

Private-sector engagement needed to reach UN goals – Business Day 8 September 2019

United Nations logo. Picture: 123RF

Meeting the UN sustainable development goals will require more private-sector engagement, says Mark Suzman, the chief strategy officer at the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

The sustainable development goals were set by the UN in 2015 and include ending poverty and hunger as well as creating quality education by 2030. Achieving the sustainable development goals could unlock \$12-trillion in market opportunities globally, with up to \$1-trillion for the private sector in Africa alone, and could create up to 85-million jobs.

“There’s a financing gap with the sustainable development goals and the private sector needs to step up and get involved with that,” Suzman told Business Day on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Cape Town on Friday.

“Many private-sector companies are looking for ways to maximise their development impact. Most companies want to do good things in their communities or environment, but they’re also not going to be very innovative or direct themselves, so they’re looking for the kinds of opportunities they can partner or buy into,” Suzman said.

More engagement from the private sector would close the gap between the cost to deliver the sustainable development goals and current available resources, which are estimated to cost about \$7-trillion a year, he said.

The call for greater private-sector engagement comes after the government announced extensive health reforms aimed at achieving universal health coverage through National Health Insurance (NHI) in August. The bill proposes the establishment of a central NHI fund that will buy services for the entire population from accredited public- and private-sector providers.

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation focuses on big infectious diseases that disproportionately affect the poor. In SA, this includes a focus on tuberculosis and HIV.

“When it comes to NHI, we don’t have strong points of views on the best ways to do it, but we do believe it’s very important that countries prioritise public health care and use it as a mechanism to achieve the sustainable development goals,” Suzman said.

“We support that goal to maximise financing for health that is going to most reach the poor and reduce out of pocket expenditure which is a huge cause of deep poverty,” he said.

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