

## The inspiration of South Africa

The concept of 'Corporate Catalyst' derives its inspiration from South Africa's ability to achieve the final transition from apartheid to democracy through the art of negotiation.

Those negotiations, which took place between 1990 and 1994, were negotiations between enemies: the African National Congress (ANC) and the National Party. But they were successful and they continue to be an endless source of inspiration even now, in March 2009, as the chapter Leverage began in South Africa in 1996 is brought to a close.

My first meeting with the country took place on Sunday 4 February 1996. After my plane arrived early in the morning at the international airport (named Jan Smuts at the time, later the Johannesburg International Airport, and now Oliver Tambo International Airport), I took a taxi to the Balalaika hotel. I knew nobody and I had made no appointments. But I had two questions that, in the weeks to come, proved capable of opening almost any doors.

- Why is there so little venture capital in South Africa?
- What could venture capital contribute to the development of South Africa?

The answers I received were to improve my knowledge of the country enormously. But I learned something else the Sunday I arrived that was just as valuable. The night before Bafana Bafana, the South African soccer team, had won the African Nations Cup. It was a victory that led to joyous national celebrations. In the streets of the Johannesburg township Soweto, black and white people celebrated *together*. I discovered all this when I bought my Sunday papers in preparation for the following working week. As the day progressed, the TV offered a more complete picture. And then, in amongst the footage of the celebrations, I saw something else.

The TV included pictures of the famous 1995 Rugby World Cup, when Nelson Mandela appeared on the field after the South African victory in a Springbok shirt and cap. He was chatting with Francois Pienaar, the captain of the victorious team, and thanking him for what he had done for South Africa. And Pienaar, in turn, was thanking Mandela for what *he* had done for South Africa. Those pictures, of blacks and whites celebrating a national sporting victory together, guided me to the essence of the process of transition South Africa had embarked upon since 1990, and all the contradictions it was in the process of trying to bridge. It both inspired me and made me feel at home. Instantly.

A change in the political landscape in 2007 prompted me to close the chapter begun in 1996. But the images I saw that Sunday I arrived, and the knowledge I gained during the rest of my visit, have never left me.

The inspiration continues.

And a second South African chapter remains a very definite ambition.