

2020 VOLUME 2

# VOICES

**MAXWELL MTOMBENI – UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG STUDENT, ENROLLED IN A HEPSA HOSTED PROGRAM.**

Sub-Saharan Africa has many socio-economic challenges, and access to quality, affordable tertiary education is a key factor in reducing poverty, improving the living standards and providing opportunities for many people across the continent. South Africa is in desperate need for an online education solution as there is a significant shortage of tertiary education infrastructure in the country. For every three students who have the necessary qualifications and requisite funding available to study at one of South Africa's tertiary education institutions, there is only one seat available. The other two potential students have the qualifications and funding but nowhere to go.

Higher Education Partners SA ("**HEPSA**") is improving access to tertiary education by bridging the gap between students who are unable to attend classroom-based courses and quality tertiary education through online access and support.

**Maxwell is a 31-year-old student from Johannesburg. He works full time, classrooms for full-time contact students are full and his long daily commute makes attending class at the university impossible. Through HEPSA, Maxwell is now involved in an online tertiary education course. We interviewed him as part of a survey of students enrolled in HEPSA courses.**

South Africa has an unemployment rate of ~30% which is increasing each year. HEPSA recognizes that education lays the foundation for future employment and provides the stepping stones to rise out of poverty and lay the foundations for long-term economic growth. HEPSA's quest is to unlock the intellectual capital which is currently restricted due to limited access to quality tertiary education.

1K1V was initially attracted to HEPSA's developmental and societal impact as a tertiary education platform, the experience of its founding partners in online tertiary education globally and the company's robust business fundamentals. We were pleased to provide investment capital for expansion, which fulfilled our fund mandate to impact development across the African continent in an industry which is widely considered the most important driver of lasting prosperity.

HEPSA has over 1,400 students enrolled in its 20 courses across its portfolio of eight partner universities. The company is launching three more programs in 2020, and rapidly expanding by adding another 10 in 2021. The nature of the online learning has also facilitated expansion into neighboring African countries which presents exciting opportunities to scale.

The students interviewed all concurred that they benefit immensely from reduced travel costs, time saved from working at home and the convenience of studying in your own time to fit their daily schedule. They found their grades had improved, often as much as 20% over the academic year. Several students were relieved to be studying online, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic shut down campuses across South Africa. Overall, students found the courses affordable, flexible and enabled them to finance their own studies accruing little or no debt. This was particularly true for postgraduate students.

*HEPSA and 1K1V are proud to play a key role in enabling and supporting the increased economic opportunities and autonomy for these students, and thus contributing to the advancement of talented, skilled and ambitious young Africans.*



## Q&A

WITH MAXWELL MTOMBENI

**Tell us about your experience of online learning?** I wouldn't have been able to attend on-campus classes because of where I work. I'm glad to not be travelling to and from campus, the increased flexibility that it offers me and for the savings in travel costs which I use for better internet.

**How much access do you have to your lecturers?** At first, I worried about how much attention I would get from my lecturers, but I am in daily communication with them.

**What are you enjoying most about learning online?** I enjoy being able to study at my own pace. I can focus on the content of the work and ace the assignments.

**What do you think is behind your improved grades?** I have experienced reduced stress because

I can plan my studies to fit within my schedule which has made me more efficient and improved my grades. Also, I think it's because the HEPSA tutors are available and there are plenty of resources. I have everything I need to succeed, including time.

**If the online platform saves you time, what do you use that extra time for?** Sometimes I put in more effort into my assignments. On weekends it gives me enough time to rest and still login at my convenience to study.

**Do you feel safer working from home?** I feel safer working from home, it reduces my risk of trouble on the road, and now of COVID-19. I can still continue with my studies even through the lockdown period because of COVID-19, which is a massive plus for me.