

Corporations have been served notice that environmental issues, linked to the Reconstruction and Development Programme, are firmly on the agenda. Sound communication between all players is going to be vital, argues Terry O'Donovan

GREEN GOAL POSTS

The recent Southern African International Conference on Environmental Management held in Zimbabwe, arguably the most important meeting of local and foreign experts since the Rio Earth Summit, reinforced a number of important themes which resonated strongly amongst those representing industry.

And the messages were clear: the green goal posts are moving in Southern Africa and business has to keep abreast of these if relevant environmental management is to be employed. Standards, operating practices and projects should, where possible, take cognisance of the needs of individuals and communities and companies must communicate about this clearly, honestly and openly.

Locally, there is a new environmental agenda facing South Africa and the link with development will become critical. Of crucial importance here will be the development of sound working partnerships with non-governmental organisations (NGO's), local communities and government in order to achieve environmental objectives and the identification of new actors and issues within environmental management.

More specifically, it was emphasised time and again that business needed to move pro-actively in dealing with green issues if it is to counteract some of the "disturbing new trends" now becoming evident in South Africa. Such trends include the "professionalisation of issues" by individuals and groups who make careers out of targeting an industry, thereby attracting funding, staff and political clout to pursue their cause. These groups quickly assume the "moral high ground" and, once this has been established, it is very difficult to dislodge them as far as the public is concerned. Companies must move quickly before these groups become established, especially by establishing partnerships with NGO's and community groups.

Many of the new actors and issues will be driven by the development agenda. And herein lie important new opportunities for business, from a marketing point of view. For individuals (and government), environment will increasingly be driven by grassroots needs couched within the context of the RDP. For example, health, the needs of the poor, the working and residential environment and human rights issues will become focus points for environmental agendas. Companies able to move quickly in establishing some credibility in these areas may be able

to take the initiative. For example, the linking of Corporate Social Investment projects with community needs that meet development objectives (and therefore the RDP) could achieve best results.

It is going to be increasingly important to develop environmental standards relevant to South Africa. Such standards need to focus on issues spe-

cifically relevant to the experience of developing economies. South Africa needs to adopt measures which can be sold to the first world as credible objectives, such as linking environmental management to specific development objectives. For example, meeting future environmental standards in South Africa may mean allocating certain resources specifically to upgrading local

communities. The days of green projects which ignore development issues and individual needs are gone.

Few at the conference were left with any doubt that a new vision and perspective would be needed. And it's quite clear that the people have served notice.

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*Some of our biggest reasons
for believing in big business
are some of our smallest.*



If our children are to inherit a country worth inheriting, a financially strong country, big business becomes more important than ever before.

For one thing, like other small countries with big business, it is big business that enables South Africa to compete in the international markets and be a big earner of foreign exchange.

For another, it is big business that provides a stable base from which medium and small business can grow and expand on

a scale significant enough to become major contributors to the wealth- and job-creation processes of the new South Africa.

And that is really what a healthy economy is all about, a mix of big, medium and small businesses operating internationally and internally off a strong, competitive base.

Big business and the South African economy. Inseparable if the new South Africa is to have an economy worthy of generations to come.

A few of the business leaders of tomorrow at play.



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