

[View this email in your browser](#)



Thirty Years of the NBI: Partnership, Reform and the Next Growth Chapter



On 23 April, business leaders, government partners and development stakeholders gathered at Nedbank's head office in Sandton to celebrate 30 years of the **National Business Initiative (NBI)**.

As a founding member of the NBI, Nedbank's hosting of the event carried symbolic weight, underscoring the long-standing commitment of South African business to collective action in support of national development.

The evening was marked by a strong sense of reflection and renewed purpose. It was both a celebration of institutional legacy and recognition that the work of economic inclusion, resilience and competitiveness remains unfinished.

Leaders from across sectors came together not only to honour three decades of impact, but to engage with the question that has defined the NBI since its inception: *what is the role of business in building a more inclusive, competitive and sustainable South Africa?*

At the centre of the evening was a clear message that while the policy direction is increasingly clear and the reform agenda is underway, what is now required is coordinated execution at scale to define the next phase of South Africa's development.

A Legacy of Collective Action

In her remarks, **NBI CEO Shameela Soobramoney** reflected on the organisation's evolution from its origins in the democratic transition to its current role as a convener of business leadership around systemic challenges.



She emphasised that the NBI's enduring value lies in its ability to bring together business, government and civil society to address constraints that no single actor can resolve alone. This includes strengthening institutional capability, environmental stewardship and security, aligning skills with economic demand and supporting pathways into employment and enterprise, particularly for young people.

Her remarks also spoke to a shift that is increasingly shaping the role of business globally and locally. Competitiveness, sustainability and inclusion are no longer separate agendas. They are mutually reinforcing. In this context, she reinforced the importance of embedding transformation and sustainability principles into core business strategy, as reflected in the *NBI's Transformation Blueprint*.



She also pointed to the growing gap between the scale of South Africa's challenges and the current configuration of corporate social investment (CSI).

While CSI remains significant, its impact must increasingly be measured by how effectively it contributes to inclusion, whether through strengthening education-to-employment pathways or supporting participation in emerging sectors such as the green economy.



The implication is clear. The next decade will require business to align capital, capability and strategy more deliberately with national development priorities, and to do so in ways that deliver measurable, long-term impact.



A Moment of Opportunity

The keynote address by **President Cyril Ramaphosa** reinforced this call to action, situating the NBI within the broader trajectory of South Africa's democratic journey.



He reflected on the origins of the organisation in the Consultative Business Movement (CBM) and its role in supporting the country's political transition, highlighting the longstanding tradition of partnership between business and government. This historical perspective served as a reminder that collaboration has always been central to South Africa's progress. Importantly, the President's remarks also pointed to a shifting economic context.

Progress in energy reform, improvements in key industries and renewed investor confidence are beginning to create the conditions for growth. The outcomes of the sixth South Africa Investment Conference, which secured significant investment commitments, alongside the announcement of a large-scale infrastructure pipeline, signal a renewed opportunity to accelerate economic expansion.

At the same time, the inclusion of the NBI in **Operation Vulindlela Phase 2** reflects a growing emphasis on implementation, particularly at the level of local government where service delivery remains a critical constraint to both investment and inclusive growth.

This signals an important evolution in the role of partnership, from advocacy to co-implementation and delivery.



Real Economic Impact

A key thread emerging from both the CEO and the President's remarks is that as structural reforms in energy and infrastructure begin to take hold, the next challenge is to ensure that these gains translate into tangible economic outcomes.

This is where the role of business becomes even more critical.

Beyond investment, business has a role to play in shaping markets, building supply chains, developing skills and supporting the institutions that underpin economic activity. It is through this broader contribution that growth becomes inclusive.

Looking ahead, the NBI will also intensify its focus on low carbon investment, actively helping to finance and build green and low carbon businesses that protect our environment and offer real opportunities for our youth, and our economy.

We continue to serve as a convening force where collective action translates into national resilience and systemic change, contributing to the development of a more sustainable, inclusive and competitive South African economy and call on businesses to join us and increase the power of collaborative action for systemic change.