

AMCHAM Public Forum meeting

The Forum meeting took place on the 27 August 2013 and was hosted by AMCHAM at their offices in Killarney Johannesburg.

i) Corporate Social Investment (CSI)

The first presentation was by Ms Kim Robinson, CEO of Renaissance Strategic Solutions who focused on CSI. She noted that most organisations approach to CSI is to see it as some form of goodwill rather than a legitimate self interest, to make their businesses sustainable. For instance, among other things a car company could be looking at investing in the area of drive training for young people instead of making donations to charitable courses in that area. Private sector contribution to CSI in the area of education is to the tune of R650m. (R445m was contributed by 69 of the American company that are based in South Africa on CSI). Carol indicated that the Corporate Social Investment spend of American companies far outweighs that of any other bilateral investment in South Africa.

She reckons if there were to be collaboration with government whose contribution to education is in the vicinity of R6bn, this would change the picture dramatically. However, the lesson here was the need for a focussed approach instead of dealing with issues in a piecemeal manner. The other challenge was an absence of synergy among private sectors regarding their contributions to CSI. There are instances where more than three companies are contributing to one entity without the knowledge of the other.

ii) Managing stakeholders during strikes within a company

The second on labour unrest by Mr Shibe Maruatona, Head of Public Policy and Corporate Affairs, General Motors, talk on how to manage stakeholders during strikes within a company. He indicated that he had been informed that he could share this at this juncture until a joint formal announcement had been made by the company with the trade union concerned on the agreement reached. He however shared some of the dilemma that this posed for an American based in South Africa as they were competing with other Centres located in other parts of the world such as Thailand, who were proving very competitive in terms of targets realised as well as reduced overhead costs.

iii) Discussion on role of Public Forum in relation to the AMCHAM Board

The role should be an advisory role where leadership is provided to the AMCHAM provided with regard to stakeholders interest, perception as well as role.

-Power matrix tool (influence real power) by Richard Calland from the University of Cape Town

In using this tool, some members perception were that there is some distance in relationship between AMCHAM and the leadership of the ruling power. The perception that China has done more in SA and Africa has exacerbated the matter. Hence the need for engagement as well as for stakeholders to be presented with substantial information regarding the contribution that Americans companies are making to the South African economy in terms of creating jobs and providing skills among others. The reality was that they were American companies and were here as guests/visitors although many of the people employed in such companies are South Africans. The issue of labour as well as localisation seems to be a sore issue among American companies (my perception).

- National Development Plan

Whilst conversation would be pursued regarding the role of AMCHAM members, it was felt that companies need to take this message to their staff with regard to fostering an understanding from their staff about the NDP and its intended role.

- Last meeting for the year will be on the 17 October 2013 at a venue to be confirmed and the guest speaker will be Mike Spiker who will speak on the Trust deficit between government and business. Chose Choeu from Eskom will also be join the meeting to assist the group with Board's expectations.