

Radio 702 & Cape Talk

Midday Report (Chris Gibbons)

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9 min 35 sec.

Chris Gibbons: Twenty past twelve, the time on the Midday Report. South Africa is at a crossroads, and what we as a society will look like in 2020 depends very much on whether or not we engage with a more capable government to set the country on a path of renewal. That is the broad headline that has emerged from the Dinokeng Scenario team, a diverse group of 35 South Africans from right across the spectrum which has just completed what they're calling a robust debate about the present and future of our country. And joining us now from Dinokeng which is in north eastern Gauteng is one of the Dinokeng Scenarios convenors, also well known businessman, Rick Menell. Rick, good afternoon to you and welcome to the Midday Report. First off we had some very important scenario work done in the 1980s and early 1990s, why the need to go down the road again?

Rick Menell: Well, we're 15 years on, and I think in August last year a few people sat down and said you know there's a permanent debate around this country, a great sense of concern and foreboding about some... a whole lot of issues. Concern about the future and a point of transition in many ways, politically and subsequently you know economically, and it was time to re-examine some of the assumptions that were made back in the early nineties when the last lot of scenario exercises were done.

Chris Gibbons: Who was involved this time around?

Rick Menell: Well, initially people in Old Mutual thought it was worth triggering a process like this. They did one of the scenario processes in the early nineties if you remember.

Chris Gibbons: Indeed.

Rick Menell: But they decided it was something that they couldn't own or [unclear] direct, so they asked some of us convene a completely representative group of South

Africans. They gave us resources to, you know, get the best support we could to have the debate and the discussion over three or four months.

Chris Gibbons: And who was involved?

Rick Menell: Well, the convenors were Mamphela Ramphele, Vincent Maphai, Graca Machel, Bob Head who came to us from Old Mutual, myself and Bishop Njongonkulu Ndungane. And we sat down for some time and made up a list of 40 people and virtually everybody we asked to come along leapt at the chance to get involved in a serious discussion about where we are and where we could go.

Chris Gibbons: Your starting point if I read the news release correctly is that you've decided there are some very stark realities that we have to confront.

Rick Menell: Ja, look, most of our work or the first [unclear] of our work was the diagnosis. You know, where are we today, how did we get here, what's good and what's bad. And you know it was a very uninhibited process and we asked a lot of people to come and join us to give us some ground truths and realities about the economic situation, the situation for the majority of poor South Africans, the education system, the state of the public service, our sense of identity as a country, you know, whether we have one or not. Our concept of race and identity and we debated at length the evolution of our government, public service. We talked at length about you know the political environment and options, and accountability, delivery in the country. And then that was... you know, we came up with I think conclusions that are not unique, that are shared by most people in the country. The interesting thing was of those 35 people behind every one of them as I sat around the circle I saw another 100 people of a similar background, if you took any group from the breadth of political and age and race backgrounds that we had, I suspect you'd come up with very similar conclusions. So we felt there was a real legitimacy to the conclusions we came up with. And certainly got some very serious landmines, you know there's some real problems here if we don't make some choices about the way we act as citizens and the way we interact with our government then we could go to a very bad place over the next ten, 15 years.

Chris Gibbons: Now, from that background you've produced three basic scenarios. Walk Apart, Walk Behind and Walk Together. Briefly talk me through them, please.

Rick Menell: Well, there're three scenarios out of many, many that we looked at and we felt that they were plausible use for challenging pictures of the future. They're not predictions; they're just pictures of the future that raise questions today. The Walk Apart one is essentially going as we are, tomorrow is the same as yesterday. Some musical chairs, a changing clique in leadership in the country, the carving of the spoils in a small group, and an increasing disengagement of big components of our society, leading to essentially a sort of country where the citizens don't believe much in the state and look out for themselves, which leads to exclusion and alienation as a large part of the population, which leads to, you know, unrest and breakdown which ultimately in our scenario leads to an authoritarian rule. As with the other scenarios there're certainly seeds of all of this in the present. But you know we didn't think that that was the dominant thread, but it's certainly a possibility and one that we ought to heed very carefully.

Chris Gibbons: Okay, that's Walk Apart, Walk Behind?

Rick Menell: Walk Behind is perhaps a more realistic scenario where a government says you know we have huge challenges in our society, we are going to lead, both politically and economically and drive this country forward, follow as you must, but we're going to take a lead here in government. And it would be characterised over the next ten, 15 years by increasing public expenditure which inevitably would result in increasing taxes and public debt. It would have, you know, public works programs, much stronger parastatals, and prescribed investments as [unclear] for example. A problem that we had with that scenario, and it's not an unattractive one in some ways, was that our analysis of the capacity of the state in South Africa today is that it simply couldn't do that. Maybe in 15 years' time but we do not have a public service capacity to lead in the way that that would require. And it would enhance the dependency of the citizenry, you know, you'd have a much more compliant citizenry and in the end of the day there'd be a crash. You know, you couldn't sustain it, and at the end of the day the pressures of debt, the financial pressures would... and the failure to deliver because of the failures in management that we think would be inevitable certainly over the next few years would

be... would be really negative. The third scenario, Walk Together, is a hard one. It's in essence an act of faith. It says that fundamentally you have a government which we elect which says, you know, we have very major problems in education, in health, in economic developments with the international crisis. Inequity in our society and in our sense of identity and the need to heal the wounds of the past, and we need your help. And it's the government that in effect really is quite open and prepared over time to form partnerships. And because that's not a simple or easy process it doesn't have immediate results, but it's a style of engagement where you've got a much greater involvement in terms of responsibility developed among the citizenry at the time. A real sense of ownership by people, it's a problem for [unclear] and [unclear] in their hands, and the government [unclear] must be helped in every way. And if that set of values can build through good leadership there can be successes along the way, then you know initial disappointments could turn over time into a much more robust country with a much stronger sustainable path towards equity.

Chris Gibbons: Rick, clearly the last scenario, Walk Together, is the most desirable one. What do we as a nation have to do to bring it about?

Rick Menell: Well, look, every future we looked at we felt after a lot of this debate revolved around four main axis, like four main issues are the ones that we've got to focus on. One of them is political leadership, management and accountability. We have to hold our chosen public servants accountable. The next one, absolutely fundamental to breaking out of the trap of poverty that's killing our country is education and our education system is very, very sick indeed, and it's an absolute priority. We need to focus on that and bring the spirit of cooperation and service to education. Unemployment and poverty and job creation we need again, collectively and not always in our own self-interest to work on the consequences of poverty in daily life and you know on creating jobs very, very vigorously. And the last one is this issue of race and identity. You know, we need leadership and inspiration to find out what we have in common and not what separates us all. Those four areas are the ones that, you know, how we act and work in those areas in civil society and interacting with our government, and from the government leadership are critical. From those would come the energy and the solutions to economic problems and delivery problems in health and other areas.

Chris Gibbons: It's short checklist, but my heavens it's quite an important one, isn't it?

Rick Menell: These are the landmines that we've got to face up to and realise will blow us up if we don't deal with them properly.

Chris Gibbons: Rick Menell, one of the convenors of the Dinokeng Scenarios. Also of course well known businessman, I appreciate your time on the Midday Report.