

NBI Member Update 2021

NBI
National Business Initiative



20 July 2021

Message from the NBI: Supporting our Member Companies as we Recover and Rebuild

The events of the past week and the destruction to infrastructure, lives and livelihoods in KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng have left many of us completely overwhelmed. Words have simply seemed inadequate to capture the depth of the national trauma we have witnessed as a country. In particular, the combination of attempted insurrection, huge destruction of economic infrastructure and criminality, combined with the third wave of the pandemic, have left many feeling extremely fearful and vulnerable.

The NBI stands in solidarity with all our members at this difficult time and offers our support to those whose direct operations have been affected. Together we will regroup, restructure, repair and rebuild.

In the immediate aftermath, the focus has been on securing critical infrastructure and keeping food, fuel and key supply chains open and protected. Simultaneously, there is the immediate clean-up operation that has seen thousands of company staff, community members and volunteers come out as a united front to clean the streets and shops of rubble, broken glass and debris and to restock stores and warehouses. There is a strong determination to restore normal life and also to prevent this destruction from happening again. We have seen this all over the country and we stand in awe of the bravery and determination of the majority of South Africans in the face of chaos. However, more than any other set of events since 1994, the unrest has starkly highlighted the failings of our current state and amplified the intersecting consequences of systemic poverty and inequality with those who are determined to wreak destruction. This requires us to ask many hard questions but more than anything it will require structural changes, institution and capacity building, as well as policy interventions to address systemic failings.

The NBI is an organization that deals with complexity. The focus of our work is on multi-faceted problems and on similarly complex solutions. We talk of intersectionality and systemic approaches and look to understand chains of

events and consequences, in order that our interventions address root causes. This means that we understand that there are many truths, and that they can co-exist simultaneously. We understand that we defeated a planned insurrection, while also understanding that hunger and desperation played a major role in the events of last week. We can understand that political tensions may have played a role in unleashing mobs, while at the same time understanding that organised criminal syndicates played a major role in the looting and the targeted undermining of the economy. We also understand that the fragility of the state was on full display, in its policing failures, and at the same time that there is a limit and significant risk to a society where ordinary citizens come to rely on self-organised militias.

For the NBI as an organisation, there are a number of issues that we believe we must address and integrate into our work going forward:

1. Many of our member companies have been hit hard by the destruction to their facilities, their logistics capabilities, their infrastructure and by the loss of their product. We are considering how to best support Members in the processes of rebuilding and reconstruction. We are already working with BUSA and B4SA in an initiative to collect and analyse information relating to the unrest and, to the best of our ability, will respond to requests for practical support from our members and stakeholders.
2. Our **Social Transformation** programme has a focus on inequality and economic inclusion. In light of last week's events, we are considering how we advance this work rapidly and engage with our stakeholders and members to contribute to finding solutions for business that will help to narrow our deep societal divides.

Sadly, the NBI's own Economic Inclusion work has also been affected by the devastation of last week. The area around our iLembe Enterprise and Incubation Hub, which is working to support township-based SMEs and provide township youth with skills development and employment in the Installation, Repair and Maintenance (IRM) space, has been severely impacted by the looting. We are concerned about the recovery of most businesses in the area. We are regrouping around this and rethinking the implementation strategy to see how we can best support recovery in the district. We will engage with members who are involved and donors in this regard and also see if we can bring in other members who are active in KwaZulu-Natal.

3. The fragility and lack of capacity of a hollowed-out state has been dramatically visible in the past week. Our **Technical Assistance, Mentorship and Development Programme (TAMDEV)** programme is systematically addressing this in specific areas and we are considering how we accelerate the reach and scale of this work, given the impact of this issue on the lives of the majority of South Africans. Lastly, there are many people both in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal who will need on-going assistance with food, medicines, baby supplies and so forth for the foreseeable future. There are many feeding schemes and charities such as **Gift of the Givers**, that are doing amazing work and in both our individual and organizational capacities we encourage you to support these efforts.

We will be in touch in the coming days and weeks to offer practical support and assist where we can. If there are specific ways that you feel we could support you at this time please do contact us directly. We are in this together and together we will rise from the ashes.

For more information or to engage specifically with the NBI in this regard, please contact Gillian Hutchings (Head: Membership & Communications): GillianH@nbi.org.za



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The National Business Initiative (NBI) is an independent and voluntary coalition of South African and multinational businesses launched in 1995 by the then President, Nelson Mandela.

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