

CSI: a business imperative

By [Danette Breitenbach](#)

9 Jun 2014

Perhaps 10 years ago Corporate Social Investment (CSI) was about doing something for the sake of doing something and then feeling good about it, but today it's about creating a good business story. It has become a business imperative.

This evolution of CSI over the past 20 years of South Africa's democracy was examined at Trialogue's *Making CSI Matter* conference that took place at the Wanderers Club last week.



Cathy Duff, Director: Trialogue, presenting on the state of CSI in the plenary session.

The conference, which runs over two days, looked at the role of CSI in the country's democracy by exploring five themes related to this, including engagement, responsibility, economic freedom, diversity and vision, and were addressed in panel workshops where two to three panelists introduced the topic, and then a facilitated discussion took place.

Local and international speakers, panelists and sponsors

Speakers included Margaret Coady, Executive Director of the New York-based Committee Encouraging Corporate Philanthropy and Jillian Reilly, international Aid Worker and Author of *Shame* as well as Godwin Khosa, CEO of the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) and Shaka Sisulu of the Love Movement.

Panelists ranged from Coca-Cola's Asyia Sheik-Ojwang, Head of Public Affairs, Charles Reed, Head of Community Investment, Barclays Africa, Lauren Turnbull, CSR and Sponsorships Manager, KFC and Kgotsi Schoeman, CEO, Kagiso Trust.

The conference headline sponsors were Absa, the Eskom Development Foundation, Transnet Foundation and Vodacom Foundation. The non-profit organisation (NPO) attendance sponsors were MMI Foundation, Rand Water Foundation and Coca-Cola South Africa. The media partner was Mail & Guardian.

Bringing together practitioners to examine the developmental aspects of CSI



Michelle Matthews, Content Manager at Trialogue, explains that the aim of the conference is to bring together practitioners across the CSI sphere - from government, non-government organisations (NGOs), NPOs, corporates etc. - and examine CSI specifically as it relates to development.

She says, "People come into the CSI space from different backgrounds, and often not a developmental background, and therefore there is a huge thirst for knowledge." So the conference provides delegates the opportunity for knowledge sharing over a broader number of topics related to CSI through the various presentations and panel discussion as well as the opportunity to learn from one another.

A motivational shift to strategic CSI

"CSI was present in business, or some businesses, before then, but now the motivations are often more than moral ones, and are about the alignment of creating shared values and aligning CSI with business values and creating a positive impact on society," explains Matthews.

This change is reflected in the content of MBAs which today include several modules on sustainability or these types of

concepts. In the long run, this is where businesses are moving towards. She says sustainability is a benefit of good CSI and by good she means well targeted in the context of the business and its DNA.

"When strategic CSI is applied, then the benefits to an organisation are not only external, but leverage other parts of the business, such as the employees of corporate."

CSI is a combination of what a business has to do and wants to do

For her, CSI today is really a combination of what a business has to do and what it wants to do. "It is also playing a bigger role in enterprise development, while responding to a variety of pressures, including pressure from the consumer. It is not a feel good anymore; it's more than that and is viewed as strategic by corporates."

The conference is a valuable platform for CSI practitioners and stakeholders to meet and gain knowledge as there is currently no formal qualification to become a CSI practitioner. Matthews says that while trialogue does provide training as an introduction to CSI, the training is not accredited. "For many years we have been investigating a formal qualification in CSI." One of the possibilities to have been examined recently is a CSI accredited course through the Gibbs School of Business, but so far there is nothing concrete in this.

The conference also allows the various stakeholders to gain a better understanding of each other's roles. NGOs need to understand the corporates' constraints and initiatives while the corporates need to understand how NGOs work.

In South Africa there is a business imperative attached to CSI, and various codes - and even licensing arrangements such as those in mining and telecommunication - in different industries have placed additional demands on businesses.

ABOUT DANETTE BREITENBACH

Danette Breitenbach is a marketing & media editor at Bizcommunity.com. Previously she freelanced in the marketing and media sector, including for Bizcommunity. She was editor and publisher of AdVantage, the publication that served the marketing, media and advertising industry in southern Africa. She has worked extensively in print media, mainly B2B. She has a Masters in Financial Journalism from Wits.

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