

# Social change is key to a better world

 By [Danette Breitenbach](#)

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To overcome the economic and social issues of our time and, in particular those relevant to Africa, you need to be entrepreneurial and have an element of social change in your product or concept.



This was the opinion and verdict of the panel of judges at the third Falling Walls Lab which was held at the Sci-Bono Discovery Centre in Newtown, Johannesburg. The event brought together 22 of the brightest young minds in the country, who presented on topics which ranged from bio-technology to music.

Falling Walls Lab is a platform for young minds to present their breakthrough concept. The Falling Walls Foundation is a non-profit organisation in Berlin dedicated to supporting science and the humanities. Many countries participate in the Lab annually. The winners represent their respective countries at the finale in Berlin.

This year's local winning project was the brainchild of Vinu Nair, an engineer and one of the founders of GenWye, a technology company that does things differently. In his presentation Nair explained that as a young engineer he wants to change the world by transferring engineering knowledge and using technology in innovative ways.

Second was Andrew de Villiers with a water based monitoring tool that anyone can understand and use and therefore it is empowering communities. Third was Ané van Heerden, who presented a completely natural substrate for the sustainable farming of mushrooms.

The young researchers/entrepreneurs present their idea to the jury, but they have only three minutes to do so. They were judged on the breakthrough of their idea/concept, its impact or relevance and then their actual presentation.

The jury was made up of business people, diplomats and academics, and included:

- Wim Plaizier, Partner from A.T. Kearney in Johannesburg,
- Dr. Horst Freitag, German Ambassador to South Africa,
- Dr. Thomas auf der Heyde, Deputy Director General of the Ministry of Science and Technology,

- Professor Adam Habib, Vice Chancellor of Wits University,
- Liesel De Villiers, Head of Research and Development at African Explosives Limited, and
- Roelf Meyer, former Minister of Defence and business man.

## Changing society

Plaizier, as head of the jury, said Falling Walls is a display of hope and an event that not only changes the economy, but society and people's lives. "The ideas presented here today reflect not only the bettering of lives, but that Africa, as a continent, is rising. The presenters are proof that Africa is a continent of opportunities."

Nair, who was shell shocked after being announced winner, could only manage the words: "I can't believe this is real. What an amazing competition." He will go on to represent South Africa at the global Falling Walls Finale in Berlin later this year.

South Africa's previous winner, in 2013, John Woodland, a PhD student at the University of Cape Town, won third place at the finale last year for his fluorescent probe concept to accelerate the detection of malaria.

Addressing the finalists, jury and audience, the German Ambassador to South Africa, Dr. Horst Freitag reflected on two events that changed the world; one that took place in Germany and one here. "The fall of the Berlin Wall and the release of Nelson Mandela were two events that changed the world. We are still realising the impact of these two events and so I urge you not to forget the fallen walls of the past, but to continue building on the lessons of the past. Continue to bush boundaries and meet challenges. This is what Falling Walls is all about."

## ABOUT DANETTE BREITENBACH

Danette Breitenbach is a marketing & media editor at Bizcommunity.com. Previously she freelanced in the marketing and media sector, including for Bizcommunity. She was editor and publisher of AdVantage, the publication that served the marketing, media and advertising industry in southern Africa. She has worked extensively in print media, mainly B2B. She has a Masters in Financial Journalism from Wits.

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