

Busisiwe Khaba, head of public policy for Uber sub-Saharan Africa

 By [Robin Fredericks](#)

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In celebration of Women's Month, we shine the spotlight on Busisiwe Khaba, head of public policy for Uber sub-Saharan Africa. Passionate about women and youth empowerment - and considers herself an activist in her own right - Khaba is responsible for the management of the company's public policy strategy, regulatory requirements, engagements with senior regulatory stakeholders, and local and international organisations and governments in the seven countries in SSA where Uber operates.



Source: Supplied - Busisiwe Khaba

Here, Khaba tells us more about her position as a woman in the technology and transport space, the challenges she has faced and some advice for those wanting to enter the industry.

Tell us a bit about yourself - your background?

I hold a Master's Degree in Political Science from North-West University. I am passionate about women and youth empowerment and consider myself an activist in my own right. I am an avid chess player - I like to solve complex problems.

My first part-time job was at age 14, at a pharmacy in Ermelo. I was editor of the school's newspaper and served as a member of the Learners Representative Council (LRC).

At university, I was a Student Representative Council (SRC) member and served nationally for South African Union of Students (SAUS). I value love, knowledge and learning. I have completed two executive leadership programmes with the London School of Economic and Political Science (public policy and regulatory strategy). I am enrolled as a PHD candidate in politics and international relations. Prior to joining Uber in 2021, I lectured at various universities in South Africa in Political Science. I enjoy shaping and inspiring young people.

Prior to joining Uber, I worked as a corporate affairs, external affairs and public policy consultant for over 10 years and I have done political analysis on various media platforms. I sit on an advisory board in the Presidency of South Africa on Maritime Economy matters which includes over 22 member states, this has opened a lot of opportunities for global travel and engagement with high level officials across the world.in and across South Africa. I am also married and have two daughters.

The activities I enjoy are spending time with family, engaging in politics, updating on current affairs, watching movies - when I can, playing chess. I love exploring new cultures, meeting new people and travelling. I am also married and have two daughters.

📌 ***Describe your role at Uber - what does a typical workday look like for you?***

As the head of public policy for sub-Saharan Africa, I am responsible for the management of the company's public policy strategy, regulatory requirements, engagements with senior regulatory stakeholders and local and international organisations and governments in the seven countries in sub-Saharan Africa where Uber operates.

📌 ***Tell us more about your position as a woman in the technology and transport space?***

It is important that more women occupy spaces in these sectors that were once only open to men. While the numbers are not where we want them to be, we are slowly seeing change and that is encouraging.

Uber is committed to creating economic opportunities for employees and female driver-partners and is keen to provide women with additional skill sets that help them thrive at being independent entrepreneurs.

As an example, we have launched the Women Preferred View feature which allows women and non-binary drivers to only pick up women riders. Uber hopes that this feature will increase the number of women drivers in the rideshare industry.

We have already doubled the number of women in our active driver base and launching the Women Preferred View feature is another positive move towards paving the way for more women to take part in the ridesharing industry. We are also excited that this feature enables current female drivers with the power of choice and convenience when using the Uber app.

Another example is Uber's partnership with African Management Institute (AMI) to help drive business forward across Africa, offering practical business skills programmes to women partners and communities in Kenya and South Africa. The Skills on the Go and the Micro-enterprise Accelerator programmes, not only provide women with the necessary skills needed to thrive as independent entrepreneurs but also help them expand income generation opportunities for their families

and communities.

Playing our part to support and upskill women by developing them professionally, has given Uber the opportunity to drive change that is positive, meaningful and empowering. Female drivers benefit from these programmes as they are able to apply what they've learnt to improve and grow their own businesses. We are committed to our partnership with drivers and we are working hard every day to ensure their businesses continue to succeed.

We have also hosted a number of Women in Tech events that encourage collaborative discussion, whereby challenges faced by women in the tech industry can be discussed. In previous events, we brought together innovative women leaders in technology such as Google, Microsoft and Facebook, as well as the local start-up, SweepSouth, to discuss the challenges and opportunities faced by women in technology.

Our partnership with Moove is now in Nigeria, Ghana and South Africa this year. Moove is Sub-Saharan Africa's first flexible car ownership company, to provide potential and current Uber drivers in Sub-Saharan Africa with long-term access to vehicles. We have done this because we believe in accessibility for all, and we are most excited about extending these opportunities to women, especially as the transport industry has traditionally been male-dominated. Women now have the opportunity to get into the driving seat and increase their earning opportunities to suit them.

■ Do you have any role models? If so, who?

I look up to my mother who helped shape my life. I admire her resilience and strength, she is a self-made businesswoman.

■ What are your thoughts on the impact of Covid to the industry? How has Uber dealt with this challenge?

The Covid-19 pandemic has created an unprecedented set of challenges for countries across the globe. It has become a litmus test, not only for global leaders, national governments, and the frontline workers stepping up to protect the communities they serve, but also for businesses and their leaders, who need to find ways to adapt their business models to ensure they respond to the "new normal".

For a global company with the object of moving people from point A to B, the lockdown disrupted how we operate in various countries - each with different regulations and its own set of challenges. As part of our safety commitment, it was important that we promoted social distancing on both our apps, to help flatten the curve. This presented us with a unique opportunity to look at other ways we can help businesses and riders Move What Matters. For example, we launched Uber Connect, to assist people by moving packages to one another while they stay at home.

The health and wellbeing of our communities is our highest priority during this time and our primary focus is quickly adapting our technology of both the Rides and Eats apps to meet the evolving needs of communities and companies. Our various teams have worked very hard to innovate as quickly as possible, to adapt the business to help people stay at home and still get the items they need or get them to where they need to be, safely and reliably.

We have and continue to partner with organisations around the world to Move What Matters - from free meals or rides for frontline workers to delivery of essential medicine to homebound patients, to getting food parcels to those most vulnerable. In response to improving access to the vaccination, Uber has partnered with Mastercard and the Department of Health to provide one million free trips to vaccination sites countrywide.

Our platform also allows us to quickly adapt to unlock economic opportunities for delivery people and drivers now and beyond the lockdown. Safety continues to be a top priority, but now in addition to our current safety features, we have also rolled out a number of new features and policies in response to the Covid-19 pandemic in order to help protect the health of riders, drivers and delivery people including mask verification tech, no-contact delivery, free cancellations, providing sanitizing supplies and updating the feedback options. We also provide users with the information they need to help them stay safe

We also witnessed a trend in consumer spend. With the price-sensitive consumer in mind, Uber also launched Uber Go - a more affordable option for consumers which makes use of smaller, fuel-efficient hatchback vehicles, to boost rider demand and unlock further earning opportunities for drivers. Our focus remains on providing industry-leading safety features (in-app button, mask verification), lowering access to mobility with products like Uber Go, providing cost-saving solutions such as Uber Pass and creating earning opportunities for locals.

🔴 ***Do you think it's important to have a month dedicated to women? And why.***

Yes I think it is important. This is a time for us to recognise the challenges women face and focus greater attention on women's rights and gender equality to mobilise all people to do their part to emancipate women in society. However, it is important that we do these as an ongoing effort, while ensuring company policies are focused on diversity and inclusion.

🔴 ***What advice would you ?***

To just do it and to identify mentors who can help guide you on your career path. We hardly have to reinvent the wheel, but rather learn from those before us.

🔴 ***What is the best advice anyone has given you?***

1. Initiation: Be highly motivated and energized by opportunities. When an opportunity comes, you may have only seconds to claim it before someone else does.
2. Be flexible and adaptable
3. Always be willing to learn

🔴 ***As a woman, have there been any significant challenges in the workplace that stand out for you?***

Women empowerment is not only women's focus but also requires the participation of men to help address the gender disparity problem that continues in our society today. It's no secret that women are very much underrepresented in the tech and transport industry but companies like Uber have allowed women to enter a traditionally male-dominated industry and have contributed to this shift by championing equality and creating an inclusive environment.

🔴 ***Do you have any pearls of wisdom to share this Women's Month or words of encouragement?***

In the words of Brené Brown: "Owning our story can be hard but not nearly as difficult as spending our lives running from it."

ABOUT ROBIN FREDERICKS

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