

Is CSI a farce or impactful?

 By [Bonnie Ramaila](#)

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It's that time of the year again, when a lot of corporates go out to give Christmas parcels to the needy. They give away food parcels, clothes, toys and school uniforms, fix schools, donate funds and everything in between. They task their PR agencies to create publicity around this razzmatazz and the agency gets measured on how much publicity they got. And if the CEOs get to be interviewed on one or all the morning TV shows, they are sure as hell keeping the account for another year.



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I often wonder why publicity is so sought after by these corporates, instead of putting their minds on the meaningful gesture they are making to the community. They hassle agencies to organise handover ceremonies, expect publicity like they have completed building Guggenheim Museum in Soweto, when actually they have spent a mere R5,000 purchasing goods for the needy community, and expect to get publicity worth R2.5 million, when they actually make R3.5-billion profit per annum. Alright, I'm exaggerating, but you get the point. It's also sad that PR agencies continue being measured based on the publicity the client gets, and not on the impact their initiatives have or had on the target audience.

There is something wrong with this picture. The thing about this sordid picture is when all is said and done, and the corporates think they have made a difference, unfortunately the lives of these people is made better at that moment, not sustainably. These poor people, the earth will still remain last night's bed and wake up to drearily sweep the broken pieces of yesterday's life. In a way, depending on how you look at it, it creates a culture of dependency, not independence. Where is the difference if it's not sustainable and soon forgotten?

ROI should be a two-way street

I understand that corporates are in business to make profit and see return on investment (ROI). But isn't it about time that CSI projects are relooked into and re-engineered to fit in with the national agenda of our country. The National Development Plan (NDP) is in place and it outlines what needs be achieved and by when. The business fraternity is always engaged by government in terms of the needs of our country and how they can get involved on a long term basis. If corporate South Africa is serious about making a difference on a sustainable basis to the lives of those communities they choose to assist, they could utilise their CSI projects effectively so that their projects have a positive sustainable impact on the poor.

It's sad that NDP continues to be seen as a government road map, amidst strides that have been made to educate and inform all civil and business fraternities on its purpose. If corporate South Africa truly has the interests of the country at heart, they would need to start participating and ensuring that the vision of the country is achieved through their assistance and dedication to projects that make meaningful impact to the lives of the poor and at the same time getting their ROIs. ROI should be a two-way street. CSI projects need to be contextualised and redressed to mean that when a company decides to adopt a child or children, they not only feed and clothe those children for a day, but, could educate, absorb, train and mould to make a meaningful difference to their lives, so that they in turn can give back to their communities.

Giving away once-off material things needs to be a thing of the past when the CSI directors start developing their strategies. We need to come up with long term strategic solution and involvement with communities in terms of enhancing their lives on a sustainable basis. Paying varsity fees for the first year for 10 children from disadvantaged households would surely go a long way as opposed to buying shoes for 20 children, which would outgrow them before the year ends.

I am not underplaying the importance of giving the needy and helping out, these can still be done at various times, but let the CSI projects be meaningful, sustainable and assist in building our nation's future leaders. We need to look at the future we want our children to have and help towards it.

We get what we give.

Companies that run successful CSI projects are said to have a heart of gold by the recipients of their goodwill. We surely would not need a post-mortem to prove that this heart of gold really exists now do we?

ABOUT BONNIE RAMAILA

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