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Towards the future – Walk apart, walk behind or walk together

By Johan du Plessis – NOVA Feeds

Most of us are aware of the well-known high road and low road scenarios of Dr Clem Sunter. Recently a diverse group of 35 South Africans from civil society, government, various political parties, trade unions, business, religious groups, academic institutions, and the media met to create three possible scenarios for South Africa towards 2020. They are called the Dinokeng Scenario Team.

Although we have a very proud young, democracy since 1994 there still remain some strong realities to address. These include political intolerance, weak state capacity, racial polarization, poverty, crime, unemployment, and education. The Dinokeng Scenario Team believes that we are seeing the symptoms of three inter-related trends:

1. since 1994 citizens have become disengaged (or have been co-opted into government or party structures);
2. state capacity to address our challenges is weak and declining;
3. leaders of all sectors have become increasingly self-interested, unethical and unaccountable.

The following three scenarios were decided on for South Africa towards 2020 by the Dinokeng Scenario Team:

1. Walk apart

South Africa continues on the same course that we are on today. Our pressing problems worsen and forces outside of state fill the gap created by the failure of the state to deliver.

2. Walk behind

The state both manages and leads the process of addressing our challenges. Citizens either support strong state

intervention or submit due to the power of government.

3. Walk together

Our challenges are addressed through active citizen engagement, a catalytic state, and strong leadership across all sectors. Good governance, competent delivery and active citizen involvement become the key to fixing social problems that become deadly if left unaddressed.

In summarizing the conclusion of the Dinokeng Scenarios, Dr Ramphela said: *"A healthy democracy and strong socio-economic development require a healthy interface between an effective state and an alert and active citizenry. South Africans are standing at a crossroads. Each one of us, citizens and leaders, must choose how we walk forward. Through the steps we take, we will create our future".*

The South African feed industry also experiences the challenges of South Africa and has to ensure that the industry has a future and contributes to a stable and prosperous future.

Currently the industry is experiencing the financial crisis, challenges of government resources, new demands of consumers, and world trends. Industry has responded by filling gaps, for example where new analytical capabilities were created (walking apart). Industry has also responded in adhering to challenges from government as regards BSE guidelines and BEE requirements (walk behind). Industry is also cooperating with government and customers to improve standards through active liaison with government

on legislation and regulations, as well as setting up standards for industry to assist government (walk together).

Currently AFMA has developed good systems such as monitoring systems for Salmonella, Code of Conduct, and Early Warning System (EWS) to ensure that industry stays relevant and abreast in a changing environment.

The challenge remains for industry to actively walk together with one another and government to keep on improving the environment and the future. It is also important to liaise with other relevant stakeholders such as our clients, suppliers and other branches of industry in agriculture. This will be done by actively supporting initiatives that have been accepted by industry, but also to partake in developing and engaging one another to develop systems in industry that are robust and relevant.

A challenge remains in that our immediate or urgent matters sometimes demand more attention than working side by side on creating and ensuring a stable environment for us to operate in the future. We need to ensure that we spend enough time on focusing on the future by engaging today. Let us not only focus on our challenges but also enhance our strengths such as excellent technical capabilities as well as interaction with government and stakeholders. Our strengths of being resourceful, innovative and practical must be cherished.

The reality remains that our environment will be a combination of walking apart, walking behind and walking together. Let us ensure that we spend most of our time walking together. ●