

Filmmaker Dugan Bridges on Upward Globility and FMF's Khaya Lam episode shot in SA

By  Juanita Pienaar

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Upward Globility is a new video series produced by Atlas Network in the USA that explores how people flourish when they are free to make choices that unleash innovation and change. The pilot episode focuses on the Free Market Foundation's Khaya Lam project in South Africa, whose aim is to help previously dispossessed families acquire title to their homes and land.



We caught up with filmmaker Dugan Bridges whose work has been distributed by Amazon and TimeWarner and who has previously been featured in *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, and *MovieMaker* magazine. He says about the project:

“ Upward Globility is particularly exciting because it transcends politics in a way that is rare. We’re exploring ideas that show how human ingenuity and initiative can change lives for the better. ”

Here, Bridges elaborates on the project as a whole and how they got involved with the FMF, and shares the feedback they've received so far.

■ **How did you get involved in the Upward Globility project?**

I heard about Atlas Network starting a show where they would be travelling around the world looking for people who are doing amazing work to uplift society and show how people can lift themselves out of poverty if some basic barriers are out of the way. I've worked with them before and knew that they have a unique network of global organisations feeding them these incredible stories, which I hear about every year.

So, I approached the VP of Communications, Melissa Mann, who created the concept, to see if she needed any help. She told me that she wanted Vale Sloane to host the show, so it would be like an Anthony Bourdain-style travelogue. I thought that was a great idea as Vale is intelligent and charming. Eventually, we met up in Los Angeles where we sat down one afternoon to map it all out on paper and our hunt for the first story began.

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Atlas Network is excited to announce the launch of Upward Globility, a new video series produced by Atlas Network that explores how people flourish when they are free to make choices that unleash innovation and change. The first episode will premiere on YouTube on June 1, 12 PM EST. We can't wait to see what you think! 💎💎

A post shared by [Atlas Network \(@atlasnetwork\)](#) on May 29, 2020 at 4:07pm PDT

🏠 **What made you choose to focus on South Africa and the FMF as your pilot episode?**

Good timing! We were in Nairobi, and since we were already mostly all the way to Joburg... But seriously, Khaya Lam is a great story to share with millions of people who aren't aware that it exists. FMF's initial goal was to transfer title to 3,000 municipally-owned properties, starting in the Ngwathe area of the Free State province, and FMF worked with the municipal council to bring them on board with Khaya Lam.

Today, more than 20,000 titles have been put in private ownership at a cost of about \$140 per title. Thousands of black South Africans are landowners. So the value proposition is high and the cost is relatively low. Since Atlas Network has a long history of cooperation with FMF, we knew about this from the start of the project, and we've reported on it before. This time, it was a chance to introduce a global audience to real people who are benefitting from the change.



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🏠 **What was it like working with Vale Sloane?**

Vale is as light-hearted and cheerful in real life as he is on camera! And Australians are naturally tough so it makes it a lot easier on those of us behind the scenes. Really, it was a joy to work with him. Part of this job is being able to think on your feet and make people feel comfortable on camera, so he was a natural fit for the project. He's professional when it's time to be professional and you can grab a beer with him once that's done. My hope is we'll get more opportunities to work together in the future.

■ **Tell us about your involvement with FMF and what was it like meeting the director, Temba Nolutshungu.**

I had previously no connection with FMF and didn't know much about them, although Atlas Network has been working with them for many years. Obviously, they are doing important work as they created the Khaya Lam project, and the project is such a great idea. Maybe the principles of what they are doing can spread west as the United States could benefit from their ideas for race reconciliation. Our team loved meeting Temba, who is such a gentle soul with much inner strength. It was an honour to get to help illustrate his personal passion for social justice and land reform. It's contagious in a way and I hope we bring some of that back with us, and are sharing it with our viewers.



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■ **Can you tell us a bit more about the Upward Globility project as a whole?**

For the last couple of years, Atlas Network has been shooting short documentaries about public policy work that people are doing to end poverty around the world. They're terrific – and available on Atlas Network's YouTube site as well as at AtlasNetwork.org – but we thought it would be fun to have a guide along for the ride as viewers discover how people are using a single, simple idea to transform the lives of people living in poverty. Vale was a perfect choice! He's smart, funny, naturally curious, and has a genuine interest in people and the paths they've taken to get to where they are. He takes you by the hand and introduces you to a whole new world.

The next episode is in Tennessee with a group of recently incarcerated women who are trying to turn their lives around. Criminal justice reform is a huge issue in the United States right now, of course. We work with a group that is trying to end recidivism and change laws that make it harder for former inmates to get jobs. How do you become a productive member of society if laws actively prohibit you from getting work? So we meet with women who are getting back into society and starting their lives over.

■ **What do you plan to achieve with this series?**

“ Our goal is really to draw attention to the innovative, creative vision of people who are making the world a better place.

There are millions of people who get up every morning and are changing the world, even if they're not waking up and thinking: “Today, I'm going to change the world!” Our actions have consequences beyond the scope of what we see, and Atlas Network partners around the world (more than 500 in 97 countries) are trying to create the conditions for people, particularly those living in poverty, to be more free and more prosperous. ”

■ **What was the initial feedback regarding the pilot episode?**

Very positive overall from viewers around the world, many of whom had no idea that a project of this kind even existed. We've had some pushback by people who feel that just giving land away isn't fair. It's a complicated question, and as a US-based production company with an Aussie host, we're sensitive to the issues that we raise. Our partners at FMF have dealt with this question since Khaya Lam started.

“ Our goal was to show how real people are impacted by this project, and to share their joy in knowing that there is security in owning their own small piece of earth. Not just for them today but for their children and their children's children as well. ”

■ **Do you think there could be a follow-up episode in future, regarding FMF?**

We'd love to work more with FMF and share their projects, particularly Khaya Lam, of course, but there might be others that would make great stories. We'd love to share how South Africans are using the power of free markets to advance human rights and democracy, and – when we're free to travel again – going back to South Africa is definitely a goal!

Watch the episode here:

ABOUT JUANITA PIENAAR

Juanita is the editor of the marketing & media portal on the Bizcommunity website. She is also a contributing writer.

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