

CSI is not a nice-to-have, it's a necessity in SA

 By [Sandy Peters](#)

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The [Tiger Brands Foundation](#) recently served its 50-millionth meal as part of its in-school breakfast programme. A public-private partnership with the Department of Basic Education, the programme was first piloted in 2011 at six schools in Alexandra township in Johannesburg. Today, it serves breakfast every school day to just under 64,000 learners at 92 schools across South Africa.

Set up by Tiger Brands as a special purpose BEE vehicle, the foundation, with a focus on issues pertaining to food and nutrition security, is funded through a bi-annual trickle dividend from the company. We interviewed Eugene Absalom, director of the Tiger Brands Foundation, to find out the long-term goals of the programme, how they plan to ensure its sustainability through the economic downturn, and how the programme has impacted the communities in which it operates.



Eugene Absalom, director of the Tiger Brands Foundation

■ ***Now in its seventh year, could you describe the impact of Tiger Brands Foundation's in-school breakfast programme?***

Eugene Absalom: The Tiger Brands Foundation (TBF) was established to effect a broad-based socio-economic impact in vulnerable communities. The success and impact of the TBF programme lies in the focus on our holistic approach to deliver on our mandate of a sustainable and replicable programme aimed at improving the nutritional and educational status of vulnerable learners.

Independent studies, done in collaboration with the University of Johannesburg, have indicated that absenteeism in schools where the programme is active has dropped, leading to improved educational outcomes. Law enforcement agencies have also reported that there is a drop in petty crimes in the areas where the programme has been implemented because learners are in school instead of roaming the streets. The programme's implementation also had an economic impact within the communities in the form of new employment opportunities being created across the value chain.



■ ***With South Africa in an economic downturn, how does the Tiger Brands Foundation ensure the in-school breakfast programme remains sustainable?***

Absolom: A portion of the Tiger Brands Limited shares were ring-fenced in a special purpose vehicle, and dividend flow from these shares fund the foundation's programmes. The up-side is that when Tiger Brands Limited performs well, we have a bigger pool of funds from which to draw on and reach more learners. But as you rightly say, in difficult economic times, this pool of funding may also narrow, but to a lesser extent than would be the case if the funding was dependent on external donors who have to approve budgets each financial year. So we are partly, but not completely insulated from economic fluctuations.

The TBF operating model is built upon policies and procedures that drive efficiency in the organisation. The performance of the organisation is measured, monitored and evaluated through our unique monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework that utilises a real-time data collection tool. This enables quick response times to issues that may occur in our value chain, accurate measurement and management of performance and effective tracking of the social return on investment (SROI) achieved by the organisation. Our strategic value chain partnerships enhance SROI by enabling quality food products to be procured in a manner that enables the benefits of economies of scale without the TBF investing in sizable capital infrastructure itself.

We have also developed a risk management and quality framework that enables quality food product to move from the point of manufacture, to school kitchens, and ultimately into the stomachs of learners, with minimal risk of non-delivery or food contamination. This further enhances our operational efficiency.

■ ***What are the long-term goals of the programme?***

Absolom: TBF ratified their new strategy in 2016 (2017-2022) and kick-started the implementation by driving change adoption, refocusing skills and aligning expectations of how to move the organisation forward. The following were identified as key strategic activities:

- Financial sustainability,
- Direct impact,
- Targeted advocacy,
- Strategic partnerships, and
- Positive reputation - communications.

Key enablers to this were identified as: effective monitoring and evaluation (M&E), having packaged and replicable

operations, and having adequate capacity in people, knowledge and networks.

Ultimately, we would like to see every child receive breakfast so that their future is not compromised by lack of proper nutrition. We would like to see the complete eradication of stunting, obesity and other health challenges that are a result of poor nutrition. We would also like to see young learners perform well in school, and where nutrition plays a role in improving educational outcomes.



■ ***What role can private sector organisations play in the programme?***

Absolom: We would like to invite private sector organisations to join the breakfast programme, either by donating funds to the foundation or by simply adopting our model and rolling it out themselves. As we speak, we have several private sector partners, other than Tiger Brands Limited, who are working with us in various locations around the country, including Nungu Marketing and Distribution, the Shishen Solar Facility, Tetra Laval and the Gouda Wind Farm.

■ ***How important is authenticity and transparency in the CSI space in South Africa?***

Absolom: CSI is not a nice-to-have nor should it be used as an instrument to polish one's image. In South Africa, CSI is a necessity. We have one of the highest Gini co-efficient in the world, a measurement used by economists to get a sense of the level of economic inequality. So our strategic intent is not in question. However, we do need to make sure that the limited resources that flow in our direction are utilised in the most effective and efficient way possible if we are going to secure funding in future to expand our reach and influence.

Most importantly, we need to account for every cent that we spend and the value-add to the programme. For example, the Tiger Brands Foundation spends more than 85% (2016/17) of every rand on the actual breakfast programme, and the administration part of the programme relies on the remaining 15% - we need to show time and again that we are adhering to this benchmark.

■ ***How important is it to align your CSR strategy with your brand and what are the benefits of doing so?***

Absolom: For a CSR programme housed within an organisation, there might be a need to consider the alignment of the brand with a CSR strategy. However, because Tiger Brands Foundation is a separate legal entity (and focused on social development rather than social investment short-term interventions) to Tiger Brands Limited, what is important to us is that we uphold our values at all times across our entire value chain – from our staff at head office to our corporate partners, provincial coordinators and all other individuals associated with the programme. We do not exist to serve the interest of any corporate, but rather respond to the needs of vulnerable communities, as per our mandate.

■ What is the Tiger Brands Foundation doing for Mandela Day this year, and what do you think is the significance of Mandela Day in 2017?

Absolom: We don't do anything on Mandela Day other than support the Tiger Brands Limited initiatives on the day.

"We need to restore and reaffirm the dignity of the people of Africa and the developing world. We need to place the eradication of poverty at the top of world priorities. We need to know with a fresh conviction that we all share a common humanity and that our diversity in the world is the strength for our future together." – Nelson Mandela

Our programme strives to restore the dignity of vulnerable learners in previously disadvantaged communities on a daily basis.

So, Mandela Day is who we are everyday.

ABOUT SINDY PETERS

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