



An Agenda for Civil Society: A Business Critique? Shaping South Africa's Region-Building Role

Policy Advisory Group Seminar

Cape Town, South Africa

20 October 2017

The Centre for Conflict Resolution (CCR), Cape Town, South Africa, hosted a one-day policy advisory group seminar – funded by Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) South Africa – at the Double Tree By Hilton Cape Town Hotel on 20 October 2017 on the theme “An Agenda for Civil Society: A Business Critique? Shaping South Africa's Region-Building Role”. The main aim of the meeting was to assess the challenges and opportunities for business and civil society in the agro-processing sector, in particular leather and leather products, in South Africa and the wider Southern and Eastern African regions, within the framework of South Africa's region-building role. Towards that end, the day-long seminar sought, through a combination of panel-led discussion and breakaway-group sessions (see Agenda), to achieve five key objectives:

- First, to assess the problems and prospects of strengthening the role of business and civil society actors in shaping and achieving South Africa's region-building and regional integration goals, especially those related to the promotion of value-driven industrialisation, economic diversification, and job creation;
- Second, to reflect on the major challenges facing the leather and leather products agro-processing sector, in particular, which are hindering growth and improvements in competitiveness;
- Third, to discuss concrete ways in which government policies and programmes can support businesses in the sector take fuller advantage of the potential benefits of greater regional integration;
- Fourth, to increase knowledge about implementation challenges, through exposure to diverse national and regional perspectives; and
- Fifth, to provide an impartial space for engagement between the invited stakeholders with a view to fostering greater cooperation and collaboration in the sector, strengthening business partnerships beyond South Africa into Southern and Eastern Africa, and promoting civil society ownership of regional integration.

The meeting brought together about 30 diverse representatives of civil society and business (see Participant List),¹ including the South African Skin, Hide, and Leather Council (SHALC); the South African Footwear and Leather Export Council (SAFLEC); the Fibre Processing and Manufacturing Sector Education and Training Authority (FPMSETA); the Zambia Leather Industry Association; and key national and regional business actors, as well as emerging entrepreneurs, in the leather and leather products industries. The seminar also involved participation from senior office-bearers in South Africa's Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and Department of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries (DAFF); the New Partnership for Africa's Development's (NEPAD) Southern Africa Business Forum; and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa–Leather and Leather Products Institute (COMESA-LLPI). Notable attendees included:

- Nkosana Moyo, Executive Chairman, Mandela Institute for Development Studies (MINDS);

¹ This included two CCR staff: Dr Kudrat Virk, Acting Executive Director; and Dr Dawn Nagar, Senior Researcher.

- Ernest Heunis, Chairman, SHALC;
- Stephen Kanyanta, Chairman, Zambia Leather Industry Association;
- Francois De Wet, Managing Director, Southern Cape Ostrich Tannery;
- Gill Maleka, Head of Administration, Bakgatla-ba-Kgafela;
- Hameedaa Deedat, Acting Executive Director, National Labour and Economic Development Institute (NALEDI);
- Birkinesh Gonfa Yado, Investment, Trade, and Marketing Expert, COMESA-LLPI;
- Nigel Gwynne-Evans, Chief Director: African Integration and Industrial Development, DTI;
- Abisha Tembo, Chief Director: IDD Textiles, Clothing, Leather, and Footwear, DTI; and
- Victor Thindisa, Head: Agro-Processing Sector, DAFF.

Twenty participants completed an evaluation questionnaire immediately after the seminar.² Eighty-five percent of respondents (17 participants) noted that the meeting had increased their understanding of key issues related to the role of business in the agro-processing sector in building regional integration. One participant found the “exposure to new ideas ... enriching”, while another noted that s/he “now know who are the civil society and how they can be engaged in various issues for the benefit of the region”. Yet another attendee “learnt how government can help businesses and about the leather sector”.

“Need to understand more on trade barriers, multi-dialogues happening around world trade and other platforms.”

“It was a stimulating seminar with useful insights. The content was detailed and easy to understand.”

“There is a need for [a] more robust labour movement and civil society mobilisation.”

“We are just getting in [to] the leather industry. This meeting has helped us identify where and how to join in.”

In this regard, participants seemed to have benefitted, in particular, from the diversity of perspectives represented at the seminar. In the words of one attendee: “It [the meeting] helped in understanding obstacles faced by other critical players that were not fully understood before this conference.” Several attendees anticipated using the knowledge and resources gained at the meeting in their future work, including public discourse and policy work.



Seventeen of 20 respondents (85 percent) noted that the seminar improved their relationships with relevant stakeholders at the meeting. Several anticipated collaborating with their fellow attendees at the meeting, including for training and in education. At least one participant noted the potential for collaboration with the DAFF, DTI, as well as other role players. The seminar was attended, among others, by Victor Thindisa, Head of Agro-Processing at DAFF, and Abisha Tembo, Chief Director of IDD Textiles, Clothing, Leather, and Footwear at the DTI (see above).

In this context, it is worth noting that Thindisa reportedly offered, during the seminar, to coordinate efforts among attendees towards developing a framework for translating key ideas that emerged from the meeting into actionable steps.

A policy brief, documenting the ten key recommendations to emerge from the seminar, has been produced and widely disseminated to over 4,100 stakeholders through the Centre’s distribution databases; and is freely available on its website. The brief has also been disseminated through CCR’s Facebook and Twitter platforms.

² For monitoring and evaluation purposes, the two Centre staff in attendance are not included.