

# Just who is Chuma Niklaas? Disruptor or menace?

By [Chuma Niklaas](#), issued by [AFDA](#)

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The name's Niklaas, Chuma J. Niklaas or just CJ if you prefer and I'm a second-year BCom student specialising in Digital Technology at AFDA.



My goals and aspirations are becoming a futurist and entrepreneur, creating my own business, travelling and changing the world and enrolling at one of Singularity University's programmes.



I honestly had my reservations about pursuing a degree at AFDA but as I soon realised throughout the course of my first year and delving deeper into the BCom programme that this was the kind of learning narrative that was perfect for me especially with my wide variety of interesting and wacky interests and this course moved beyond the common BCom degree.

I'm very passionate about technology and how emerging and exponential technology have the potential to create a new paradigm in society. I am generally interested in and curious about a lot of different industries and subjects but what I'm most passionate about are the biotechnology and the healthcare sector.

## Why biotechnology?

I've always had a keen interest in technology and how it could help create a better world for everyone ever since high school more specifically in biotechnology which is essentially just an umbrella term for the application of biological processes to create beneficial applications in medicine, agriculture, food, environment. I remember reading *The Singularity is Near* by Ray Kurzweil when I was fifteen and subsequently hearing about Singularity University is definitely what got me inspired and one could even say obsessed with exponential technology especially in how they can be integrated into biotech. New and exciting advancements in the field are on the rise such as CRISPR, the decreasing cost in genomics, synthetic meats, bioelectronics and many more which help save and augment lives.

I also could consider biotechnology to be one of the most important technologies right now as what is more important than the technology that is able to manipulate the code of life.

And who knew I would get an opportunity to get some form of hands-on experience in the industry through a hackathon.

### **The M² Hackathon and Metamorph**

The M² Hackathon was a two-day event which was the collaborative effort by both Mest Incubator Africa and Merck with the goal of gathering young creative talent and have them interact and innovate with Merck's products and services and come up with creative solutions around biotech, healthcare and sensor technologies. Attending this event was pretty much a no-brainer for me.

There were four challenges for us to choose and form teams to solve these challenges. The challenges range from healthcare access solutions to engagement beyond the pill. Unfortunately the fifth challenge that I was most interested in was cancelled, which was going to involve biosensing and interfaces. So I picked challenge two which was using facial recognition for diagnosing hypothyroidism or hyperthyroidism and formed a team to develop a solution for the challenge. Before we began I ran a short experiment with the team to see how they envisioned healthcare in the future (the year 2030 to be exact) and for the first time I shared my vision and personal moonshot for personalised medicine and human enhancement with complete strangers. It was an interesting experiment but it did help get the team fired up with drawing up ideas to solve the current challenge we were faced with. Despite the exhaustive challenges we were faced with we managed to put something together in the form of Metamorph, which in this version of the concept would be a health companion app and a voiced chatbot powered by machine learning algorithms and facial recognition software to diagnose hypothyroidism or hyperthyroidism.

The overall event was loads of fun and I had a chance to apply what I learned from AFDA in a different setting and it was a huge surprise when our team came third place and receiving two tickets to the SA Innovation Summit. Despite the challenges the hackathon was great learning experience and more importantly it was fun as I met some great people, from my teammates to the coaches and mentors hosting the event.

Attending the SA Innovation Summit was like a dream come true for me, being surrounded by an incredible cast of South African innovators.

When I was at the innovation summit, I was on a mission to get as much knowledge and information as I can and see how I can apply what I've learned from AFDA, the hackathon and the summit into starting my own moonshot startup right now and there's no time to start building the future than the present.

From the hackathon, the concept of Metamorph shall be further expanded and building towards an institution of the future.

The two current co-founders of Metamorph are myself and Muzalema Mwanza who is also currently running her own company called The Safe Motherhood Alliance which provides sterilised affordable baby delivery kits containing essential supplies a woman requires at childbirth to ensure she has a clean, safe and hygienic delivery. Coincidentally Muzalema was already invited to summit as a contestant for the FemBioBiz Acceleration Programme and made it as a finalist for her pitch at the summit winning both a cash prize and tickets to Slush 2018 which is a world-leading startup in Helsinki.

### **Metamorph and the future**

Currently there are only two founders of Metamorph but we are currently working on expanding the concept of Metamorph and converting it into a moonshot startup as well as building a team of co-founders. We are also planning on applying at the newly formed OneBio incubator, which is a brand new pan-African biotech incubator. Muzalema and I are both driven individuals who aim to reach for the stars and make the dream of an institution that can enhance the lives of millions a reality and transform the healthcare industry beyond the realms of therapy and into enhancement/augmentation.

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