

How CSI can help unlock the 'democracy dividend' - Thuli Madonsela

Corporate social investment has the power to unleash "the generosity of strangers" to address South Africa's inequality, poverty and unemployment, and the indignities imposed by those ills, said Professor Thuli Madonsela, delivering the keynote address at the 2018 [Dialogue](#) Business in Society Conference.

The former public protector said in doing so, CSI will help unlock the so-called democracy dividend, enabling South Africans to embrace and benefit from not only democracy, but their freedom, and to have a stake in nurturing faith in democracy and humanity.

She recounted how her own parents – a former farmworker and a domestic worker – could only afford to pay for her schooling until grade seven. But she was able to secure scholarships and grants to be able to pursue the career of her choice.

"That meant I have the privilege of being at the forefront of the democracy dividend, a position of social, political and economic power that brings with it an obligation to ensure social justice," said Madonsela.

'Business has a voice'

"Business is in a position of power and privilege and business has a voice, in the same way that when you become an advocate, you have a voice. It also means that you have an obligation to leverage your influence for good," she explained.

That extends to ethical business, said Madonsela, explaining that even the most vigorous CSI effort can't compensate for a business underpaying its employees or suppliers, or overcharging its customers.

She cited the African proverb, "It takes a village to raise a child", and suggested that all South Africans, including business, have an important role in driving social justice.

The indignities imposed by poverty, inequality and unemployment can imperil democracy. As a counterpoint, effective CSI can drive justice, where the Millennium Development Goals become community goals, and where social justice has the power to help insulate a nascent democracy from the peril of corruption and exclusion, and inequality between and within communities.



Professor Thuli Madonsela, former public protector, now social justice chair at the Stellenbosch University Law Faculty

Reducing extremities of inequality

“It may take hundreds of years to address the legacy of apartheid, but even if apartheid had never happened, it would still be our duty to make sure nobody is left behind. CSI might not be able to end inequality but it can reduce its extremity,” suggested Madonsela.

She encouraged delegates to the conference to examine the role of business in helping to bring about systemic social change by supporting social justice interventions.



A word or two with Thuli Madonsela

Nicci Botha 31 May 2017



Inaugural Trialogue research on social justice in 2017 found that only 11% of South African companies support social justice interventions, with less than 1% of total corporate social investment (CSI) spend allocated to this issue.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>