

Covid-19: How corporates can rise to the occasion and support vulnerable communities

In the face of severe socio-economic realities, what can organisations do to protect and empower our vulnerable communities?



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According to Neil Reddy, business strategy and projects manager at Veer Steel Mills, the critical consideration in dealing with Covid-19 is understanding that it is not experienced equally by all South Africans.

“We are all feeling the effects of this pandemic very differently, depending on where you reside and who you live with, how you earn money, your mental and physical health, and your access to healthcare and basic amenities. Our strength and solidarity as a community is entirely dependent on the lengths we as individuals - and as organisations - are willing to go to ensure that the bottom of the pyramid experiences as little impact as possible.”

Private sector support, innovation

According to Reddy, the South African government has responded quickly and decisively in dealing with the outbreak of Covid-19, but they cannot work in isolation in mitigating the spread of the virus. He believes that support and innovation in the private sector is needed now more than ever.

“Government has set the tone in terms of leadership and direction in response to Covid-19, and we are prepared to serve the communities in which we operate. By entering into partnerships with government, we are able to leverage off of existing community initiatives to maximise on their impact. The onus is on community leaders, business owners, non-profit organisations and municipalities, alike, to combine expertise, pool resources and drive education to combat this threat.”

“As part of our community-level response to the coronavirus, we have partnered with the City of Ekurhuleni and their Department of Community Safety, headed by MMC Phaladi Frans Mmoko, to donate 300 food parcels to indigent families in Tembisa and Germiston. The areas surrounding Veer Steel Mills are in dire need of necessities and ongoing support, such as toiletries and groceries. These communities are the lifeblood of our company, it is our responsibility to ensure that they are provided for.”



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Sindy Peters 18 May 2020



Mindset shift needed

Further to this, says Reddy, a mindset shift is needed to ensure that communities are best-equipped to combat the spread of the coronavirus. Communication campaigns - tailored to local languages and with customs and cultures kept in mind - must be in place to consistently raise awareness, reinforce healthcare best practices and instil a sense of accountability within areas.

“An education exercise is essential to not only protect our workforce, but to equip them with the knowledge to keep their families, neighbours and communities safe and sanitary. We have had to recondition our staff to operate safely under this new normal while at work, but we have also provided them with material to better identify symptoms, and understand necessary hygiene and sanitisation measures,” says Reddy.

Vulnerable communities cannot be isolated in their struggle. In the spirit of *ubuntu*, says Reddy, it is the responsibility of every South African to fight the spread of Covid-19. In order for this fight to be effective, we are reliant upon South African ingenuity, compassion and collaboration to support one another through this pandemic.

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