

Fostering philanthropy for greater impact - social justice giving

By  Sindy Peters

12 Oct 2020

Executive director of the [Social Justice Initiative \(SJI\)](#) Bongiwe Mlangeni was part of the social justice panel at this year's Africa Brand Summit. She spoke on the fundamentals to achieving social justice, what's required in order to change the systems that are undermining social justice, and how the focus of philanthropy needs to shift from charitable giving to social justice giving.

Speaking from the perspective of the SJI, Mlangeni outlined the three fundamentals of social justice:

1. Fair, equitable distribution and access to resources, rights, and power.
2. Recognition and respect of human dignity.
3. Systems change - engaging and transforming the social structures of society.

She pointed out that societal systems were largely where social justice was compromised and people undermined.

"Over the past few years, particularly now, I think we can all agree that we have witnessed a spectacular collapse of systems all over the world. We have seen that the systems we have undermine people in many ways, but they also benefit a few," said Mlangeni.

"It is our view that you can only change the system by changing the human being behind the system and this means we all have work to do. It's not just work that has to be done by our leaders, but it has to be done by every citizen, every individual in all the countries that are there in the world today. And changing who we are as human beings requires that we shift our mindset, that we shift our attitudes."



Bongiwe Mlangeni, executive director, Social Justice Initiative (SJI)



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Charitable giving vs social justice giving

Mlangeni explained that the SJI was formed in order to make social justice the central focus of philanthropy in SA as opposed to charitable giving. Rather than investing resources to improve the lives of individuals and communities at a systemic level over the long term, charitable giving focuses on addressing short-term immediate needs that never go away, she explained.

Most CSI expenditure in SA is invested in education, social and community development, and food and agriculture, but most of it falls under short-term giving, Mlangeni noted, and is insufficient in the long term. She emphasised that charitable giving should be balanced with social justice giving, which, according to Mlangeni, requires three key elements:

"The first one is the courage to engage power and confront structural injustices. The second is having the commitment to transform lives long-term at a systemic level, not individual by individual. The third one, of course, is taking responsibility for the outcomes. So often we tend to look at government and point fingers at politicians about the outcomes in our countries. In terms of social justice giving, you are recognising that you have a responsibility as a citizen in determining the outcomes of the country that you are living in," she explained.

Registered in 2013, the SJI became operational in 2014 and mobilises resources from high-net-worth individuals (HNWIs) to invest in civil society with social justice in mind. Rather than CSI being carried out as a tickbox exercise, or charitable giving by HNWIs on a short-term basis, the SJI motivates for giving of greater significance that enables change at a systemic level, explained Mlangeni.



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Realising social justice

In order to foster philanthropy that has a greater impact, the SJI believes an ecosystem approach is needed and requires not only leadership that understands that interconnectedness, but citizens to recognise their responsibility as well in realising social justice in SA.

"The pandemic has shown us just how vulnerable we are, that we are all vulnerable and, therefore, for us to rebuild ourselves and rebuild this country, we have to think of everything that we are connected with," said Mlangeni, noting that a lot of reflection is required by individuals and society at large on their role in changing systems that do not serve all.

One of the most challenging requirements for some in helping promote a socially just society is giving up power and wealth, said Mlangeni. "I think, again, the pandemic has shown us that we are all on the same boat and if we do not move together, we will continue to be in trouble as a people," she concluded.

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