

Delivering when it really counts

The softer side of banking has really been put to the test during Lockdown. Finding the golden thread that takes CSI from boardroom box ticking and into company culture and conversations, has never been more front and centre than during the current Covid-19 pandemic.

Kennedy Dembetembe, Senior Manager: Corporate Social Investment (CSI) at African Bank says that as the spread of Covid-19 continues, the one thing that is clear is that this pandemic is a vital reminder that human beings are on this planet to take care of each other – and business is a way we can leverage this purpose. While the bank has been proactive in providing customers with as much education and information as possible to make informed financial decisions and weather this challenging cycle, Dembetembe and his team have been hard at work behind the scenes delivering where it really counts.

“In the beginning of the pandemic we partnered with organisations that we have worked with over the years, namely Afrika Tikkun and Rise Against Hunger. Through these two organizations we were able to provide food to vulnerable South Africans in urban and rural communities in Gauteng, the Western Cape, Mpumalanga and KwaZulu Natal,” he says.

As the pandemic continued, Dembetembe says the bank shifted its focus to grassroots organisations across the country. “We provided financial support in May and June to nine organisations, particularly vulnerable women and orphan organisations.

Another key focus has been trying to save the academic year for Matriculants and final year University students. “In March and April we immediately made funding available directly to Universities to assist them in getting computers and data for students. This included a R200,000 donation, split between the University of Cape Town and the University of Witwatersrand.

Dembetembe says through the Bank's partner organization, the Yenze Foundation, they were even able to provide data to students in under resourced universities such as University of Limpopo, Tshwane University of Technology, Vaal University of Technology to name a few.

“Education is a passion at African Bank and it was our privilege to also engage with the Gauteng Department of education and other stakeholders to make masks available for matriculants across the country. We were able to supply, through the Department and our agents, 16 000 masks to matriculants nationally.”

Another exciting initiative in education has been the bank's work with the Regent Business School. 100 face shields were provided for front line workers at the Witkoppen Clinic in July. The Face Shields were produced by Regent Business School using their 3 D printers. “They have also provided additional face shields that we will be donating to the Tambo Memorial Hospital in Boksburg and the Sterkfontein Hospital. There is a concerning shortage of PPE at these clinics and hospitals leaving doctors, nurses and other frontline workers dangerously ill-equipped to care for COVID-19 patients,” he says.

Then of course in line with African Banks humanity in banking ethos, staff at all its branches and offices have been integrally involved in making a difference too. Staff from the Collections contact centre made 200 blankets and masks for learners from Afrika Tikkuns Centre in Alexandra Township. CSI augmented this with an additional R20,000 worth of goods for the centre to distribute to needy parents. The Blankets were handed over in June. “We've also initiated a payroll giving campaign where we invite African Bank staff to donate a portion of their salary to Afrika Tikkun and the Solidarity Fund. To date we have received commitments worth almost R400 000 which are being split between the two.

Dembetembe says the last initiative this month for staff was a virtual Mandela Day Campaign where African Bank staff were asked to use their skills and experience to assist a Non-Profit Organization. This will run from the 17th July till 02 August.

“It is so important for companies to fast track their CSI programmes at this time. We appreciate everyone is struggling to stay afloat but CSI cannot be a tick box exercise in one’s organisation. Good business Post Covid will require a rethink in strategy and finding ways to inculcate a giving culture into an organisation. It has to start from the top. At African bank we have put “advancing lives and getting involved” as a Key Performance Indicator to ensure that our people do one activity per quarter and fundraise for the NGO of their choice. It’s an ethos embedded into the organisation where everyone knows what is expected and required of them. We believe the most important thing is to be committed, as a company, to the lives of others,” concludes Dembetembe.