

BUFFERING AGAINST INSTABILITY: VIOLENCE PREVENTION: WORKSHOP WITH ISS

Agbiz hosted a workshop for an extended Agbiz working group on buffering against instability with the Institute for Security Studies (ISS)'s Violence prevention team. The ISS's Violence prevention team convene the Violence Prevention Forum. This is a collaboration between government, civil society, researchers, international organisations, development partners and the private sector. The intention behind the forum is to ensure that the best knowledge and evidence is used to prevent violence in South Africa. The Forum was started in 2015 to share knowledge and experience about researching and implementing interventions and programmes to prevent violence since then a provincial and local forum have been established in the Western Cape.

Framing of the conversation

Agbiz hosted a series of workshops on the theme of rural rejuvenation. The last workshop in January 2023 focussed on the theme: "Buffering against instability". Amongst others, Lizette Lancaster from the ISS presented at that workshop. She talked to the drivers of unrest and instability, warning signs of unrest, policing and communication strategies. She touched on potential measures to prevent violence. Dr Gould and her team are the violence prevention specialists at ISS and have done a lot of research on the topic and have developed and tested interventions. The January workshop came to the following conclusion: *"There is no single solution or template that can be used to buffer against instability. Innovative policing tactics, crowd control & intelligence have been shown to make a difference in other jurisdictions. This is something which can be advocated for on a national level and there are benefits for agribusinesses to become involved in local level security forums. In addition to the reactive elements outlined above, agribusinesses can*

consider proactive steps to reduce the likelihood of violence. This can be done by identifying hot-spots, assessing indicators for likely instability and by proactively investing in local level initiatives to build social cohesion and create economic prosperity. This is not an easy task and it was recommended that further work be done to map out the steps that an agribusiness can take towards establishing a relationship of mutual trust and a common commitment with local communities.” The workshop held on the 12th of July focussed on preventative measures that agribusiness can consider.

Understanding the nature of the problem

Dr Gould made a short input on the nature of the problem of violence in South Africa. She pointed out that our biggest problem is a deficit of trust, particularly between businesses and adjacent communities. It was necessary to properly define the problem of instability and violence in the context of the agricultural sector. If a problem is really understood, solutions tend to come more easily. It was of little use coming to quick solutions that proved not to be suitable to the situation at hand. Dr Gould emphasised that this workshop would only scratch the surface as far as this discussion was concerned

There was an interactive session with breakaway rooms where participants discussed three questions, namely:

- When do I believe that because of the extent of violence in our country, society is disintegrating to the point of self-destruction
- When do I get excited because I see what is happening to prevent violence?
- When do I have reason to live with hope, because I believe that through our working collaboratively the growing crisis can be met.

The participants gave feedback on their discussions in plenary. Participants felt that violence is sometimes used as a means of communication and seen by some as a solution. Unemployment was seen as a big problem and a big contributing factor to instability. Expectations created and not met were problematic. Perceptions of the farming community amongst South Africans that were not necessarily correct were identified as a problem as well as a lack of trust and an, “us and them” attitude. Concern was raised that it becomes difficult

for legitimate companies to compete with the shadow economy where there are no consequences for those who used unlawful means and violence to further their business interests.

The team from the ISS pointed to a study done by the Wits Centre for Excellence (The Birth to Thirty (Bt30) study in Soweto which is Africa's largest and longest-running birth cohort study) that followed a group of people born around 1993 for 30 years. 99% of the people involved in the study had experienced at least one form of violence by the time they were 18. The study found that experiences of violence had a significant impact on their lives, including on educational completion and employment.

Presentations

The ISS made two presentations on:

- The Violence Prevention Forum: a model for multi-sectoral engagement to prevent violence
- A presentation on the local community forum in Hoekwil and Touwsrante and its origins

Some important points from the presentations included:

- The principle of deep democracy was applied in meetings of these fora. Deep democracy includes listening to dissenting voices.
- Building relationships of trust is critical.
- Professional facilitators can add a great deal of value.
- Positive parenting programmes and support for parents was very important in violence prevention programmes. Support to parents has been proven to prevent violence in communities.
- The example of the dialogue forum in Hoekwil / Touwsrante where safety and security matters are discussed on a regular basis between two communities was cited.
- ISS found that the more opportunities that are created for dialogue, the more small successes that can be shown and then more people are likely to join such initiatives.

Way forward

- It was agreed that awareness of the concept of violence prevention and the link between violence and social instability needs to be created.
- The ISS team is in the process of creating a course with UCT institutions to train people in dialogue facilitation and in the use of evidence and data to prevent violence. Details can be shared and agribusinesses can consider the value of training their staff .
- ISS has done a lot of research that can be studied. This includes the following:
<https://issafrica.org/research/southern-africa-report/community-wide-change-towards-positive-parenting>
<https://issafrica.org/research/policy-brief/what-is-violence-prevention-a-new-definition>
<https://issafrica.org/research/policy-brief/how-violence-and-adversity-undermine-human-development>
- A cost-benefit analysis of violence prevention measures in the agricultural sector can be considered to make a business case for investing in community-based projects to create social stability.
- More research should be done on how agribusinesses and communities can work together to prevent violence and awareness created;
- There is currently no list of credible, community-based organisations and their initiatives but ongoing engagement with the ISS team will be pursued to assist agribusinesses who want to become involved.

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