

Business Ethics Network Africa

Conference Declaration 2014

3 October 2014

Whereas we convened at the 15th annual meeting of BEN-Africa at the Business School of Stellenbosch University in Bellville, South Africa from 1-3 October 2014;

Recalling the vision of BEN-Africa to strengthening the commitment and competence of Africans to do business with moral integrity;

Sharing a commitment to sustainable development through ethical and responsible leadership and business practices;

Taking the theme of *Equal in an Unequal World* as the focal point of our discussions;

Acknowledging the role that business, business schools, and universities can play in contributing towards both inequality and equality in society;

Conceding that there is not a single, all-encompassing definition of equality but many different kinds of equality;

Cautious of the fact that inequality is also a highly complex phenomenon, and that differences exist between natural or hereditary inequalities, cultural inequalities, constitutional/political/legal inequalities, ascribed social inequalities; economic inequalities, competitive/meritorious inequalities; ecological inequalities and the different kinds of discrimination, divisions and exclusions that they can cause in society;

Recognising that inequality is undergirded by ideological assumptions that need to be unmasked and critically analysed, especially given that most societies have developed well-established rationalizations [apparatuses of justification] of inequality, all of which tend to perpetuate and prolong inequality;

Registering with concern that

- Inequalities in society, which build on and reinforce asymmetrical power relations, create vicious social effects such as unemployment, poverty, displacement, homelessness, insecurity, poor sanitation, exclusion from adequate health care, feelings of worthlessness, depression, anxiety, which can lead to social instability;
- Inequality causes members of society to live in different worlds, in that it leads to both unequal holdings and unequal freedoms;
- An uninformed and uncritical commitment to free market business practices can substantively contribute to an increase in inequality;
- Corruption in business, industry and all levels of government contributes substantively to inequality in society;
- A poor public education system contributes substantively to inequality in society;

Agreeing that humanity is one single race with the earth as shared homeland;

Affirming the necessity of moving the discourse about inequality beyond race towards a more inclusive discourse about factors impacting on inequality, whilst acknowledging that present distributions are in part the result of a historical legacy of racism and colonialism;

Emphasising that education at all levels, but especially basic education, is the generative mechanism behind income distribution and redistribution, i.e. that the quality of education hinders or promotes the development of high-level skills which translates into access to the labour market, and in turn influences the educational prospects of the next generation;

The BEN-Africa conference attendees therefore resolve to promote through their spheres of influence:

1. Democracy and human rights in society, and integrity in business practices by actively engaging with the issue of inequality;
2. Critical reflection on a free market business approach;
3. The sharing of enabling knowledge with those who were, and who continue to be, excluded from quality formal and informal education;
4. A public discourse on the continent with the aim of raising consciousness about inequality and influencing policy and business practice;
5. A critical assessment of the paradigms of discourse, including the forms of rationalization [apparatuses of justification], that continue to dominate the conversation about inequality with a view to effecting a paradigm shift and a change of language;
6. The establishment of an open access archive of business ethics case studies from the continent, that focuses on business ethics issues, as well as on innovatory best practice by social entrepreneurs aimed at addressing and overcoming the various challenges of inequality;
7. Research and teaching collaborations between business ethics educators, public and private practitioners, consultants and advisors at regional and international level;
8. A view/self-understanding of business as:
 - a. a powerful agent for the positive transformation of society
 - b. an alternative channel for formal education in order to promote skills development
 - c. an important ally in addressing the challenges of primary, secondary, tertiary and further education;
9. Ethical leadership development through offering a university curriculum, which incorporates a focus on the knowledge and skills sets required to respond to critical societal challenges, including inequality;
10. Ethical leadership development for/with small and medium-sized enterprises, micro-finance banks, and micro-finance institutions, with the aim of reducing inequality.