

PRESS RELEASE

Solidarity Fund receives pledges of R2,6bn as it procures protective equipment for front line healthcare workers and disburses food parcels to vulnerable communities.

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The Solidarity Fund today announced that it had received R2,6bn in pledges from tens of thousands of South Africans and has disbursed more than R1bn in critical interventions, such as the procurement of protective equipment for frontline health workers and disbursement of food parcels, to help South Africa respond to the health and socio-economic impacts of the coronavirus.

“A month to the day after President Ramaphosa announced the establishment of the Fund on 23 March, we are pleased to report significant progress against our objectives,” said Chair of the Solidarity Fund, Gloria Serobe. “What is astonishing is that around 1 000 businesses and more than 75 000 individuals have reached into their pockets to assist those most impacted by Covid-19. We thank each and every one of you.”

The Fund is a rapid response vehicle set up to support the national health system, contribute to humanitarian relief efforts and mobilise South Africans to drive a united response to the coronavirus. It is independent from both Government and Business.

Interim CEO of the Fund, Nomkhita Nqweni said it was truly gratifying to see South Africans come together in response to the challenge.

“We would like to thank South Africans for their generosity and showcasing that we can indeed come together to make a difference. As an independent and agile organisation, we have been able to work together with stakeholders, from government to business, civil society and labour, to make meaningful interventions to support those provided by the state and other organs of society in a very short space of time.”

The Solidarity Fund relies on the efforts of more than 75 individuals who have been deployed by 25 organisations or who have offered their services free of charge to help the Fund to fulfill its objectives. None of the staff involved, including the Chair, CEO or board members receive salaries or payment from the Fund for their services.

Governance and oversight

To meet the highest levels of governance and oversight, an independent board with oversight committees had been established, operations formalised and a governance and risk framework had been put in place.

“A principle and commitment that we live by as a fund is to ensure that there is transparency on all of our activities. Our website will soon be re-launched and this will be the central portal that will contain detailed information and daily updated information around pledges received, how we have allocated these resources, as well as the tracking and reporting of the impact we are having,” Nqweni added.

Ernst & Young and ENS Africa have, on a pro bono basis, developed a governance framework to guide the allocation of all funds. The Fund is independently administered by Old Mutual, on a pro bono basis. PWC has been appointed as an external auditor, also on a pro bono basis.

Funding update

The Fund, which was launched a month ago with R150 million seed capital donated by the State now stands at R2.6bn. Of this amount just around R1.6bn has already been received in the Fund's bank account.

"We are particularly grateful to the businesses as well as tens of thousands of individuals who have contributed amounts ranging from R2 to R1 million. It is also inspiring to see so many individuals and public figures having pledged a proportion of their salaries in the coming months – this is a growing amount and an incredible act of solidarity," said Paul Bondi, Lead: Funding.

As President Cyril Ramaphosa reiterated this week - taxpayers who donate to the Solidarity Fund will be able to claim a deduction from their taxable income.

Health interventions

Dr Jonathan Broomberg, Lead: Health Interventions said that as global demand for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) had surged, the Fund had worked hard to procure PPE, mainly for frontline healthcare workers in the public sector and for community health workers.

This included 19m patient masks, 300 000 sanitisers, 100 000 gowns, 2m N95 masks, 20 000 goggles and 900 000 gloves. Some of these orders had already arrived in South Africa and had been distributed. More was expected to arrive in the next two to three weeks.

The Fund has also procured 200 ventilators for use in the treatment of complications from coronavirus.

In addition, a Solidarity Fund grant will allow the National Health Laboratory Service (NHLS) to an additional 400,000 COVID19 tests to enhance its surveillance efforts.

"There is a strong emphasis on local manufacturing in our procurement processes and we would welcome reliable and sustainable domestic production of critical equipment for Covid-19. To that end we have set up a sophisticated web portal which 4 000 suppliers from SA and abroad have already registered and which forms part of a rigorous validation process," added Broomberg.

Food intervention

The Fund had already taken swift action to inject immediate humanitarian relief in the form of food parcels for the most vulnerable communities across the country. Complementing and augmenting the work of government and others, the Fund set the task of providing emergency relief to over 250 000 distressed families during the lockdown in April.

"While over the medium term, longer term systemic solutions will be required to come on stream - both through additional government grants and sustainable food supply chains, our key goal was to act rapidly, at scale, to reach people facing severed food insecurity now, to achieve national coverage, and to be as inclusive as possible," said Nicola Galombik, Lead: Food Intervention

To do this, the Solidarity Fund is managing distribution of food parcels in partnership with a wide collective of organisations. These had been selected through a rigorous four-phase process taking into account multiple criteria including NPO's ability to meet compliance requirements, geographic footprint and networks, a proven track record of food distribution and capacity to implement quickly.

Around 25% of the food parcels will be distributed through the Department of Social Development's Community Nutrition and Development Centres, and their nine implementing agents, while a further 50% through large national food distribution Non-Profit Organisations. The remainder will be distributed through a range of Community Based Organisations at provincial and local level, as well as private logistics companies.

The Fund has consulted with civil society coalitions like the SACC, Covid 19 Peoples coalition, SAWID and the Nedlac community sector to identify Community Based and Faith Based Organisations across the country, and reach vulnerable households across the urban and rural areas.

"We have made a deliberate effort to direct the organisations we're distributing through, to cover geographic areas and poor communities that are underserved and not covered by other interventions and to minimise overlaps with others doing food relief. Part of the exercise has involved identifying the most deprived local municipalities in the country and ensuring that as many of them as possible were covered," she added.

Galombik added that the Fund had implemented active monitoring and reporting measures to ensure efficient delivery and that the food reaches its intended beneficiaries.

Solidarity Campaign

The Solidarity Fund had also launched a Solidarity Campaign to inspire and mobilise South Africans to act, both individually and collectively, to flatten the curve and support those who are affected.

The Fund has partnered with 15 radio stations that reach all provinces where we are fighting educational segments in 11 languages supported by clinicians and well known and identifiable role models. The campaign will communicate important messages around social distancing and hand washing to contribute towards flattening the curve.

"We worked together not only with creative agencies that have given of their time and skills on a pro bono basis, but also importantly we have partnered with various media owners and organisations that have generously donated the media booking slots and various billboard platforms to flight our campaign. This is yet another example of unity in action."

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