

MOBILISING LOCAL KNOWLEDGE AND CAPACITY THROUGH SAFETY AND SECURITY

The Challenge – Local, Regional and Global

Vision and Realities

In his State of the Nation address at the opening of the South African Parliament in February 2005, President Thabo Mbeki picked up the foundational vision expressed in the Constitution, that “We, the people of South Africa, believe that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity”. He went on to spell out the next set of criteria along the path to implementing that vision, including the further entrenchment of democracy in the country; the successful transformation of the “Second Economy”; and securing the safety and security of all the people.

He noted, however, that “our country does not have the resources immediately to meet, simultaneously, all the admittedly urgent needs of our people, especially the poor”, and, in particular, that there is “a lack of all-round capacity” at the local level, which in turn impacts on the situation of “the marginalised in the wilderness of the Second Economy”.

This governance deficit, however, is not confined to the countries of “the South”. It is now commonly acknowledged that governments everywhere, singly or in combination, lack the capacity and resources to meet the security needs of their citizens.

If, therefore, we could build an effective model of partnership in democratic policing by living into our own possibilities as Africans, we could at the same time be building a model of far wider potential application.

The principles of gathering people together, mobilising local knowledge and capacity, and having community-focused and future-oriented ways of problemsolving, were and are still central to pre-industrial society, and continue to have resonance in many people’s minds. Moreover, in the course of the 1980s in South Africa, “street committees” emerged as a means of re-asserting the value and the effectiveness of local knowledge as a response to the brutal repression of the faltering apartheid regime.

The “Zwelethemba model” resonates with and draws upon the forms and sensibilities of these indigenous processes. The challenge today is to create institutional vehicles for expressing these values effectively within the contemporary urban and rural contexts and in a developing democracy, whether in South Africa, Brazil, or elsewhere.

What then?

Given President Mbeki's reminder of a broadly shared vision of a country transformed from its oppressive past, and at the same time the sobering recognition of the deficits and obstacles on the path to realising that vision, what practical steps can be taken, especially by organisations in civil society, towards closing that gap and erasing that deficit?

To put it differently, what could be done to create the opportunities and the institutions that

- can work with the state and its resources to accomplish that vision, and
- be applicable, with relatively minor adjustments, in a wide range of environments, nationally and globally.

Transformative development

There is much talk of “development”, but this only too often turns out in practice to have benefits primarily for those nations and communities that are already “developed”. How can this be avoided?

The approach taken would aim at building a replicable model of community development that would

- deal with poverty
- create work (not necessarily “jobs”)
- deepen democracy
- encourage a spirit of social entrepreneurship
- invest in the community

and

- integrate the objectives of state agencies and community organisations.

Such a model, to be sustainable,

- would be cheap to run
- would not depend on professional expertise
- would be largely self-directed, within an appropriate regulatory framework
- would bring resources into the community
- would be financially and socially accountable

and

- would be economically, culturally and environmentally sustainable.

A model of this kind would therefore be a mechanism that

- respects and mobilises local knowledge and capacity in the context of a shared national vision

and

- provides a service to the community that complements the valued but admittedly limited resources of the state.¹

¹ These aims and values are consistent with the “open source” concept used in the sharing of computer software, as an alternative to the privatised and profit-based application of knowledge and experience. This is a concept that is now being extended to other arenas of Intellectual Property more generally.

Roles and Partnerships

There are numerous precedents for this kind of relationship, commonly referred to as “Public/Private Partnerships” (“PPPs”). Much has been achieved by these means in the First Economy (in health, education, etc), while the potential of the Second Economy has been much less explored.

But does this always have to be the case? Is there a way of building partnerships with poor communities in which their knowledge, capacity and enterprise is given the same respect as that demonstrated in most PPPs towards entities operating in the First Economy?

The Response

The Community Peace Programme (a project of the Institute of Criminology at the Law Faculty of the University of Cape Town), together with the community of Zwelethemba (a suburb of Worcester, in the Western Cape), took up this challenge in 1997, asking themselves several central questions:

- *By what means and through what agencies or institutions is security with justice produced in any given community, especially in the “Second Economy”, the South, and wherever the resource deficit appears greatest?*
- *How, in particular, can the knowledge and experience of groups and communities in civil society be effectively and sustainably mobilised in order to realise a shared vision of equity and social justice?*
- *How may broad-based concepts of justice and human rights be integrated into social projects?*
- *What forms of cooperation or partnership between the state and civil society could give most effective expression and implementation to the varied strengths and capacities that they bring?*

Guided by the shared national agenda of social transformation, and operating through a process of experimentation and dialogue, a mechanism has been developed through the facilitation of the Community Peace Programme that realises the aims set out above under *Transformative Development*. The institutions that have been invented to implement those aims are known as Peace Committees and Community Peace Centres.

How the model works

The Peace Committee model is designed to enable people to manage their own lives. This is capacity building of a fundamental kind – the development of human capital through focused action around real problems. Although its aims are general (that is, the whole of people’s lives) it approaches general things in very specific and concrete ways by giving priority to disputes. The model sees most disputes as problems that are usually small in themselves, but which, if they are not dealt with, can often escalate until they become disastrous.

The model aims to:

- bring a range of knowledges and perspectives to bear on both individual and generic or community-wide problems
- bring legitimacy to both the process itself and its outcomes
- facilitate the implementation of the outcomes
- develop the deliberative and planning skills of all the participants.

It does so in Gatherings that are “deliberative forums” that allow views and ideas to be aired, discussed and a consensus reached.

There are two main processes in this model, which are referred to as “PeaceMaking” and “PeaceBuilding”.

PeaceMaking

Peace Committees operate according to a Code (see below). When a complaint is brought to a Peace Committee, an agreed set of procedures is followed. A ‘PeaceMaking Gathering’ is arranged, usually within days; the purpose of this Gathering is to bring together the disputants and any other people who may be in a position to help understand and resolve the dispute. In this process, the role of the Peace Committee members is entirely to facilitate, not to engage in blaming or judging, and not to propose any particular solution. The focus of the Gathering starts with the past problem and moves towards making a better and more secure future.

Here is a more detailed account of the process:

- People in communities establish groups of 5-20 people, who call themselves a Peace Committee. The purpose here is to create an ongoing structure that people in the community, governments and others can relate to.
- This Peace Committee announces itself within the community as a group who will facilitate the resolution of disputes. When this happens the Peace Committee tells the community about their values. They do this by stating and making available a Code that says ‘Here are our values, here is what we are committed to’. A key feature of this Code is that “we don’t use force to solve problems”.
- Why would people choose to bring a dispute to the committee? People usually do this because they do not want the blaming and punishment that the criminal justice system promotes, but also do not wish to take a vigilante route.
- Once a dispute has been brought to the Peace Committee, it assigns three or more people to facilitate a dispute resolution.
- Once the Peace Committee understands what has been going on, they organise a Gathering that includes the disputants and other people who they think will be able to contribute to solving the problem. We call these PeaceMaking Gatherings. Who is asked to attend is very important, as the people that come bring with them knowledge and resources that they can use to help solve problems. Having the right people from the community there ensures that solutions will be community solutions and that the decisions taken will respect people’s values and the way they live.

- Gatherings usually take place in the house of a Peace Committee member, in a room at a community centre, or in a Community Peace Centre (see below). Whatever the location, the environment is informal and non-threatening.
- At a Gathering, after reading the Code, the first thing the facilitators do is to hear from the disputants (separately) what the dispute is all about. The purpose here is not to decide who is right and who is wrong but to try and identify the causes of the problem and to find out who is likely to be able to help in solving it. No one is labeled as a victim or an offender. Rather they are seen as people who have a dispute.
- At a Gathering the focus is always on the future. The question asked is, what can be done to reduce the likelihood of this and similar problems happening again? This does not mean, of course, that they don't talk about the past; but they do so in order to find out what can be done to make tomorrow better.
- When a plan of action to improve matters is reached, it is written down and everyone signs to show his or her commitment to it. If specific things have to be done the plan will list them and it will say who is responsible for doing these things. The purpose is to make sure that everyone knows what has been decided so that they can make sure that what is decided does actually happen.
- At the end of the Gathering it may be that the disputants apologise to each other. If they do, they may shake hands or hug each other. But this is not seen as essential. It is useful if it contributes to people being able to move forward to a better tomorrow. But sometimes people decide that this is not going to be either necessary or helpful. When this happens there may be no apology.
- What usually does happen at the close of a Gathering is that the people present do something that symbolises their commitment to what has been decided, such as a dance, a song, a prayer or a holding of hands. This expresses a sense that justice has been served.

The gathering together of appropriate local people in a facilitative environment is the key to the resolution of the dispute and the agreement on workable and effective plans of future-oriented action.

During the PeaceMaking Gathering, the Peace Committee members who are there complete a report on what happened. This goes to a central office where statistics are prepared, and feedback is then given to each Peace Committee on a monthly basis.

Payments

Before going on to the PeaceBuilding part of the model, we need to consider the matter of payments and work creation. For every gathering that is held *according to the rules agreed upon*, a payment is made to the Peace Committee. This recognizes the value of the work that they do and responds to the criticism that professionals are always paid, while poor people are usually asked to volunteer.

Of this payment, half goes into the pockets of the Peace Committee members who facilitated the PeaceMaking Gathering, while the other half goes into a PeaceBuilding Fund that is used to fund projects or individuals who respond in a responsible entrepreneurial manner to long-term problems in the community. This ensures that communities have money of their own – this is not a grant or a handout, it is money that they have earned – to spend on doing things that they think will contribute in the long term to building a better future.

For PeaceMaking payments to members, detailed monthly payment schedules are circulated and all payments are signed for. For PeaceBuilding projects, Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) are drawn up which lay down the conditions of payment in each case. The regular implementation of these procedures is also part of capacity building in the community.

PeaceBuilding

PeaceBuilding works in the same way as PeaceMaking, except that here the Peace Committee is dealing with broader generic problems rather than with individual disputes. If the Peace Committee comes to the conclusion – either as a result of a pattern they notice in disputes or through the regular community surveys – that there is a long-term problem that should be addressed, they arrange for a Solutions Gathering (there may be more than one) to work out what should be tried by way of a solution and whom to commission to carry out the work. The idea is to pay for this service out of the money they have built up in their PeaceBuilding Fund and to make sure that as much of this money stays in the community as possible, in order to create work. PeaceBuilding projects frequently involve a focused partnership with local government.

This PeaceBuilding process broadens the model from being a conflict management model to a governance model, as PeaceBuilding is not limited to what we call the ‘window’ of security. In other words, individual disputes are seen as starting-points, issues that bring people together and mobilise the knowledge and experience that they bring with them.

Outcomes

In October 2006, 33 Peace Committees participated in the South African programme, and they had facilitated the resolution of over 13 000 peace gatherings. These gatherings had generated about R2 500 000 in revenues for Peace Committees. All of these revenues are spent in these communities.

At the time of writing we have analysed the reports of some 12 673 gatherings. By now about 129 988 people have been involved in participating directly in solving problems in their communities through the ‘window’ of gatherings. That is, 129 988 people have had the experience of shifting their stance from one of dependency to one of responsibility and of moving from an orientation of blame to one that is focused on creating a new future.

In gatherings, 65% of the participants were women, 35 % men, of whom 10% was made up of youth, 86 % of adults, and 3 % of seniors.

The most frequent issues related to money (money-lending disputes, non-payment of loans or for goods and misappropriation of funds) occurred in 48 % of cases. Assault featured in 15 %, Property Offences in 44 %, Neighbourhood Disputes in 26 %, Domestic Violence in 21 %, Substance Abuse features in 11 % and Sexual Offences in 2 % of 12 673 cases.

In 99% of the gatherings held, the participants developed a course of action and people committed themselves to it. In a little under three quarters of the gatherings some gesture marking the end of the conflict took place. At times this involved everyone present making a commitment to peace. At other times only the disputants were involved.

Relations with State Agencies

From the beginning of the pilot project in Zwelethemba in 1997, a good working relationship was established with the South African Police Service and the Department of Justice, on both the national and the provincial levels, and similar informal relationships of mutual referral have since been established with the Station Commissioners and magistrates in areas in which the Peace Committees have come to operate. However, an important further step in cooperation has been taken with the establishment of Community Peace Centres (referred to locally as 'Project iThemba' [Project Hope]).

Community Peace Centres

In April 2002 the Community Peace Programme was approached by the Area Commissioner for the South African Police Service in the Boland (a large area of small towns and farming areas not far from Cape Town), to consider the possibility of a cooperative venture in the township of Nkqubela, Robertson. The satellite police station in Nkqubela had been closed for some time for lack of resources, and the Commissioner was being pressed by the community to restore services there.

After considerable negotiation, the principles and outlines of a cooperative agreement became clear. In effect, the new Nkqubela Peace Committee would provide a conflict-resolution and community-building service, while the police would provide a contact point for reports and enquiries, and an emergency response service. The former police station would be refurbished and extended and would reopen as a Community Peace Centre.

After appropriate community consultation, the Nkqubela Peace Committee began work in late June 2002. 22 police reservists were trained (with Community Peace Programme and Peace Committee input) in September. The Nkqubela Community Peace Centre was formally opened on 19 October 2002, in the presence of representatives of the Finnish Embassy and the SAPS Western Cape management, the Mayors of the Boland District Council and the Breede River-Winelands Municipality, and the Western Cape MEC for Community Safety.

Project iThemba in Nkqubela was seen explicitly as a pilot project, with the intention of extending the model in due course throughout the Boland SAPS Region. Subsequently, the Zwelethemba Community Peace Centre was formally launched on 28 February 2004, and the Mbekweni Community Peace Centre was formally opened on 1 April 2004. The plan is to open more Community Peace Centres as rapidly as funding permits. What has become apparent during this period, however, is that a Community Peace Centre is not a building but a relationship, and the local Peace Committee(s) may or may not actually hold their Gatherings in the Centre building itself from which the police operate.

This partnership works as follows:

- The SAPS carry out regular police work – that is, law enforcement, emergency response and detective services

- The Peace Committees facilitate the resolution of disputes, conflicts and problems that do not require police action.
- Community members may take their problems directly to the Peace Committee for facilitation.
- Alternatively, the SAPS shift officers in the Community Peace Centre may offer complainants the option of taking the matter to the Peace Committee rather than opening a docket or following some other bureaucratic route.
- The Peace Committee may also refer matters to the SAPS where appropriate.
- The SAPS notes referrals to the Peace Committee, while Peace Committees complete a detailed report-form for all facilitations they carry out.

What has become clear through the day-to-day experience of this partnership model is that it does not depend on a shared physical space attached to a police station, but on a relationship of mutual respect.

In addition to providing an effective service to the residents of these communities, this project is intended to demonstrate the feasibility and sustainability of a partnership between state agencies (in this case, the South African Police Service and local government) and a civil society organisation, between professional or ‘expert’ knowledge and local knowledge – a partnership whose practices are premised on respect for the other’s culture, capacity and experience. In particular, and in relation to national policy on policing, the Community Peace Centre model gives one form of effective expression and implementation to the SAPS national policy of ‘Sector Policing’.

When addressing the question of security and policing in his State of the Nation address in February 2005, President Mbeki emphasised the need to “strengthen partnerships with business and communities”. This model of cooperative policing does just that, in the context of the democratic transformation of our country. Moreover, this is a model that – with or without an explicit partnership with the local police service – has already been accepted as appropriate and applicable in a wide range of cultural environments beyond South Africa.

Scaling up the Peace Committee Model

The Process

Peace Committees may be regarded as small businesses specialising in dispute-resolution and community-building, who have been contracted by the Community Peace Programme to carry out this work in conformity with the Peace Committee Code, the Steps in PeaceMaking and the PeaceBuilding criteria. They are paid on a strictly outcomes basis after their completed reports have been verified.

The Community Peace Programme has – within South Africa, at least - until recently provided all the training, support, monitoring, fundraising, payments processing, data management and verification in this contractual relationship with the Peace Committees. It is responsible for maintaining the integrity and consistency of the Peace Committee/Community Peace Centre model, and for leading reflections on its effectiveness and on appropriate modifications where necessary.

We are now in the process of identifying and negotiating Implementing Agents for the extension and local/regional management of the Peace Committee model, in South Africa, Africa at large (beginning with Uganda), and elsewhere.

Approved Implementing Agents receive (at no charge) a copyrighted package of materials, which consists of the following documents: Service Agreement among the parties, training guides, guide for Peace Committees, PeaceMaking report forms and payment schedules, PeaceBuilding criteria and Memoranda of Agreement, guide to monthly reviews.

The Community Peace Programme assists Partnership Agents in finding sustainable funding and in setting up new Peace Committees. Thereafter the CPP engages in regular reviews leading, if satisfactory, to annual certification; manages the central database of Peace Committee activities, and provides reports and analyses of this data.

Conclusion

The continuing aims of this model of community development are

- to develop Private/Public partnerships involving poor communities and state agencies in a relationship of mutual respect;
- through both the PeaceMaking and the PeaceBuilding processes, to build the capacity and increase the effectiveness of Peace Committee members and community service-providers;
- to build a culture of community solidarity, self-direction and respect for human rights;
- to show how market incentives, in the form of remunerated rather than voluntary work, can be applied to mobilise and organise civil society in the local governance of justice and security;
- to “put bread on the table” in poor families in recognition of their service to the community;
- to extend the model to other countries and jurisdictions, adapting it where appropriate to local circumstances but without compromising its essential foundation – that is the effective mobilisation of local knowledge within an appropriate and facilitative regulatory framework.

Selected Readings

Books

- *The New Structure of Policing*, Clifford Shearing and David Bayley, Washington: The National Institute of Justice, U.S. Department of Justice, 2001.
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