

3 trends in responsible business

By [Zyaan Davids Anter](#)

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Companies spent an estimated R10.2bn on corporate social investment (CSI) in South Africa in 2019 - a 5% year-on-year increase in nominal terms (2018: R9.7bn), but flat when taking inflation into account, reflecting a subdued economy. This is according to research findings featured in the latest edition of the annual *Dialogue Business in Society Handbook*.



Zyaan Davids Anter, content manager at Dialogue and editor of the *Business in Society Handbook*

Here are three key trends, according to Dialogue, likely to shape the sector, and responsible business more broadly, in the coming years.

#1 Continued investment in education to help realise systemic change

Dialogue's inaugural CSI research in 1998 found that the education sector was receiving around half (54%) of CSI expenditure. Twenty-two years later, the sector continues to receive the most corporate support, with 94% of surveyed companies contributing to the sector, and accounting for an average of half of companies' CSI spend (50%) in 2019. This focus on education is in line with global trends, which are also tracked in the handbook, and which show that education is a priority for companies around the world.

Education is understood as a cornerstone of meaningful transformation and will continue to receive the majority of corporate support. The support will also shift to include more strategic investments that seek to leverage and influence the public education system, such as support of research, policy and advocacy work, innovative public-private pilots and broad collaborative initiatives.

#2 Employee volunteerism to become more strategic

Consistent with previous years, the majority of surveyed companies (81%) had formal employee volunteer programmes (EVPs) in 2019. The most common type of EVP was company-organised volunteering initiatives, offered by 92% of respondents, despite this type of initiative being the least popular among non-profit organisations (NPOs).

Employees increasingly expect to work for companies whose values they can identify with and the upward trend in corporate volunteering programmes is expected to continue. Volunteering will become more sophisticated, with increased matching of company skills, resources and opportunities to the skills and desires of individual employees and the needs of NPOs.

#3 Support for social justice and advocacy set to strengthen

Dialogue recently began researching CSI spend on the social justice and advocacy sector, which is defined as "contributions that support the influence of public policy outcomes, with and/or on behalf of a vulnerable group or community, or for the wider public good". In 2019, the sector was supported by just 10% of companies surveyed and received less than 1% of CSI expenditure.

Despite current low investment into the sector, we anticipate that companies will increasingly be expected to take a stand on the social and political issues of the day. This will take the form of leaders voicing their companies' positions, either

individually or through business alliances. More corporate funds are also expected to be channelled into research, thought leadership and networking relating to the specific development sectors that companies are supporting through their CSI.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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