

# RMB's Emrie Brown takes centrestage

By [Katja Hamilton](#)

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Emrie Brown has been appointed chief executive officer of Rand Merchant Bank (RMB) - the corporate and investment banking business of FirstRand Limited, effective 1 October 2022. Here she unpacks what her new appointment means to her and what the future holds for RMB.



Source: Supplied, Emrie Brown, the new chief executive officer of RMB

**■ Congratulations on your appointment. What are the key core strengths that you'll be bringing into your new role?**

I deeply value diversity. The essence of my role at RMB revolves around creating an environment that is inclusive and where people have a sense of belonging.

I am also a highly energised and deeply passionate person. I fully believe that you should love what you do; that's how you bring impact and do your best work.

I value people. I think that our people are absolutely key to our success, and I want to create an environment where they can thrive.

For me it is about serving the people of RMB and the organisation, ensuring an RMB that is future-fit and there to help our clients thrive.

**■ *How do you feel about your new role?***

This role brings new challenges, new learning opportunities, and new opportunities for growth. RMB is an amazing organisation. I've worked here for 21 years.

To be trusted with the responsibility of leading this amazing organisation leaves me deeply humbled. I feel very privileged. I feel excited; it's great to be a woman in a role like this.

**■ *How did the Covid pandemic impact your organisation and what are the lessons you've learnt from that experience? How will you carry that forward?***

The impact of Covid has been profound on people. People have lost family.

We're only fully appreciating now and continuously seeing the impact it's had on how people see themselves relative to their employer and their workplace.

We all think people want to be valued, but I think people want to be seen for who they are now more than ever.

People have realised life is short and fragile, and they've started questioning what they do. They want to do work that has maximum impact while they're alive. And do work that matters and has purpose. As employers, we need to reframe how we think about why people come to the office.



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A lot of organisations are still figuring out what the right approach is. Do they need their employees to be in the office two or three days a week? Do they try and understand the employees' context?

It's difficult if you've got 50,000 employees, but it's important for employers to really articulate what the value is of their employees coming to the office. Why are they there? For RMB it's the connection, the personal relationships, and a sense of community.

Recently I had a colleague talk about the sense of community she felt at RMB, and it was so beautiful to me to learn that that's why our people are at the office because some of them have been completely capable of doing their jobs from home; sometimes even better - without a drop in productivity.

That is where employers' challenges now lie. Employees' needs have changed in terms of what they're looking for from an employer. We need to adapt as an organisation to meet those needs, fulfil them, and ensure we can attract and retain our top talent.

At RMB we are a people's business across the organisation, across all of our capabilities, and our future depends on attracting and retaining top talent.

**■ Recently, RMB acted as co-arranger and sustainability coordinator in Helios's ESG-linked capital call facility - the first deal of its kind in Africa. What differentiates this deal?**

At RMB and the First Rand Group, sustainability, sustainable finance and ESG are key focus areas. For us, it's about assisting our clients in their transition journey with appropriate products and solutions, and seeing what role we can play as a financial services provider in helping our clients to transition to more climate-friendly and sustainable businesses.

We do look at all of the components of our clients' business not only ESG; we also look at the social side and what we can do for our clients to improve diversity on the gender front and otherwise. That is the role we play.

We have made a R200m commitment of funding facilitation over the next five years in sustainable finance and ESG.



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For us the opportunity is compelling. We are a financial institution that really wants to have a positive impact on our societies. If you look at the growth of sustainable finance internationally it's sitting at double digits - I think it's now over \$7tn in South Africa, and in the rest of Africa it is in its infancy. The opportunity and the impact we can have is immense.

**■ Could you give me some examples of what that might look like in the next five years?**

We're going to assess whether our clients have net-zero target plans, and what role we can play for them. The solutions are different for each client. Once we understand our clients' transition path then we can start having conversations around which of our products and solutions can facilitate that for them.

Our products are continuously evolving. Whether we link them to specific targets or whether we use them for specific projects is dependent on what our clients' needs are.

**■ Would you say this strategy differentiates RMB from other financial institutions? Are you leading?**

Yes, we are. In South Africa we are leading. We established our team about a year ago and we've done about 42% of the market facilitation in the last year.

It's obviously a space that all the banks are looking at, but where I think our differentiation lies is in the solutions and advice we give our clients. That is what distinguishes us. That quality of advice, I believe, is what makes us the best team in South Africa.

**■ Will RMB make more inroads in Africa and facilitate intra-African trade?**

For us the rest of Africa is a great growth opportunity and at RMB we see where we can use our skillset in South Africa to assist our subsidiaries to serve their markets better. In the infrastructure finance space, we've done market research in renewable energy and we're doing a lot of research in private power.

We've transported those skillsets into [Namibia](#), for example. For RMB our connection into our subsidiaries is important because of that transfer of skills - where we can really bring something new to some of the subsidiaries based on what we are doing in South Africa.

**■ What's headlining that's concerning for RMB?**

One of the aspects involving South Africa that is specifically concerning is that Eskom continues to be in the headlines. I think our broader infrastructure has got some challenges, and we need to rally support for the country.

I love South Africa. I say to people that they will have to carry me out of here one day. But I think we have our challenges. If we can really get the private and the public sector together to solve and find solutions for our challenges then I think the future will be bright.

But - we've got some work ahead of us.

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