

# Quick Brief 2023



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## Conscientizing A Culture of Ethical Leadership Amongst the Youth: Mirroring Mandela's Leadership Values

*'Young people must take it upon themselves to ensure that they receive the highest education possible so that they can represent us well in the future as future leaders.'* –Nelson Mandela

Corruption is the antithesis of ethical leadership, and it thrives in the shadows of apathy and indifference. Over the past decade, we have witnessed communities across South Africa falling victim to the effects of corruption. The Zondo Commission unearthed several cases of corruption across the public and private sector, highlighting the urgent need for leaders who embody principles of democracy, social justice, and ethical leadership.

The **National Business Initiative (NBI)** has developed key pathways that focus on engaging in Ethical Leadership and Anti-Corruption strategies for society, the workplace, and the broader economy. Our focus on building trust and accountability within the private sector supports the practical implementation of ethics, anti-corruption, and corporate governance. Through our carefully designed **Ethical Leadership and Anti-Corruption (ELAC)** training we facilitate, support, and explore culture change within the private and public sectors.

Ethical leadership is the cornerstone of socio-economic growth. It's the foundation upon which a nation can build trust, attract investment, and create opportunities for its youth. Through mirroring former President Nelson Mandela's leadership values, we can begin to cultivate a culture of ethical leadership amongst the youth. As we move towards building a thriving society, it is imperative that we connect the dots between anti-corruption efforts and ethical leadership awareness, for they are intertwined threads in the fabric of a just society.

### **Nelson Mandela – Lessons in Citizenship and Ethical Leadership**

Mandela left an indelible mark on our country through his unwavering commitment to driving socio-economic development that is deeply rooted in ethical leadership. Drawing inspiration from Mandela's teachings it becomes clear that ethical leadership is a compass that guides businesses in embedding a culture of ethics, accountability, and transparency within their organisations in order to build a society that thrives on fairness, equality, and the empowerment of people. Promoting a culture of Ethical Leadership and Accountability within government structures and private business sectors, will not only go a long way toward contributing to socio-economic growth, but will assist in projecting an image that South Africa is worth investing in and that the youth do have an opportunity to work within these spaces. It is essential to understand that by creating a culture of ethical leadership amongst the youth through mirroring and taking lessons from Mandela's leadership values, there needs to be a link between anti-corruption and ethical leadership awareness. This angle requires us to unpack the following within the South African context:

- Intergenerational effects of corruption and unpacking the role of youth in ethical leadership and anti-corruption
- Pathways toward ethical leadership and accountability through the NBI
- Creating a just society through ethical awareness

### **How the NBI is addressing the Intergenerational Effects of Corruption**

The NBI's Intergenerational Leadership Dialogues serve to activate Bold and Transformative Leadership by providing a platform for the youth to engage in constructive dialogue, critical engagement, and input on issues of public concern and implementing social transformation across generations. The focus of these dialogues is to amplify the voices of young people. A critical element of this work is to enable the youth to share their concerns and frustrations, which stem from ongoing economic inequalities, corrupt leadership, and a lack of social integration.

### **The Effects of Corruption on the Youth**

Youth in South Africa are disproportionately affected by corruption and are already largely excluded from decision-making processes. Corruption deepens the power gap between those in powerful positions and those affected by these decisions, both in the public and private sectors. The current load-shedding crisis, youth unemployment, economic downturn, climate change, and the gross inequality faced by the youth in South Africa – are a product of corruption, and unethical leadership by those in power. According to the UN Global Resource for Anti-Corruption Education and Youth Empowerment <sup>[1]</sup>, "...engaging youth is key to tackling the challenges that corruption poses to society. To meaningfully engage youth, young people not only need to be involved, but the capacity and "voice" of the youth needs to be strengthened." It is essential that we not only

engage the youth on issues around anti-corruption, but also create an avenue for education on ethical leadership and the importance of ethical awareness, as they become participants and contributors to society and the workplace.

### **The Role of Youth in Ethical Leadership and Anti-Corruption**

Youth participation in leadership is an important pillar of a thriving society, but many youth share the viewpoint that professional and government spaces do not allow them to engage safely without fear of retribution. They see leadership as being oppressive rather than empowering, exclusionary rather than welcoming, and divorced from their everyday realities and struggles. With corruption at the forefront of every dialogue around economic inclusion, state accountability, and collaboration, it gives the impression that in order to be a part of the group that benefits, one must engage in unethical practices. These assumptions are fueled by the worsening unemployment crisis and recurring reports of money being exchanged for lucrative projects, access to higher education and secure jobs. However, this is not an isolated problem, it feeds into the increasing number of people turning to crime to survive.

### **How the NBI is Contributing Towards Ethical Leadership and Accountability**

Corruption not only hinders social progress and stifles economic growth, but it also contributes greatly to lawlessness and hinders the ability of the state to serve and protect its citizens.

NBI's **Ethical Leadership and Anti-Corruption Course** strives to support the practical implementation of ethics, anti-corruption, and corporate governance. This requires understanding the nuances of organisational culture in order to strengthen the ethical awareness of employees when faced with complex issues. One of the ways we do this is by supporting culture change within the private and public sectors by building capacity through Ethical Leadership and Anti-Corruption (ELAC) training. The **Ethical Leadership and Anti-Corruption Course** is the perfect platform for youth to gain an understanding of the importance of ethical leadership. Our **Accountability Talks** are a platform for deep and nuanced reflection and conversation to understand the manifestations of unethical and corrupt practices and explore the key insights and learnings required to strengthen accountability and governance. **The Ethical Supplier (Ethics Coalition for Business)** is a project that aims to fast-track the inclusion of diverse Small Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs) into the economic mainstream. This project advances the urgent need to build higher levels of trust and accountability in the ethical practices of SMMEs.

### **Creating a Just Society through Ethical Awareness**

The NBI works towards creating a community of businesses that drive sustainability, equity, and a thriving society. Creating awareness on the importance of ethical leadership, understanding how corruption manifests in the workplace and in society is critical in the development of young people as the leaders of tomorrow.

Therefore, it is crucial to consider using the lessons from Nelson Mandela everyday as a catalyst for reimagining our economy and society. Creating a just society through ethical awareness starts with advocating for a society where all people can access tangible opportunities to improve their lives regardless of their economic background, race, gender, sexuality, and age.

Companies interested in learning more about the **Building Trust and Accountability pathway** and **Bold & Transformative Leadership: Intergenerational Leadership Dialogue** are encouraged to contact Thuthula Ndunge (Programme Manager: Social Transformation): [ThuthulaN@nbi.org.za](mailto:ThuthulaN@nbi.org.za) and Phumla I. Eneanya (Project Co-ordinator: Social Transformation) [PhumlaE@nbi.org.za](mailto:PhumlaE@nbi.org.za)



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The National Business Initiative (NBI) is an independent and voluntary coalition of South African and multinational businesses launched in 1995 by the then President, Nelson Mandela.

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