

THE HOUR FOR IMPLEMENTATION IS NOW

Having experienced two civil wars and desiring social reform, Thomas Hobbes was concerned with understanding the fundamentals of human nature and proper government for achieving the greatest good for the most citizens. In this endeavour he considered two quotations, confronting us with the claims that "man is a wolf unto man" as well as "man is something sacred for man". I believe both these inclinations reside in every person.

Considering the law of unintended consequences, we will find decisions based on immediate interests, rooted in our wolf nature, may eventually cause us to wake up to a world we would never have chosen if we knew it was coming as a result of our selfish choices.

The current statistics in gender-based violence (GBV) are the unintended consequence of numerous underlying impairments in our social fabric - some clearly rooted in our wolf nature and others the results of choices made in prideful ignorance. The iceberg syndrome demonstrates this phenomenon where the spate of the current GBV onslaught is the consequence of a malady not only of individual perpetrators, but of the family and our Namibian society. And yet it is only the tip of the iceberg. Underneath the surface lies the greatest part of the iceberg, which points to deeper problems of frustration, insecurity and injustice.

Numerous studies by health professionals and social scientists have established alcohol and drug abuse, culture, unemployment, a lack of education, abandonment, abuse, amongst the root causes. In 2006 Women's Action for Development and the University of Namibia even went as far as interviewing perpetrators convicted of GBV. Indeed, through research and consultation Government worked on progressive laws and policies such as the Combating of Rape Act (2000) and the Combating of Domestic Violence Act (2003). We

even have a National Gender Policy (2010-2020) as well as a National Plan of Action on GBV (2012-2016). When and whether sufficiently costed is another story. The first Women and Child Protection Unit was already established in 1991. Additionally, civil society developed innovative programmes and implemented these though without national coordination or government endorsement. In spite of all these efforts the effectiveness - which would be proven by changing statistics - is evidently lacking. Why?

I ascribe the ineffectiveness of positive social transformation to two omissions. The first is the lack of will - both political and social. The second is the inconsistent application of justice, fueled by the suppression of the recognition of the sacred in our neighbour and our preference to allow our wolf nature, though disguised in sheepskin, to protect only our own interests at the expense of others - even our nation's future well-being. And as always, the first we want to point a finger at is government. But here I have to stop you. Take a look around. We blame politicians for being stuck in the past, blaming colonialism for everything and yet we as individuals blame our pasts - lack, abuse, neglect - for our current and continued addictions, failures and abuse of others.

We shake our heads at our old stock of politicians and yet we have principals, pastors, board members, rectors, deans, CEO's, amongst others, who seem to cling to their positions. Let's look no further than our own homes. Why should politicians drive fancy new cars, receive eye-popping salaries when it seems they are clueless half of the time? Excuse me, Mr Emotional Abuser, Mr Farmer, Mrs With-a-Maid and Ms Business Owner - what about your entitlement syndrome where all of a sudden minimum wages are acceptable and "eating first" is your right as the breadwinner of the house or the employer? Now that we have all been quietened like the men who brought the woman caught in adultery to Jesus, let us consider our national

condition once more.

Inequality and injustice see the poor becoming poorer. It sees the important "I" considering myself first and more important than you - because I am white, because I fought for liberation, because I am a man, because I'm connected. It sees police officers, nurses, and teachers unable to afford proper housing and basic needs, relegating them to living in shacks. With the housing crisis even well-educated persons seem unable to afford simple housing. The President was shocked at the living conditions of the NDC dam workers, but the painful truth is that a great percentage of Namibians are living lives that should anger the President. This growing and seemingly unseen inequality breeds the disintegration of values. For now, law enforcers are likely to succumb to corruption in their struggle to make ends meet, hungry nurses can become careless, and overworked teachers may vent their anger. Can you foresee the unintended end result of a tired people growing angrier and angrier?

We don't need to reinvent the wheel in terms of research or new laws for the way forward. The HIV pandemic should be an inspiration that even life threatening situations CAN be turned around. In this case government and civil society are both needed to take ownership of this crisis and to forcefully role out the intentions. As a people we are also called upon to consider the humanity of our fellow - both culturally, politically, socially and economically. Would I have deemed it acceptable if I was treated like that woman or child or man? Unless we tame our wolf, we will not have the necessary will to see this much needed social upliftment or dialogue on equality that will result in a reduction of GBV.

Violence starts in our wolf heart. Treating our voters and lovers with justice, because they are sacred, will abate the anger and the fear. Now is the time for leadership. Now is the time for implementation.

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