



Launch - Triologue CSI Handbook

The Venue, Melrose Arch

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Keynote Speech

By:

Ms Nozipho January-Bardill

Chairperson: Global Compact Network South Africa

How South Africa can and should contribute to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Introduction

Good Morning ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to start by thanking Triologue for inviting me to speak this morning. It was purely on trust. They believed Achieng from the NBI. She has always been a great support for those of us who have sustainability mandates in our organisations and we appreciate her passion for the work she does in supporting the implementation of the UN Global Compact and the Network of companies in South Africa who have not only signed the compact, but are also committed to implementing its principles.

We are on the eve of the first anniversary of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, adopted by the family of nations at the UN General Assembly in September 2015, and effective from January 2016. Most of the 17 goals, if not all, are of great relevance for South Africa given our developmental challenges. We know what our challenges are as a country, but we are also fortunate to have our own guiding frameworks for action, such as the National Development Plan (NDP) that are also quite aligned to the SDG framework.

The NDP has identified 3 key challenges for South Africa. These are Poverty, Unemployment and Inequality. Our responses as individual organizations or in partnerships with others, should address these key challenges.

I have been asked to deliver this keynote speech, in my capacity as the chairperson of the UN Global Compact Network South Africa, which is managed within the National Business Initiative (NBI).

THE UNGC

The UN Global Compact was established in 2000 by Kofi Annan, the then Secretary General of the United Nations. His dream was of an initiative that would guide business to fully understand their role in society.

He benchmarked the business role in society across 10 Principles in the universal areas of human rights, labour protection, environmental protection and anti-corruption. He also saw the Compact as a multi-stakeholder platform that would bring business together with government and other key stakeholders to find solutions to priority societal challenges.

This need for a compact between business, government, labour, civil society and other stakeholders still resonates for us today in South Africa.

Hence the SDGs, unlike the preceding Millennium Development Goals, are indeed a North Star:

They offer us a 15 year vision for shaping a better, more humane world for all and in particular the poorest and least empowered in our societies.

- They carry the name of, and are mandated by the world's largest and only governing body.
- They have received global attention and offer a fresh optimism to many of us who are keen to tackle the challenges that our world faces at this time.
- They challenge the territorial boundaries that exist amongst our institutions and that frustrate collaboration.
- They challenge us to lead more, certainly communicate much more both vertically and horizontally, and manage less.
- They have a strong and clear role for the private sector in their implementation.

The SDGs offers the private sector a big opportunity to address the apparent conflict between it and communities that contribute to its success in untold ways, including very negative perceptions of some of the sectors. They provide a convenient framework for those companies that have (or have not) embraced the sustainability agenda and really wish to make a positive, visible and tangible social and economic impact on people's lives.

If we focus briefly on some clusters of the SDGs. (And this is not at the expense of other important areas of the SDGs), it is evident that all 17 are closely linked and fulfilling one may have significant impact on a range of others.

For example, 5 of the SDGs deal with equality- and these are:

SDG 1: End Poverty

SDG 2: Zero Hunger

SDG 4: Quality Education

SDG 5: Gender Equality &

SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities

22 years into democracy, we still have serious deficits in each of these areas.

There has been some movement on poverty due to state interventions like Grants. Statistics SA reports in 2014 that the overall rate of poverty is at 39% down from 46% in 2011. The youth are still the ones mostly affected.

In terms of hunger and although SA produces sufficient food, 26% of the population are hungry and another 28% on the verge of hunger.

Regarding quality education, there has been increased access to education but with very poor educational outcomes at all levels. It is quite scandalous that the quality of our education is lower than many other middle income and poorer countries on our continent.

On gender dynamics, women in SA experience domestic and social violence at alarming rates. They are often the ones most affected by poverty and though every racist comment on social media is condemned with ferocious vigour, gender based violence is tolerated much more.

In terms of inequality, South Africa remains one of the most unequal countries in the world and inequality has increased rather than decreased since 1993.

Knowing what we know and where we are at as a country, what then do we need to drive impact on the SDGs?

1. We need good, purposeful and committed leadership in both the public and private sectors. We have known examples of what good leadership can do for a country. Such leadership has:

Established direction and propelled us into the future rather than drag us back into the past; It has aligned and mobilized people to achieve astonishing results;

It has ignited interest and released passions and positive energy

It has motivated and inspired;

It has unleashed innovation and has been adaptive.

It has demonstrated that the sum is bigger than its parts (good examples being the 2010 World Cup and the Nelson Mandela Children's Hospital)

2. We need to build trust and learn to collaborate within and across sectors. Our challenges are huge and cannot be achieved at individual levels. Each sector and each organization needs to bring forth their unique strengths and contribute to implementation of the SDGs. Let us be proactive and not always wait for crisis in order to pool together.
3. We are still a deeply divided country, characterised by rampant inequality and entrenched racism. It is necessary that we embrace a new set of values and mind-set that will enable us to bridge these divides, promote social cohesion and build an inclusive society.
4. There are existing initiatives and projects in South Africa that already address some of our key challenges. We need to identify successful ones and models with potential, rally around these and take them to scale. To surmount our challenges in a way that can positively change lives require scale and quality of interventions. We also need to interject urgency in the way we respond, so we are not caught up in a cycle of crises.
5. We have a sophisticated private sector in SA that competes with the world's best. We are capable of driving innovation and developing new financing models that can facilitate implementation of the SDGs. Opportunities and new markets will be created. Our investments on the SDGs should be long term and will give us results.
6. I love the notion that we need not outsource the implementation of the SDGs and our NDP. Rather that we need to own them. Make them OURS and adopt a perspective that makes us permanently, and not temporarily, responsible for shaping a better SA.
7. That we should "insource" our transformation by putting our heads and hearts in it and finding our own solutions, like has been done with the Nelson Mandela Children's Hospital; and establish a true sense of urgency that we don't allow to dwindle because enough of us actually want to make progress and be successful.
8. We insource and find solutions by involving everyone both vertically and horizontally, people from all ranks, roles and functions in our organisations in their diversity and produce what Kotter calls an army of volunteers to drive the change.
9. This approach of insourcing requires a sustained, focused investment of time.
10. Both the 2010 World Cup and the Nelson Mandela Children's Hospital presented us with a big opportunity that we pulled off in no time. Both had the following:

Leaders comprised of public and private sector collaborative partners.

There was a sense of **urgency**;

We built and mobilised a coalition of people with diverse knowledge, skills and abilities;

Formed a strategic vision and initiatives;

Enlisted a volunteer army and strong partnerships;

Barriers were removed to enable and facilitate action;

We generated short term wins

Sustained the pace and accelerated it when we needed; and,

Made the CHANGE happen.

Collaboration and partnerships are critical if we are to achieve any impact on our priority areas.

Right now the SDGs and Global Compact need a Senior Leadership team in the private sector that will set the direction. We only need between 12- 20 champions to lead this.

We need to create an urgency team and volunteers who are excited and can build a multi stakeholder coalition.

We need to build Strategic Initiative Teams that will tackle the different SDGs and ensure purposeful, coordinated execution.

We need to track and measure the impact of the gains we make and communicate the achievements with pride.

It is my belief that this process has started all over the country within the private and public sectors. Let us be the new leaders that generate new SDG initiatives or be the army of volunteers that help with the low hanging quick wins and long term strategic initiatives and grow them to scale. There is much work to do and I think the private sector is more than ready. There is no time left.

Thank you.