

OVERVIEW OF COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS FROM SEPTEMBER 2009 TO APRIL 2010

The NMF programme was implemented against a backdrop of violent community protests unparalleled in recent history. Occurring in several townshipsⁱ across the country, the violence had been linked to public protests over corruption and failures of local government to deliver basic services such as housing, electricity, sanitation and other essential services. However, fuelled by entrenched xenophobic attitudes, not unlike 2008, refugees and other migrants became easy targets for communities' frustration and anger. In the first five months of 2010 at least eleven incidents were recorded in five provinces involving violent attacks and looting of shops, particularly of Somali and Ethiopian nationals.

Within this general mood of anger, on the one hand, and profound fear, on the other, community conversations proceeded, with minimal disruption. Between September 2009 and April 2010, 21 community conversations were successfully completed, bringing to 30 the total number of community conversations conducted during this programme. As mentioned previously, the community conversations took place against the background of angry, and often violent, community protest action about the slow pace of housing, electricity, sanitation and other service delivery concerns. Community members' frustration about their living poor conditions; a perceived state of lawlessness where criminal and rogue elements continue to operate with impunity; and the apparent lack of accountability from key local and provincial government departments, therefore, featured prominently throughout the conversations. The objective, in each of the 11 local sites where community conversations were held, was to identify and develop relationships with key stakeholders and, through the process of dialogue, enable community structures to take responsibility for the continuation of community dialogues. The overall approach in all conversations, taking due account of the specific dynamics and unique set of challenges in the respective sites, was to accompany communities through a set of exercises to identify their most burning issues; to enable them to explore the root causes of their challenges; and to facilitate a process of action planning with a view to identifying the key stakeholders that would continue the dialogue process beyond the NMF-supported process. Some of the key tools used included the Historical Time Line, the Tree Analysis, the Five Friends of Planning, and Envisioning the Future. The section below details some of the burning issues identified and the structures put in place to continue the dialogue process in each of the implementation sites.

Atteridgeville

- The need to put in place truly participatory and representative processes to promote community-based conflict resolution and reconciliation.
- The under-representation of youth in community consultative forums and community development initiatives. They recommended the setting up of projects aimed at youth empowerment, particularly in skills development and rights awareness.
- The reported lack of understanding within the community of structures and mechanisms aimed at strengthening democracy. They felt that both government and civil society organisations must put more emphasis on demystifying the notion of democracy; consult more with communities to understand their expectations of democracy; and where needed, realign communities expectations with that which realistically can be achieved e.g housing, basic services etc.
- The apparent lack of participation of migrants and migrant organisations in community initiatives. They felt that some of the misperceptions of migrants, among the host communities, can be addressed if migrants are encouraged to play a more active role in the social and economic development of the community.

Following lengthy and often tense discussions, community decided to set up an ad hoc committee, inclusive civic associations, community structures and migrant formations, to be coordinated by the Speakers Office.

Albert Park

- Degeneration of values - breakdown of family unit and the dearth of role models, drug and alcohol abuse, materialism and the influence of the media;
- Crime - unemployment and poverty, destruction of cultural values, drugs and alcohol abuse;
- Rights and cultural awareness - historical legacy of apartheid and colonialism, leaders motivated by self-interest, lack of transparency and accountability, illiteracy, apathy and despondency;
- Access to resources - language barrier, lack of accountability, lack of documentation, low levels of literacy, financial and administrative barriers, and lack of trust;

- Leadership and participation - poor communication, selfishness, dictatorship, competition at the expense of cooperation and a failure to recognize gender equality.

A committee was put in place to follow through on the Action Plans. The community was briefed on positive developments in relation to these issues such as the presentation of a petition of liquor petition calling for the reduction in the number of liquor outlets in the area; ongoing discussions to integrate migrants into the local CPF structure and an audit of the skills possessed by foreign nationals in the area which could form a basis for skills sharing programmes with locals

Nkomazi

- Exploitative labour practices fuelled by high numbers of migrants from SADC countries, especially Swaziland and Mozambique and the tendency among employers to exploit their vulnerability.
- Perception of high levels of corruption especially with regard to the issuance of refugee permits or permits for economic migrants, resulting in many migrants operating without legal documentation.
- Low levels of education, coupled with high levels of unemployment.

Formation of a Working Committee with representatives from Mozambique, Somalia, Pakistan, Swaziland, and local community structures.

Leandra

- Fear among migrants because of the wide-spread rumour that xenophobic attacks will take place after the Fifa 2010 World Cup.
- High levels of poverty and unemployment – seen as the underlying reasons for alcohol and substance abuse and high crime rate.

Follow up activities could not be planned due to violent protests and subsequent cancellation of community conversation.

Walmer

- Perception of general lawlessness, lack of trust in police and the tendency to 'take law into our own hands'

- High levels of unemployment especially among the youth, seen as the major contributors to alcohol abuse, teen pregnancies and break down of family unit.
- Ongoing struggle to secure legal documents such as birth certificates, social grants- many households supported by grandmothers who have the added burden of caring for children's children.

Red Cross Society, Lovelife and Department of Social Development made commitment to continue with community dialogues.

Jeffreys Bay

- Crimes such as housebreaking, human trafficking and domestic violence are very rife, fuelled by the mushrooming of shebeens, high levels of alcohol and substance abuse.
- Perception that violence against migrants is instigated by criminal elements and not xenophobia. Criminals are targeting migrants because they are interested in their goods and money.
- The absence of a high school contributes to the high rate of school drop-outs
- The general community do not take ownership of Jeffrey's Bay and therefore do not feel they have a stake in the development of the community

Follow up activities could not be planned due to violent protests and subsequent cancellation of community conversation

Nyanga

- Who belongs to Nyanga? The community of Nyanga has to exercise its right to determine who really belongs here based on the contributions they make to the community.
- Migrant shop owners do not always take account to relevant business regulations, resulting in conflicts with local spaza shop owners.
- Lack of capacity of local leaders to provide direction to the community and to address their economic challenges.

Despite drawing up Action Plans, the community was reluctant to take responsibility for the implementation of plans. In the end it was agreed that the Institute for Healing of memories, supported by other operational partners will continue the dialogues in the Western Cape.

Diepsloot

- Complicity in and responsibility of community members to stamp out corruption. In remaining silent when crimes are committed, receiving stolen goods or enabling violence against migrants, the community contributes to the culture of silence that enshrouds criminality and violence.
- The need to involve youth in community activities and to ensure youth representation on various community structures. They undertook to launch a public campaign in June and to use community activities planned for 'Youth Month' to break the silence around corruption and crime.
- The need to elect competent, responsive and accountable leaders and to communicate clear criteria, values and competencies that they expect of their leadership to enable greater decentralisation of resources to stimulate economic activity at community level; the identification and development of co-operatives to initiate joint projects and greater skills-sharing, especially between host and migrant communities; and the promotion of sustainable community-driven activities that will lead to self-sufficiency.
- General lack of awareness about policies and laws relating to refugees, asylum seekers and other categories of migrants. City of Joburg's Migrant Help Desk, must embark on programmes to raise awareness about the rights and responsibilities of migrants, including their right to participate in economic development activities in Diepsloot.

Formed 9 –person committee to promote the implementation of the Action Plan developed in the community conversation. The Migrant Help desk of the City of Joburg has also committed to assisting the committee especially in terms of promoting awareness about refugee and migrant rights.

Cato Manor

- The need to inculcate tolerance and respect for the rights of all, including the right of migrants in South Africa.
- The need to build open communication and consultation between leadership structures (church, community leaders, local government) to ensure that root causes of conflict are addressed.

- Put in place strategies to promote the transfer of skills to promote self-reliance and overcome barriers to cohesion between South African and migrant communities.

Set up a committee housed by local government to follow up on recommendations and outcomes adopted

ⁱ Orange Farm, Sedibeng, Siyathemba township in Balfour, Leandra, Lesilie, Oogies, Accornhoek near Bushbuckridge, Chochocho near White River in Mpumalanga, Protea-Glen, Dobsonville-Gardens in Soweto, Ennerdale in Fine Town, Reiger Park in the East Rand, Parys, Diepsloot, Attridgeville and Mamelodi, to name a few.