White Paper

ADDRESSING XENOPHOBIC TENSIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA

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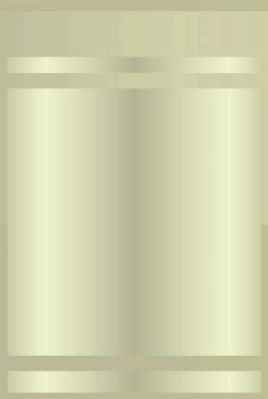

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Introduction

Post 1990, owing to conflicts that erupted in many African nations, South Africa became a country of refuge for those seeking asylum from human rights abuses and collapsed governments (Mutumu, 2010). In 1994, reports of xenophobia emerged in South Africa when migrants, feared disease-ridden, were ejected from moving trains (Waller, 2006). In 2008, nationwide attacks left 62 migrants dead - in some cases, rubber tires filled with lighter fluid were forced around people's necks and set ablaze. More than 13, 000 foreign nationals fled their homes, finding refuge in mosques, churches, and police stations. Most of the displaced were from neighboring African countries, and many were refugees and asylum seekers who came to South Africa seeking protection from violence in their own countries (South African Human Rights Commission [SAHRC], 2008). The violent mobs - mostly youths and the unemployed poor - were subdued when the South African government deployed the military. In April 2015, similar attacks erupted both in Durban and Johannesburg - seven migrants died and more than 5,000 fled their homes (Patel and Essa, 2015). Most of the xenophobic violence takes place in townships, on the outskirts of major cities.

Social structures that exacerbate xenophobia

The main driver of the conflict is survival as nearly 58% of South Africans live on the margin of poverty (Crush and Ramachandran, 2014). Foreign-owned informal traders threaten local businesses because foreigners offer goods and services at much lower rates (Everatt, 2008). Also, because foreigners are willing to accept low paying jobs, the sentiment that foreigners were crowding South Africans out of the labor market, and taking jobs away from citizens gained credibility. High rates of nation-wide unemployment (although a separate issue) gradually became mixed into the negative sentiments against foreigners, especially because foreigners not only accept jobs that locals refuse, but will work the more desirable jobs for lower wages. Further, the absence of economic redistribution structures within migrant communities infuriates many local South Africans.

For example, close-knit Somali communities - having developed their own micro-lending and bulk buying businesses (Patel and Essa, 2015) - were accused of strictly serving and doing business with Somali migrants. Exclusive business practices are not unique to Somali migrants living in South Africa - such practices are commonplace among Indian, Chinese, and other migrant communities in the country.

Lessons-learned from Albert Park, Durban, South Africa

Migrants became increasingly drawn to the city of Durban because of its bustling central business district, and the myriad of civil organizations that cater to refugees (Mutumu, 2010). As the migrant community grew, locals began blaming the rise in crime, informal street trading and drug trafficking on foreigners. Although Albert Park was not a part of the 2008 xenophobic attacks, continued xenophobic violence has plagued the area, much of which has been organized with the same brutal intensity seen in other parts of the country (Amisi et al., 2009). In 2009, the Nelson Mandela Foundation (NMF) launched a pilot programme to strengthen social cohesion between migrants and members of the local community (Mutumu, 2010).

Dialogue is the first tool of choice when xenophobic tensions flare up (Amisi, 2010; Amisi et al., 2009; Everatt, 2008; SAHRC, 2008; Hadland 2008; Nyar, 2010; Waller, 2006) and was the main vehicle through which cooperation and peaceful resolution was sought in Albert Park. As a methodological structure, NMF adopted the Community Capacity Enhancement (CCE) programme, used previously by the UNDP (Mutumu, 2010). With the goal of social transformation via the inclusion of major Albert Park stakeholders, NMF dialogued with community members to gain a better understanding of the economic and socio-cultural misgivings that breed violence. NMF partnered with civil society; religious organizations (the KwaZulu-Natal Christian Council); refugee and migrant organizations (the KwaZulu-Natal Refugee Council and the Refugee Social Services, and the Union of Refugee Women); and, the Abahlahli BaseMjondolo organization (a shack dwellers' movement) (Everatt, 2008; Mutumu, 2010; Amisi et al., 2009).

These five groups were chosen because they had social capital required to gain entry into the community and develop networks to support coexistence (Hadland, 2008, Mutumu, 2010). On the ground, NMF expected this group-of-five to spearhead the CCE framework via the following social transformation stages: i) establishing intra-communal relationships, ii) pinpointing key grievances, iii) step-by-step issue mapping, iv) solution implementation, and v) continued reflection and communication during each stage of the process. The first sign of progress made by the CCE was the decision to allow migrants to join the Albert Park Community Policing Forum (CPF), a policing organization which previously excluded migrants (Amisi, 2010).

Community conversations led by the CCE involved bilateral meetings between government, political and community members, as well as one on one sessions between migrants and locals (Waller, 2006; Amisi, 2010). In one CCE-led scenario, many Albert Park locals voiced complaints that homeless migrants sleeping in the parks and informal trading shops were affecting the aesthetics of the city(Mutumu, 2010). As an added step towards social cohesion, the eThekwini Regeneration and Urban Management (henceforth, eRUM) Team was brought onboard to develop image restoration initiatives aimed at returning Albert Park to its former prestige (Amisi, 2010; Amisi et al., 2009; Mutumu, 2010). The eRUM Team suggested renovating abandoned buildings as homeless shelters and assigning spaces for informal trade (Amisi et al., 2009; Mutumu, 2010). To further address aesthetic concerns, the planting of palm trees, and the retrofitting of street lights and pavements was suggested.

Identifying conflict management institutions/processes to be modeled nationwide

Weak governance - in every sense of the word, i.e., state, legislative, media, social, police, moral - appears pervasive in townships where xenophobic violence is prevalent (Everatt, 2008). Cultural extension programs that address impunity; and, socioeconomic policies affecting informal trade policies at the local level, will be crucial for maintaining peaceful coexistence.

Equally problematic is that some local media outlets publish inflammatory reports that outrightly blame the rise in drug trafficking and criminal activity on foreigners alone (Amisi et al., 2009; Everatt, 2008; Nyar, 2010). In many cases, media narratives have been used to justify xenophobic attacks.

The structure of cultural extension programs must involve community dialogue, as a critical first step towards coexistence. At the national level, the country would benefit from ensuring that the media (newspapers and radio broadcasts, in particular) tames its narrative and avoids printing/broadcasting biased, incendiary reports about foreigners. At local levels, informal, respectful, repeated dialogue involving major stakeholders should include representatives from every group involved in/victimized by the violence.

Dialogue sessions should include key representatives and leaders from: Provincial and local government agencies, NGOs, asylum and refugee organizations, migrant organizations, civil society organizations, faith-based organizations, youth leaders, media representatives, influential informal migrant traders, influential local traders potential saboteurs of the community dialogues (i.e., the individuals implicated in previous xenophobic incidents). It is crucial to include saboteurs as they could potentially undermine the integrity of decisions agreed upon during dialogues. For instance, if during the dialogue, an agreement is made about designated trading spaces, saboteurs (if not included in the dialogue) might violate (or encourage others to violate) the agreement, undermining the integrity of the process.

Ordinary community members (both foreign and local) must also be included in the dialogue. The dialoguers can be broken up into small groups that share similar concerns, e.g. security, trade regulations, etc. Once small group concessions are reached, dialoguers can regroup in a plenary session to layout decisions made in the small groups. Key spokespersons should be appointed to convene stakeholders and oversee repeated plenary sessions over a structured period of time.

With additional help from faith-based and civil society organizations, stronger bridges/social networks between key stakeholders can be established to forge trust. Sustaining these networks will require social structures (similar to CCE) so that dialogue continues, and dialogue-bred resolutions are swiftly enacted.

Identifying social structure to prevent future outbreaks

Impunity must be addressed as a future deterrent. In 2008, more than 180 perpetrators (many caught on camera) were released without sentencing because the courts concluded that there were no witnesses (Patel and Essa, 2015). This showed the government's approach via the criminal justice system was inefficient. Justice may be sought more effectively by the community as a whole (versus individuals seeking justice independently). But first, key stakeholders must understand and agree that although xenophobic violence singles out migrants, it threatens the livelihoods and well-being of the entire community, thus impunity should be jointly addressed for the safety of all. If community members can agree to rally together and jointly prosecute offenders via civil lawsuits brought by the whole community, impunity might be addressed more effectively.

The Township Business Development - South Africa group (TBDSA) has been the middle-man for negotiations between the South African government and businessmen in local townships recovering from xenophobic violence (Patel and Essa, 2015). TBDSA can step in to facilitate/coordinate community-based structures that will implement the practical solutions that emerge from dialogues sessions. Enforcing decisions reached during dialogues would serve to model and reassure the rest of the community of the stakeholders' commitment to peace.

Stand-out stakeholders identified during the dialogues (as having the highest amount of social capital among the dialoguers) can forge partnerships with specific local, and provincial government officials (e.g., home affairs, social development, etc.) so that the necessary changes/suggestions that emerge during dialogue are rolled out without delay.

Also, since not all townships with foreigners have experienced xenophobic violence, stand-out stakeholders can meet with leaders of peaceful communities to learn from and adopt structures that promote peace.

Solutions that emerge from the dialogue process will be temporary if trust is not maintained. Faith-based organizations can play a key role in sustainability by encouraging healing through charity-based initiatives that target both the migrant and local community members. In cases where the local government is unable to provide access to professional counselors that can provide immediate support for community members who need counseling, faith-based organizations can step in to provide emotional comfort for those who need it.

Policy suggestions

Policy revisions involving financial incentives and informal trade regulations will be essential in affecting attitudes towards economic coexistence. Since locals are dissatisfied about unregulated informal trade among migrants, assuring South African locals of their business priority status as citizens will be critical to establishing economic coexistence. Dialogue sessions should include formulating policy addressing stricter paths towards establishing foreign-owned businesses. If foreigners are mandated to complete a lengthier process before business licenses are granted, only a fraction of informal traders would receive trade licenses per year – this would significantly decrease the level of competition between migrant traders and locals.

Permits issued in support of these policy changes would require both local and provincial government mandates. Once temporary business licenses have been granted, maintaining the licenses should require stipulations like: “foreign business owners can only hire South African nationals or naturalized citizens”, for example.

When local community members see that naturalized/legal foreign business owners can only hire South Africans, the disenchanted narrative that foreigners are taking jobs away by starting businesses and hiring fellow migrants will be changed to one that highlights the role of foreign nationals in creating job opportunities for locals. Media campaigns promoting these new developments can further strengthen this narrative.

South Africa plays a major role in the Southern African Development Community (SADC), a regional economic conglomerate, which consists of 14 countries in the southern region of Africa. The SADC's economic objectives include strengthening: cross-border market integration; macro-economic convergence; financial and capital market gains; and investment growth (SADC, 2012). South Africa can leverage its existing cross-border trade agreements with its SADC partners by giving local South Africans special benefits or financial incentives when they work for or have business partnerships with migrants from the SADC zone. These incentives can be funded using import taxes levied from trading with SADC countries, and with monies collected from (the newly enforced) informal trade permits.

Further, South African traders that pay heavy import/export prices could receive discounts on import and export fees for working with legalized foreign nationals. The South African economy relies heavily on the skills and cheap labor (especially mines and farms) provided by the migrant community. Local farmers who hire a certain percentage of migrants could be rewarded with a higher subsidy percentage than local farmers who choose not to hire foreigners. Mines that either employ or partner with migrants could pay less export taxes. Also, price floors can be used to dissuade foreigners from selling cheaper than set price points.

Intervention measures that reward South Africans for integrating migrant workers into their economic ventures will likely affect the value that local South Africans place on migrant relationships. These newly structured business policies can be carved out during the dialogues and relayed to the middle-man (the Township Business Development - South Africa group), which would then negotiate for these changes with the South African government.

Once negotiations are complete, TBDSA can appoint the stand-out stakeholders identified during the dialogue to monitor the progress and implementation of the new business mandates. Dialogues should continue post implementation to ensure that issues have a forum to be heard and appropriately handled to prevent flare-ups.

To strengthen cohesion as new mandates are unrolled, civil society organizations can partner with media to create image restoration campaigns that laud the unique advantages of multicultural traditions. The eThekwini Municipality hosts yearly celebrations 'Africa Day' and 'World Refugee Day' to raise awareness through cultural celebrations (Amisi, 2010). Municipalities in affected areas could emulate these events. Multicultural food and music shows would not only bring visitors from neighboring provinces, but would provide an avenue for cross-cultural interactions through music, which has been a source of reconciliation in places like Albert Park, where cross-cultural tensions are forgotten during the yearly Awesome Africa Music Festival.

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