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## The potential impact of advocacy on Corporate Social Investment (CSI) and the *impact of CSI on advocacy*

Civil society is alive and kicking in SA and has been for many decades. Once upon time civil society gave us the United Democratic Front, the End Conscription Campaign, the Black Sash and IDASA. More recently it has given us the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), Equal Education, SECTION27 and a plethora of other activist and social justice organisations.

**T**he older organisations created a social force that empowered and inspired ordinary people and thus helped to undermine the foundations of apartheid – bringing about democracy from below. Their importance was reflected in the type of Constitution adopted as our Supreme Law in 1996 – one that created a participatory democracy with multiple institutions for civic engagement and a Bill of Rights that included rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly. Indeed, the Bill of Rights departs from many more traditional constitutions by expressly recognising the right of every citizen to campaign for a “cause” as well as for a political party.

This constitution embeds civil society within government and makes its involvement necessary for good governance. Its latent power has been well – but insufficiently – used. For example, the fact that South Africa can today boast that 1.9-million people receive life-saving antiretroviral medicines through the public health sector owes much to the advocacy of the TAC

and networks of NGOs and CBOs that link people to services. Similarly, in 2012 SECTION27 helped elevate the education crisis to national attention through its efforts to resolve the Limpopo textbook crisis.

Although there has been a tense and sometimes outwardly hostile relationship with them, the government and the ANC now recognise and respect this role. The National Development Plan (NDP), for example, states that “active citizenry and social activism is necessary for democracy and development to flourish”. Trevor Manuel has stated that active citizenship permits “a better equilibrium in democracy”, a view that is evident from the location of “active citizenry” alongside “effective government” and “strong leadership” as the engine of development (see diagram 1).

But despite this CSI steers almost completely clear of civil society advocacy. The 15th CSI Handbook (Dialogue, November 2012), for example, reports that 40% of corporates are “not willing to support

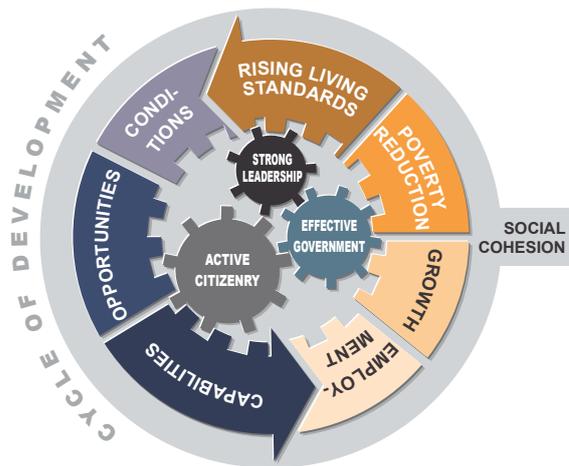


Diagram 1

advocacy". It is not clear which corporates these are, but if they are the larger investors the impact of the refusal to consider this type of support in CSI portfolios is even more deleterious.

In my view, CSI's outcomes, impact and credibility are poorer as a result. I explain why below.

The National Planning Commission's Diagnostic Report (June 2011) lists the fact that "the quality of school education for black people is poor" and "the public health system cannot meet demand or sustain quality" as two of our greatest social challenges. Not surprisingly a large amount of CSI goes into both these areas; in 2012 nearly R2.9bn in the case of education (40% of the overall CSI spend, and the target of 93% of companies surveyed). Not surprisingly, this is also an area where there is a great deal of civil society advocacy.

However, while there is an overlap on the issues, there is not any overlap of support, partnership or funding.

Why? The CSI Handbook shows that CSI is a significant source of funding for NGOs/NPOs: in 2012 an estimated 25% (R1.7bn) of nearly R7bn per annum was directed their way. But more than 70% of this is described as "delivering services to beneficiaries" and only 10% (R170m) goes to support social justice advocacy programmes. Actually,

this seems quite a large amount. Given that none of the advocacy organisations I am involved in benefits from CSI, one wonders what definition of advocacy is being employed (the World English Dictionary definition is "active support, especially of a cause").

Why is this? What is the problem? What are CSI managers afraid of? Allow me to unpack two of what I imagine to be the arguments that are made around this issue.

**Reason 1:** According to the CSI Handbook "there is a general preference to avoid involvement in political agendas", in other words advocacy is considered controversial, conflictual and antigovernment. Is it?

No. The starting point for most social justice advocacy is our supreme law, the Constitution. As already stated, the Constitution envisages a vibrant, dynamic sometimes conflictual democracy. But it creates systems and institutions – including the courts – for debating, managing and resolving these conflicts. Resorting to the streets or the courts in the face of a policy impasse, such as existed in the early 2000s on antiretroviral treatment for HIV, does not make an advocacy organisation antigovernment or equate to having a political agenda. Neither does exercise of the right to freedom of assembly.

Of course, some politicians don't like robust advocacy, especially when their departments are exposed for mismanagement or corruption. They resort to caricaturing motives and dark suggestions of hidden agendas. But this is not justification for lily-livered CSI grant-making. Corporate fear of political disfavour for supporting legitimate and lawful advocacy works to the detriment of the constitutional project.

**Reason 2:** "Advocacy is intangible and has no measurable impact." Unfortunately, this is an even graver mistake! Advocacy is not the same as service delivery; its results cannot be so easily added up and may not be immediate. It is often about social fabric. But it has proved that it can be essential to the quantity, quality and sustainability of service delivery.

In relation to health for example, sustained advocacy has driven the roll-out of the ARV programme, leading to improved investments and quality in the health system, as well as monitoring from above and below of service delivery. The result – in eight years nearly 2-million HIV-related deaths prevented, a massive drop in mother-to-child HIV infection and a rise in life expectancy. This could not have been achieved by advocacy alone, but advocacy has been the catalyst needed to make the system work. However, it was achieved by organisations that received not a cent of CSI, but which instead have to struggle in a difficult and declining foreign funding market.



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The same picture is emerging in relation to basic education. As already mentioned, in 2012 CSI in education amounted to R2.9bn. There is no doubt that CSI managers will be able to point to little pools of promise and excellence – probably misdescribed as the “impact” – brought about by this investment. But what will happen when CSI moves elsewhere (as is happening with health)? What has it done to reshape the bigger picture?

In the context of CSI, impact is most appropriately defined as “influence” or “force”. The influence that CSI seeks in education should be an improvement of overall educational outcomes and the teaching system.

But judging by core indicators of results in numeracy, literacy and science CSI is not having “impact”.

By contrast, in 2012 SECTION27 was able to lead a campaign that influenced a renewed focus on systems for procurement and timeous delivery of books to schools. As a direct result, in 2013, for the first time in many years, the vast majority of schools nationally received their books on time. Similarly, Equal Education made its quest for legally prescribed “Norms and Standards for School Infrastructure” a matter of national interest and by year end had “forced” (another definition of impact) the government to set a time frame for their finalisation.

These two organisations received no CSI. They spent a relatively miniscule amount (less than R5m) to achieve a far greater impact – perhaps greater in terms of “influence” (i.e. impact) – than the billions spent by CSI. Equally important, they have empowered communities and school governing bodies (SGBs) with an understanding of their rights and the law. They have raised the prospect of active citizenship to claim rights and improve systems to deliver these rights. This is vital to combat the prevalent sense of resignation and powerlessness.

In conclusion, therefore, I would argue that the challenge today is to bring the two strands more closely together. Lasting impact will not be achieved without advocacy, oversight and ownership of CSI by the communities it benefits. This will be achieved by helping the institutions of participatory democracy that exist at grassroots and community level (SGBs, hospital boards etc) to function properly and to both solicit and protect the public and private investments that are needed to create a more equal, fair and economically active and competitive society.

That South Africa is a country of enormous social challenges was illustrated in the results of Census 2012. That South Africa is a country with enormous potential is evident from the NDP, and the grand aspirations that it sets for 2030. But to realise this potential it is necessary that different cogs depicted in the NDP, which have different strengths and provide different opportunities for impact, work better together. ■