

The Worcester Hope and Reconciliation Process

17-21 February 2014

Hosted by the Restitution Foundation and the Towards Carnegie³ Inquiry (now Mandela Initiative)

Worcester, a small town in South Africa with a population of roughly 150 000 residents, has long struggled with problems of poverty, racism, segregation and inequality. Much of this can be attributed to the legacy of apartheid. With the intention of breaking the inertia that had stifled the town, the Khulumani Victim Support group in 2009 invited the Restitution Foundation to work with the Worcester community. The collaboration resulted in the initiation of a community-led restitution initiative known as the Worcester Hope and Reconciliation Process (WHRP), which started in 2010. Since 2012 the WHRP has begun to focus on the socio-economic aspect of restitution in an economically, psychologically and spatially divided town. Using the WHRP as a point of reference, the Action Dialogue focused on current efforts to redress the problems plaguing Worcester. Four themes were built upon: employment, education, substance abuse and housing. The workshops offered a networking opportunity between civil society and the government and a way to mobilise Worcesterians. It was built on an ethos of respect, trust and humility and a unified vision of the future.

It was noted that there is a need for increased employment but also for these jobs to be of a better quality. Similarly, even within the informal sector, many of the jobs available lie on the margins and are primarily in the retail sector. This is due to the structural inequality and the domination of existing companies. Within the agricultural sector, similar problems exist whereby the agricultural supply chain remains strongly centralised and vertically integrated. However, there are models that can be replicated. The Timbali Technology Incubator, for example, has become a success story with women growing top quality flowers. This system rewards the skill and effort and pays for wider support structures.

Another option that has been implemented by the South African state is that of the community work programme (CWP), which provides a maximum of 100 days of work per year at a daily rate of R60. The project, inspired by the Indian government, supports those who struggle to find employment, providing a safety net, earning floor, supportive social structures and creates opportunities for women to be economically involved.

Reiterating points made in earlier Action Dialogues, it was noted that the first 1 000 days are essential to a child's life. Presentations were made by those involved from a crèche level to a high school level. Those educating children come from various spheres and positions of influence. For example, there was a presentation by citizens who were providing food and training for 165 children all at their own expense.

Children often suffer the effects of substance abuse, either as users or as members of households. Substance abuse can lead to a host of other social and emotional problems and in particular it can have drastic effects on early childhood development.

Gangs in the area have also increased in sophistication and local drug action committees have not been successful. Intervention programmes are also expensive and in need of private sector funds as well as involvement of the family. The myriad of obstacles makes rehabilitation difficult. Centres such

as the Toevlug Centre for Alcohol and Drug Dependence uses a holistic family and community-centred approach, which includes initiatives in environmental greening and recycling which also provides much-needed funds.

In a rural area, the Goedgedacht Alcohol Rehabilitation Project is part of the Goedgedacht Farm, the conference venue where the Worcester workshop was held. The farm runs a rural development programme, Path out of Poverty (POP). POP is a 25-year programme which has now been going for 16 years. POP identifies children from birth who are most at risk and provides support and funding to them. This continues as supplementary support once they reach school and the programme can work with children's parents. The programme aims to provide safety, housing, clothing, transport and nutrition.

Adequate housing is key in developing sustainable and prosperous communities. Much of South Africa's problems with housing and design started in the apartheid period. General Motors South Africa Foundation has focused much of their corporate social responsibility on providing housing and housing solutions. This includes the planning and development with residents' support but also the use of alternative building techniques and self-help. Furthermore, there are other options for the state to consider including the upgrading of informal settlements, providing free housing, rent-to-buy options and permanent rentals, amongst others.

Actions

- Skills training (including financial) for young entrepreneurs with sustained mentorship and a market for workers.
- Connect informal business with "thicker" markets, strengthen supply chains, processing centres and develop support centres.
- Remove barriers to employment and work with local state and business structures.
- Conduct school and education audits.
- Engage with the state, civil society and business (including the farming sector) to find various solutions in housing, education and employment.
- Provide nutritional support as well as support for substance abuse.
- Research, train and implement policy to limit and treat substance abuse.
- Change land ownership to equity and have a meaningful discussion on land and the meaning of land to its people.

"Worcester has the capacity to become a model of what South Africa could become – it is small enough to be manageable, but big enough to be significant as a model for other places in the country. Worcester can show how a whole community can mobilise itself – and that is going to be a model for society."