

Governing Security: A working model in South Africa - The Peace Committee

by

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The Community Peace Programme

The Community Peace Programme coordinates, facilitates and supports people engaged in re-imagining and transforming the way in which governance generally – and safety and security in particular – is accomplished. In doing so, it develops, reflects upon and makes available ways of doing, thinking and living that make innovations in governance possible.

In particular, we work to facilitate the validation and effective application of local knowledge and capacity as a massive but under-valued resource, making it possible for communities of 'ordinary' citizens to enter into effective partnerships of mutual respect with state agencies and specialist professionals.

The challenge

- Whose knowledge and experience is valued?
- By what means and through what agencies or institutions is security with justice produced in any given community?
- How, in particular, can the knowledge and experience of groups and communities in civil society be effectively and sustainably mobilised in the common interest?
- How may broad-based concepts of justice and human rights be integrated into social projects?
- What, in these circumstances, are the responsibilities of the state?
- 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?

The post-apartheid South African context

Questions of this kind became exceptionally prominent in public life in South Africa in the early 1990s after the collapse of the apartheid regime. Anything seemed possible, and there was – and to some extent continues to be – an exceptional opportunity to think freshly about the kind of society we wished to live in.

'Reconstruction and Development' was the leading slogan of the new government for the first few years, and – encouraged by the exceptionally enlightened guidelines laid down in the new national Constitution - a great deal of energy and creativity went into developing policies and strategies aimed at social transformation.

In the area of safety and security, for example – a crucial element in a period of radical social change – the concept of 'policing' was revisited, with the general agreement that policing is not the monopoly of the police, or even of the state. On the contrary, security may be seen as the collective responsibility of networks of state agencies and commercial and non-commercial 'partners'. The possibility was thus opened up of taking more seriously the capacity of communities to contribute to their own safety and security (and, of course, other aspects of their wellbeing).

The beginnings

In late 1997, with the strong encouragement of the then Minister of Justice, the Community Peace Programme launched a deliberately model-building experiment in the rural town of Worcester (the Xhosa name for the suburb, Zwelethemba, means 'place of hope'), in the Western Cape. Specifically, the focus was to be on questions of safety and security in the local context, and the aim was to build a sustainable model of local governance, based on the mobilisation of local knowledge and capacity around issues of dispute-resolution and community-building.

This work, then, has been concerned with developing structures and ways of doing things that can be sustained over time that enable poor people to:

- Control and direct what happens in their communities,
- Rely on their own knowledge and capacity in their planning and in putting their plans into action, and
- Access money to support their planning and actions.

Governance and Security

The Peace Committee model is, as we have said, designed to enable people to manage their own lives. 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.

There are two main processes in this model, which we refer to as "PeaceMaking" and "PeaceBuilding".

PeaceMaking

Peace Committees operate according to a Code of Good Practice (see below). When a complaint is brought to a Peace Committee, an agreed set of procedures are 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 Gathering is guided through several stages, with all those present being encouraged to take part: first, statements and discussion on what happened and its consequences; then an attempt to identify the root cause(s) of the problem, and finally discussion to produce an appropriate action plan agreed by all, to try and ensure that the problem does not recur. The focus of the gathering therefore 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 of Good Practice that says 'Here are our values, here is what we are committed to'. In South Africa a key feature of this Code is that "we don't use force to solve problems". The purpose of the Code is to ensure that people know the key values of the Peace Committee so that people know what to expect.
- 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 the vigilante route (which is relatively common in poor communities in the larger South African cities).
- 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 understand what has been going on, they organize 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 peoples' 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 under *Community Peace Centres*). Either way, the environment is informal and non-threatening.
- At a Gathering, after reading the Code of Good Practice, 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 labelled as a victim or an offender. Rather they are seen as people who have a dispute.
- At a Gathering (whether for PeaceMaking or for PeaceBuilding) 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 apologize 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 always does happen at the close of a Gathering is that the people present do something that symbolizes their commitment to what has been decided. This might be a dance, or a song, or a prayer or a holding of hands or a combination of things like that.

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.

Code of Good Practice

Members of this peace committee use these guidelines in the course of their work as peacemakers:

- We help to create a safe and secure environment in our community
- We respect the South African Constitution
- We work within the law
- We do not use force or violence
- We do not take sides in disputes
- We work in the community as a co-operative team, not as individuals
- We follow procedures which are open for the community to see
- We do not gossip about our work or about other people
- We are committed in what we do
- Our aim is to heal, not to hurt

Problems and disputes brought to PeaceMaking Gatherings for facilitation have included unpaid loans and child maintenance, insults and fighting, theft and domestic violence. In all these matters, 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.

Payments

Before going on to the PeaceBuilding part of the model, we need to consider the matter of payments. 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, two-thirds goes into the pockets of the Peace Committee members who facilitated the PeaceMaking Gathering, while one third 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.

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 base-line 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, as far as they can, to make sure that as much of this money stays in the community as possible.

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

There are now (February 2005) 20 Peace Committees in South Africa, and they have facilitated the resolution of over 11 000 peace-gatherings. These gatherings have 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 7000 gatherings, which took place over 4 years. By now about 40 000 people have been involved in participating directly in solving problems in their communities through the 'window' of gatherings. That is, 40 000 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. On average, 5.6 Peace Committee members were involved in each gathering.

In gatherings, 59% of the participants were women, and 17% were youth. 62% of the Peace Committee members who facilitated gatherings were women.

The distribution of issues that gave rise to gatherings was as follows. The most frequent issues (36%) were to do with money (money-lending disputes, non-payment

of loans or for goods and misappropriation of funds). Insults, threats and gossiping made up 17% of the total number, while property offences made up 20%.

In 96% 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

The continuing evolution of the Peace Committee model takes place against the background of a very broad and important question. That is, what kind of partnership can be built between the state and civil society, in which the resources, knowledge, capacity and responsibility of each party can be given practicable and effective expression?

From the beginning of the pilot project in Zwelethemba in 1998, a good working relationship was established with the SAPS 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'), as described in the following section.

Community Peace Centres

In April 2002 the Community Peace Programme were approached by the Area Commissioner for the South African Police Service in the Boland, 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, 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 peace-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.

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 (the SAPS 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'.

Global Implications

The broad underlying issues raised and responded to in the development of this model – that is, the responsibilities of the state, the relations between the state and civil society, and specifically the capacity of civil society organisations to play an appropriate, accountable and effective part in building safe communities – are by no means confined to South Africa. For example, the Peace Committee model was introduced in Argentina (Rosario) in 2001, and local implementing agencies in Canada (Montreal and Trois Rivieres) and Australia (Bendigo, in Victoria) have decided to establish pilot Peace Committees and are at present seeking local funding.

Conclusion

As is evident, the model outlined in this report has already been tested well beyond the original pilot site. Furthermore, procedures have been developed for ensuring that it can be sustained and for ensuring that the principle of utilising local knowledge and

capacity that is so essential to it is given practical effect. In addition, detailed operational procedures for managing Peace Committees on a wider scale are being constantly refined as the network is extended. As part of this process, the Community Peace Programme has by agreement taken on a regulatory role, in relation both to financial accounting and to the the monitoring of the PeaceMaking and PeaceBuilding procedures.

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.
- Governing Security: Explorations in Security and Justice, Les Johnston and Clifford Shearing, London: Routledge, 2002.

Articles and Chapters in Books

- John Braithwaite, 'The New Regulatory State and the Transformation of Criminology', *British Journal of Criminology* 40, 222-238, 2000.
- Clifford Shearing, 'Transforming Security: A South African Experiment', pp. 14-34 in *Restorative Justice and Civil Society*, H. Strang and J. Braithwaite, Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Declan Roche, 'Restorative Justice and the Regulatory State in South African Townships', *British Journal of Criminology* 42, 514-533, 2002.
- Clifford Shearing and Jennifer Wood, "Nodal Governance, Democracy and the New 'Denizens': Challenging the Westphalian Ideal" in Steve Robins (ed.) *Limits to Liberation: Culture, Citizenship and Governance After Apartheid*, Oxford: James Currey, 2004.
- John Cartwright and Madeleine Jenneker, 'Mobilising Local Knowledge and Capacity: A South African Case Study', *New Community Quarterly*, Melbourne (forthcoming, 2005).

Note

'Ideaswork', the name of our URL, is a term we have chosen in order to stress the dynamic link between theory and practice – ideas work. If and when the Peace Committee/Community Peace Centre model is extended through other agencies than the Community Peace Programme, Ideaswork will become an institution that carries out the training and monitoring functions that are at present embedded in the CPP.

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Once again, this is being done in and through the crucible of practice, which ensures that local people are part of the process through which the principles and procedures they will be applying are developed. This insistence on the full participation of civil society is matched by an insistence on pursuing mutually respectful partnerships with state agencies.

To conclude: the strength of this model lies in

- the lawful and effective mobilisation of local knowledge and capacity around local conflicts and problems
- the consequent negotiation of complementary relationships with state agencies, in the service of the public good.