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Mohale: "Business is the answer, not the enemy"

By Danette Breitenbach

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South Africa's first years as a democracy saw substantially higher economic growth than population growth. Business was a central driver of that success, and has been indispensable for the growth of this country ever since.

Bonang Mohale, new Business Leadership South Africa CEO

Business is the answer for this country, not the enemy, said Bonang Mohale, newly appointed CEO of Business Leadership South Africa and former chair of Shell SA, at The Directors Event in Sandton recently.

"Our country is at a tipping point," he said. And the next five years will determine whether corruption will become the country's operating system or if we will have a thriving country with a rule of law in a constitutional democracy serving all its people.

So, business must act now. "As hard working patriotic business, we have a duty to protect our citizens. Our pedestrian economy will only flourish in a capable system that has a well-functioning justice system, Sars, Treasury and auditor-general."

State capture can ultimately become corporate capture, he warned. Therefore, business must keep its house clean. "We cannot clean up the state if we have unethical behaviour in our own house. We need an ethical code; this is not just about the bad guys, it is about transformation. It is the project of rebuilding this country one brick at a time."

Integrity six pack

He spelt out the integrity six pack, needed if the country is to be saved: "Firstly we need a judicial inquiry into state capture. Secondly, the nuclear energy deal must be halted for two years to investigate it properly. Thirdly, the public sector must be professionalised and depoliticised. Fourthly, business must reflect the country's demographics broadly. Fifthly, the independence of key institutions must be restored and respected always. Lastly, the root cause of the crisis, political party funding should be transparent."

These six steps will move South Africa to a much better trajectory, but added capital is still needed. "The people we are opposing have very deep pockets. This is a massive task. It is an investment we need to make – or we must pack up."

No more chameleon camouflaging

He added that, to succeed, business must accelerate transformation. Describing transformation as a “fundamentally breaking with the past so that our present in no way resembles it,” he said that it is not about reformation. “This is not a chameleon camouflaging itself. This is an uprooting so that we can be one nation. It is urgent and serious, it is creative and innovative.”

Last year, issues discussed at The Directors Event included a lag in global competitiveness, creating an enabling environment for SMEs and entrepreneurs, the crisis in the healthcare sector, declining education standards and capacity. The need for economic growth dominated the discussion.

Most of these issues are as pertinent today as they were a year ago - with the crisis in some (if not most) worsening. Education and healthcare (80% of doctors prefer not to work for the state) have declined into further crisis, while unemployment is up, and any gains made in global competitiveness have been offset by political instability and the first credit ratings downgrade and SMEs are struggling more than ever to access funding.

ABOUT DANETTE BREITENBACH

Danette Breitenbach is a marketing & media editor at Bizcommunity.com. Previously she freelanced in the marketing and media sector, including for Bizcommunity. She was editor and publisher of AdVantage, the publication that served the marketing, media and advertising industry in southern Africa. She has worked extensively in print media, mainly B2B. She has a Masters in Financial Journalism from Wits.

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