

6 keys to deliver meaningful change through collaboration

By [Miles Dally](#)

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If there is a silver lining in the dark cloud that is Covid-19, it's the unity that has arisen amongst government, businesses, communities and individuals working towards the same goal of managing the crisis and supporting those most in need.



Miles Dally, CEO of RCL Foods

If we can sustain this collaborative spirit beyond the pandemic, we can collectively improve systems, achieve goals and ultimately create a more just and sustainable society. RCL Foods' experience of collaboration in the CSI space has taught us that this is achievable if approached in the right way.

Three years ago, we formed the Do More Foundation to deliver more meaningful change in three key areas – young children, easing hunger and supporting youth – by collaborating with a broad range of role players, including government, municipalities, NGOs and other businesses.

The multi-stakeholder partnerships that have arisen from this are attracting increasing support and making a far greater difference than we could ever have achieved on our own.

It's a model that has been recognised by stakeholders, earning the Do More Foundation the Collaborative Partnership and Change Award at FirstRand's 'Beyond Painting Classrooms' conference in 2019.

In measuring outcomes, collaborations that pool resources, ideas and capabilities result in higher quality delivery, more holistic solutions, and better return on investment.

The 'Leave No Young Child Behind' initiative, spearheaded by the Foundation to drive implementation of the National Integrated Early Childhood Development (ECD) Policy in the two poorest wards of rural Nkomazi, has provided a platform for integration between provincial government departments and has brought government, NGOs and other organisations together to jointly improve services provided to young children.

An independent study in 2019 found that the ECD programme quality in the area had improved from a score of 25% to 60% over an 18-month period.



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Similarly, the multi-partner '#DoMore4Hammarsdale' initiative in KwaZulu-Natal yielded a nearly 350% return on investment across its various food-growing and economic linkages projects in its first two years, a 2018 Social Return on Investment Study found.

Through partnership, the Foundation was able to provide over 8 million meals across South Africa in the 12 months to June 2020, of which 3.5 million were part of a dedicated #GiveItUp Covid-19 relief effort. To date, the #GiveItUp campaign has enabled over 5 million meals to reach vulnerable communities, including a million hot chicken meals prepared at soup kitchens nationwide in honour of Mandela Day.

Based on our learnings of 'CSI unusual', we have distilled six key principles of collaboration that could help other businesses drive meaningful change in their sphere of influence.

1. Understand what government policy is and where opportunities exist for action

In forming collaborations, take cognisance of existing policy frameworks and responses to avoid duplicating or compromising what is already being done. Business can play a key role in helping government deliver on its mandate through well-managed public-private partnerships.

2. Have a shared vision and stay focused

Individual agendas have the potential to create conflict in multi-stakeholder, public-private collaborations. Finding a shared vision that resonates with all stakeholders is important to ensure a common guide for all strategies, enable teams to focus on what needs to be achieved, and mobilise added support. Make sure your vision is specific enough to result in clear and achievable goals.

3. Prioritise open communication to build trust between role-players

Building mutual trust takes time and perseverance, but it is vital for success. The key is to create space for open, two-way communication between all parties about their respective needs, expectations, and capabilities. This will lead to better decision-making, with more sustainable results.



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4. Place empowerment of local communities' front and centre

Whether you are the biggest employer in an area or just one of many involved stakeholders, empowerment of local communities must be the main objective. Providing knowledge, skills, and mentorship, rather than just donations, makes impoverished communities more likely to break the poverty cycle. A former food garden beneficiary now manages a farmers' association and negotiates deals with formal retailers.

5. Involve employees and suppliers as essential partners

Employees and suppliers can be powerful allies in helping execute collaborative campaigns, donating towards key projects and being ambassadors for initiatives. In our case, our people are among the Foundation's most passionate supporters, while many of our suppliers have partnered with us because it makes sense to do good together.

6. Do not be a hero, be a catalyst for more

When facilitating a collaborative project, resist the urge to take the reins. Rather focus on modelling a joint decision-making process and catalysing relationship building. Ultimately, the only heroes should be the people whose lives will change for the better.

Moving beyond Covid-19, these six principles could provide a collaborative framework to deliver on pressing imperatives like job creation, land reform and waste-management. As the saying goes, "If you want to go far, go together."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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