

SA's best years lie ahead if its resources are properly used

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A NUMBER of leading international business people join prominent South Africans – from Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma to Yvonne Chaka Chaka – in believing the best is still to come for South Africa despite its numerous challenges.

They are clear in a book published by multinational management consulting firm McKinsey that while there is much to celebrate in the country, its best years lie ahead if all its resources are properly harnessed.

Moving forward

“The first 21 years of democracy have been an exciting time of growth, transformation, experimentation and nation-building. While all of us involved in this journey have made our fair share of mistakes, we have also built a strong foundation for the future. As this book emphasises, South Africans across society must now work in partnership to roll back poverty and inequality, unlock this country's talent, and heal the wounds of its bitter past,” McKinsey says in the introduction of the book.

Reimagining South Africa, which contains essays from 22 contributors, was published to mark the 20th anniversary of the opening of McKinsey's South African office. Its launch yesterday in Cape Town, coincides with the World Economic Forum on Africa.

The authors look at practical solutions on how South Africa can move forward in a number of areas, such as the economy, education, mining,

developing jobs for youth, and forming better partnerships between the government, labour, business and civil society.

Gloria Serobe, the executive director of Wiphold, an investment and operating company owned and managed by black women, slams big business for not acknowledging its role in apartheid and not stepping up to help deal with challenges.

“In all the discussions about who's responsible for the woes of this country and who will lead us forward, there's one player that seems to get a free pass. I speak of big business...



companies have a duty to help fix our nation but they've been shirking that duty for 20 years,” she says in the book.

“The result is that our companies have not embraced their role as a force for positive change in South Africa.”

Serobe said it was time business came up with innovative solutions, instead of waiting for the government to impose policies such as black economic empowerment or, even worse, getting caught in scandals of collusion such as in the bread and construction industries.

She said business also needed to focus on helping to improve the education system. Many problems at schools are largely administrative and logistical, and these are areas in which business excels.



Participants take a walk around the World Economic Forum Africa yesterday.

PHOTO SIMPHIWE MBOKAZI

Sizwe Nxasana, First Rand's chief executive and chairman of the board of trustees of the National Education Collaboration Trust, agreed that education was key and said that in order for South Africa to prosper, the state of the education system needed to be addressed urgently. He said the necessary reforms needed to be crafted around a national integrated digital strategy.

Technology

“There is an urgent need to examine the integration of technology in our schools, and how it can be leveraged and used for the purposes of learning and teaching throughout

the entire education ecosystem. “What I believe is needed is a new information technology curriculum that goes beyond the screen and the keyboard; one that teaches our children how an iPad actually works.”

Nxasana also said that courses in entrepreneurship, with a strong technological bent, were urgently needed. These skills were needed for the world of work that was constantly changing, he said.

He also raised concerns about the government's Telecoms and Postal Services Department and the Communications Department being split as they should be creating a digital strategy together. “It made no sense to split these away

from each other and I'm afraid that we are now drifting further and further from the strategy that is so urgently needed for South Africa.”

Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, who heads up the African Union Commission, said that it had become crystal clear to her since her new posting three years ago that South Africa needed to fully embrace being part of the African continent if it wanted to unlock its economic potential.

“We need to start by changing mindsets. We get irritated with foreigners when they treat Africa as one country, as if we were not a continent of over a billion people and 55 sovereign states. But the global trend

toward regional blocs must remind us that integration and unity are the only way for Africa to leverage its competitive advantage,” she said.

Dlamini-Zuma believed the transport sector in general, with its desperate need for expensive infrastructure, was rife with opportunities that no single country could take advantage of. Together, African countries could improve the



The year the NDP has given, by which to end poverty

economic outlook for all by knitting the continent together with ports, highways and railroads. This would also result in jobs and training.

Jeff Immelt, the chief executive and chairman of General Electric (GE), also punts education and infrastructure development as key to developing the South African economy.

However, he added that the business environment, especially for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) that could integrate into local and global supply chains, needed to be improved.

Success

“As an example, for each job that GE hires directly, we create multiple jobs for outside suppliers, many of which are SMEs. SMEs as a whole are abundant job generators and help to foster a climate for entrepreneurs to grow and

prosper. To succeed, they need to have an environment that provides them with market opportunity and with support to achieve the necessary quality, volume and reliability to meet the needs of global supply chains,” Immelt said.

“In short, there is no single recipe for success. Sustained investments in infrastructure, health and education have been key ingredients of success... Policies and reforms were not dogmatic – adjustments were made to get results.”

Former finance minister, Trevor Manuel, said the objectives of the country's National Development Plan (NDP), which include ending poverty and significantly reducing inequality by 2030, were ambitious. To achieve them, a national commitment and great effort was needed.

He said recent initiatives such as Operation Phakisa, which is aimed at fast-tracking the delivery of priorities in the NDP by accelerating investment in the oceans economy and mining sectors, was a good example of the kind of collaboration needed.

The message in the book from Yvonne Chaka Chaka is that freedom brings great responsibility, and South Africans have to be wary of becoming complacent.

“For me, any reflection on South Africa's freedom must begin with one amazing man: President Nelson Mandela. As I say in the song I wrote and performed for him in 2013, he was not only a leader, but also a teacher – he taught us how to be free, how to forgive and how to live and work together.