

Xfor Security quiet Kenya entry, loud impact!



From Left Mr Enock Makanga, Director, Business Development, Mr Josh Cocklin, Group Operations Manager and Mr Steve Gillespie, Group COO

● By Margaret Obondo

Security East Africa spoke to the Xfor Security's CEO Gary Lincoln-Hope on a wide range of issues. The company with a UK background and link has left tongues wagging ... quite literally as they seek to quietly change dominance of top 5 security companies G4S Securicor, BM Security; Wells Fargo; Group 4 Security and Radar Security. Here are the excerpts;

When did you come to Kenya? How? And what key services are you offering?

XFOR came to Kenya in October 2011, through liaison with Kenyan ex-special forces

experts. They saw a gap in the market especially on counter terrorism and expertise needed to handle security matters through services such as training. Security is far too serious a matter not to be handled with respect, knowledge and skill. Our key services include security protection, investigative services, training and consultancy services.

What has been the impact so far?

So far XFOR has established a market presence with a high brand visibility. XFOR is fast growing and a very sought after company in Kenya with excellent services, dedication to duty and the level of trust

we have built with our clients and the general public we interact with in training seminars. It is quite an achievement considering we have been in the market for a short while.

Unlike the UK, Kenya is grappling with possibility of the first ever regulation, Private Security Regulatory Authority, how are you faring in the absence of market regulation?

Market regulation raises standards. It enforces best practice, accountability and compliance in service delivery but equally important holds the training, development and welfare of security officers as a priority. It should not only



Mr Keli Munyao, Human Resources Manager and Mr Gary Lincoln Hope, Group CEO PHOTO> File

be welcomed, but also pursued by the industry, and companies operating within it, with vigour.

The absence of such regulation is extremely damaging because it necessarily follows there is an inherent absence of control and standards. Companies that hold high standards at the core of their operational culture can often struggle to remain competitive as selection, vetting training, equipping and sustaining highly capable services have an expense attached to them that ‘cowboy’ outfits simply do not.

That said, however, Kenya’s approach to security and the need for credible security is completely different to the UK. The threat is significantly different, it is much more ‘at risk’. As a consequence, we are not finding ourselves hampered by the lack of regulation because clients come to us knowing they need

quality, and knowing they will get quality. Our clients simply would not entertain engaging the lower end of the market because they understand the importance of an effective security provision. I would welcome regulation. I would work tirelessly with the authorities to develop and implement regulation, and I’m absolutely certain it will come in the near future.

Your old competitors, like G4S, have been around and they control huge market share. How do you intend to wrestle them?

We are not competing with anyone. We aim at achieving our own goals and objectives. We exhibit extraordinary customer friendly and effective services. We single out cases and tailor make our services to suit the particular needs of each client. We are pro active to customer needs and

sensibilities.

Cash-in-transit has been a challenge in Kenya largely because of “inside-job” sabotage. Is Kenya really ready for this service? If yes, how well can it be addressed?

I would say the country is ready just like in any other structure. We as a company love challenges, because it’s by them that we grow in strength. Having good training, exceptional leaders with integrity, honesty and team spirit who have bought into the well defined company ethics should questions of mischief , sabotage arise. This comes down to rigorous selection, vetting, training and management procedures and structures.

Should our security guards be armed?

This is a very complex issue with



Steve Gillespie, Group COO; Keli Munyao, HR Manager and Gary Lincoln Hope, Group CEO

intelligent answers for and against. My answer is no.

Relating this back to the UK for a moment, the same debate is prominent whether to arm our police officers. The argument against arming UK police centres on the profile they wish to maintain with the public. It is viewed less aggressive, less confrontational and certainly de-escalates potentially volatile situations.

However, the security threat is mutating in the UK and we have seen incremental steps towards that end state, the utility of ‘non-lethal’ stun guns for example, albeit they are only issued to officers already authorised to carry firearms.

In Kenya, the threat posed by criminals and the terrorist is certainly higher in relation to firearms. However, if security guards were to arm themselves, it could potential have the knock on effect that more and more of the criminal fraternity would seek to arm its self to maintain its own capability.

That will only see an escalation of firearms on the street, and this is a very dangerous set of circumstances for the wider public in general.

The solution is not to arm security guards, but to train them, equip them and use intelligence led security measures to identify and dilute threats before they even get to the stage of armed confrontation.

Use of technology, intelligence sharing and crime reduction strategies should be the primary means of degrading criminal activity, long before the arming of security officers.

Community policing in the UK has seen closer collaboration between private security and government. Any lessons for Kenya from XFOR UK?

I think we can say something along the lines of: In the UK there is a Community Safety Police Accreditation scheme which allows for members of private sector companies working on Local Government contracts to be vetted together with their staff so that they can be granted accreditation to join the wider ‘Police Family’.

This allows for information and data sharing in addition to closer working relationships on the ground. Companies such as XFOR are allowed

to attend Joint Action Group meetings (JAG) where policy and strategy is agreed in relation to crime and disorder issues!

This allows companies such as XFOR to play a meaningful role in respect of the Security and Policing issues and provides valuable support to a currently depleted ‘front line Police Service’

XFOR is in an advanced stage of applying for this accreditation with a view to enhancing our service to Local Government.

Body search by security companies has been criticized by some VIPs in Kenya. Experts have dismissed it as a necessary formality that may at worst mean nothing but a time-waster and at best deter petty crime. How is XFOR adding meaning to this?

Anyone can carry and raise metal detectors. XFOR is proud to employ various special equipment used by expertly trained officers who know exactly what they are looking for and how to use the equipment tactically without causing unnecessary time wastage and annoyances. This is very important as it forms the customer

and client prerequisite.

Security equipment especially for electronic security is full of counterfeits from alarms to metal detectors. Kenya has no new security laboratories and Kenya Bureau of Standards is yet to develop specialized standards for such equipment. How will Kenya deal with this dilemma?

I think companies should identify one supplier who supplies genuine equipment which are tried and proven and stick to it.

And the government should also consider coming up with a body that checks the quality and license the supplier.

With the looming terrorist attacks, there is certainly a need for systems and structures to be put in place to control the flooding of counterfeit equipment in the market.

Security companies are generally accused of being poor and exploitative employers. How is XFOR different?

That is tantamount to mob lynching. We don't look at ourselves as just any other security company. We do not use the other security companies as our yardstick. We set our own goals and standards.

We compete ourselves and this is what sets us apart from other security companies. We take security as a career. All our employees are trained effectively to perform as professionally as is humanly possible and they have bought into this culture.

There is a very well drawn progressive paying and promotional procedures that are guided chiefly by merit, achievement and professionalism and this contributes highly to the morale and the will power of our employees, resulting to superb dedication to duty.

Our terms of employment are favorable to all our employees in general. They are paid very well and the remuneration is done in good time.

XFOR is genuinely interested in the growth of its employees, their welfare and well being.

Any general comments on your fears, hopes and expectations on the overall security reform for Kenya?

As I have already alluded to, I only hold security regulation in the highest of regard.

It is for the benefit of the security industry, those requiring security and for the safety and welfare of the public in general.

I support it, and I hope I get the opportunity to assist with the development and implementation. ■



Xfor guards in protection mode PHOTO> File