



The brand produces bags and accessories that are 80 per cent recycled | Photo source MicGalaw

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## SOUTH AFRICAN STARTUP TURNS PLASTIC WASTE INTO LEATHER-LIKE ACCESSORIES



FASHION & BEAUTY

### MicGalaw makes eco-friendly fashion while combating plastic pollution and creating employment opportunities for young people

**Spotted:** In South Africa, only 16 per cent of plastic is recycled. The remaining 84 per cent ends up in landfills, on the side of the road or eventually polluting rivers and oceans.

South-African based high fashion startup MicGalaw is showing how businesses can both help reduce pollution and also make a profit from doing so. With its own little niche in the recycling industry, MicGalaw up-cycles discarded plastic into leather-like bags and other accessories.

The brand was co-founded by two women from the south of Johannesburg, Phumudzo Muthanyi and Mbali Mokgosi. Muthanyi and Mokgosi have said that they were inspired to recycle plastics because it smothered their town and so far it wasn't being recycled in any major way. They added that it has taken them about three years to understand the art of working with plastics.

The first collection launched in 2019, with five bags made from 100 per cent upcycled, recycled bags. Today, the brand produces bags and accessories that are 80 per cent recycled, with the remaining 20 per cent involving bought leather, so that the accessories look fresh and new.

To collect the plastic, Muthanyi and Mokgosi came up with a clean-up campaign in their town, where they cleaned illegal dumping sites, together with the 15 young people they work with.

For the manufacturing processes, MicGalaw uses two processes. The first involves washing and separating the plastics after collection and choosing different patterns. The selection is then shredded and melted to become a leather-like fabric, which is then cut and used with other patterns of leather. The second process involves manufacturing the entire product from scratch, with the use of industrial machines.

The company said that its biggest challenge has been access to funding. “We are trying to raise an amount of money to pay all these young people that are helping us for a period of at least two months,” Muthanyi and Mokgosi say.

In an interview with [Global Citizen](#), the entrepreneurs said that the core purpose of their initiative is to raise awareness, educate and change the perspective that young people have about the environment and recycling. They said that in South Africa, younger generations tend to view recycling as something for people who are addicted to drugs because most of the people collecting rubbish in the streets do it to make money.

Written By: Katrina Lane

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### **Takeaway:**

According to a [report](#) by The Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF), reasons for a lack of recycling in South Africa can be attributed to poorly designed packaging and the lack of industry guidance. Despite this, as demonstrated by MicGalaw amongst a number of other initiatives spotted by Springwise, the recycling sector in South Africa is advancing in ever more creative ways. Attaining top-quality recycling involves education, incentives and collaboration amongst designers, brands owners and retailers -- which is precisely what MicGalaw is targeting.