

Interview with Rona Kotecha of Mara Foundation, Mara Group's social enterprise.

It was with utmost pleasure that I interviewed Rona Kotecha late June 2017.

Brief background: Rona Kotecha is the Executive Director of the Mara Foundation, initiatives of the Foundation include, Mara Mentor, Mara One on One and the Ashish J. Thakkar Global Entrepreneurship Index. Rona is also sister to Ashish J. Thakkar, Founder of the Mara Group and Mara Foundation, her role is running the Mara Foundation, amongst other duties which are part of the Mara Foundation, a social enterprise founded in 2009 by Ashish.

The purpose of these initiatives are to support young entrepreneurs and women entrepreneurs with a network, contacts, tools and mentors to build their businesses so they can become agents of job creation and contribute to the economic advancement in Africa. Mara Mentor started as an Africa focused initiative, which organically evolved into a global platform with plans to launch in the Arab region very soon.

I asked Rona a couple of key questions:

- Does Ashish mentor?

'Yes, he is also one of my mentors. We have formal and informal mentoring sessions but he is always there when needed. He is extremely positive, insightful as well as incredibly inspiring'

- What is your biggest challenge?

To create more awareness of Mara Foundations offerings for entrepreneurs, especially Mara Mentor, an online tool which we feel could change the course of an entrepreneurs journey in an extremely positive way.

- What do you have to have achieved to be a Mara Mentor?

'The application process is initiated through Mara Mentor, the mentor needs to have 5 years business or corporate experience to qualify initially although there are also other factors to determine approval process. Each application is assessed on it's own merits.'

- How do the businesses in Africa find you?

'They find us through our government and private sector partners and the events we hold in various cities throughout the continent as well as word of mouth and social media platforms'

- What is the vision?

To extend our reach further and really increase our impact, which in turn will have a positive impact on business growth, empowerment of youth and women in business, contribution to local economies and job creation.



- How do you monitor the results the initiates are achieving?

'Through reviews, feedback and case studies, we are looking to strengthen this element of our work further through our new Mara Mentor platform, which we'll launch very soon.'

In his book, Ashish describes an Africa that is not known to many in the west. Do you think this Africa will become more of a consistent picture?

'Yes I do, very much so. With the increase in investment into Africa and accessibility to the rest of the world the narrative is and should continue to change. We mustn't underestimate the fact that Africa is a continent of innovators and entrepreneurs.'

About the Mara Group

Established in 1996, Mara has grown from a small computer hardware trading firm in East Africa to a multi-sector group with investments and operations spanning 25 African countries and 3 continents.

A must read - **The Lion Awakes** by Ashish J Thakkar

https://www.amazon.co.uk/Lion-Awakes-Adventures-Africas-Economic/dp/113728014X/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1500287271&sr=8-1&keywords=lion+awakes