrictions on what projects can be funded in this way – be they charitable, entrepreneurial, or just plain silly – and it's up to the fund's creator to figure out how to spread the word and get the cash rolling in.

But how does crowdfunding compare to simply taking out a loan? With its emphasis on working together to hand over money that's used in whatever way the beneficiary sees fit, might it best be compared to the tried-and-tested stokvel system?

What are its pitfalls – and might it work for you? Two women whose crowdfunding ventures caught our attention share their stories.

Nzeka Biyela - Sugarbird Gin

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Although this would be hard to measure, it seems reasonable to imagine that contributors might already feel a degree of brand loyalty to an item that could not have come to life if not for their donations. Nzeka sees it a little more pragmatically: that Sugarbird Gin is sure to be successful because without debts to pay off, they're able to offer an excellent craft product at an accessible price.

Without debt to pay back, Nzeka and her business partners can turn their attention to paying forward. "Entrepreneurship is also dear to our hearts," Nzeka says, introducing the next step of Sugarbird Gin's journey. They've partnered with Koi Group to ensure that with every bottle sold, they contribute towards empowering entrepreneurs in South Africa. "Our focus is on women, previously disadvantaged people and entrepreneurs who are looking to improve their community or the environment."

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She and the team behind the project believe that longboarding is an ideal vehicle for their message: it's an extreme, male-dominated sport, but one in which women are breaking heteronormative stereotypes and confronting sexist oppression through their achievements and recognition.

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“Since we needed to raise a large amount in such a short space of time, we wanted to create incentives that were really affordable so that anyone could contribute,” she says. “With our minimum incentive being \$10 (around R135) for an online pre-release (six months before public release), we figured it was the same amount people would pay to watch a movie.” While Andréa and the rest of the team behind the ambitious, globe-trotting effort have been

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