

Back to nature with Sonto Pooe's NativeChild

By  Ntandokazi Ntozakhe

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Behind every braid or big afro there is a story to be told. For Sonto Pooe, it began at the tender age of 8 when she tried to braid her own hair after a cruel experience with a hairdresser who braided it too tightly, leaving her unable to sleep for days.



Sonto Pooe, founder and CEO, NativeChild

Years later, this bad hair experience, coupled with frustration that the haircare market was flooded with chemical products, ignited her entrepreneurial spark. Pooe, a trained quantity surveyor, then developed a natural hair and bodycare line she called NativeChild – designed to be a representation of who she is, a proud African woman with strong roots.

NativeChild is a natural ingredient-based hair and bodycare brand that caters to women of colour with Afro, kinky or ethnic hair. All products are locally developed and manufactured.



Source: [NativeChild](#)

For [Women's Month](#), we chatted to Pooe, founder and CEO of NativeChild, on her entrepreneurship journey thus far.

■ ***What skills have you transferred from your profession as a quantity surveyor to entrepreneurship in the personal care space?***

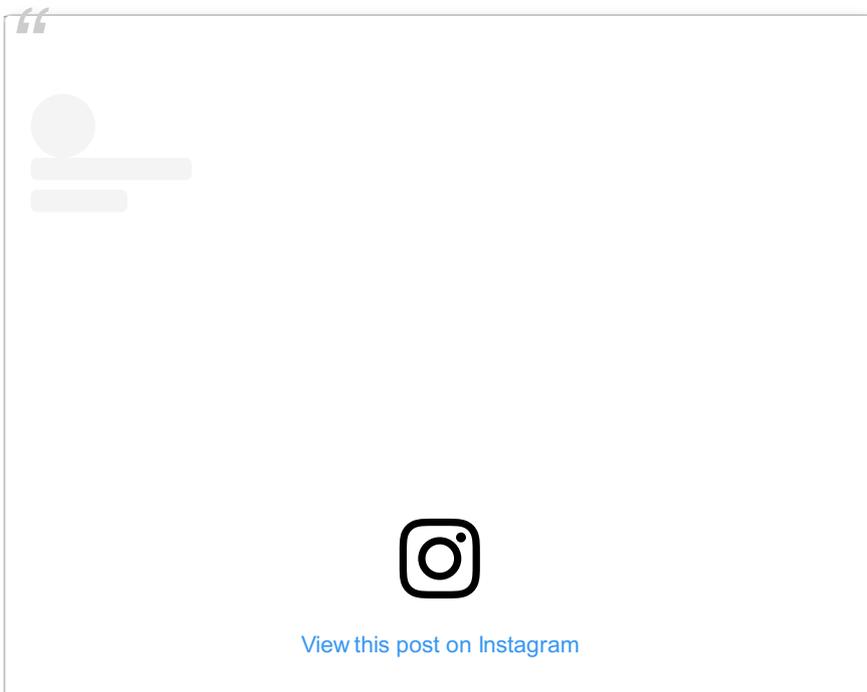
Professionalism. Being in a professional environment helped me to be accountable for my time and projects (tasks). You don't just float around aimlessly. We have targets, which one learns to execute swiftly and within a budget.

I needed those skills in business. In fact, I would dare say without these skills, I would not be a success.

■ ***You staked your territory in retail against giants like L'Oréal and Revlon, how daunting was this? Did you feel overwhelmed?***

Would you believe me if I told you, I didn't even think of them? I didn't. I knew that what I wanted to offer the market had not been done and so I could not achieve it by looking at them.

So no, I never felt overwhelmed by other brands and I still don't. I've mastered the art of minding my own business, literally. Quite frankly I was happy to be under the radar as it would allow me to build my roots undisturbed.





I hate the idea of not reaching my potential. I knew I had so much more in me and so I decided to go for it and push through all the challenges that came my way.

■ **What sets NativeChild apart from its competitors?**

Me. There isn't another me. Every business will be different because of the vision of the owner/CEO. I come with a unique set of experiences that allow me to navigate the way I do as an entrepreneur.

Secondly, we are not just haircare and bodycare brand. We are a conscious brand, very much aware of the impact of cosmetics on the environment and people and we are at the forefront of brands who genuinely care about the people we serve and our planet. Our products are plant-based, which means we are doing our bit to make this world a better place whilst instilling self-confidence in our customers.

Almost all our packaging is recyclable, which also helps with the fight against global warming.

▣ **What are the biggest challenges you have had to overcome in starting your own business?**

I think every stage comes with its own set of challenges; it comes with growing pains. Once you think you've arrived, the rug can be pulled under your feet and you're back on your toes again. I've learnt to change my perspective and not see the word 'challenge' but see 'growth'.

▣ **Do you see yourself doing business in areas other than body and haircare?**

Absolutely. I love a few other things and I think I have an amount of talent too like building incredible homes, interiors, fashion. I consider myself a creative. So, I could easily do any of the above if I had, or should I say when I have, more time.

▣ **What advice would you give to budding entrepreneurs who wants to start their own business, especially women?**

Follow your passion. Don't waste time doing things you don't love. Align your business with your passion.

Secondly, be willing to walk alone. The journey of entrepreneurship can be difficult and lonely, so be willing to walk alone if need be. Not everyone will believe in you, not everyone will see your vision but that's ok. Build one brick at a time and stay positive.



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▣ **What are your future plans and wishes for Native Child?**

To be a global player. We are already doing baby steps into that vision as products are already available in Swaziland, Namibia, Botswana, Lesotho, the US and the world through our online site, but ultimately I would love to see our products in retailers across the world.

▣ **With the information you have now, what would you do differently if you were starting a business?**

I'm not sure I would change anything because everything I went through brought me to where I am today. I've gained some wisdom along the way but that is because of some of the challenges I had to overcome.

But if I must pick something, I would stress less about everything.

ABOUT NTANDOKAZI NTOZAKHE

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