

ESD thrives with an impact-driven, investment approach

By Miranda Simrie: GIBS's EDA Director

When you take a township entrepreneur from nothing to something, that's impact. When you help a business scale from three employees to 10, that's impact. When you enable a company to successfully navigate the red tape around procurement, that's impact. When your interventions result in notable pro-small business mindset shift within a large corporate, that's impact. When you invest for impact, then change is assured; and Enterprise and Supplier Development (ESD) is no different.

This results-driven perspective underpins the work of the Entrepreneurship Development Academy (EDA) at the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS). It's an approach which is in line with GIBS's philosophy of being close to business and relevant within the broader business environment; although in the ESD context this includes multinational firms, big corporates as well as start-ups and small-, micro- and medium-sized enterprises (SMMEs).

This view hinges on the assertion that it makes good business sense to invest in suppliers, young business owners and emerging industries, both from a national growth and employment perspective and as a way of building effective supply chains.

Approached in this manner, ESD has the potential to be a win-win situation, rather than a compliance necessity.

Getting this right comes down to building solid foundations, addressing the pressures on business and entrepreneurs, and reinforcing customised interventions through the use of meaningful analysis and interpretation. Anything less is missing the impact opportunity and risks falling into the 'tick box' trap.

A business-like approach

GIBS's EDA has been intentionally positioned with the business school as the focal point of entrepreneurship education, incorporating the GIBS Social Entrepreneurship Programme as well as customised interventions. This enables the EDA team to play on GIBS's strengths as the business school for business and the institution's canny ability to interpret corporate needs and translate these into meaningful solutions.

"The EDA tailor-makes ESD programmes that focus on entrepreneurship development," explains Miranda Simrie, EDA Director. "Our clients could be corporates

or institutional funders like international foundations, or public sector organisations such as government departments and SOEs. All clients are bound by one shared goal, to build and capacitate entrepreneurs in a way that impacts economic development and job creation."

The EDA positions itself as a partner in the process, and not simply a service provider. This is a unique approach which enables the team to challenge attitudes on the part of its clients who lean towards a tickbox approach. This involves working closely with clients to create programmes that talk to their industry and area of interest, such as social entrepreneurship, working with start-ups, helping entrepreneurs scale their businesses, or addressing ways in which to access supply chains.

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This is not always easy, with many clients still preferring to take an arms-length approach, but Simrie believes this is changing. "For some clients ESD is still a grudge purchase, but some are realising that good corporate citizenship is not just about ticking the box, it's about taking an interest in the economy and playing an active role in the development of smaller enterprises."



Miranda Simrie, GIBS's EDA Director.