

## **The time is now for business to uplift society**

Although the notion of shared value, CSI and businesses giving back to the communities in which they operate is nothing new, it is becoming more imperative for businesses to integrate the well-being of society into their core objectives. In many instances, contributing to society is a secondary objective for businesses and yet without a healthy flourishing society, we cannot be successful in business.

Currently South Africa faces many challenges and whilst government has outlined key priorities in the 2030 National Development Plan, businesses need to both align and contribute to addressing these challenges. Some of the main issues we face include unemployment, employment equity and lack of transformation, and environmental sustainability and these areas should be translated into what we do as businesses. We should be aligning ourselves to the agenda of government and we should essentially start reporting on what, we as businesses, are doing to uplift South Africa.

For the past five years Siemens has taken this approach and translated it into a Business to Society approach whereby we take the development of the country and embed it into our business model. We have made an effort to report on how we have added value to society and how we contribute to the country, by showcasing results.

In doing so we have seen great results in creating more than 1500 jobs, growing our female work force to be 28,6% of the company, maintaining a B-BBEE level 2 status, and enabling our customers to lower their CO2 emission. However, over the past few years we have taken key learnings in terms of contributing to society.

### **1. If you stimulate the right growth in society – your business grows:**

When businesses aim to put society at the centre of what they do, it is imperative to firstly understand societal needs and secondly be able to link this back to your business offering. This is the difference between development and pure philanthropy. For example, any business should be able to manage skills development, however it will need to consider which skills lead to employment and fills the skills gap in South Africa.

2. For real impact you need to look beyond your own business:

It is true that business should continue to upskill their own employees and manage their own sustainability in terms of both the environment as well as the economic health of the company. Having said that, for a business to have a wider impact on society, businesses also need to enable their suppliers through enterprise and supplier training and development, as well as provide their customers with solutions to impact society. If we are not enabling other businesses through the work we do as companies, then we are missing opportunities for these businesses to grow and in turn contribute to the growth of the country.

3. Measure, report and evaluate:

It is critical to not only set goals against your efforts to uplift society, but also to measure the outcome and report on it to track year-on-year improvements and evaluate your programmes to ensure they remain both relevant and effective. This should be done on a yearly basis in alignment with the social, economic and political climate of the country with a consistent focus on the needs of the community.

As a global business, we take key learnings from our other operations, however everything we do is localised for impact.

Businesses can no longer afford not to contribute to society if we don't uplift the communities in which we operate, our future in South Africa will also be affected. By building the country in line with both its potential and challenges, we are building a destination attractive for investment, growth and development.

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