



Sustainability Media Conference

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Address by Nozipho January-Bardill

Ambassador of South Africa to Switzerland

(The spoken version is definitive)

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is always a pleasure to be invited to address audiences such as yourselves. For us in South Africa, we value any opportunity that facilitates dialogue between different interest groups. We have created words such as “Bosberaad”, an Afrikaans word meaning “caucus”, “discussion”, “consultation”. Recently we have taken the Sesotho word “lekgotla” meaning a communal consultative meeting and turned it into a mechanism for dialogue between the president and his business and other stakeholders whose functions and interests are different from those of government. The President now has regular “lekgotlas” with the business community to discuss matters of national policy and find mutually beneficial solutions to economic and social problems. Increasingly, business in South Africa is beginning to understand that it exists within a specific South African political, economic, social and cultural environment that it cannot ignore. It exists in a society that is in the process of transformation, where every institution has had to reinvent itself in order to create something new as well as respond to the changes in our complex environment. Change in South Africa is still a constant today as we try and find creative solutions to deal with the enormous legacies of a political system, Apartheid, that violated every human right in the book by subjecting millions of Black people to unimaginable pain and suffering, while instilling in white people a racist ideology which also dehumanized them.

Access to health was also denied to the majority of our population in the old South Africa. Poverty meant that many could not afford to maintain their own health or buy health services when they needed to. The few public health facilities were poorly managed and patients were treated without care - a legacy that we still live with in our public hospitals but that the department of health is battling to correct.

The Phelophepha Train, also popularly known as the “MiracleTrain” is the world’s first health care train to bring hope to the rural people of our country. Christened with a name taken from 2 of our languages, Sesotho and Venda, the name “Phelophepha” means “good, clean health”.

This world renowned example of a public private partnership began in 1993 when the South African government developed the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) to address the political, economic, social and cultural legacies of Apartheid. The RDP called for accessible, affordable and easily available health care for all citizens. In typical South African fashion, the Corporate Social Investment Unit of Transnet, the public transport parastatal, together with the Rand Afrikaans University in Gauteng joined hands to provide rural South Africa with primary eye care.

Ten years later, the Phelophepha train has developed into a 16 coach health train, utilizing Transnet’s infrastructure and expertise and offering a holistic, one stop shop health care service to rural South Africa. In operation 36 weeks a year, the train has, since its inception traveled more than 25,000 miles offering primary health care services including eye care, dental care, health education, HIV/AIDS awareness, and counseling to millions of rural patients. En route, it also utilizes and supports local clinics, hospitals, social workers, doctors, and local healers to reach out to local communities. It has helped train

more than 4000 South African volunteers during its 5 day health care programmes at each of the villages it visits, leaving behind stronger, more self sufficient communities to sustain their own health.

This ground breaking multi stakeholder initiative is currently supported by more than 15 benevolent community organizations, 8 South African business enterprises, several South African universities, local and international media entities and 8 multinational companies.

It is with great honour that I stand here today to pay tribute to Roche. This company can proudly and modestly celebrate, in this tenth year of freedom, peace and democracy in South Africa, its status as the first corporate sponsor outside South Africa to support the Phelophepha initiative. Roche has contributed to the train since 1994 and remains one of its major sponsors.

The company has supported the health care coach, also known as the “heartbeat* of the train. This is where patients first report so that nurses can examine them and then refer them to the other clinics. To pay tribute to Roche’s commitment and generosity, this coach was officially renamed the Roche Health Clinic in 1995. The company has full responsibility for this clinic, handling its maintenance, sponsoring salaries for 2 nurses, maintaining the clinic’s equipment and providing training materials. Recently Roche incrementally expanded its sponsorship to support a new clinic for diabetes care and oncology. It has also increased its support for the expansion of the school health service, the maintenance of the train, its communications infrastructure and outreach education programmes to create jobs for local communities.

This partnership is an excellent example of a private public partnership in South Africa. It is in line with the government’s 1999 – 2004 strategic framework:

“To consolidate and build on the achievements of the past five years in improving access to health care for all and reducing inequity, and focus on working in partnership with other stakeholders to improve the quality of care at all levels of the health system, especially preventive and promotive health, and to improve the overall efficiency of the health care delivery system”.

The government welcomes private public initiatives (PPIs) and sees partnerships as one of a variety of possibilities. In developing an equitable, efficient, coherent and high quality health system, it sees considerable potential for collaboration and cooperation between the public and private health care sectors. However, it cautions that such engagements can, in some instances undermine health system goals. It is therefore necessary to develop a set of principles, based on the vision and goals of the national health system, to guide consideration of public private interactions. In this way, PPIs will serve as a mechanism for the achievement of health system goals, rather than an end in themselves.

This approach seems to dovetail well with that of Roche which has a long history of active community involvement. In addition to humanitarian projects the company has promoted research, professional development of young scientists and artists and has encouraged its staff to involve themselves in community projects. In addition the company has a history

of contributing to quality of life programmes around the world through innovative solutions. This has guided its approach to focusing on impact rather than cost only when assessing projects. By developing and implementing innovative solutions together with competent local partners, the simplest measure can often result in more lasting improvements than many high profile projects.

In conclusion the future holds much promise for private public partnerships driven by values rather than profits only. On behalf of all the government and people of South Africa, I wish to express our sincere appreciation of the support that Roche has offered us. By working together we learn to understand each other better, value each partner's contribution, and most of all address the dire needs that the legacies of apartheid created in our country. We look forward to another decade of mutually respectful collaboration and friendship.