

# The Kolisis call for fresh thinking after "a time of mayhem"

"We need to listen to what people dealing with challenging circumstances really need," says Rachel Kolisi, co-founder of the Kolisi Foundation. This and other fresh new thinking is being championed by young philanthropists such as Kolisi and her husband Siya as key ways in which to meet the country's growing development challenges after the most disruptive year in democratic South Africa's history.



Source: Supplied

Springbok captain Siya Kolisi and his wife, Rachel, formed their foundation last year to respond to the needs of communities hard-hit by the Covid-19 pandemic. The pair shared their views on meeting new challenges facing the nation in the third edition of the *Annual Review of South African Philanthropy* which was officially launched on Tuesday, 2 November by the Independent Philanthropy Association South Africa (Ipasa) at their Annual Philanthropy Symposium.

The Ipasa Annual Review aims to provide valuable public information on the nature, scope, achievements and challenges of some of the many hundreds of philanthropic organisations active in South Africa.

Ipasa's membership consists of 40 philanthropic organisations and includes some of South Africa's well-established foundations such as the Ackerman Family Foundation, Allan and Gill Gray Foundation, Oppenheimer Generations Foundation, Cyril Ramaphosa Foundation, Raith Foundation and the Ford Foundation.



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A 'time of mayhem'

The *Annual Review of South African Philanthropy* editor Shelagh Gastrow describes the past year as a ‘time of mayhem’. Philanthropists not only had to sustain their longer-term priority projects and programmes but also had to respond to emergencies created by such events as the Covid-19 pandemic and the mid-year outbreak of looting and violence in KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng.

“These are indeed momentous times for philanthropy,” says IPASA executive director, Louise Driver. “An important new challenge for IPASA members and other funders is to try to achieve a balance between providing immediate emergency support and also driving systems change to tackle the root causes of the many complex issues our country faces.”

Events such as the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic and sudden demand for food and emergency supplies caused by the nation-wide lockdown has brought to the fore the increasing need to give local communities greater flexibility and freedom in how they invest funds from donors such as philanthropic foundations.

Driver explains: “There is greater emphasis on community and trust-based participatory philanthropy in which donors and communities work more closely together to develop solutions to pressing social issues. This is all about listening to communities and trusting that they know best how to solve many of their problems and that they will invest donor funds wisely.

This approach to shift more power from the grant-maker to the grantee is becoming very prevalent especially among new, young philanthropists such as the Kolisis.”



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## “Listening is the first step” to true philanthropy

The approach being taken by the Kolisis is highlighted in one of a number of case studies that appear in Ipasa’s *Annual Review of South African Philanthropy* as examples “of the kinds of impact that can be made from small beginnings”, says editor Shelagh Gastrow.

In the case study describing their approach, the Kolisis say that ‘true philanthropy’ begins with listening: “We need to listen to what people dealing with challenging circumstances really need. We need to listen to the people already working in the community, the other not-for-profit organisations, in order to both learn from them and to better support them. Listening is the first step. Understanding and action must follow in order to make a meaningful difference. Doing this collaboratively is far more efficient and effective than striding out on one’s own.”

A number of other case studies in the Ipasa *Annual Review of South African Philanthropy* provide valuable insights into the

nature and scope of philanthropic foundations that are active in fields ranging from early childhood, basic and higher education to community development, environment and climate change, food security, gender-based violence, health, job creation and social justice.

On another level, philanthropists are being challenged by the recently formed African Climate Foundation (ACF) who has partnered with Ipasa to assist funders in understanding and addressing the impact of climate change on philanthropy and to incorporate the issue of climate change in their giving.



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Noting that less than 3% of global philanthropy is dedicated to climate change mitigation, the ACF states in the Ipasa Annual Review: “The failure to adopt a climate lens will ultimately undermine the particular philanthropic goal, whether this be in the field of health, education, social justice and so on. Inclusivity, justice and rights will never be realised on the continent unless there is an adequate response to the threats that climate change poses to Africa’s economic systems and its development pathway.”

“The hope is that the stories and perspectives in the 2021 edition of the Annual Philanthropy Review may also inspire others across the country to consider philanthropic giving or to make contributions to organisations that can effectively use these private resources to advance their objectives,” Gastrow concludes.

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