

Social investment must empower communities for the future

"While donations may aim to satisfy an immediate need in a given area, true sustainable investment must look to the future," says Peter Metcalfe, Novus Holdings group executive of sales.



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Novus Holdings, formerly known as the Paarl Media Group, is dedicated to education, skills development, and community engagement. The principle of giving 'a hand up, not a hand out' is how Novus Holdings approaches all potential social investment activities.

"An ongoing contribution without looking into a long-term strategy creates a society that will perpetually be in need," says Metcalfe.

Investment is not a once off event, nor are the benefits perceived immediately. Instead, it is carefully calculated and prepared for, it includes a few risks, a lot of hard work and in the end, a principal which, if all goes well, continues to grow.

Daunting prospect

Social investment should be approached in the same manner. With so many South Africans in dire need there is no shortage of organisations and individuals which require assistance. A potential investor seeking a sound stock is faced with a daunting prospect, and requires careful consideration before moving forward.

A corporate social investment potentially weighs even more in the balance, because this involves the lives, housing, education, and health of real people. In the way of all investments, the decision on where and how to use a corporate social investment budget must be approached and planned in a way that helps the 'investment' to grow.

In terms of a corporate social investment there is no financial return on investment, with the exception of the repayment of an agreed loan. However, in the case of a social investment, the principal amount, the investment, should be considered the actual beneficiary which is being funded. It is the beneficiary which should flourish and grow, not only immediately, but long term as well.

"When there is a situation that is related to basic needs, such as adequate food, clean water, air, or a threat of physical harm, those needs must be met. However, part and parcel with that should be a long term outlook of bettering that person so that they are not again subjected to that situation," says Metcalfe.

The company encourages corporate donors to look at providing support which will not leave the beneficiary forever reliant on contributions, but rather to empower the project to operate successfully on its own.

Growth is monitored

Novus Holdings monitors and tracks the growth of each of its benefactors, and Metcalfe believes that if the support given is sufficient and of the right type, a benefactor should within two years of the investment be in a stable place to cease the required support. He points out that support may take many forms - membership, guidance on business management, basic start-up packs and equipment, management courses for the NGO leader(s), or an upgrade of facilities.

In addition to dealing with immediate needs, strategies should include education and skills development to equip a beneficiary to help themselves in the future. With this in mind Novus Holdings established the Novus Academy to provide employees and potential employees with the opportunity to learn, grow and excel at their jobs through a variety of technical, life-skills, management, leadership, IT and systems related courses and programmes. The Academy is set to establish new standards in printing and related business skills for the industry and beyond in Africa.

Novus Holdings also provides support to tertiary scholars such as through the Bursary Trust, as well as assisting start-up initiatives or Academy programmes such as the Emagqabini Education Academy.

"Our philosophy is in line with the old adage: 'Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day, teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime'. Teach skills which will empower a community in the future, and that community will in turn empower generations to come," Metcalfe concludes.

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