

Robert Appelbaum

Partner



Area of speciality

I started my career as a M&A and healthcare lawyer. I did pretty much everything that one could do within healthcare, including healthcare regulation, and after 30 years I transitioned into oil, gas and energy. With the advent of Covid-19, my love for healthcare was rekindled and I now head up the healthcare team at Webber Wentzel.

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Experience in ESG (focus being within SA and especially in the deal making / financial market space)

I led the team that advised Business for South Africa, the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition and the South African Radio Astronomy Observatory on a pro bono basis on the National Ventilator Programme. We helped procure non-invasive ventilators from foreign manufacturers and then advised on the choice of outside experts, drafting, negotiation and settlement of the prototype and manufacturing agreements required for the NVP. Webber Wentzel helped to ensure the non-invasive ventilators were registered by the South African Health Products Regulatory Authority.

Shortly afterwards, I also led the Webber Wentzel team that advised the National Department of Health in drafting all the vaccine-related agreements, including those between the NDOH and the African Union where the AstraZeneca/Serum Institute vaccines were sold to the African Union, the agreement with Jansen (Johnson and Johnson) and that with Pfizer.

On the dealmaking side, I am currently helping a major international client to set up their oncology, vaccine and pharma-

ceutical business in SA. I also have extensive involvement in deal making in mine tailings and retreatment technology. These new technologies will substantially lessen pollutants in the mining industry.

Thoughts on ESG as a whole in the context of SA

I think in general businesses are paying lipservice to ESG in SA, but it will happen where there is money to be made from it. For example, companies are finding it makes more sense to rework mine tailings rather than starting new mines – this is both positive for the environment and hugely profitable, as some of those dumps are very old and contain high grade ores.

In SA - and it seems in other countries as well – companies don't seem to fully understand what ESG means.

Hurdles | challenges within this sector

In SA - and it seems in other countries as well – companies don't seem to fully understand what ESG means. They are only doing it because their shareholders require it.

Some personal information, eg how did you get into this speciality?

I wanted to train as a doctor. For me, returning to the healthcare sector, which I never thought I would, is wonderful. It is my first love, and I am enthusiastic about cutting edge, lifesaving work, especially where it is not necessarily profit-driven.

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Interesting fact(s) about yourself / your achievements

I was very involved in starting the cultural boycott of SA. I was counsel and spokesman for Artists United Against Apartheid and their founders, Steven van Zandt and Arthur Baker. ●

