

Business should be obsessed with state building, says Bonang Mohale

Addressing leaders in business and corporate social investment at the 2018 [Trialogue](#) Business in Society Conference, Bonang Mohale, CEO of Business Leadership SA, said the country has been given a second - and last - chance following the appointment of a new president. "South African business is currently basking in the glory of positive sentiment," he said.

Mohale reminded delegates that, after democratic elections, the new government inherited a technically bankrupt country and grew the size of the economy five-fold, creating world-class institutions. National Treasury had "exceptional" leadership and staff.

"When state capture was at its height, we were still able to function. And yet state capture hollowed out our institutions and replaced good cops with bad cops. Public administration is now worse than what was inherited 24 years ago."

Ethical leadership

Business must focus on both state building and the appointment of suitable ethical leaders, Mohale said. "As business, we must join hands with other social partners to hold elected leaders accountable and insist on being involved in policy-making. We need to do everything in our power not to become another failed African state. Investors want us to succeed – because they know we can realise the South Africa of Mandela's dreams."

He commented that South Africa was good at developing plans, but lacked success in implementing and executing them. Section 25 of the Constitution, for example, was more than adequate to address land issues, but the current challenges were due to prior lack of focus and will to implement, years ago.



Bonang Mhale, CEO, Business Leadership SA

"Transformation means together we are creating a future that has no resemblance to the past. Transformation is hard work, painful and emotive. We need to address issues such as poverty, economic equality and land with seriousness."

A key challenge of governance and oversight facing business boards today is that corporate decision making should address the needs of both direct shareholders and broader stakeholder communities. Business may talk about a concept of 'shared value', for example, but needs to pay its own employees a decent wage. "If the directors of Lonmin had walked through the shanty town of Marikana, it would have personally grieved them that their own colleagues live in such appalling squalor."



Mohale: "Business is the answer, not the enemy"

Danette Breitenbach 15 Jun 2017



Building a shared future

Mohale said it was vital to address questions such as how to build a shared future in a fractured world, how to drive sustainable economic progress, overcome societal inequalities, and address the challenges of rapidly shifting technology to adequately prepare children for the future world of work.

"South Africa is the only one of 55 African countries where, when it became free, education did not improve. Education is the only thing, with hard work, that can enable a child born in Alexandria to move to Bryanston.

"Excellence is about getting better today, compared to yesterday, and we are a resilient bunch," said Mohale. "We must, as business, be genuinely obsessed with the notion of state building."

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