



Tackling Youth Violence Colloquium, Ikhusi Primary School, Khayelitsha, 15 June 2013

Summary of Proceedings

On 15 June 2013 AMANDLA EduFootball (AMANDLA), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and the University of Cape Town's Safety and Violence Initiative (SaVI) hosted a colloquium entitled 'Tackling Youth Violence'. This event took place at Ikhusi Primary School in Site B, Khayelitsha, with the purpose of the event being to highlight the challenges around violence that young people living in Khayelitsha face on a daily basis; and to discuss potential strategies for, and practical approaches to, violence reduction and prevention. This event was run simultaneously to AMANDLA's annual immensely popular twenty-four hour youth football event.

The colloquium was attended by more 50 invited participants, drawn from government, academia, non-governmental organisations, the United Nations Children's Fund, community organisations, religious bodies and concerned parents from Khayelitsha. High-level speakers from government included Dan Plato, MEC for Community Safety in the Western Cape and the Hon Masizole Mngasela, Member of Parliament (Democratic Alliance). Ntutu Mtwana from Violence Prevention through Urban Upgrading facilitated the event.

Key Discussion Points

Substance abuse

Numerous participants, such as Xolisa Mandlokazi and Boniswa Tima emphasised the link between substance abuse (particularly alcohol and drugs) and violence. Participants noted that violence often took place as a result altercations following excessive consumption of alcohol and hard drugs, and that drug trafficking and consumption was central component of gangsterism.

In addition, Cathy Ward from the UCT's Department of Psychology reported that foetal brain development is adversely affected if expectant mothers frequently abuse alcohol and drugs during pregnancy. Once born, these children will

subsequently struggle to learn, which may make them predisposed to disruptive and violent behaviour.

Poverty

Ian Edelstein from the ICRC presented a theory of youth violence, and suggested that poverty is an important determining factor in understanding pathways to violence. The link between poverty and violence subsequently became a moot point among other speakers and participants. There was agreement that youth violence tended to be concentrated in areas affected by high levels of poverty, but it was stressed by some observers that not all violent people are poor.

Parents and parenting

It was repeatedly emphasised that parents were central to either creating an environment where violence amongst youth people flourishes, or providing children with a balanced psychological grounding that will make them less prone to engage in acts of violence. Some speakers advised that harsh and inconsistent parenting has the potential to result in unruly and violent behaviour in children. The reason for this is that such a parental approach does not establish clear guidelines for, and communicate to children, what is considered acceptable and unacceptable behaviour (with the appropriate rewards and punishment being provided accordingly).

Lerato Kossie claimed that there currently was a major communication gap between the youth and the elders, and there was a crucial need more spaces for spaces to be created for young and old to talk, share experiences and improve inter-generational understanding. Rev Rich Mbuli from Khayelitsha noted that responsible parents should establish networks and structures to constructively address key contributing factors to youth violence.

Cathy Ward suggested that, based on existing research, children who displayed violent behaviour often had parents who had committed criminal offences and/or the parents were often aggressive and abusive towards each other (which often involved physical violence). Children of such parents often see violence as an acceptable means to resolve conflicts. Another participant claimed that some parents even condone violent behaviour by their children and/or conceal them when the police are looking to arrest them.

Peers and friends

There was general consensus that peers and friends were crucial in the equations for both violence and violence prevention. Lerato Kossie emphasised that young people typically search for a sense of belonging, which is often satisfied by joining or establishing friendship circles and peer groups. There was agreement amongst the participants that if children regularly interacted with deviant and troublesome peers then they themselves would become unruly, dysfunctional and potentially violent. This was particularly the case with street gangs, where the threat and/or use of violence are an every day occurrence.

Boniswa Tima noted that in some situations girlfriends were supportive of their boyfriends' involvement in gangs. Hence, it was stressed that strategies and processes should be pursued that encourage youth to pursue friendships with more "positive" peer groups.

Schools

Many participants emphasised the important role that schools can play in mitigating and preventing youth violence. The key ingredients are: qualified and dedicated teachers (who can be positive role models for children); an appropriate teaching curriculum; variety of extra-mural activities; effective school management and administration; active parental involvement.

In terms of teaching, it was stressed that teachers should provide appropriate rewards (especially for achievements) and punishment (for unruly behaviour), which should be administered in a fair and consistent manner. There were some views that corporal punishment was not an effective means of punishment for children, as other than being illegal, it effectively teaches children to attempt to conceal or deny inappropriate behaviour.

Sport and other leisure activities

One of the main purposes of the colloquium was to explore the extent to which sport and other structured leisure activities can result in a reduction of violence. Ian Edelstein suggested that sport and similar activities introduces new models of behaviour, which result in more focused individual thinking about ones body, which has the potential to lead to less substance abuse, and the development of more positive peer networks. This view was shared by many participants, such as Melvin Maras, who commended AMANDLA for the manner in which their football programmes had improved the lives of a number of youth in Khayelitsha.

There was consensus that the more involved youth were in a variety of sporting, cultural and other extramural activities, the less opportunities there were for them to engage in in problematic behaviour. However, many participants indicated that access by youth to such activities in Khayelitsha was limited, either due to insufficient funds or the inaccessibility of such programmes. Xolisa Mandlokazi noted that there is a noticeable lack of recreational facilities throughout Khayelitsha.

Religion

There was some discussion about the role that religion can play in preventing violence, especially around: the nature of spiritual accountability; norms and values of compassion, love and tolerance (that are promoted by most major religions); and the potential positive role modelling of religious leaders for youth. Rev Rich Mbuli expressed concern that there were more shabeens and taverns in Khayelitsha than places of worship.

Government

There was general agreement that all levels of government should support and/or provide variety of positive extramural activities for youth in areas such as Khayelitsha. Dan Plato (MEC for Community Safety in the Western Cape government) and David Abrahams (Department of Social Development in the Western Cape government) both indicated that government was making significant efforts in this regard. The Western Cape government's youth development strategy was presented, which has a violence prevention and reduction objective. David Abrahams also suggested that the academic community should provide government with ideas of best practice programming for youth violence reduction.

Chris Giles from Violence Prevention through Urban Upgrading (VPUU) provided feedback on the practical interventions that the City of Cape Town and Western Cape government have supported in Khayelitsha. Such interventions included the upgrading of public spaces in the Harare section of Khayelitsha with a view to safety promotion. There have also been a series of programmes geared towards social crime prevention.

Cathy Ward indicated that poor service provided by government officials, such as teachers and police personnel, has the potential to contribute to youth violence. Consequently, government should consistently hold police and teachers to account for policing and teaching, and take appropriate action against those that do not adequately perform.

Building resilience

It was emphasised throughout the colloquium that only a minority of youth engage in violence acts and/or join gangs and criminal groups. Hence, there was general consensus that there needs to be a better of understanding of youth resilience to violence, and how this can be consolidated and encouraged.

About the Event Partners

AMANDLA EduFootball

AMANDLA EduFootball (AMANDLA) is an international Non-Profit Organisation that has a base in both South Africa and Germany. The organisation's mission is to create safe spaces that bring together the power of football and learning to empower youth and change lives. This informs AMANDLA's vision of a world where all young people access equal opportunities, strive to realise their full potential, and dare to dream. AMANDLA's dynamic approach is founded on community and youth participation, shared expertise, innovative thinking, on-going reflection and replication.

International Committee of the Red Cross

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is an impartial, neutral and independent organization whose exclusively humanitarian mission is to protect the lives and dignity of victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence and to provide them with assistance. The ICRC also endeavours to prevent suffering by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and universal humanitarian principles. Established in 1863, the ICRC is at the origin of the Geneva Conventions and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. It directs and coordinates the international activities conducted by the Movement in armed conflicts and other situations of violence.

Safety and Violence Initiative

The Safety and Violence Initiative (SaVI) was established at the University of Cape Town (UCT) in 2010 as a key UCT imperative through the Vice-Chancellor's Strategic Fund. SaVI facilitates debate, research and interventions across the university on understanding and responding to violence as well as promoting safety. SaVI brings together scholars from various faculties across UCT.