

Food security, especially in schools, requires collaborative intervention

By  Sindy Peters

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As part of our #LockdownLessons series, Bizcommunity is reaching out to South Africa's top industry players to share their experience of the current Covid-19 crisis, how their organisations are navigating these unusual times, where the challenges and opportunities lie, and their industry outlook for the near future.

We chatted to Karl Muller, operations manager at Tiger Brands Foundation to get his take.



Karl Muller, operations manager at Tiger Brands Foundation

■ **What was your initial response to the crisis/lockdown and has your experience of it been different to what you expected?**

Karl Muller: We pivoted our business towards providing food hampers to families of learners in our programme. Thus far we have provided 6,000 hampers in the last two weeks and will provide more than 6,000 in the two weeks coming in order to ameliorate food insecurity during May.

The foundation provides nutritious in-school breakfasts at over 100 non-fee paying schools across South Africa. It currently serves a hot cooked breakfast to a total of 74,300 learners every school day. The foundation also provides food hampers for learners during long school holidays. The hampers ensure that these learners and their families have access to basic food supplies for the school holiday period, ensuring that they do not return to school malnourished when the new term commences.

■ **Comment on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on your organisation or economy as a whole.**

Karl Muller: It tested our agility to quickly shift operations from delivering breakfast cereals to schools to facilitate in-school breakfast to providing food hampers to families of learners in our programme.



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■ **Comment on the challenges and opportunities.**

Muller: Opportunities: scenario planning to examine existing business model and systems to see if there are areas we can

change or optimise to meet the changing context of a lockdown and even the post-lockdown society. We are asking ourselves, among others, what interventions are most relevant in the different levels of the government's Covid-19 interventions. For example, at level five food hampers meet the most important needs of families, but once level four starts, what changes in society and what are our best options to meet the needs of our beneficiaries.

■ ***How has the lockdown affected your staff? / What temporary HR policies have you put in place regarding remote working, health & safety, etc.?***

Muller: We have not seen a big change here other than ensuring contact between staff at the national office to ensure business continuity. We have added hygiene interventions for our staff in the field, such as face masks and hand sanitisers.



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■ ***How are you navigating 'physical distancing' while keeping your team close-knit and aligned?***

Muller: All team members are working from home. We have regular touch-base meetings as a group and managers make regular one-on-one calls with subordinates.

■ ***How have you had to change the way you operate?***

Muller: The impact has mainly been on our national office team. The team in the field were already working remotely. The office team has had to learn to work from home.

■ ***Any trends you've seen emerge as a result of the crisis?***

Muller: There may be a longer term impact of more people working from home. The lockdown had forced many organisations to reorganise around this and once the savings from this become real to companies, we may see smaller or shared office space (more "hot desking").



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24 Apr 2020



■ ***Your key message to those in the sector?***

Muller: Food security, especially learners in schools, will be a key challenge going forward and it requires a combined intervention. We would like to reach out to other organisations in the space of in-school nutrition and look for a combined response going forward once schools are open.

We implore the Department of Basic Education to explore ways and means to re-introduce the "lunch meal", vouchers, or food hampers for learners whilst schools remain closed during the lockdown.

■ ***What do you predict the next six months will be like?***

Muller: Further to the trends already noted, we do not believe that our team will be able to return to "regular" office work in the next two to three months. We are a small team and if anyone were to get ill, it would leave a big gap in our capacity. We are keeping key staff members apart to assure their safety and business continuity.

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