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The University of Manchester



# Master of Leadership for Development

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An interview with...

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## Seopedi Baitsile

Founder,  
The Upcycle Project  
Gaborone, Botswana



Our Master of Leadership for Development attracts applicants from around the world with an interest in making their mark in international development. Delivered in partnership with the University of Melbourne, this course brings a collaborative approach to help students develop the skills and international networks that they need to succeed in this space. We spoke to Seopedi Baitsile, one of our students, about her background, career interests and what drove her to choose this master's.

### CULTURE AND DEVELOPMENT

"We need to go beyond speaking about culture as a tick-box activity," Seopedi tells us, "we need to be more sensitive of context by finding a way to incorporate these issues in achieving sustainable and equitable development."

Seopedi Baitsile has big plans for the development sector. Born and raised in Botswana, she moved to South Africa to study at the University of Cape Town. Through studying two degrees - a Bachelor of Social Science, majoring in Environmental Sciences and Sociology and an Honours Degree in Development Studies - she realised that development was the career for her. "I realised that there is a role I could play to drive meaningful and positive change in these communities," she tells us.

Seopedi has been working in environmental and social consultancy in Botswana since returning. Currently, she is a freelance social consultant and the founder of The Upcycle Project, a business that repurposes glass bottles and educates local communities about the environment.

For Seopedi, development work and taking care of the environment are closely linked. She also believes that cultural heritage has a role to play in development. Through a project for a mining company, Seopedi got to know the residents of a village where they were conducting exploration work. This experience had a profound effect on her. "It was through this project that I got to learn that cultural heritage should be preserved in the pursuit of development," she says.

### BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS

"The lack of meaningful involvement of communities' voices and identity in development projects and goals has been a barrier for many decades," she tells us, "and it's one which I hope to help address through studying this course."

The failure of many actors and stakeholders to account for and include local cultures is a major barrier to development, according to Seopedi. While acknowledging climate change, war, greed, corruption, poor leadership and dependency as major detrimental factors, she sees this lack of community engagement as a serious, and all too often overlooked, issue.

"It is detrimental because when there is no meaningful involvement and ownership, there will be no sustainability and positive change," she says. The way to remedy this, Seopedi believes, is by approaching development in a sense of partnership with local communities.

Through studying the Master of Leadership for Development, she hopes to further understand how to navigate this barrier and gain leadership skills to drive development in a way that is ethical and culturally sensitive.

## TRANSFORMING THE INDUSTRY

When applying for this course, themes about the implications of shifts in power for development projects, the connection between leadership and dependencies, and the distinctiveness of leadership in the sector stood out to Seopedi. As she studies this course, she is especially eager to learn about the challenges in development and how to address them in a practical way.

"It is hard to only mention one thing," Seopedi admits, "not only does it provide the theoretical background about the world's development challenges, but it is also future-focused and deliberate about making leaders that will serve in various fields of the sector."

She wants to radically change the way development projects are created and sees this course as a route to doing this. The Master of Leadership for Development has allowed Seopedi to leverage her interests and experience, and she is confident it will equip her with the tools she needs to make a difference. She hopes to develop practical skills that will allow her to be a confident communicator and decision-maker, and this course is key to that.

"After completing it, I will have the skills and platform to be actively involved in work that challenges the inequalities and development injustices that exist in my field," Seopedi tells us.

## WELLBEING AND COMMUNITY

People from all walks of life deal with challenges and pressures on their wellbeing. According to Seopedi, focusing on caring for mental health in a time of great stress and uncertainty is extremely important. Taking time to go outside and commune with nature has also been a key technique that she has used to boost her wellbeing.

Taking a digital detox, whether away from the blue glare of the work monitor or social media, is another thing that helps. "We spend a lot of time indoors and in front of computer screens and on our mobile phones," she says, "taking social media breaks and turning my phone off after dinner has also made me less anxious." Keeping in touch with friends and family is also important.

In her work as in life, Seopedi reiterates the importance of community to help overcome challenges. This community-minded spirit is what Seopedi wants to bring to the development sector, infusing every single project with contextual sense and a collaborative approach. The Master of Leadership for Development will empower her to do that.



### September start

Begin studying in September



### 2-5 years

Part-time master's



### Online learning

Benefit from fully-online interactive course delivery



### Flexible format

Transform your career while you work



### International collaboration

Delivered in partnership with the University of Melbourne

# GET IN TOUCH

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