



SAFI

SOUTH AFRICAN
FURNITURE INITIATIVE



NEWSLETTER

September 2026

Message from the CEO

There are moments when the progress being made across our industry reminds me just how much potential South African furniture manufacturing has. The past few months have given us many reasons to feel encouraged.

The success of SAFI's pavilion at SARCEA in Johannesburg was one of them. The feedback from participating manufacturers, buyers and visitors was extremely positive, and receiving SARCEA's 2026 Award for Stand Originality was a wonderful acknowledgement of the hard work behind the pavilion. Tracy Symons' exceptionally well-received presentation at Speaker's Corner also provided an important opportunity to tell the wider story of our industry and showcase what South African manufacturers have to offer.

For me, the real significance of SARCEA goes beyond an award or a successful exhibition. It demonstrated what can happen when South African manufacturers come together, present themselves in a confident, professional manner, and take their products directly to new audiences.

That same spirit is evident in the response to our skills initiatives. When 35 manufacturers came forward offering workplace learning opportunities for 199 young people, despite funding currently being available for 120 placements, it sent a powerful message. Our manufacturers understand that developing skills is a shared responsibility and are actively helping to build the workforce our industry will need tomorrow.

Of course, we cannot ignore the challenges. Rising costs, skills shortages, unfair competition and an increasingly complex trading environment continue to place pressure on manufacturers. SAFI remains committed to advocating for stronger localisation, fairer procurement and action against illicit and under-declared imports.

But we cannot allow those challenges to define us. We also need to look outward, pursue opportunity and have confidence in what local manufacturers can offer.

That is why I am particularly encouraged to see our industry increasingly looking beyond our borders. In September, SAFI will take a delegation of 12 companies and 22 industry representatives to WMF 2026 in Shanghai, giving delegates exposure to international developments in furniture manufacturing technology, machinery and automation. Later this year, attention is expected to turn to HIVE Dubai, scheduled for 26 to 28 November following its postponement from June. SAFI has resubmitted its application and received acknowledgement, although participation remains subject to adjudication, as well as geopolitical stability in the region. Should it proceed, the event will provide an opportunity to showcase South African manufacturers and connect them with buyers across the GCC and wider international market.

These opportunities matter. They allow us to learn, build relationships, understand international markets and, importantly, show the world what South Africa can produce.

There is creativity, craftsmanship, resilience and ambition in this industry. If we continue working together, investing in our people and taking South African furniture confidently into new markets, I believe we have every reason to be excited about what comes next.



Greg Boule

CEO, South African Furniture Initiative

From SA to Shanghai: Exploring the future of furniture manufacturing

South Africa's furniture manufacturing industry is heading to Shanghai this month, with SAFI leading a delegation of 12 companies and 22 industry representatives to one of the world's leading showcases of furniture manufacturing technology.

The China International Furniture Machinery & Woodworking Machinery Fair (WMF 2026) takes place from 5 to 8 September 2026 at the National Exhibition and Convention Centre in Shanghai. The exhibition focuses on woodworking machinery, furniture manufacturing technology, automation, materials and smart factory solutions, giving South African manufacturers an opportunity to see first-hand how production technology is evolving internationally.

"This is about much more than attending an international exhibition," says Tracy Symons, SAFI Marketing & Relationship Manager, who has led the coordination of the delegation. "It is an opportunity for our manufacturers to step inside the factories of the future, explore technologies and production solutions that could improve their own operations and bring that knowledge back into the South African industry."



Interest from local manufacturers has been strong. SAFI successfully secured participation from 12 companies, with each able to nominate up to two representatives, bringing the delegation to 22 people. SAFI has taken responsibility for coordinating the programme directly with AdSale, the company facilitating the Hosted Buyer Programme, including administration, travel arrangements, visa guidance, documentation and ongoing delegate support.

For an industry facing pressure from rising input costs, imported products and increasingly competitive international markets, exposure to new manufacturing technologies is particularly valuable, notes Symons: “South African furniture manufacturers have enormous skill and capability, but competitiveness increasingly depends on how efficiently we can produce, how effectively we use our resources and how quickly we respond to changing markets. Seeing developments in automation, machinery, materials and smart manufacturing gives our delegates an opportunity to consider what could realistically be adapted to South African businesses.”

Importantly, SAFI intends the value of the initiative to extend beyond the companies travelling to China. Insights gained at WMF can help stimulate broader conversations around productivity, technology adoption and the future competitiveness of South African furniture manufacturing: “We want our delegates to come home asking questions... Where can technology reduce waste? Where can automation improve productivity? Which new materials or processes could create opportunities? And, importantly, how do we embrace innovation while retaining the craftsmanship and people that remain such an important strength of South African furniture?” For SAFI, Shanghai represents both a learning opportunity and another step towards connecting South African manufacturers more closely with developments shaping the global furniture industry. □



China International
**Furniture &
Woodworking
Machinery Fair** (Shanghai)

2026. 9. 5-8
NECC (Shanghai, Hongqiao)

Consumer Exhibitions CFF 中国家具博览会 (上海) CFF (Shanghai) CBCE 中国建博会 (上海) CBCE-BCTF (Shanghai) 智能家居技术展 SMART HOME TECH

WMF 国际木工展





SAFI makes its mark at SARCD 2026

SAFI's first dedicated pavilion at [SARCD Christmas 2026](#) was about far more than showcasing beautiful products. It brought South African manufacturers, designers and home décor brands together on a single platform, putting local capability directly in front of trade buyers and creating opportunities for conversations that could translate into future business. SARCD itself is a trade-only platform designed to connect manufacturers, wholesalers and suppliers with professional buyers.

The SAFI Pavilion featured [Alifurn Outdoor Living](#), [Chic Fusion](#), [Grandeur Interiors](#), [Karoo Baba](#), [Major John](#), [Me&Co Furniture](#), [NC Upholsters](#), [Zuideman \(RA Woodcraft\)](#), [Threads That Bind Us](#), [Ukhuni](#), [Unearthed Home Décor](#) and [Zizamele Ceramics](#), together with the German Design Award-winning [Ubuntu Curve](#) by [Nyambose Architects](#). The collective represented everything from outdoor and commercial furniture to upholstery, timber craftsmanship, textiles, ceramics and contemporary design.

The pavilion itself proved a talking point, with SAFI receiving SARCD's 2026 Award for Stand Originality. Curated by Ukhuni's design team and brought to life by SAFI's exhibition supplier, the space was designed to feel warm, contemporary and unmistakably South African.

Exhibitor feedback reinforced its impact. Unearthed Home Décor described the pavilion as “stunning, well designed and impactful”, while Major John called the stand design “excellent” and the exhibition “a great experience”. Karoo Baba praised the quality of the pavilion and its ability to attract high-end buyers, while The Lobby-Ukhuni reported “great feedback from visitors”. Across the participating businesses, the show generated new contacts, trade leads, potential orders and valuable opportunities for follow-up.

Behind the scenes was a significant organisational effort, spearheaded by SAFI Marketing Relationship Manager, Tracy Symons, who worked tirelessly with exhibitors, SARCDCA and the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition (the dtic) to bring the pavilion together. SAFI extends its sincere thanks to the dtic for its sponsorship through the Sector Specific Assistance Scheme (SSAS), which made the initiative possible.

As Symons explained: “For SAFI, this pavilion is far more than an exhibition stand. It’s a place where conversations become collaborations. Where introductions become partnerships.”

Symons also took SAFI’s message to SARCDCA’s Speaker’s Corner, delivering an exceptionally well-received presentation: Made in South Africa: Building the Future of Furniture Manufacturing. She used the opportunity to showcase the people, skills, innovation and entrepreneurship behind the sector and to explain why strengthening market access is so important to its future: “It’s one thing to manufacture a great product. It’s another to get it in front of the right buyers.”

That, ultimately, was the real achievement of SARCDCA 2026. The award recognised an outstanding pavilion, but the greater success was creating a collective platform where South African manufacturers could be seen, make meaningful connections and demonstrate what the local industry is capable of achieving. □



New markets, new opportunities

For South African furniture manufacturers, the opportunity to grow increasingly extends beyond our borders. From the Gulf to the UK and North Africa, SAFI is actively working to create practical pathways that can connect local manufacturers with new buyers, new markets and new sources of growth.

HIVE Dubai: Building South Africa's presence in the Gulf

SAFI is looking to build on the industry's exposure at INDEX 2025 Saudi Arabia by returning to the Gulf later this year, this time with a focus on a different segment of the furniture market. HIVE Dubai 2026 is scheduled to take place from 26 to 28 November, with SAFI working towards taking 13 South African manufacturers to the show. Twelve companies have been submitted for support through the Sector Specific Assistance Scheme (SSAS), with a further company applying through the Export Marketing and Investment Assistance (EMIA) programme. The initiative will also pilot bringing participants supported through the two funding mechanisms together on one South African pavilion.

Participation remains subject to funding approval, while the geopolitical situation in the region may also influence both the application and the event itself. Despite this uncertainty, SAFI believes it is important to continue pursuing opportunities that can strengthen South Africa's presence in international markets.

"We have to keep showing up, exploring new markets and creating opportunities for our manufacturers," says Tracy Symons, SAFI Marketing Relationship Manager. "There are factors beyond our control, but we have to remain positive, keep trying and be ready to take advantage of opportunities when they arise."

While INDEX Saudi Arabia targeted interior designers, architects, hospitality groups and related specifiers, HIVE Dubai is focused more directly on the mass-market furniture sector. The strictly trade-only show also incorporates a hosted buyer programme designed to attract more than 600 targeted buyers, offering participating manufacturers access to potential retail and distribution partners.

"HIVE gives us an opportunity to explore a different part of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) market," adds Symons. "It is not simply about exhibiting products. It is about understanding where South African furniture can compete, meeting the right buyers and continuing to build our presence in the region."



Building a route into the UK

That approach can already be seen in SAFI's work in the United Kingdom (UK). Engagement with UK furniture specialist, Mark McCann, is progressing with participating manufacturers undertaking early-stage market development work. Etvaal, for example, is exploring opportunities for its Eco Green children's bedroom furniture and its pet bed products. "Importantly, the process is addressing product development, compliance and suitability for the UK market before manufacturers move further into market-entry discussions," concludes Symons.

Exploring opportunities in Morocco

Morocco presents another very different opportunity. SAFI is working with Blue Nomads on a proposed market-entry pilot in Casablanca. The concept envisages a phased model incorporating showroom retail, e-commerce and B2B trade channels, with the potential to include complementary South African décor and lifestyle brands to create a curated South African retail experience.

"Every market is different, and that is why these initiatives matter," Symons explains. "We need to help manufacturers understand the realities of entering a market before they invest significant time and money. Compliance, pricing, positioning, logistics and product suitability all have to form part of the conversation."

From export opportunities to export readiness

The strategy reflects a broader evolution in SAFI's export-development work: moving beyond simply identifying opportunities to helping manufacturers access new markets, understand potential non-tariff barriers and gain valuable insight through partnerships, collaboration and networking. It is a gradual process, with SAFI and its members learning and navigating new markets together, but each step helps build knowledge, connections and momentum for future export growth.

South African furniture has much to offer international markets, from manufacturing expertise and craftsmanship to distinctive design and locally produced products. But opportunity alone does not create exports. Manufacturers need access, information, preparation and the right connections.

"Our role is to keep opening those doors," concludes Symons. "Not every market will suit every manufacturer, but the more credible routes we can create into international markets, the greater the opportunity for South African furniture businesses to diversify, grow and build sustainable export relationships. For an industry facing intense pressure at home, looking outward is no longer simply about ambition. It is about creating new possibilities for growth and saving our industry." □





Engage Trade Africa 2026: Connecting local manufacturers with global buyers

For South African furniture manufacturers looking for new customers, distribution channels and export markets, [Engage Trade Africa 2026](#) offers something refreshingly different from the conventional tradeshow model.

Taking place in Durban from 6 to 8 October 2026, the event brings qualified buyers directly to South Africa and connects them with local manufacturers and suppliers across various industries through targeted, pre-arranged business meetings. More than 350 South African and international buyers across various sectors are expected to participate, with over 4,000 one-on-one meetings planned.

“This is an opportunity we really want our members to take seriously,” says Tracy Symons, SAFI Marketing Relationship Manager. “Instead of exhibiting and hoping the right buyer happens to walk past your stand, Engage is designed to put manufacturers directly in front of decision-makers who are actively looking for products and suppliers. Over and above this, all SAFI members qualify for a 30% discount off the delegation fee.”

A different kind of trade event

The Engage model centres on matchmaking rather than foot traffic. Buyers are identified and qualified, with one-on-one meetings scheduled according to genuine sourcing requirements. Participating businesses can identify relevant buyers through the event platform and develop a focused meeting programme before arriving in Durban.

For furniture businesses, that means conversations with potential customers ranging from hotel groups, furniture retailers and distributors to interior designers, architects, property developers, procurement companies, healthcare groups, as well as commercial furniture buyers.

“The value lies in the quality of the connections,” explains Symons. “A manufacturer could meet a hospitality group furnishing a new development, a distributor looking for a new range or a retailer specifically interested in South African-made furniture and décor. These are the conversations that can turn into genuine commercial opportunities.”

Multiple markets, one meeting place

Buyers are being recruited from markets across Africa, as well as Europe, Asia, the Middle East and North America. African markets represented include Botswana, Namibia, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Malawi, Mauritius, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Ghana and Nigeria, among others. For manufacturers wanting to expand beyond South Africa, this creates an unusual opportunity to explore multiple markets without travelling from country to country.

SAFI members: get involved

SAFI is encouraging furniture manufacturers, designers, décor brands and suppliers seeking serious commercial opportunities to participate, notes Symons: “We continually talk about the need to find new markets for South African furniture, and opportunities like Engage give manufacturers a practical way to start doing exactly that. My message to the industry is simple: don’t wait for new business to find you. Secure your place, come to Durban, meet the buyers and start building those relationships.” □





Taking South African furniture online

For South African furniture manufacturers, e-commerce offers an additional route to market beyond traditional showrooms and retail channels. SAFI's Takealot initiative is testing how local manufacturers can access this opportunity, while providing valuable insight into what is required to sell furniture successfully online.

From factory floor to online marketplace

The pilot is currently in its implementation phase, with participating manufacturers working through Takealot's comprehensive registration and onboarding process. Recognising the complexities involved, Takealot is providing dedicated one-on-one support to help businesses navigate the requirements and address practical challenges as they arise.

"Selling furniture online involves much more than simply listing a product," says Tracy Symons, SAFI Marketing Relationship Manager. "Manufacturers need to consider product and catalogue information, stock availability, logistics, shipping costs and the platform's administrative requirements. The onboarding process itself has also highlighted just how much preparation is involved."

Home Concept, The Room and Leisure Lounge are currently at the most advanced stages of onboarding, while Make Furniture and Woodlam continue to progress through the process.

Learning what works

Importantly, the pilot is as much about learning as it is about getting products onto the platform. The process is helping SAFI identify practical stumbling blocks and better understand what manufacturers need to participate effectively in e-commerce.

"One of the real benefits is seeing where the challenges emerge in a real-world environment," explains Symons. "Takealot's individual support is helping manufacturers work through issues around logistics, product information and onboarding, while the experience is also giving SAFI useful insights that can inform the ongoing development of our own national furniture catalogue."

Looking ahead

SAFI will continue to monitor the pilot and learn from the experiences of participating manufacturers before considering how the initiative could be expanded.

"We're not assuming that e-commerce will suit every manufacturer," concludes Symons. "The aim is to understand what works, where the challenges lie and how we can use what we learn to help manufacturers make better-informed decisions about accessing digital markets." □



Small changes, bigger gains: Manufacturers share ideas on LEAN

Improving productivity does not always require major investment. Small changes to processes, workflow and resource use can deliver meaningful gains in efficiency and competitiveness. This was a key theme at SAFI's latest Western Cape Industry Information-Sharing Session, hosted at Pierre Cronje, where manufacturers discussed Lean Manufacturing, operational efficiency and skills development.

Learning from each other

The sessions provide a practical platform for manufacturers to exchange experiences, discuss common challenges and learn from solutions being implemented elsewhere in the industry. "There is enormous value in manufacturers sharing what works and what doesn't," says Greg Boule, SAFI's CEO. "Another business may have faced exactly the same challenge and found a relatively simple way to address it."

Lean Manufacturing generated particular interest, highlighting opportunities to examine processes, reduce inefficiencies and make incremental improvements across manufacturing operations.

From ideas to action

"These sessions are about practical knowledge that manufacturers can take back into their businesses," says Boule. "Lean encourages us to look closely at how we operate and identify where time, materials and resources can be used more effectively." The discussion also highlighted the connection between efficiency and skills development, with successful improvements relying on employees having the knowledge and skills to implement change.

Strength through collaboration

Strong interest in further information-sharing demonstrates an appetite for greater industry collaboration, says Boule: "We have an enormous amount of knowledge within South Africa's furniture manufacturing sector. The more we share that knowledge, the more we can help individual businesses become more productive, efficient and competitive, while strengthening the industry as a whole." □

Making it easier to join SAFI

For South African furniture manufacturers, being part of a strong industry network can open doors to opportunities that are difficult to access alone. SAFI is working to make membership simpler and more accessible, while also encouraging existing members to make greater use of the benefits already available to them through its new website.

More than membership

SAFI membership connects manufacturers to a growing network while providing access to industry initiatives focused on market development, export opportunities, exhibitions, skills development, training, industry information and collaboration.

Members also benefit from SAFI's advocacy on issues affecting local manufacturing, opportunities to increase their visibility through SAFI's marketing platforms and access to initiatives designed to connect manufacturers with buyers and new markets.

"The value of SAFI lies in what we can achieve collectively," says Tracy Symons, SAFI Marketing Relationship Manager. "Whether we are opening doors to export markets, creating exhibition opportunities, supporting skills development or representing manufacturers on industry issues, our focus is on helping build a stronger, more competitive sector."

Making the process simpler

For manufacturers considering SAFI membership, a straightforward joining process is an important part of making the organisation more accessible. SAFI is therefore looking at practical ways to simplify some of the administrative steps involved.

SAFI is working with Furnbed, the largest Bargaining Council serving five northern provinces, to simplify the registration process for manufacturers looking to become SAFI members. The aim is to create a more efficient digital pathway that reduces unnecessary barriers to joining.

"We want to make the process as straightforward as possible for manufacturers wanting to become part of SAFI," explains Tracy Symons.

Extending this approach nationally may take time, however, as the Bargaining Councils serving SWD, KwaZulu-Natal and the Western and Eastern Cape currently have varying levels of digital infrastructure and online capability.

Join the industry conversation

Growing membership also strengthens SAFI's ability to represent the sector concludes Symons: "The more manufacturers who participate, the stronger our collective voice becomes. If you manufacture furniture in South Africa and aren't yet a SAFI member, we encourage you to join us. Becoming a member means becoming part of a network working to create opportunities, solve shared challenges and grow South African furniture manufacturing."

Become a SAFI member and [JOIN HERE](#). □



Building skills where they matter most

South Africa's furniture industry needs skilled people to grow. As experienced workers leave the sector, developing a new generation of work-ready talent is becoming increasingly important. SAFI's FP&M SETA-funded Work Integrated Learning (WIL) Programme is designed to do exactly that, with 120 unemployed learners set to gain 12 months of structured workplace experience within furniture manufacturing businesses across South Africa.

Moving from planning to placement

Following an intensive planning and recruitment phase during July and August 2026, the programme is moving into implementation. SAFI is verifying learner eligibility, matching candidates with suitable host employers and finalising the documentation required for placements.

Importantly, interest in the programme has already exceeded its current funded capacity. SAFI now has a database of 162 potential learners, including an additional pipeline of 37 learners identified through Northlink College and Sihlalo. This provides a valuable pool for replacements as well as potential future expansion of the programme.

"Training can teach the fundamentals, but there is no substitute for experience in a real manufacturing environment," says Lynn Adonis, SAFI Administrator & Qualifications Manager. "This programme gives learners the opportunity to understand production, quality, productivity and what is expected of them in the workplace."



Manufacturers answer the call

The response from industry has been equally encouraging. By August, 35 furniture manufacturers had registered as host employers, collectively offering 174 workplace learning opportunities. Gauteng accounts for 98 opportunities, the Western Cape for 48 and KwaZulu-Natal for 22, with a further six available through national or multi-province manufacturers.

“For me, that response is one of the most exciting parts of the programme,” says Adonis. “It shows that manufacturers recognise the skills challenge and are prepared to play an active role in addressing it.”

The fact that industry has offered considerably more workplace opportunities than the 120 currently funded placements is significant. It not only demonstrates manufacturers’ willingness to participate, but also gives SAFI a strong foundation from which to motivate for future skills-development opportunities.

Host employers provide structured workplace learning through their normal operations and nominate an experienced employee to mentor and supervise learners. Importantly, businesses do not need QCTO or FP&M SETA accreditation to participate as host employers.

Information from the factory floor

The WIL Programme is also giving SAFI something that could have a longer-term impact on skills development: direct intelligence about the skills manufacturers actually need.

The latest data shows very high employer demand for furniture making, cabinet making, carpentry and joinery, furniture upholstery and general furniture manufacturing. Furniture assembly, wood machining, quality control and production support are also in high demand, while CNC operations, furniture design, finishing, installation, warehousing and dispatch feature among other areas of need.

“This is valuable intelligence because it comes directly from manufacturers and reflects what is happening on factory floors,” says Adonis. “It helps us understand where the skills gaps are and where future training efforts need to be focused.” This information can help SAFI work more closely with training providers and other skills-development partners to ensure that future programmes are aligned with real workplace demand, rather than training people for skills the industry does not require.

Building a stronger skills pipeline

The formal Expression of Interest period for the current intake closed on 20 August 2026 and SAFI is now progressing towards placement and implementation. Manufacturers interested in supporting workplace learning are encouraged to contact SAFI about future opportunities.

“This is an investment in the future workforce of our industry,” concludes Adonis. “The more opportunities we create for people to gain meaningful workplace experience, the stronger our skills pipeline becomes.”

For further information, contact Lynn Adonis at SAFI on 011 888 0655 or safi.admin@furnituresa.org.za. □





Building the next generation of furniture talent

For South Africa's furniture manufacturing industry to grow, it needs a steady supply of appropriately trained people. SAFI is working to strengthen the link between education and employment, so that the skills being taught are relevant to what manufacturers actually need on the factory floor.

Connecting training with industry

A key part of this work is building stronger relationships between manufacturers and the institutions responsible for training future employees. During July 2026, SAFI continued working with universities, training providers and other educational institutions to expand furniture-related training and support the implementation of QCTO Occupational Qualifications.

"The aim is to connect training more closely with actual workplace requirements," says Lynn Adonis, SAFI Administrator & Qualifications Manager. "We want people to gain relevant qualifications and practical skills that can lead to real opportunities within the furniture industry."

SAFI is helping training providers navigate accreditation requirements, implement occupational qualifications and access appropriate learning materials. It is also supporting the workplace-learning component needed to turn theoretical knowledge into practical ability.

Creating more places to learn

Several new partnerships are helping to expand these opportunities. SAFI is supporting the Bowers School of Excellence with accreditation for the Occupational Certificate: Furniture Upholsterer. It is also in discussions with Tshwane University of Technology about potentially introducing the Occupational Certificate: Furniture Designer.

A new collaboration with Johannesburg-based training institute, Skills to Furnish International, will also provide monthly technical workshops, including guidance on moving from legacy FP&M SETA Unit Standards to QCTO Occupational Qualifications.

“These partnerships allow us to increase the number of institutions that can provide relevant furniture training,” explains Adonis. “That ultimately gives more people a pathway into our industry.”

Manufacturers have a vital role

Training institutions, however, are only one part of the equation. Manufacturers provide the practical knowledge that helps ensure training reflects the skills required on factory floors, explains Adonis: “We need manufacturers to tell us where the skills gaps are and what competencies they need from future employees. That information helps us work with training providers to make skills development more relevant.”

For SAFI, the objective is straightforward: bring education and industry closer together to create a stronger pipeline of skilled, work-ready people, notes Adonis: “If we can get training providers and manufacturers working towards the same goal, we can give more people meaningful career opportunities while building the skilled workforce our furniture industry needs for the future.” □



From reclaimed timber to real opportunity



Sometimes the impact of skills development is best demonstrated by what one young person can create when given the opportunity.

Tayo Schilder, a learner at Sihlalo Promise and former learner of Florida School of Skills, recently transformed recycled timber and factory offcuts into a handcrafted display stand. Remarkably, he developed the piece entirely from his own ideas, without drawings, plans, templates or measurements.

“Tayo’s work shows us that practical talent does not always reveal itself through conventional academic routes,” says Lynn Adonis, SAFI Administrator & Qualifications Manager. “Given the right environment, people can discover abilities that could lead to meaningful careers.”

The finished stand demonstrates more than woodworking skill. It reflects creativity, problem-solving and resourcefulness, while showing how discarded timber can be transformed into an attractive, functional product.

For SAFI, Tayo’s story reinforces the importance of occupational and workplace-based learning in developing future furniture makers, artisans and entrepreneurs, says Adonis: “We need different pathways into our industry because people learn and demonstrate their abilities in different ways. Our challenge is to recognise that potential and help develop it.”

Tayo’s progress also highlights the important work being done by Sihlalo Promise in supporting learners who require additional guidance.

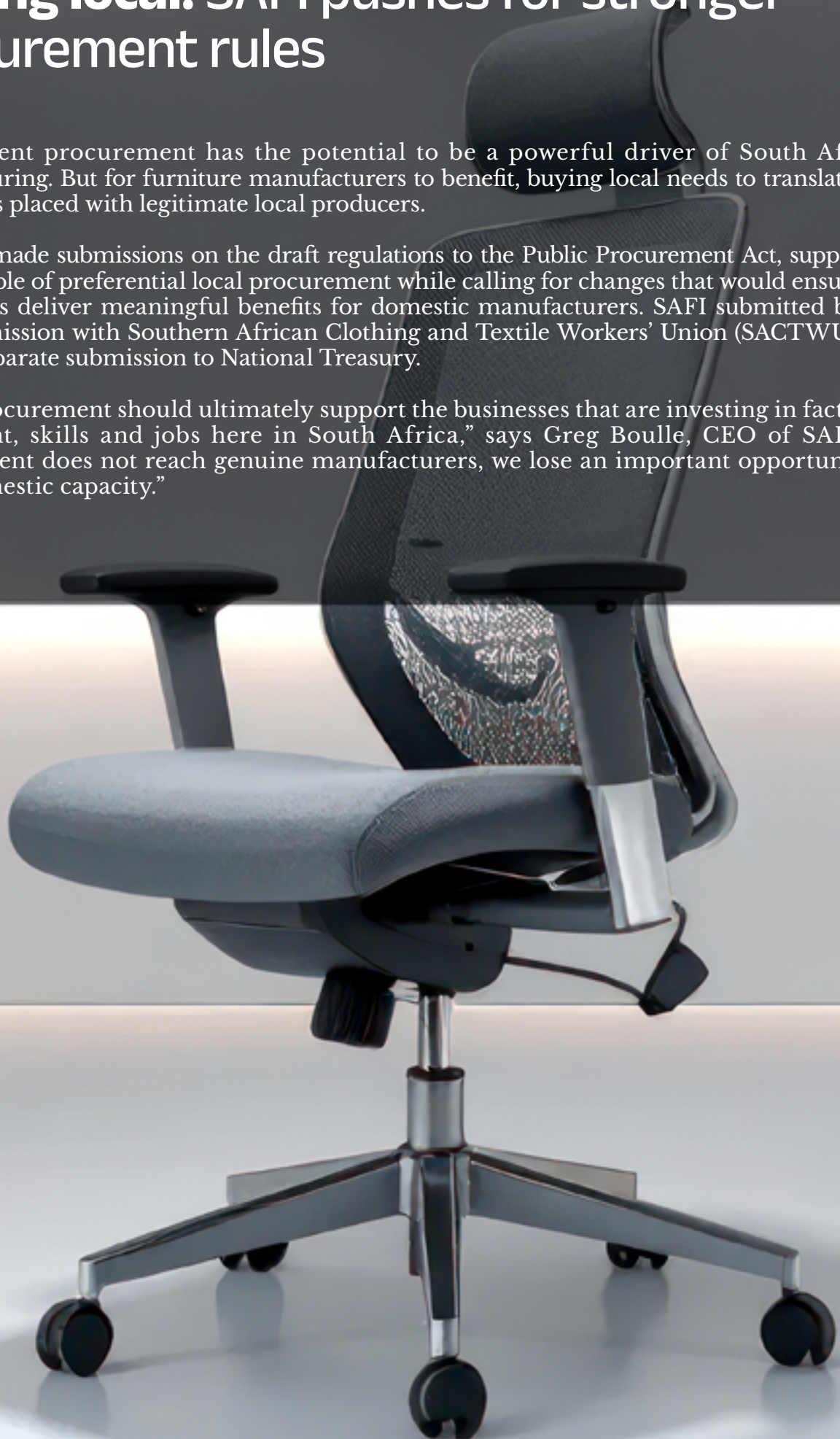
For manufacturers, his story carries a powerful message: tomorrow’s skilled employees and entrepreneurs may come from places the industry has not traditionally looked. Creating opportunities for practical learning could help uncover the talent South African furniture manufacturing needs for its future. □

Buying local: SAFI pushes for stronger procurement rules

Government procurement has the potential to be a powerful driver of South African manufacturing. But for furniture manufacturers to benefit, buying local needs to translate into real orders placed with legitimate local producers.

SAFI has made submissions on the draft regulations to the Public Procurement Act, supporting the principle of preferential local procurement while calling for changes that would ensure the regulations deliver meaningful benefits for domestic manufacturers. SAFI submitted both a joint submission with Southern African Clothing and Textile Workers' Union (SACTWU) and its own separate submission to National Treasury.

“Local procurement should ultimately support the businesses that are investing in factories, equipment, skills and jobs here in South Africa,” says Greg Boule, CEO of SAFI. “If procurement does not reach genuine manufacturers, we lose an important opportunity to build domestic capacity.”



Greater transparency, fairer access

Transparency is a major concern. SAFI's submission argues that a lack of transparency in government procurement has undermined fair competition, sometimes favouring intermediaries or suppliers without the necessary manufacturing capacity or experience. The result is underutilised local manufacturing capacity and fewer opportunities for businesses to scale and create employment.

“For our members, this is about having a fair opportunity to compete,” says Boule. “South Africa has furniture manufacturers capable of supplying the market. Procurement should recognise and utilise that capacity.”

SAFI is therefore calling for furniture categories to be clearly designated within strategic procurement, local manufacturing requirements to be included in procurement wording and all RFQs to be openly advertised on the eTender portal. It has also recommended greater transparency around framework agreements, sole-supplier processes and contract management.

For SAFI members, finding relevant opportunities is already easier. Members can access furniture-related tenders in one place via the SAFI website, helping manufacturers identify and respond to procurement opportunities relevant to their businesses

Supporting manufacturers of all sizes

This is particularly important in a sector dominated by small and medium-sized manufacturers, many of them family-owned businesses. SAFI has cautioned that aspects of the proposed regulations risk excluding much of the furniture manufacturing sector, potentially working against wider re-industrialisation and job-creation objectives.

“We need procurement rules that recognise the structure of our industry,” says Boule. “Localisation should create opportunities for capable South African manufacturers of different sizes to participate and grow.”

SAFI is also pushing for the designation of furniture products for local production and content to be implemented without further delay. This, it argues, would complement broader efforts to address illicit and under-declared imports.

“For manufacturers, procurement is not simply a policy discussion,” concludes Boule. “It affects production volumes, investment decisions and employment. Getting these regulations right can help turn public-sector purchasing power into genuine support for South African manufacturing.” □



Protecting local manufacturing: Tackling illicit and under-declared imports

For South African furniture manufacturers playing by the rules, competing with imported products that are incorrectly declared, undervalued or misclassified is more than a frustration. It can distort pricing, undermine local production and make it increasingly difficult for compliant businesses to compete.

SAFI continues to push for stronger action on illicit, under-declared and mis-declared imports as part of its broader drive to protect South Africa's furniture manufacturing capacity.

“Local manufacturers invest in people, equipment, factories and compliance, and they should not be placed at a disadvantage by products entering the country without being correctly declared,” says Greg Boule, CEO of SAFI. “Creating a fair competitive environment is fundamental to the future of our industry.”



Building the evidence for action

An important part of SAFI's approach is developing credible evidence that can support stronger enforcement. The Localisation Support Fund has been working to secure funding for research into under-declared and mis-declared imports, while support for the research was also due to be considered through the PG Bison/NEF Fund.

"This is a complex problem and we need reliable information to understand its scale and impact," explains Boule. "The stronger the evidence, the stronger our position when engaging with government and the relevant authorities."

SAFI has also been engaging with the International Trade Administration Commission (ITAC) on tariff-related matters. ITAC is investigating the possible withdrawal of the rebate provision for plywood seats and backrests, while recommendations are being prepared following an application to increase the tariff on medium-density fibreboard.

Localisation and enforcement must work together

SAFI believes stronger import controls need to be supported by procurement and localisation policies that actively favour legitimate domestic production. In its submission on the draft Public Procurement Act regulations, SAFI called for the designation of sectors for local production and content to be implemented without further delay, noting that such measures can support efforts to counter illicit and under-declared imports.

"Localisation only works if we address both sides of the equation," says Boule. "We need to create opportunities for South African manufacturers while ensuring imported products compete on a fair and properly regulated basis."

For furniture manufacturers, the stakes are significant. Fairer competition can help protect production volumes, support investment and strengthen the industry's ability to sustain and create jobs, concludes Boule: "This is ultimately about protecting South Africa's ability to manufacture. Every time we strengthen local production, we retain skills, economic activity and employment within our own economy." □



Ubuntu Curve: Where local design meets everyday function

South African design is making its mark internationally, and SAFI member, [Nyambose Group](#), is demonstrating how local thinking can combine cultural identity, sustainability and practical problem-solving in one innovative piece of furniture.

Designed by Mangaliso Mtetwa, Senior Architect at Nyambose Group, Ubuntu Curve is a modular seating system inspired by the South African philosophy of Ubuntu: “I am because we are.” Designed and manufactured in South Africa, it uses FSC-certified timber and recycled steel and has been engineered around circular-design principles including modularity, repairability and longevity.

“Ubuntu Curve was designed around the idea of connection,” explains Mtetwa. “It is about creating furniture that brings people together, but also responds practically to the way people use shared spaces.”

A curve with a purpose

One of its most innovative features is also the one that gives Ubuntu Curve its distinctive form. The curved sections incorporate space for parking bicycles, scooters and motorbikes alongside the seating area – allowing users to sit close to their transport rather than leaving it elsewhere. Mtetwa’s own description of the system identifies bicycle parking as one of its key functional features.

This makes the concept particularly relevant for contemporary public and urban environments. It could be used in parks, campuses, transport precincts, office developments, shopping centres and mixed-use developments, as well as hospitality and corporate environments. The system has been designed specifically for flexible use in public spaces and contract and hospitality interiors.

The integrated parking also makes more efficient use of space, while allowing cyclists and riders to keep their bicycles, scooters or motorbikes conveniently alongside them, explains Mtetwa: “It is functional art. The curve has a visual identity, but it also has a purpose. Good design should respond to how people actually move through and use a space.”



Made in South Africa, recognised internationally

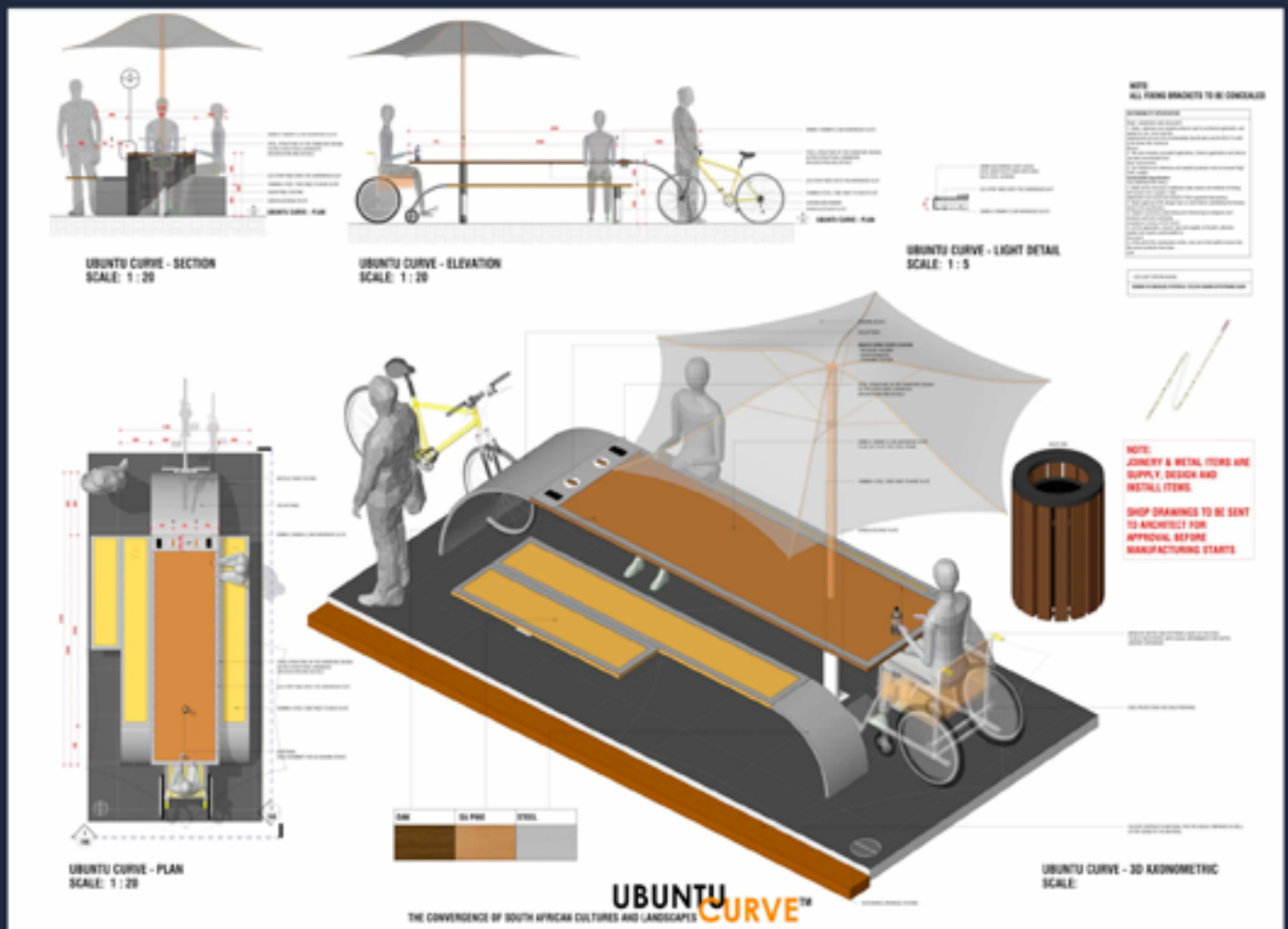
Ubuntu Curve is handcrafted and manufactured locally, combining recycled steel with FSC-certified timber. Its modular construction means components can be configured for different environments, while repairability and adaptability can help extend the product's useful lifespan. The design has already achieved significant international recognition, winning two German Design Awards 2026: Excellent Product Design: Furniture, and Excellent Product Design: Circular Design ([German Design Award](#)).

Setting sights on global markets

As a SAFI member, Nyambose Group is part of SAFI's drive to showcase South African furniture and design talent internationally. Following a successful exhibition at SARCD, Mtetwa is keen to pursue future opportunities through SAFI, including applying for Sector Specific Assistance Scheme (SSAS) support to exhibit at international trade shows.

For Mtetwa, international exposure is an opportunity to show what South African design can offer: "We have our own stories, our own design language and enormous manufacturing talent. Ubuntu Curve shows that something deeply rooted in South Africa can still have relevance anywhere in the world."

For more information, contact nyambosearchitects@gmail.com, 073 324 9456. □



CONTACT US



www.southafricanfurnitureinitiative.co.za

P O Box 1529, Sanlamhof 7532, Cape Town, 7532