

Critical aspects that contribute to construction thuggerism in South Africa

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Abstract: Background: South Africa's construction industry has long been plagued by various challenges, including issues related to thuggerism. This phenomenon involves organized crime infiltrating construction projects, leading to corruption, violence, and inefficiency. Understanding the critical aspects contributing to construction thuggerism is essential for developing effective strategies to combat this pervasive problem.

Purpose: This study aims to investigate the key factors contributing to construction thuggerism in South Africa. By identifying these critical aspects, the research seeks to provide insights that can inform policymakers, industry stakeholders, and law enforcement agencies in their efforts to address thuggerism within the construction sector.

Objectives: the study focused on the following objectives: To examine the historical context and evolution of construction thuggerism in South Africa. To identify the socio-economic factors driving individuals and organizations to engage in thuggerism within the construction industry. To analyse the tactics and strategies employed by criminal networks to infiltrate and exploit construction projects. To assess the impacts of construction thuggerism on project timelines, costs, and quality. To propose recommendations for mitigating the risks associated with thuggerism and enhancing the integrity of the construction sector. Findings: The study reveals that construction thuggerism in South Africa is influenced by a combination of socio-economic factors, including poverty, inequality, weak governance structures, and the presence of organized crime networks. Criminal elements utilize intimidation, bribery, and violence to control construction projects, resulting in significant disruptions and financial losses for stakeholders.

Conclusion: In conclusion, addressing construction thuggerism requires a multi-faceted approach that combines law enforcement efforts, regulatory reforms, community engagement, and capacity building within the construction industry. By tackling the root causes of thuggerism and implementing effective preventive measures, South Africa can foster a more transparent, accountable, and sustainable construction sector.

Keywords: Construction Thuggerism, South Africa, Socio-economic Factors, Criminal Networks, Mitigation Strategies

Introduction

In the vast landscape of South Africa's construction industry, amidst the intricate tapestry of progress and development, lurks a phenomenon that challenges the very essence of growth and prosperity – construction thuggerism. Defined by its clandestine operations, coercive tactics, and often violent undertones, construction thuggerism poses a significant threat to the integrity and sustainability of the nation's infrastructure development.

This study embarks on a journey to unravel the multifaceted nature of construction thuggerism in South Africa, seeking to dissect the critical aspects that underpin its existence and proliferation. As the construction sector stands as a cornerstone of economic advancement, understanding the intricate dynamics of thuggerism within it becomes imperative for fostering a climate of transparency, accountability, and ethical conduct (Buntse and Mboti 2016).

South Africa's history is fraught with socio-political complexities that have undoubtedly shaped the contours of its construction industry. From the legacy of apartheid to the persisting challenges of inequality and unemployment, the backdrop against which construction activities unfold is imbued with layers of tension and disparity. Within this milieu, construction thuggerism emerges as a manifestation of deeper systemic issues, intertwining with issues of governance, socio-economic inequality, and criminal networks (Armstrong and Meyer 2023).

This study seeks to delve into the root causes and enablers of construction thuggerism, examining factors ranging from regulatory shortcomings and institutional weaknesses to socio-economic disparities and political influences. By adopting a holistic approach, the research endeavours to provide nuanced insights that extend beyond surface-level observations, shedding light on the intricate interplay of forces that sustain the phenomenon (Geldenhuys 2023).

Furthermore, the study aims to explore the ramifications of construction thuggerism on various stakeholders, including government agencies, private enterprises, workers, and local communities. By elucidating the direct and indirect impacts, it endeavours to highlight the urgency of effective

countermeasures and proactive interventions to mitigate the adverse effects and safeguard the integrity of the construction sector.

Through a combination of existing empirical, theoretical literature, case studies, and data analysis, this study aspires to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on construction thuggerism in South Africa. By fostering a deeper understanding of its underlying dynamics and implications, it seeks to empower stakeholders with the insights necessary to formulate informed policies, implement robust regulatory frameworks, and foster a culture of ethical conduct within the construction industry (Armstrong and Meyer 2022).

In essence, this study endeavours to shine a spotlight on the critical aspects that drive construction thuggerism in South Africa, with the ultimate goal of fostering a climate of transparency, accountability, and sustainable development within the nation's construction sector.

Methodology

A systematic literature review is a rigorous and structured approach to examining existing research and literature on a particular topic. When applied to the topic of critical aspects contributing to construction thuggerism in South Africa, it becomes a valuable methodology for several reasons. By systematically reviewing literature, researchers can gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of construction thuggerism in South Africa. This involves identifying and synthesizing various perspectives, theories, and empirical findings related to the topic. Through the systematic review process, researchers can identify key themes, patterns, and factors that contribute to construction thuggerism. This includes exploring socio-economic, political, cultural, and institutional factors that may play a role in fostering such behaviour within the construction industry (Cocchia 2014).

A systematic review allows researchers to gather evidence-based insights into the phenomenon of construction thuggerism. By critically appraising and synthesizing existing studies, researchers can assess the strength of evidence for different contributing factors and their implications.

Systematic literature reviews helped the author to identify gaps in current knowledge and understanding of construction thuggerism in South Africa. By pinpointing areas where research is lacking or inconsistent, the researcher highlight the need for further investigation and contribute to the advancement of knowledge in this area (Dziopa and Ahern 2011).

Insights generated from a systematic review can have practical implications for policy and practice. By synthesizing evidence on the critical aspects contributing to construction thuggerism, the study can inform policymakers, stakeholders, and practitioners about effective strategies for prevention, intervention, and regulation within the construction industry.

Systematic literature reviews follow a rigorous and transparent methodology, which enhances the credibility and reliability of the findings. By adhering to predefined criteria for literature selection, data extraction, and synthesis, researchers can minimize bias and ensure the validity of their conclusions.

Overall, a systematic literature review provides a robust framework for investigating the critical aspects contributing to construction thuggerism in South Africa. By systematically analysing existing research, it offers valuable insights into the complexities of this phenomenon and informs efforts to address it effectively (Xiao and Watson 2019).

Corruption in Public Procurement in South Africa

Corruption in public procurement is a multifaceted issue that has significant repercussions, particularly in the construction sector. It creates a breeding ground for what can be termed "construction thuggery," where bribery, kickbacks, and collusion among contractors and government officials become rampant.

Bribery is perhaps the most straightforward form of corruption in public procurement. Contractors may offer bribes to government officials responsible for awarding contracts in exchange for preferential treatment or for overlooking deficiencies in their bids. Conversely, officials may demand bribes from contractors to ensure they secure lucrative contracts. This undermines the

integrity of the procurement process, as contracts are not awarded based on merit but rather on who can offer the biggest kickback (Munzhedzi 2016).

Kickbacks involve contractors paying a percentage of the contract value to government officials or intermediaries as a reward for awarding them the contract. This often leads to inflated contract prices, as contractors' factor in the cost of kickbacks when submitting their bids. As a result, taxpayers end up paying more for projects that may be of inferior quality or unnecessary, solely to accommodate these illicit payments (Williams-Elegbe 2012).

Collusion occurs when contractors conspire to manipulate the bidding process to their advantage. This can take various forms, such as bid rigging, where competing contractors agree not to undercut each other's bids or to rotate winning bids among themselves. Collusion stifles competition, driving up prices and reducing the quality of work as contractors focus on maximizing profits rather than delivering value for money (Ambe and Badenhorst-Weiss 2012).

In an environment rife with corruption, the focus often shifts from delivering quality infrastructure to maximizing profits. Contractors may cut corners, use substandard materials, or engage in shoddy workmanship to increase their margins. This compromises the safety, durability, and functionality of the infrastructure, posing risks to public safety and squandering taxpayer funds in the long run (Mantzaris 2014).

Corruption in public procurement hampers economic development by distorting resource allocation and hindering fair competition. Scarce public funds that could be invested in essential services such as healthcare and education are diverted to line the pockets of corrupt officials and contractors. Moreover, the lack of transparency and accountability erodes public trust in government institutions, further exacerbating the problem (Abioro 2021).

Addressing corruption in public procurement requires a comprehensive approach that tackles both the supply and demand sides of corruption. This includes strengthening transparency and accountability mechanisms, enhancing procurement regulations and oversight, promoting competition, and fostering a culture of integrity and ethics within both the public and private sectors. Without concerted efforts to combat corruption, construction thuggery will continue to undermine public trust, impede development, and perpetuate inequality (Mathiba 2020).

Lack of Transparency and Accountability

The absence of transparency and accountability in the construction industry can indeed foster an environment ripe for dishonest practices and thuggery. Without proper transparency measures in place, dishonest contractors can easily manipulate contracts to their advantage. This might involve concealing crucial details, such as the quality of materials to be used, the scope of work, or the agreed-upon timeline. By doing so, they can exploit loopholes and discrepancies in the contract to maximize their profits, often at the expense of the client (Sibanda, Zindi and Maramura 2020).

Transparency is essential for ensuring fair pricing in any industry, including construction. However, without proper oversight, dishonest contractors can artificially inflate prices for materials, labour, or other services. This could involve collusion with suppliers or subcontractors to overcharge for goods and services, padding their own pockets while driving up project costs unnecessarily (Munzhedzi 2016).

In the absence of accountability, there's little incentive for contractors to deliver quality workmanship. They may cut corners, use inferior materials, or neglect essential safety protocols to save time and money. This not only compromises the integrity of the construction project but also poses serious risks to the safety and well-being of those who will inhabit or use the finished structure (Fourie and Malan 2020).

Perhaps most concerning is the fact that dishonest contractors can engage in these unethical practices without facing any real consequences. Without transparency and accountability mechanisms in place, it's challenging for clients or regulatory bodies to hold these bad actors accountable for their actions. As a result, they may continue to operate with impunity, perpetuating a cycle of corruption and exploitation within the industry (Okubena 2016).

To combat thuggery and dishonesty in the construction industry, it's essential to prioritize transparency and accountability at every stage of the construction process. This might involve implementing stricter regulatory frameworks, promoting ethical business practices, and fostering a

culture of integrity within the industry. Additionally, empowering clients with the knowledge and resources to demand transparency and hold contractors accountable for their actions can help level the playing field and ensure that construction projects are conducted fairly, safely, and to the highest standards of quality (Van Staden, Fourie and Holtzhausen 2022).

Weak Regulatory Enforcement in South Africa

Weak regulatory enforcement is a critical issue in many industries, particularly in sectors like construction where large sums of money, safety concerns, and environmental impacts are at stake. When regulatory bodies and law enforcement agencies fail to effectively monitor and enforce compliance with regulations, it creates a breeding ground for what the author aptly termed "construction thuggery" – a range of unethical practices that can include everything from substandard building materials to hazardous working conditions and even corruption (Siebrits, Du Plessis and Jansen 2020).

Firstly, ineffective regulatory bodies often lack the resources, expertise, or authority to adequately oversee construction projects. This can result in insufficient inspections, lenient enforcement of regulations, and an inability to hold violators accountable. Without rigorous oversight, contractors and developers may cut corners to maximize profits, disregarding safety protocols and quality standards (Falkena, Bamber, Llewellyn and Store 2001).

Secondly, when law enforcement agencies fail to crack down on construction-related crimes, it emboldens perpetrators and fosters a culture of impunity. If individuals and companies believe they can get away with bribery, extortion, or other illicit activities, they're more likely to engage in such behaviour. This not only harms the integrity of the industry but also undermines public trust in regulatory institutions and the rule of law (Botha and Makina 2011).

Moreover, weak regulatory enforcement can have far-reaching consequences beyond immediate safety concerns. Substandard construction practices can lead to infrastructure failures, endangering lives and causing economic losses. Environmental regulations may be ignored, resulting in pollution or habitat destruction. And in cases where corruption is rampant, taxpayer money may be squandered on inflated contracts or kickbacks, further eroding public confidence in governance (Hendricks 2010).

To address these challenges, several measures can be taken. Strengthening regulatory bodies with adequate funding, trained personnel, and enforcement powers is essential. This might involve revising legislation to grant regulators more authority, establishing clear protocols for inspections and compliance monitoring, and implementing robust penalties for violations. Additionally, enhancing transparency and accountability mechanisms can help expose wrongdoing and hold perpetrators accountable.

Collaboration between regulatory agencies, law enforcement, industry stakeholders, and civil society is also crucial. By fostering partnerships and sharing information, it's possible to identify systemic issues, implement best practices, and coordinate responses to enforcement challenges. Public awareness campaigns can educate citizens about their rights and responsibilities regarding construction projects, empowering communities to demand accountability from both regulators and developers (Naidoo 2013).

Ultimately, combating construction thuggery requires a multifaceted approach that addresses systemic weaknesses in regulatory frameworks, strengthens enforcement mechanisms, and promotes a culture of integrity and accountability within the construction industry. Only through concerted efforts to tackle these issues can we ensure that construction projects are conducted safely, ethically, and in the public interest (BEZUIDENHOUT 2009).

Social and Economic Inequality in South Africa

Social and economic disparities play a significant role in shaping various aspects of society, including the construction industry. When examining how these disparities contribute to construction thuggery, it's essential to understand the broader context in which marginalized communities operate (Nattrass and Seekings 2001).

Limited opportunities for legitimate employment and economic advancement often force individuals from marginalized communities into precarious situations. In many cases, these

communities face systemic barriers such as discrimination, lack of access to quality education, and unequal distribution of resources. As a result, individuals may turn to alternative means of survival, including engaging in illegal activities within industries like construction (Francis and Webster 2019).

Construction thuggery, which encompasses activities such as extortion, racketeering, and intimidation within the construction sector, can thrive in environments where there is a lack of oversight and regulation. Marginalized communities may see these illegal activities as a way to secure income and exert power within an industry that may otherwise exclude them.

Furthermore, social and economic inequality can perpetuate a cycle of violence and exploitation within these communities. When individuals are deprived of legitimate opportunities for economic advancement, they may feel compelled to resort to illegal means to provide for themselves and their families. This can contribute to a culture of lawlessness and violence, further entrenching the cycle of poverty and marginalization (Wabiri and Taffa 2013).

Addressing construction thuggery requires a multifaceted approach that tackles the root causes of social and economic inequality. This includes implementing policies that promote equal access to education and economic opportunities, addressing systemic discrimination within the workforce, and strengthening regulatory frameworks to prevent exploitation and corruption within industries like construction.

Additionally, efforts to empower marginalized communities through skills training, entrepreneurship programs, and community development initiatives can provide viable alternatives to illegal activities. By addressing the underlying factors that contribute to construction thuggery, society can work towards creating a more equitable and just society for all its members (Bhorat and Van der Westhuizen 2010).

Criminal Gang Influence in South Africa

The infiltration of criminal gangs into the construction sector is a multifaceted issue with far-reaching consequences. These gangs often leverage intimidation, violence, and extortion to establish control over construction projects, thereby exacerbating thuggery and undermining the rule of law within the industry (van der Linde 2018).

One of the primary tactics employed by criminal gangs is intimidation. They use threats of violence or coercion to manipulate construction companies, subcontractors, and workers into compliance with their demands. This can include forcing companies to use specific suppliers or subcontractors affiliated with the gang, thereby monopolizing certain aspects of the construction process. Intimidation tactics also extend to local communities, where gangs may pressure residents to remain silent about their illicit activities or to support their endeavours through fear of reprisal (Petrus 2013).

Violence is another tool used by criminal gangs to maintain their influence in the construction sector. Physical assaults, vandalism, and even arson are not uncommon tactics employed to assert dominance and quell any opposition. Such violence not only endangers the lives of those involved but also creates a climate of fear that permeates throughout the industry. This atmosphere of fear can deter legitimate businesses from operating in affected areas, further entrenching the gangs' control (Lambrechts 2012).

Extortion is perhaps the most insidious aspect of gang influence in construction. Gangs often demand regular payments, commonly referred to as "protection money," from construction companies in exchange for supposed protection from vandalism, theft, or other forms of harm. Failure to comply with these demands can result in severe consequences, including physical violence or sabotage of ongoing projects. This extortion not only drains resources from legitimate businesses but also perpetuates a cycle of criminal activity by funding the gangs' illicit operations (Lambrechts 2012).

The presence of criminal gangs in the construction sector not only undermines the rule of law but also poses significant challenges to efforts aimed at fostering economic growth and development. Projects may be delayed or abandoned altogether due to gang interference, leading to increased costs and decreased investor confidence. Furthermore, the prevalence of corruption and collusion between

gang members and public officials can further perpetuate the cycle of criminal activity and hinder efforts to combat it (Maringira and Masiya 2018).

Addressing the infiltration of criminal gangs into the construction sector requires a coordinated response from law enforcement, government agencies, and the construction industry itself. This may involve increased police presence in affected areas, crackdowns on corruption within regulatory bodies, and initiatives to empower legitimate businesses to resist gang influence. Additionally, community engagement and support programs are crucial for addressing the root causes of gang involvement and providing alternatives for at-risk individuals (Kelly and Ward 2020).

Overall, the infiltration of criminal gangs into the construction sector represents a significant threat to both the industry and the wider community. By understanding the tactics employed by these gangs and implementing comprehensive strategies to combat their influence, stakeholders can work together to uphold the rule of law and promote a safer, more prosperous construction sector (Lambrechts 2013).

Results and Discussion

The construction sector in South Africa, traditionally a significant driver of economic progress, has faced a notable obstacle in recent times: the infiltration of criminal elements. Dubbed as construction mafias, these unlawful networks emerged primarily in KwaZulu-Natal around ten years ago but have since spread across the entire country, causing substantial economic losses.

These syndicates target various construction sites, from small-scale enterprises to large projects, utilizing local ties to employ tactics like extortion, violence, intimidation, and disruption. Extortion has become a regrettable but accepted part of the business landscape in this sector (Van Der Linde 2021).

These findings include the insights from a seminar held by the Inclusive Society Institute (ISI) focusing on the impact of construction mafias on the industry. It follows up on a previous summit that emphasized the significant concern these illegal activities pose to the construction sector.

Addressing the challenges posed by construction mafias is crucial for revitalizing this essential segment of the economy. The construction industry has seen a sharp decline over the past 15 years, largely due to unfulfilled government infrastructure promises. Rebuilding this industry is vital, given its potential to alleviate poverty by creating economic output and jobs, especially for those with limited skills (Petrus 2015).

The tactics employed by construction mafias, often referred to as "business forums," involve the use of violence and illegal methods to control access to public sector construction contracts. These groups infiltrate construction sites, demanding money or a stake in development projects. As of 2019, over 183 infrastructure projects totalling more than R63 billion had been impacted by these activities in South Africa. Their actions often exploit the Preferential Procurement Policy Framework Act (PPPFA), which mandates that 30% of public contracts be allocated to historically disadvantaged individuals (HDIs). However, instead of benefiting these groups, construction mafias manipulate this provision to demand a direct share of the contract value for themselves, contradicting the law and hindering the intended empowerment of HDIs and small businesses. Factors contributing to the escalation of violence on construction sites include unrealistic community expectations, gang activity, and exploiting high unemployment rates during protests against infrastructure projects (Geldenhuys 2023). These mafias employ various tactics, including threats of violence and heavy weaponry, to extort shares of contracts without genuine interest in the work. They also engage in intimidation, assault, and, in some cases, murder of site employees or managers. In areas plagued by gang violence, such as Cape Town, gang leaders even register companies and use mafia tactics to intimidate construction projects into compliance, sometimes demanding protection fees to avoid interference from rival gangs. This complex intertwining of criminal elements with legitimate business activities underscores the challenges faced in combating construction mafias (Armstrong and Meyer 2022).

The construction mafia has gradually formed ties with specific factions within the ruling party, gaining political influence and access to state contracts. This connection offers protection and eases their procurement process. This outside influence has heightened uncertainty in fulfilling contractual obligations. Contractors now face not only legal and contractual demands but also threats from

criminal groups. This interference complicates the construction process, making it difficult to meet project deadlines. Additionally, efforts to combat these mafias have made selecting subcontractors and suppliers a risky endeavour, leading to compromised quality and delays (Vahed 2022). Contractors find themselves torn between fulfilling legitimate contracts and dealing with illicit pressures from the construction mafia. Addressing this issue falls under the responsibility of the criminal justice cluster, in line with the National Development Plan Vision 2030.

As it has been indicated earlier on, findings include the insight of the ISI summit. The summit paid more attention to the Root Causes & Perspectives of the construction mafia. During the ISI's Construction Mafia Summit, keynote speakers shared their insights into the origins of the construction mafia, shedding light on the driving forces behind its emergence. Discussions underscored the symbolic significance of construction sites as potential engines of economic opportunity. For unemployed youth and marginalized communities, these sites represent pathways to a brighter future. Rejecting violence as a means to achieve economic empowerment, the conversation emphasized the importance of following democratic principles (Moodley 2016).

The traditional differentiation between public and private projects, based on funding sources, was challenged. Participants noted a shift in perceiving both types of endeavours as serving broader public interests. This shift necessitates a renewed focus on transparency and accountability within the private sector. Communities increasingly demand a say in decision-making processes related to construction projects, including land acquisition and permit issuance. Emphasizing transparency and accountability is seen as crucial to ensuring that both public and private initiatives align with community needs and aspirations (Pocock 2018).

Discussions highlighted the pervasive economic inequality in South Africa. Statistics from the World Bank reveal stark disparities, with the top 10% earning a disproportionate share of national income compared to the bottom 50%. Historical injustices and inadequate efforts to address social justice were identified as underlying causes. Businesses, particularly in the construction sector, are urged to adopt transparent, accountable, and inclusive practices to narrow the wealth gap.

The construction industry is increasingly seen as a battleground for promoting economic inclusion and combating racial discrimination in what has historically been perceived as a sector prone to corruption. A unified stance against economic marginalization is necessary, with a focus on private sector adherence to transparency and accountability principles (Monnye 2023).

Rising levels of organized crime, particularly within the construction industry, have been evident since around 2014/15. This increase is linked to a broader decline in the capacity of the state, particularly during a period of what is termed as "State capture." This period saw compromised integrity and effectiveness in key state-owned enterprises, fostering corruption and weakening law enforcement efforts. This decline in state capacity, coupled with inefficiencies in law enforcement, has created an environment conducive to organized crime. Weak governance structures, including oversight mechanisms, further contribute to the lack of accountability within law enforcement agencies (Ellero 2015).

Criminal networks exploit these weaknesses in accountability and law enforcement, targeting construction sites for financial gain. This trend has spread throughout the country, leading to significant economic consequences. According to the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, organized crime now poses a fundamental threat to South Africa's democratic institutions. A strategic response is deemed necessary to ensure a more stable future for the country. Without intervention, organized crime and its illicit activities will continue to cause significant harm (Geldenhuys 2022).

Although solutions to address the crisis within the South African Police Service (SAPS) have been identified in government policies and documents, they are not being effectively implemented. This cannot solely be attributed to a lack of resources, as is often claimed to be the reason for the country's crime crisis. Despite a substantial increase in the police budget over the past decade, their effectiveness in solving crimes has significantly decreased. The Institute for Security Studies reports that while the police budget has increased by 86% over 11 years, their ability to solve murders has decreased by 55% and armed robbery by 53%. Addressing this crisis requires leadership reform within the police, strengthened governance structures, and the establishment of independent oversight mechanisms (Moore and Booysen 2022).

Additionally, a failure to share information and resources among government, civil society, and the private sector hampers efforts to combat organized crime. Law enforcement agencies have implemented targeted plans to combat the influence of the construction mafia. These plans are aligned with a national strategy under the guidance of the national commissioner and are divided into two main components: a geographical approach and an organized crime approach.

The geographical approach involves strategically positioning intelligence operations to gather information, identify hotspots, and address challenges in specific regions. Police teams are deployed to these hotspots with a mission to stabilize affected areas (Williams 2021). The organized crime approach focuses on identifying individuals, syndicates, and criminal entities involved in extortion within the construction mafia. Law enforcement collaborates with the National Prosecuting Authority, engaging in prosecutor-guided investigations. This effort extends to asset forfeiture and financial investigations, distinguishing between major and project investigations.

Since 2019, 712 cases have been reported, with 93 currently in court. A total of 722 suspects have been arrested, and 96 cases have been fully completed and referred to the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) for decision. Additionally, 34 cases have been issued non-prosecution certificates by the DPP, and 165 case dockets were closed due to insufficient information. Of the completed cases, 50 were finalized after being received from court, resulting in 52 convictions with a combined sentence of 89 years and seven months (Ngubane, Phiri and Kunene).

The police's approach includes monthly stakeholder engagements in all provinces, co-chaired by the SAPS and the business sector, to address these challenges. Advocate for transparent and inclusive engagement practices in public and private construction endeavours. Highlight the significance of involving communities in decision-making, particularly regarding land acquisition and development permits. Cultivate a culture of openness and collaboration to foster trust between project developers and communities.

Enact policies aimed at reducing economic inequality, drawing insights from the World Bank's 2022 Inequality report. Promote transparent, accountable, and inclusive practices among businesses, especially in construction, to bridge the wealth gap. Launch initiatives empowering Historically Disadvantaged Individuals (HDIs) to ensure equal access to economic opportunities. Promoting Racial Equity (Mongale 2022)

The findings of this paper suggests that there must be an enforcement of strict measures against companies engaged in corrupt practices, holding them responsible for unethical behaviour. Charge the Minister of Infrastructure and Public Works with spearheading a cleanup effort and ensuring consequences for companies involved in corruption, including suspension or blacklisting from public procurement. Addressing Organized Crime (Adebowale and Agumba 2023)

This study advocate for the declassification of the national security strategy, making it public and updating it annually for effective coordination across sectors. Enhance crime intelligence and implementing police reforms.

It is important to address declining capabilities of the South African Police Service by ending automatic promotions without performance assessments, fixing dysfunctional disciplinary systems, and preventing compromised officers from colluding with criminal networks. Advocate for reforms in recruitment, training, supervision, and accountability to empower law enforcement against organized crime. Stress the importance of holding officers involved in criminal activities accountable, removing compromised individuals undermining public safety through corruption and brutality. Establish an effective accountability system to counter officers working against the public's interests and restore trust in law enforcement. Government-Led Initiatives

South African government must initiate public hearings to tackle racism, gender discrimination, and bullying in the construction sector. Consider a firearms amnesty under the Firearms Control Act to reduce illicit guns contributing to site disruptions. Infrastructure Development for Inclusive Growth (Analytica 2022)

Prioritize infrastructure development as a means of reducing poverty. Acknowledge the crucial role of engineering skills in economic recovery and competitiveness, emphasizing skill retention and development. Encourage collaboration among government, business, labour, and communities for uninterrupted infrastructure delivery. Community and Business Collaboration

Encourage construction contractors to halt bribery to business forums and instead focus on providing employment and local business opportunities to community members. Implement a District Development System to ensure collaborative efforts among communities, businesses, and government in infrastructure delivery. Facilitate constructive engagement between affected communities, business forums, and construction companies to address concerns and ensure compliance with the rule of law. Leadership and Accountability (Qwabe, Maluleke and Olutola 2022)

Promote leadership accountability across public and private sectors to foster responsible and ethical practices. Establish mechanisms to monitor and enforce transparency and accountability principles within the construction industry. Address allegations of police collaboration with criminal syndicates, ensuring severe consequences for those involved.

Conclusion

The complexities posed by construction mafias present significant challenges for South Africa, with ramifications extending across various domains. Tackling the entrenched construction extortion racket, particularly in areas where it has taken root, is an arduous task that cannot be ignored. Failure to address this issue will have profound effects on both the construction industry and the nation as a whole.

The impacts go beyond project delays and financial burdens. They encompass lost investment opportunities, as the risky environment discourages foreign companies from engaging in large-scale projects within the country. Consequently, economic growth and development suffer. Moreover, the departure of skilled technical personnel exacerbates the problem, reducing the available expertise for crucial infrastructure endeavours. In 2019, the South African Forum of Civil Engineering Contractors urgently appealed to then Finance Minister Tito Mboweni, stressing the need for government intervention to combat the construction mafia. Their plea highlighted the alarming exodus of 110 engineers and other highly skilled professionals due to personal safety concerns and a lack of viable projects, many of which were disrupted by armed coercion (Monnye 2023).

In essence, the construction mafia issue transcends mere criminality; it represents a multifaceted challenge that increasingly overshadows legitimate concerns about inequality and significantly impacts the country's economic landscape. Immediate and comprehensive collaboration is essential to mitigate both short-term and long-term consequences, safeguarding the stability and expansion of the construction sector, and by extension, the entire economy.

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