

SOUTH AFRICA'S RECESSION HITS IMPOVERISHED CHILDREN EVEN HARDER

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Article by Terrance M. Booysen

The 'father' of our nation, the late Nelson Mandela was once quoted saying, *"as long as poverty, injustice and gross inequality persist in our world, none of us can truly rest."* Upon reflecting on these profound words, one must seriously consider the current and dire state of South Africa, not least also the widening gap of inequality in South Africa. Could South Africa's current woes have been prevented if our nation and its current leaders followed the wisdom of Mr. Mandela, who envisaged South Africa to become a great nation when our apartheid shackles were removed?

Over the last number of years, it is not uncommon for South Africans to hear how grand scale corruption has permeated the leadership ranks of South Africa. Various reports confirm that billions of Rands are wasted by inept government officials each year. Many schools and other essential social infrastructure are in a general state of disrepair. Unemployment and household debt continues to rise rapidly and a list of poor governance practices has dominated the South African news and courtrooms. Now that South Africa has entered a technical recession, it is vital to consider how the private and public sectors alike, will prioritise their financial spend and what the impact will be on society as a whole, particularly in respect of donations, grants and corporate social investment ('CSI') spend aimed at uplifting the poorest of the poor. Experience has shown that it is often such 'discretionary' expenditure which is cut or curtailed first to achieve cost savings and maintain the bottom line.

Tough questions need to be raised regarding the reasons for South Africa's latest recession, and equally, straight answers are required to understand why South Africa's most vulnerable and impoverished children are once again getting the short end of the stick? Clearly, if donor funding and other CSI programmes are halted, or even reduced, this will have devastating consequences for the impoverished, as well as our society at large.

In an effort to regularly showcase small registered non-profit organisations (NPOs) that are specifically involved in the care-giving of less privileged children in South Africa and who are in need of financial support, CGF Research Institute ('CGF') visits these organisations to collect more information on their establishments and their requirements. In this way, we aim to promote these smaller NPOs to our extensive corporate and government client database, in the hope that our clients will consider these NPO's when planning and implementing their own CSI programmes.



Children at The Philile Foundation receiving decorative teddy-bear cushions to brighten their day, courtesy of Wot-If? Trust

This month, with the support of Wot-If? Trust who provided CGF decorative teddy-bear cushions for children's beds, I set out to meet The Philile Foundation who work with impoverished children. These

decorative cushions are donated by Big Five Duty Free who encourage travelers at all major South African Airports to buy the cushions and leave them behind in large bins for those children in South Africa who are less fortunate.

The Philile Foundation ('the Foundation') has an amazing vision for their organisation and the children under their care. Their vision is a South Africa where every child has access to quality pre-school education. Their play-based learning develops the fundamentals of mathematics, language concepts, innovation, problem-solving and creativity. The Foundation has an integrated approach to education, which includes wellness, nutrition, sport and the personal development of each child. Specifically, the Foundation is acutely aware of the 4th Industrial Revolution, as well as understanding how this next phase of technological development will impact our future social development and human interactions. Expectedly, the children of the Foundation are being guided in a manner that will assist them to adapt and confidently assume their role within this next era. Indeed, access to quality education is the major differentiator to those who will be able to cope with the future technological changes as envisioned by the 4th Industrial Revolution.

The basis of the Foundation's vision is set in line with the country's National Development Plan - Vision 2030, which envisages each community having inter alia:

- a school with teachers who love teaching and learning;
- a local library filled with a wealth of knowledge;
- a police station with respected and upright police; and
- a clinic with nurses who love caring for people.

Quality education for all children across South Africa is one of the most crucial challenges facing our society and it is often cited as the key to ensuring our continued development and growth. Recent statistics show that in South Africa +-50% of children aged 3-6 years old do not have access to pre-school education and of those that get the opportunity, many do not complete the primary cycle. Even more alarming, is the fact that nearly a quarter of children under the age of five, are developmentally stunted due to long term malnutrition.

As a part of the Foundation's vision, they believe that through strategic partnerships and CSI, they could roll out 100 scalable and replicable Early Childhood Development ('ECD') Centre's providing 100 children with quality pre-school education. As such, the Foundation is committed to working with partners to assist the South African government in achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4.2 which is to "ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education." In doing this critical work with like-minded partners, the Foundation firmly believe they will achieve an even greater social impact, where their children -- as future leaders -- will become well-grounded citizens who will fulfil their part in a future workforce and more caring society.

"Putting children at the heart of poverty reduction is one of the best ways to break that cycle and create a level playing field for every child. The inequities that deny children the right to quality education from early childhood through adolescence can trap young people in low-skilled, poorly paid, insecure employment, which holds back economic growth and fuels inequality."

Source: UNICEF 2016 – The State of the World's children 2016

The Foundation believes that investing in ECD today will see significant positive outcomes in our economy and society in the years to come. Nobel Prize-winning University of Chicago Economics Professor James Heckman, a leading scholar in the area of ECD, said. “You can simultaneously reduce inequality and increase productivity.” According to Montenegro and Patrinos (2014), low-income and lower-middle-income countries yield the highest returns on education. They further contend that poverty rates can decrease as much as 9% for each additional year of schooling.*

Given the fact that South Africa is yet again in a recession, the last one being in 2008, we should be especially mindful of Professor Heckman’s point that ECD is the clearest viable route for rebuilding broken economies. He said, “there are a lot of projects out there, but few have the ROI (return on investment) of ECD.”** This sentiment is shared by many like-minded professionals, not least also Professor Rafael Pérez-Escamilla from the Yale School of Public Health, whose message for low- and moderate-income countries was frank, stating “if you want to grow your economy and uplift your people, put money into early childhood development.” Professor Pérez-Escamilla further stated that “for every dollar invested in the first 1,000 days of life, a country receives about \$8 in returns.” ***

“Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring, those ripples build a current that can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.”

Robert F. Kennedy

Commencing with just eight children ten years ago, the Foundation currently serves two hundred children across three locations in Gauteng and provides the children holistic pre-primary education that addresses their physical, cognitive, emotional, spiritual and social development. The Foundation recruits staff from the communities in which the ECD centres are based, furthermore sponsoring their formal training as a part of the Foundation’s own commitment to empowerment and localised enterprise development. Since the Foundation’s humble beginnings, hundreds of children have been donned in their graduation gowns and have stood proudly as they received their school readiness certificate and entered the world of primary education as confident, happy, disciplined, school-ready children. The groundwork for life-long learning has been set by this visionary organisation, and our appeal to potential donors is to partner with The Philile Foundation to build a future in which all children in South Africa are given access to quality pre-primary education which ensures their successful integration into primary schools.

ENDS

Words: 1,435

*Source: Montenegro, Claudio E., and Harry Anthony Patrinos, ‘Comparable Estimates of Returns to Schooling around the World’, Policy Research Working Paper 7020, The World Bank, Washington, D.C., 2014, p. 16.

**Source - http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2015-07-28-sas-timeliest-investment-the-first-1000-days-of-childhood-education/#.V7v_RGR96b8

*** Source: <http://publichealth.yale.edu/news/article.aspx?id=14819>

About Wot-If? Trust

Wot-If? Trust operates primarily in Diepsloot, working on Socio-Economic and Enterprise Development Initiatives. Their focus is on helping emerging and small enterprises to grow and become sustainable and giving the youth hope and opportunities for the future. Agriculture, business, technology, innovation and media are key drivers, specifically on how these impact on improving lives and the Diepsloot community in general.

For further information, please contact: Gail Styger (Wot-If? Trust: Founder & Trustee) 083 625 3929 or email gail@wot-if.co.za

About The Philile Foundation

The Philile Foundation has been approved as a Public Benefit Organisation for the purposes of section 18A (1)(a) of the Income Tax Act and donations to the organisation are tax deductible in the hands of the donors in terms of and subject to the limitations prescribed in section 18A of the Act.

Bank Account (South Africa)

Bank: First National Bank
Branch: Melrose Arch
Branch No: 254 405
Account Name: Philile Foundation
Account No: 62352506227 (cheque)



Debit Order / Monthly donation

The Philile Foundation accepts both debit and stop orders.

CSI / Corporate donations:

Please contact us to request an appointment or proposal.

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