

Lessons from community-based initiatives to prevent violence

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Community-based organisations can make a significant long-term contribution to the development of communities and the prevention of violence, while strengthening social cohesion. This report presents case studies of three long-standing community initiatives, showing the multiple social benefits they bring in challenging contexts.

Key findings

- ▶ The organisations profiled in this report have made a significant contribution to the physical, emotional and social wellbeing of community members.
- ▶ Building solidarity and agency is necessary for social change. In impoverished and oppressed communities this requires intensive support. Community-based organisations play a significant, catalytic role in responding to immediate community needs. At the same time, they invest in knowledge and skills-building activities that bolster confidence and recognition of agency.
- ▶ The enormity of challenges confronting these communities results in persistent vulnerability. Organisations working in such desperate contexts have to constantly render services that respond to immediate community needs in a way that is consistent with a long-term transformative vision. They also have to optimise social capital in their communities while raising funds and accessing resources from outside to remain operational.
- ▶ The experiences of community-based initiatives can be collated into a ‘common elements’ framework containing the following guidelines:
 - Consistently build knowledge and skills
 - Work collaboratively and in ways that are empowering
 - Promote values of respect, care and appreciation of each other (as people and in terms of their contribution)
 - Respond to the immediate needs of a community and be flexible
 - Provide interventions that are not one-dimensional and open access to opportunities
 - Role-model positive behaviours
 - Build relationships and expand networks
 - Identify allies that are well-resourced and/or have access to resourced networks

Recommendations

Given the challenges of the contexts in which community-based organisations work, and their contribution to violence prevention and community development, the following are essential:

- ▶ Government agencies, private sector partners and donors must identify funding mechanisms to enable community-based organisations in impoverished communities to sustain their interventions through longer funding cycles that enable flexibility and innovation.
- ▶ Established non-governmental organisations with a national footprint (such as the Institute for Security Studies) should create and facilitate platforms to explore supportive funding mechanisms for community-based organisations.
- ▶ Provincial governments should consider mapping existing non-governmental organisations that provide services to address the risk factors for violence. They should build collaborative relationships with them to enable strong referrals between non-governmental organisations and government services. This will increase opportunities to respond effectively to the needs of communities.

Setting the scene

In 2019, the Western Cape Provincial Government identified safety as an overarching priority. It formulated a provincial safety plan,¹ recognising the importance of 'interconnected and holistic responses' to prevent violence.

This resonated with the work of the Institute for Security Studies' (ISS) Justice and Violence Prevention Programme, which has explored how to improve and provide 'interconnected and holistic responses' to prevent violence, including through the Violence Prevention Forum.² These facilitated platforms present an opportunity to overcome an information gap about what is being done to prevent violence.³

The creation of locally driven initiatives that offer sustained interventions is of keen interest

Through the work in the Western Cape, provincial platforms that comprise government and civil society organisations (CSOs) have expressed the need to gain in-depth insight into long-standing community-based initiatives that show evidence of an impact.⁴ In grappling with how to build on successful community interventions and introduce these into local settings, questions that have repeatedly emerged include:

- How have interventions been initiated, structured and implemented and who (from which sectors) has been involved?
- How have interventions evolved and/or changed since being introduced within the community?
- What have been the successes and challenges encountered in the delivery of the interventions?
- Who has experienced/benefitted/accessed the interventions? How has this shifted since the introduction of the interventions?
- What difference have the interventions made, to whom, and how has this been determined?
- What practices have enabled the sustained provision of interventions to prevent violence in the community?

- What conditions have to be established in order to optimise the impact of interventions to prevent violence in the community?

The three community organisations studied

In an effort to respond to the questions above and contribute to knowledge about how to enable local violence prevention responses, ISS undertook research to determine the elements that constitute models for sustainable community-based violence prevention. This research also sought to establish whether these interventions could be replicated in other areas, given the uniqueness of each context.

Three long-standing community-based organisations (CBOs) form the basis for this research:

- Seven Passes Initiative (SPI) started in Touwsrante in 2008 (www.sevenpasses.org.za/)
- Net vir Pret [Just for fun] (NvP) was initiated in Barrydale in 2002 (www.netvirpret.co.za/)
- Hantam Community Education Trust (HCET) started in Colesberg in 1989 (<http://hantam-trust.org.za/>)

All three organisations offer, among other things, educational support aimed at exposing children to opportunities that can enable them to thrive academically, socially and emotionally. The rationale for the establishment of each of these initiatives differs significantly, with violence prevention an explicit objective of the SPI, somewhat present as an objective for the HCET and less so in the case of NvP.

Since their establishment, the initiatives have become fully functioning organisations embedded in their respective communities where they are now a valued resource. As violence plagues so many localities across South Africa, the creation of locally driven initiatives that offer sustained interventions is of keen interest, especially if lessons from their success can support their upscaling.

This report first presents the theoretical framework and the method that has been applied in this research. Thereafter, the findings are presented, followed by an analysis and discussion.

A community-based ecological perspective

In earlier work undertaken by the ISS, the ecological systems theory provided a lens through which to

examine whether the Western Cape’s After School Game Changer programme could be categorised as a violence prevention intervention.⁵ This gave an important systems perspective, reflecting the way an individual is positioned relative to his/her context. The ecological systems theory⁶ enables an understanding of the ways in which initiatives to prevent violence can be located in order to shift the behaviour of an individual.

However, for the purposes of gaining insight into the sustainability of community-based violence prevention interventions, this theory is insufficient.

In *Violence in Context*, Wing Ye Chan et al⁷ argue that the ecological systems theory does not sufficiently emphasise the interconnectedness between the layers – especially between the individual and the community and society (Figure 1). A way in which to give greater attention to the inter-relatedness of these layers in the system is through a focus on the centrality of culture.

A community-based ecological approach attempts to re-configure the original ecological approach, highlighting the community and societal context

and the centrality of culture in interrogating how this influences the individual. This approach shifts away from a focus on the individual within the system. Instead, it concentrates on the dynamics within the system – the cultural norms, values, beliefs, practices – and their influence on the individual and groups.

To be sustainable, interventions must be aligned to a sufficient degree with the culture(s) of a community

In the application of this approach there is an understanding that a geographical community is made up of various groups, each with its own set of norms, values, beliefs and practices that inevitably influence the behaviour of the individuals within the group and the group as a whole. Thus, there is an explicit recognition that multiple cultures exist within a system and that the subtleties of these cultures need to be considered.

In order for community-based violence prevention interventions to be sustained, the assumption is that these interventions must be aligned to a sufficient degree

Figure 1: Ecological model with individual at the centre

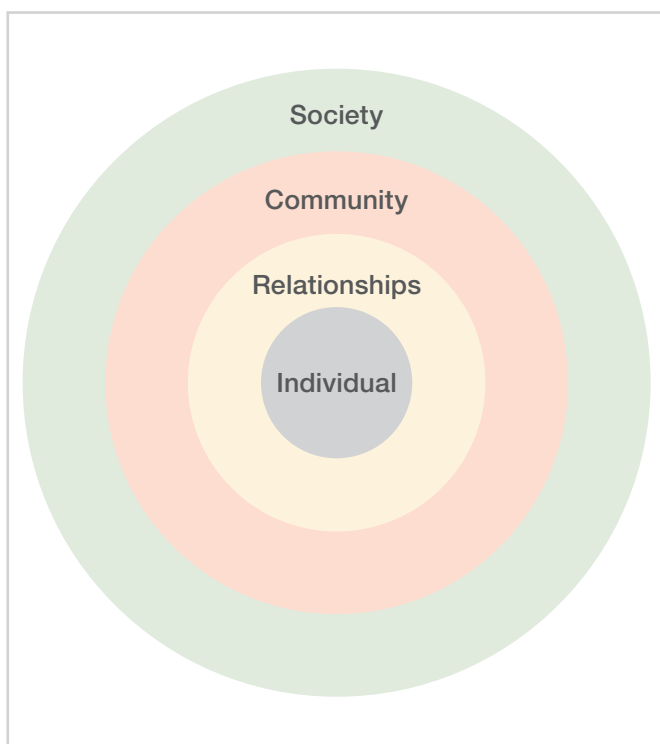
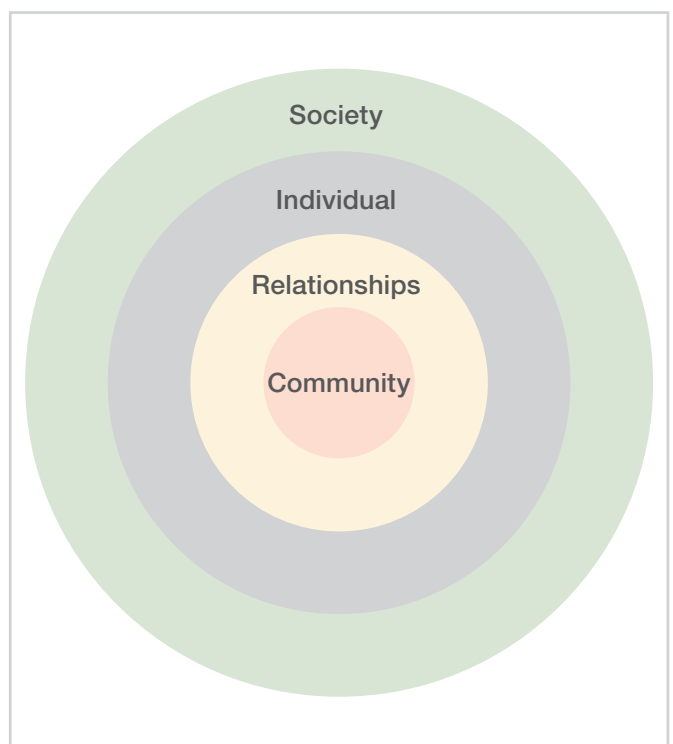


Figure 2: Community-based ecological model with community at the centre



with the culture(s) of a community or communities. The community-based ecological model enables this assumption to be interrogated.

The distinction between the focus on an individual and one that affords greater attention to the cultures within a geographical community, and how this influences the various components of the system – including the individual – is informed by the following principles:

- **Cycling of resources:** Resources are considered in relation to people, settings and events with an emphasis on ensuring violence prevention interventions produce resources that remain within a community beyond the research/initial intervention.
- **Interdependence:** This examines the dynamic and reciprocal relationships between people and settings, shedding light on the distribution of power and resources within settings. Interventions need to address inequality and be empowering so that the negotiation capabilities within individuals, groups, and communities are strengthened to enable them to gain access to resources.
- **Succession:** This includes understanding the history of the community and how the people in the setting respond to change, thereby formulating interventions that support and maximise resources within the community. Short-term intervention goals need to be linked to longer-term community development goals. Community independence and ownership are essential.

Communities are situated within a broader societal context. While it is not highlighted in this approach, the history of the society is paramount as it too informs the way in which communities are structured and the related dynamics within communities. In South Africa, which has a deep, long history of oppression, the trauma of the past continues to have an indelible impact. For example, it manifests in significant levels of violence, with impoverished black communities, women and children most adversely affected.⁸

Community-based interventions refer to those that are located within a specific geographical community. This research had an explicit interest in examining how community engagement occurs within each context, the

extent to which community ownership exists, and who is involved and/or excluded over time.⁹

The community-based interventions examined in this report have been operational for more than 10 years. Thus the application of the principles of the community-based ecological systems model first explores the history of the community in relation to the broader society (succession). What follows is an examination of the dynamic and reciprocal relationships (interdependence) and thereafter reflections on the resources (cycling of resources).

The trauma of the past has an indelible impact, manifesting in significant levels of violence

This approach supports the location of culture at the centre of the research process. In applying the community-based ecological model, the research showcases the following aspects of the interventions selected:

- A historical overview of the community interventions, outlining how they were established, who was involved and how people are positioned in the organisation relative to the community where implementation occurs
- A contextual description of the communities in which the initiative is based
- An understanding of the cultures of the communities
- Insight into how the violence prevention interventions have been shaped and adapted within the selected communities and the 'fit' with the cultures in those communities
- The transformative effect of the interventions within the selected communities
- Lessons learned since the community interventions were implemented – successes and challenges

Community-based interventions unearth a tension between community work and community organising and activism. The distinction between the two concepts sees the former defined as working with a community to render a service, and the latter as working

collaboratively with community stakeholders to transform or develop the community.¹⁰

The analysis of the initiatives reveals how the models employed manage the tension between ‘surviving’ and ‘transforming’, providing a perspective of progress along such a continuum from community work towards community organising. The lessons from practice draw attention to the ‘intangible’. They illustrate how to engage with a potential ‘common elements’ framework for developing or adapting interventions to prevent violence and taking these interventions to scale.

Community-based projects unearth a tension between community work and community organising and activism

These organisations are located within socio-economically deprived communities and were established to address the risks associated with youth violence. In order to understand crime and delinquency, social disorganisation theory examines the following:

- Social capital – factors that facilitate mutually beneficial cooperation between citizens
- Network density – the level of trust and participation within local structures and organisations
- Collective efficacy – a willingness to intervene for the collective good¹¹

The theory emphasises the norms and values within local contexts, and the reciprocal way in which communities and individuals influence these norms and values. In addition, there is an acknowledgement that when there is violence within a community, the entire community is affected – psychologically, physically, economically – and cannot be ignored when examining social capital, network density and collective efficacy.¹²

Social disorganisation theory is well matched with the community-based ecological approach as both suggest that violence prevention interventions are unlikely to influence norms and values that affect youth violence if community engagement is not well planned and implemented.¹³

The theoretical lens of social disorganisation theory will bring to the fore varying dynamics within the local context that are essential to understand, and against which interventions intended to prevent violence need to be studied. This theoretical lens was used to analyse the data gathered for each of the community-based interventions. This level of detail was necessary to generate a ‘common elements’ framework.

Research method

Previously, the ISS explored the Western Cape’s After School Game Changer programme, recognising that this co-ordinating mechanism could be considered a key intervention to prevent violence.¹⁴ This research builds on that by focusing on two community interventions in the Western Cape province – the SPI in Touwsrante and NvP in Barrydale. Both organisations aimed to reduce the risk of youth violence by introducing after school programmes and have subsequently expanded into a more diverse suite of interventions.

Furthermore, the provincial focus enables the ISS to align the research with provincial policy and provide information that can be used to support the implementation of the province’s safety plan. These community interventions are compared to a community intervention in the Northern Cape that is among the longest standing primary prevention interventions, namely the HCET. The information gathering process constituted three steps:

- A review of online documentation such as annual reports for each of the organisations.
- Interviews and/or focus group discussions with approximately six representatives from each of the organisations: the director, board member, staff members (one who was with the organisation in the ‘set-up’ stage and one that has joined more recently), and community representatives. In Barrydale, three in-depth interviews were conducted and a focus group set up with 13 members of the NvP team (board, staff, interns). With HCET, a focus group was conducted via an online platform with six members and shorter one-on-one interviews were held with each focus group participant. With SPI, two focus group discussions were held and three in-depth interviews were conducted.

- Follow-up discussions with selected interviewees from each community-based initiative, allowing an analysis of the interviews to be shared in order to obtain responses and elaborate on any gaps that became apparent through the interview process.

Dissemination of the research is a critical aspect of the research process. The research report was shared with each of the participating organisations before publication to ensure that their work was accurately reflected. Feedback was incorporated into the research report.

This report is intended as a vehicle to initiate peer exchanges among the SPI, NvP and HCET, in order to encourage networking and foster shared learning across these community-based initiatives. Discussions will be held with donors, policy makers and other key stakeholders to explore how better the CBOs can be supported in facilitating local level transformation.

Case studies

An overview of each of the communities and the three CBOs is provided below, drawing attention to:

- How the initiative/organisation was established
- A contextual description of the community where it is located and whom it serves
- How the interventions have been shaped with respect to violence prevention

Thereafter, the findings are examined in light of the principles that are central within this model:

- Cycling of resources
- Interdependence
- Succession.

Map 1: Location of the three organisations in South Africa



Seven Passes Initiative

The SPI is located in the Touwsranten community. It was started in 2008 in response to youth gang violence and began by introducing after school education opportunities for young people in Touwsranten, Hoekwil and surrounding farming communities.

Touwsranten is a small rural community located outside of George in the Western Cape. Its location and demographics are reflective of South Africa's apartheid past. The Touwsranten community has a predominantly Afrikaans-speaking 'coloured' population, with the surrounding informal settlement home to a mostly isi-Xhosa speaking population. Poverty and unemployment confront this community, as well as high levels of alcohol abuse and domestic violence. Touwsranten borders the more affluent predominantly white Hoekwil community.

Within the Touwsranten community, there have been several significant developments over the past eight to 10 years. A low-cost housing project provided homes to almost 400 families in October 2012.¹⁵ There have also been infrastructural improvements made to the local



Children playing in the street in Touwsranten, 2019.
Photo: Jonathon Rees, Proof Africa.

primary school¹⁶ and the clinic. According to municipal reports, the population in Touwsranten increased in size in the years leading up to 2015, presenting a challenge that requires 'significant investment from the George municipality'.¹⁷

The vision of SPI is 'for a safe society in which all people, children and adults, are able to realise their full potential and overcome poverty and inequality'.¹⁸ In aspiring to fulfil this vision, SPI has a two-fold mission: (i) improving the lives of people within 'Touwsranten, Hoekwil and the



Touwsranten community, 2019. Photo: Jonathon Rees, Proof Africa.

Garden Route'; and (ii) contributing to knowledge building about interventions that foster positive change in order to expand these interventions. The 'people' whom SPI identifies as their target group include children, youth and caregivers within these geographical parameters of Touwsrante, Hoekwil and the Garden Route.

The SPI grew out of a collaboration among farmers, the private sector and local community members. Over the years, this collaboration has been sustained even though the levels of involvement, particularly from the farmers and businesses in the area, have become less intensive than those of the local community members.

The Board of Trustees comprises a diverse group of individuals. Several are equipped with local knowledge and standing in Touwsrante and surrounding areas. There are also board members who, as a consequence of race and class privilege, are in a position to access a variety of resources to benefit the community, as they are highly skilled and/or well networked individuals.

The current chair of the SPI board is a woman who comes from Touwsrante, who herself benefitted from SPI's after school programme and is a teacher at the local school – a significant feat given the realities of the Touwsrante context.

Seven Passes grew out of a collaboration among farmers, the private sector and local community members

The SPI has evolved since 2008. By 2020 the organisation was offering a comprehensive suite of interventions shaped to render holistic services that would enable children to reach their full potential.¹⁹ Over the years, the SPI has expanded its after school and life skills programmes, introduced early childhood development and positive parenting projects and created a youth development programme.

To contribute towards knowledge creation and sharing, the organisation has partnered with research institutions. Examples include undertaking an evaluation of the impact of the parenting programmes; and a social activation campaign that aimed to foster collective action, in support of positive parenting, within the community.

The suite of programmes was established and refined, based on the needs of the community.

More recently, in the face of the COVID-19 crisis, SPI provided regular meals through pre-existing soup kitchens in Touwsrante and surrounding communities. The organisation also adapted its activities during the successive lockdowns, for example by providing households with activities that caregivers could use to keep children occupied and stimulated.

'The whole community is struggling and vulnerable... We have decided to focus on providing meals. This way, ALL people from the community will be able to receive a meal and not just specific families (as was the case when handing out food parcels). We are working in collaboration with the Hoekwil Ratepayers Association, VGK church, and the George municipality's soup kitchens in Touwsrante to provide soup in at least three different locations in the community for five days a week.'²⁰

As evident from the above excerpt, demonstrating care, adaptability and collaboration are key ingredients of the SPI approach. Some of the gains for the community from the work of the SPI are presented in the box below.

Box 1: Impact of Seven Passes Initiative – Touwsrante, Western Cape

- More than 80% of children in Touwsrante attend after school care daily.
- Twenty young people who benefitted from the SPI programmes have attended tertiary education.
- After school support has been linked to the academic achievements of learners who flourish in high school.
- In 2018/19, a parenting survey that was conducted in the community revealed that parents in Touwsrante are connecting more with each other around parenting compared to 2016.

Source: <https://www.sevenpasses.org.za/>

Net vir Pret

NvP started in 2002 as an after school activity in the Barrydale/Swellendam municipality, which is in the Overberg region of the Western Cape. The intention of the initiative was to provide young children in the area with a constructive and creative outlet in order to keep them safe and away from risky behaviours.

NvP was formally established in 2004 through the efforts of two local residents, both passionate about youth development and concerned about the vulnerability facing young people in Barrydale. The staff team, comprising full-time and part-time members and interns, all reside within the Barrydale community that NvP serves. The Board of Trustees consists of members who reside and own businesses in the more resourced parts of Barrydale.

The board members provide valuable access to networks that enable NvP to facilitate learning opportunities for the young people, as well as the staff who work with the children from this community. For example, children have access to 'matric outreach and bursary' programmes and

educators from NvP have had access to an online course and social and emotional learning workshops.²¹

Like Hoekwil and Touwsrante, Barrydale still reflects apartheid-era spatial planning in which there is visible division between the 'white', 'coloured' and 'African-black' communities. The organisation, which progressed from a classroom to its own building, is located in an area that is home to a predominantly 'coloured' community. The community in which the initiative is located is characterised by poverty, high unemployment, domestic violence and alcohol and drug abuse.

Net vir Pret provides young children with a constructive and creative outlet, keeping them away from risky behaviours

The area in which NvP is located is reliant on farming activities. For many in the Barrydale/Swellendam municipality, employment has been seasonal, with



A bird's eye view of Barrydale, 2021. Photo: Jonathon Rees, Proof Africa.

unskilled 'piece work' available during the harvest period when fruits are picked and packed. Increases in the number of poor households have been observed in the Swellendam area since 2014 and unemployment has remained relatively unchanged at 8.9%.²² The murder rate in Swellendam is 24 per 100 000,²³ which is lower than the provincial rate of 51.7 per 100 000.²⁴

NvP's mission is to empower children from disadvantaged backgrounds 'by giving them the childhood they deserve, by allowing them to play and be creative and to learn that they are capable of achieving'.²⁵ NvP focuses on programmes that will (i) keep children safe; (ii) unleash and develop individual skills and talents; (iii) nurture social skills and leadership capabilities; and (iv) foster a desire to excel in schoolwork and plan realistic career paths.

The emphasis is on exposing children and young people in the community to as many opportunities as possible, both within and outside of Barrydale. Conveying care and belief in the ability of children and young people is at the core of the way NvP approaches its work in the community.

Care and belief in the ability of children and young people is at the core of Net vir Pret's work

Over the years NvP's programmes, like those of SPI, have evolved. By 2020 NvP was offering holiday school programmes, supervised after care focused on skills development, creative programmes for teenagers and a homework club with career guidance. Also on offer were sporting activities and annual events to foster cohesion within the community. Internships and mentoring opportunities have been incorporated into the suite of interventions that this organisation provides, allowing young people from the community to acquire skills as varied as puppetry, bike repairs, woodwork, stage management, project management and storytelling.²⁶

During the COVID-19 lockdown in 2020, the programmes could not be implemented. Instead the staff assisted in providing meals to the community and where necessary, covered electricity costs for households in need.



The informal settlement in Barrydale is home to a thriving succulent and vegetable garden, established with the help of Net vir Pret. The growers featured in the annual Barrydale in Bloom event and sell their produce at a monthly market in the village.

Box 2: Successes of Net vir Pret – Barrydale, Western Cape

- Music, art and craft workshops continue to be well attended.
- Two jazz groups have been established and commissioned to perform at local hotels.
- A senior jazz group was featured on a television programme in 2015.
- In 2018, 13 new students entered tertiary institutions, 14 students continued with their tertiary education and 16 students graduated with qualifications in education, tourism, commerce and financial management.
- In 2018, one new student entered an apprenticeship and two students were undertaking apprenticeships in diesel mechanics and boiler-making.

Source: www.netvirpret.org/

Hantam Community Education Trust

The HCET is the oldest of the three organisations. It was started in 1989 as a playschool for the children of local farmworkers in the Colesberg community of the Northern Cape. The organisation, which started in an unused farm building, has developed into a fully fledged campus providing educational opportunities for young children (early childhood development and primary school education) and youth (high school and tertiary studies or workplace internships).²⁷

While the introduction of this initiative was not prompted by violence, the organisation recognises that its programmes provide constructive opportunities for young people and minimise risky behaviours.

The HCET serves an area characterised by high levels of poverty, with about 70% of households reliant on a social grant for survival.²⁸ According to the municipality's Integrated Development Plan for 2017–2022,²⁹ the area has a 28.3% unemployment rate with 44.7% of households living in poverty. There is poor infrastructure and the commute between farms in the area is slow

and difficult due to the poor condition of the roads. Additional challenges confronting this area are a lack of employment opportunities and low literacy rates.³⁰

The initiative defines its purpose as being 'to educate and develop members of the local community within the framework provided by the South African Constitution'. It therefore prioritises: (i) investment in human capital; (ii) interventions that enhance the quality of life of people in the Hantam community; and (iii) education and overall development.³¹

The Trust serves an area in which about 70% of households rely on a social grant for survival

Since it was established, the HCET has grown its services to include home visits with caregivers and parenting programmes as well as its own early learning centre. In addition, HCET has established a farm school offering primary and high school classes



A bird's eye view of the Hantam Community Education Trust. Picture courtesy of HCET, 2021.



A family getting ready to travel the dusty roads in the Hantam district. Picture courtesy of the HCET.

and has established a clinic that offers community health services.

The initiative focuses on being a sustainable comprehensive educational and development project. Thus, it frames its approach as 'six steps for sustainable development', taking a life course approach, namely:

- An early start
- Quality schooling
- Further education
- Youth development
- Community health
- Community participation

Each of these steps has been crafted in response to the needs of the community that it serves. For example, the community health aspect concentrated on raising awareness about foetal alcohol syndrome disorders as alcohol abuse is a huge problem in the community.

There are several distinguishing features in the HCET approach. Firstly, inclusivity is foundational to the HCET. Not only is the work of this organisation intentional in addressing the racial divides within the community (combining the farm schools and ensuring representivity among the staff team) but it also addresses learning and emotional support needs, with a programme tailored for children with special needs. Another distinguishing aspect of HCET is its commitment to stay abreast of advances in teaching methods and to introduce these into its learning programmes.

Having won several awards inclusive of the Presidential Award for Community Initiative in the Northern Cape, the programme is recognised as yielding valuable lessons

for others keen to take forward community initiatives. Some of the gains attributed to the work of the HCET are outlined in the box below.

Box 3: Successes of Hantam Community Education Trust – Northern Cape

- Families have seen improvements in their wellbeing, with family members benefitting from educational opportunities and bursaries.
- Former pupils have achieved tertiary qualifications, for example a degree in education and a Master's degree in English with published novels.
- HCET has granted 178 bursaries, with 87% of all bursary holders gainfully employed.
- Access to quality education is provided to approximately 250 pupils – 'Every day 15 bakkies transport about 150 children from surrounding farms and about 100 pupils come from the town.'³²

Source: www.hantam-trust.org.za

The HCET comprises a staff team who all live in the community and are familiar with the Colesberg/Karoo region. The staff members include those from the community who have benefitted in the past from HCET programmes. In addition to the staff team, the HCET has a diverse board that comprises local community members and international representatives. Most notable about the HCET is that it has a broad funder base that it has successfully maintained over the years through a staff member with dedicated fundraising responsibilities.

As has been shown above, the three communities in which the selected organisations are located each confront significant levels of poverty and unemployment as well as a range of associated social challenges, including alcohol abuse and violence. These conditions are historically rooted and require multiple programmatic and care-related interventions to respond to the needs of their communities. In the analysis that follows, the organisations will be closely examined to determine the commonalities and unique aspects that have defined their work.

Cycling resources

The principle of cycling resources is premised on the expectation that violence prevention initiatives need to generate resources that extend beyond the duration of the intervention. Resources are considered with respect to people (generating capacity); settings (establishing infrastructure); and services (expanding networks).

Through the initiatives of these organisations, capacity (such as self-awareness, the recognition of the impact of one's actions on others, finding alternative ways to deal with conflict as well as knowing how play enables learning) has been generated among individuals and families, with the expectation that this will have long-term benefits for the community.

In pursuit of the development of people – children, youth, parents, families – the three CBOs have prioritised knowledge building and sharing, as well as the building of skills. They all offer examples of real people who have benefitted from their programmes, thereby allowing them to flourish and improve the lives of their families. The organisations also shared many examples of beneficiaries of their programmes who have returned to the community to apply their knowledge, professions and skills either as a staff member or trustee of the organisations, or by working at another local organisation.

In addition to knowledge development and the building of skills, the initiatives have also demonstrated or modelled, to the broader community, positive relational traits or practices. Interviewees from all three organisations spoke of the limited exposure within their communities to life skills that enable the resolution of differences without violence (verbal, physical or emotional). Since they are aware that unlearning behaviours is hard, these initiatives report that significant emphasis is placed on role modelling so that community members can observe different ways in which to demonstrate care and resolve conflicts.

During interviews and focus group discussions, there was upfront acknowledgement that the multiple interventions in each community have not ended violence altogether. However, positive shifts have been observed, with interviewees articulating these shifts as follows: 'Incredible difference that is not easy to demonstrate

... it's a feeling ... we feel closer'; 'We are better than before, hard to describe, you just feel it; people care more than they did before'. These shifts suggest that the organisations have fostered social cohesion, or increased the capacity for empathy and caring behaviour.

The three organisations have, over the years, become physically embedded in Barrydale, Hantam and Touwsrante. Each organisation developed from a 'borrowed' space – whether a classroom or unused farm building – into a functional, formal building. This transition has provided additional (much-needed) infrastructure, allowing access to a range of opportunities that extend beyond the intended interventions of each initiative.

Beneficiaries have returned to their communities to apply the knowledge and skills they acquired

For example, SPI and NvP provide the community with photocopying services and young people have access to computers on which to do their CVs and apply for study or work opportunities. Hantam has expanded its services so that the community has access to health care via a clinic.

In addition to providing resources to the communities, the buildings themselves symbolise a place of safety and opportunity. For children from Barrydale, NvP is where they can experience safety, warmth, love and affirmation. A beneficiary of NvP interventions stated 'As ons nie liefde ontvang by die huis of ondersteuning nie, dan vind ons dit by Net vir Pret' (if we do not receive love and support at home, then we receive it at Net vir Pret).

In Touwsrante, an interviewee described SPI as 'Plek wat gebruik word om te leer en 'n plek vir jongmense om te ontspan' (A place that is used for learning as well as where young people can relax).

Intangible benefits have been associated with the introduction of this infrastructure into the community; hence interviewees have repeated statements such as 'All these things have made our community better'.

Within each community, the interventions introduced have contributed to children, youth, parents and families recognising their own potential to learn and share

knowledge and experiences. Not only has there been heightened awareness among individuals and households that they are a resource to others but also there is greater familiarity with other people and institutions. This represents social capital that could contribute positively to the community's development. For example, in Touwsrante, there is greater involvement of parents with their children's education, evident in the increased number of parents actively involved at school meetings.

Due to its location, SPI has access to additional networks (institutional and individual) such as pediatricians, psychologists, counselors and colleges that provide apprenticeships. These resources are not available in Barrydale or the Hantam community.

However, particularly in Barrydale, it is not apparent that the spectrum of available networks within this community has been fully accessed. The NvP staff team cited several examples of the lack of action on the part of government departments when a problem arose – such as children being expelled from school without any preventative interventions to minimise further risky behaviours. The staff team also spoke of the disrespectful treatment that community members endured, especially from police officers. The disillusionment that this creates prevents the organisation from seeking to co-operate or collaborate with other government services or structures.

Race is a central factor in understanding community relationships and the extent to which power and resources are distributed

In the community-based ecological model, the principle of interdependence is focused on understanding how interventions are structured to be empowering in the pursuit of equality. It is important to consider the relationships that enabled these organisations and initiatives to materialise. Two people residing in the Barrydale community initiated the NvP as they recognised that there was no positive outlet for young people in the area. Both founders were highly respected and recognised as leaders in this community.

In Hantam, the organisation was started for farm children by two white women who lived on the farm. In Touwsrante, the organisation was initiated by farmers from Hoekwil who were concerned about violence in the area. Each of these organisations is located in predominantly 'coloured' communities, with high rates of poverty, unemployment, alcohol abuse and violence.

Contribution to transformation

Given the deep inequality on the basis of race and class in all these communities, the relationship dynamics and distribution of power must be considered. Within the South African context, race is a central factor in



RESOURCES GENERATED
MUST EXTEND BEYOND THE
PROJECT'S DURATION

exploring the nature of relationships and the extent to which power and resources are distributed.

The staff teams of all three organisations comprise people who have been part of the community in which the organisation is located and/or have resided in a surrounding area for at least 10 years. The staff team and board members across these organisations indicated that the nature of the work requires strong relationships within the community, and therefore familiarity of the team with the community is important.

Consistency in the staff team was also recognised as being important. The NvP and Hantam staff members stated that in addition to familiarity and consistency, the dynamics within rural areas are important to understand. They said 'We need to have people who are rooted in the community.'

Across all three organisations, as several team members were beneficiaries of the organisations' programmes, there was an acknowledgement that a team that included past beneficiaries contributed strategically to the organisation's development. Including former

beneficiaries generated a sense of ownership within the community, observing progress among 'their own'. As a consequence of being 'rooted' in the community, team members develop a familial bond. They understand the challenges of implementing interventions within the community, and within a context of constrained resources and challenging community dynamics, view one another as an important support.

However, the familial bond is not divorced from the broader contextual dynamics in which race and consequently class differences are blatant. At HCET, SPI and NvP, the fundraising responsibility resides with 'white' members who are better positioned to tap into their more extensive networks and have the necessary skills and experience to craft funding proposals and reports that are in line with donor requirements.

Notable, across all these organisations, is the conscious effort to distinguish between the distribution of resources and the distribution of power within the organisations. Dismantling power dynamics among the staff teams was explicitly addressed in the interviews and focus group discussions. In addition to recognising the value of each person on the team, interviewees also

emphasised that key to overcoming longstanding power differences is being aware of the extent to which each team member, due to their experiences, is equipped to manage the work.

Therefore, an important action on the part of each organisation has been the provision of support to staff members, whether in the form of mentorship opportunities, internships or training courses, alongside the introduction of opportunities for physical and emotional wellbeing. This, coupled with the opportunities for honest discussion about race, class, privilege and power, has fostered a deeper understanding among staff and impacted the way in which they work in the community. However, the organisations recognise the necessity for ongoing conversations in order to create solidarity across these divides.

The way in which each organisation has determined how they focus their work (e.g. out-of-school youth; school-going youth; infants and their parents) has informed the relationship dynamics within the broader geographic community.

An important action on the part of each organisation has been providing support to staff members

The HCET focuses its work on the children and parents located on the 30 farms within the area and has fostered close working relationships with parents and children on these farms. Over the years, high levels of trust and respect have developed between the organisation and the parents and children, with several people echoing that 'when the organisation makes a promise to the community, (it) fulfils the promise'.

The organisation has actively worked on overcoming the racial divide, emphasising that an intensive focus has been directed at providing support and shared learning, with a deep sense of respect for one another. The emphasis on high quality services has been a mechanism the organisation has used to convey respect and value for one another. Given the small size of this community, and the isolated location, staff and board members said that there is a sense that 'we are each

other's support', and this has contributed to creating a sense of cohesion in the community.

Several interviewees spoke of the significant shift in the community that resulted from the realisation that each person is a 'change agent'. As the organisation has become more entrenched in the broader farming community, it is perceived as one that symbolises '... hope ... We give children a bigger horizon of what to expect in life ... if you have hope, you are able to make a change.'

NvP, focusing on young people in Barrydale and the surrounding farming community, has established a reputation as being a 'safe haven for children'. During the focus group discussion, the organisation was frequently described as being the place where children come to receive love and care that they do not ordinarily receive at home.

Among young people in particular, the NvP presents a beacon of hope because the organisation has exposed them to diverse opportunities and supported creative expression. Many of the young people who have benefitted from the NvP describe the experience as one where you always grow and learn. Several young people spoke of the way in which the learning opportunities presented through engaging with the NvP has enabled them to become aware of their own potential and gain self-confidence – 'creating a hunger to want more for yourself and expect more from yourself.'

The emphasis of the relationships that the organisation has established with young people is one of shared learning, whereby building experience and acquiring knowledge is prioritised over that of exerting authority.

The SPI 'serves the community of Touwsrante and children of farm workers in the adjacent farming district.'³³ While established to address youth violence, the organisational focus is not confined to the youth, but extends to the broader community. As such, the SPI has fostered personal relationships with children and the families in Touwsrante; and introduced initiatives to harness positive relationships between children and their parents.

In addition, the organisation has had 'campaigns' directed at strengthening the interaction between the people residing in this community. In the focus group and

individual interviews, the organisation was described as a 'gateway', one that enables the children and families to access opportunities that they ordinarily would not have accessed with ease, if at all.

Staff members, particularly those residing within the community, described SPI as a caring space; presenting role models of how 'we can be better – as people, parents, community'. Within the interviews, there was explicit mention made of the challenges within the community, an admission that not everyone supported the values that SPI embodies and the work that SPI does. The staff members in particular mentioned that a fair amount of effort is continually invested in addressing the scepticism, with many stating that it is not easy.

Each organisation shaped its intervention to meet an identified need in the community where it is located

It is apparent across the organisations that in attempting to address the manifestations of inequality through community interventions, these initiatives do not easily transcend racial divides. As a consequence of apartheid spatial planning, for example, the location of NvP is within the poor 'coloured' community. The services provided are thus not extended beyond this racial divide.

In an attempt to overcome the shackles of apartheid, NvP has invested in projects such as storytelling in order to generate self-pride and an appreciation of the impact of oppression on communities. Also, it uses puppet shows and art festivals to draw young people from the various parts of Barrydale together.

A similar reality faces SPI in Touwsrante, where a lack of solidarity exists across racial lines. The SPI has tried to address the racial divide between white and 'coloured' communities in Hoekwil through storytelling and reading support offered to SPI children by residents of the old age home. Volunteers from Hoekwil run a fencing club and drumming group. However, these initiatives have yielded limited success in overcoming deeply entrenched racial barriers.

The persistence of racial division is also evident in that the services provided through SPI, for example, have not

involved children and families from the informal area in Touwsrante, which is home to black African people. An interviewee commented that through the recent employment of a staff member who is from the isiXhosa community, slight shifts are being observed. The interviewee stated 'There are a few people (from the isiXhosa community) who are bringing children to SPI.' As observed by the staff, overcoming these divides requires continuous efforts.

Succession

This principle places emphasis on the way in which interventions are cognisant of the history of a community and the extent to which interventions enable community independence and ownership.

Each organisation has shaped its initial intervention to meet an identified need in the community in which it is located. In Barrydale and Hantam as well as Touwsrante, the interventions first focused on the provision of after school support for children. The geographical location of these organisations – remote, rural areas – inevitably meant that little was available to occupy young children at the end of the school day. The introduction of an intervention with recognised benefit generated interest as well as tolerance for these organisations in the communities where they were located and whom they served.

In the absence of any government support, HCET and NvP have had to rely on their 'internal resources' to implement required interventions

The programmatic interventions evolved in response to emerging community needs. SPI expanded its suite of services to provide support to parents in order to equip them to deal positively with their children at infancy and in their early years as well as during adolescence. HCET interventions incorporated formal schooling opportunities for children as well as health services that provided support to children and their families.

NvP also expanded after school activities and created interventions to respond to the absence of services for children who were excluded from school due to behavioural issues. The interventions were shaped so that they introduced concrete skills and knowledge that are applicable and relevant.

The suite of interventions that currently characterise these organisations were introduced incrementally over the years. New interventions arose in response to what was expressed and/or observed on the part of children, their parents, families and the broader communities to which each organisation was aligned.

This was explicit during the COVID-19 lockdown period. Each organisation, although unable to render their previous services, continue to 'serve' the community through providing food (either as food parcels or from food



INVOLVING COMMUNITY
MEMBERS WAS
CENTRAL TO THESE
ORGANISATIONS' APPROACH

kitchens), electricity and/or resources to support the mental and emotional wellbeing of children and parents.

Central to the approach of these organisations is the involvement of community members, not only in identifying their needs but also in shaping the response to these needs. The way in which these organisations have engaged within Touwsrante, Hantam and Barrydale – their responsiveness and inclusivity – have contributed to the varying degrees of ownership/recognised value for the communities. In Hantam, for example, this is evident from the report that the school is never vandalised as it is regarded as a beacon of hope and a valuable community resource. A staff member said: ‘The community is proud of the school and looks after it – there is no burglary or vandalism of our school.’

In Barrydale, the encouragement of artistic expression of community traditions has instilled a sense of pride that has traversed generational gaps. According to a staff member: ‘... a project of capturing stories about people in the community ... Some stories are funny and some are sad because of apartheid ... (It) has allowed young people insight into the older people in the community; given us a sense of identity.’

In Touwsrante, SPI represents an alternative, displaying that care is essential for growth. A SPI Board member noted: ‘SPI cares ... Its commitment is to care for people, there is no judgement ... always wants the best for the community and ... (looks for) opportunities for the community.’

Within each of these communities, the positive contribution of the organisations has been acknowledged. During discussions with focus group participants, concrete examples of gains were also mentioned. In Hantam, for example, the interviewees shared that over the past 10 years that the organisation has been working with the community of 30 farms, there have been no reported cases of stunting, no children born with foetal alcohol syndrome and no new HIV infections.

Interestingly, interviewees placed greater emphasis on positive shifts they considered to be ‘intangible’, using descriptors such as ‘we feel safer, we care more, we show more interest in one another.’

A common thread that emerged throughout the interviews and focus group discussions was the importance of embedding the organisational practices in such a way that communities assume ownership and agency for effecting change. Part of this practice included tapping into existing resources within or externally available to the communities.

However, there were disparate experiences of success. For example, in Hantam as well as Barrydale, government resources were not successfully accessed for these communities. The representatives interviewed in these areas stated that government – the Departments of Social Development and Basic Education as well as the South African Police Service – made no substantive contribution towards building their communities.

‘Within weeks, not months or years, we can put up a classroom once we have raised funds’

Examples from Hantam to qualify this perception of government disinterest included the failure to secure funds through the Department of Education for transport costs so that children in far-reaching farm areas could attend school. Another example sketched was the promise from the department for a mobile classroom that never came to fruition.

The experiences in Barrydale were also of an absent government, with an interviewee stating ‘When big decisions need to be discussed and made, we consult, but (we) have yet to see any productive and constructive input from them (government stakeholders).’ In the absence of any government support, the HCET and NvP have had to rely on their ‘internal resources’ (those within these organisations and supplied by committed community members) in order to implement required interventions.

Both organisations are also wary of the extent to which government would be able to perform the efficient delivery which the community requires. An interviewee stated, ‘We are better off not getting involved with government because they are not efficient – within weeks, not months or years, we can put up a classroom once we have raised funds.’ Concerns were also

expressed about the lack of respectful treatment from government officials. In Barrydale, the relationship with the police was highlighted as problematic, with interviewees citing examples of disrespectful treatment towards community members and staff members.

In Touwsrante, however, the experiences have been somewhat different. The SPI representatives shared stories of collaboration between the Touwsrante community and government departments such as health, social development and education. Also part of the collaborative process were the local police and the community policing forum as well as the municipality.

If there is trust and strong relationships that are beneficial, there is greater willingness to intervene

The significant difference observed in the SPI approach was the expressed recognition that their approach would need to prioritise fostering mutually beneficial relationships. Therefore, the SPI trustees and staff members invested time and effort to build relationships with government stakeholders who were located in Touwsrante and the broader George municipality.

While the SPI has been able to access support from government departments – funding from the Department of Social Development (DSD) and psychological support services through the Department of Basic Education (DBE) – these relationships have been challenging. Indicative of the challenges is the time lapse between requesting and receiving assistance. For example, the organisation received funds from the DSD five years after it initially requested support.

In each of the communities, the organisations took into account the existing resources that could be beneficial and with the support of volunteers created innovative ways in which these resources could be accessed. For example, children from Touwsrante were able to obtain math tuition services at better-resourced schools; children from Barrydale were able to participate in school holiday camps; children from Hantam were able to attend boarding school to further their education. The exposure gave these children an opportunity to see beyond their communities and imagine the future differently.

However, the challenges these organisations and their communities confront are enormous, especially as these are rooted within past systems of oppression. During interviews with each organisation, the persistence of violence was mentioned – particularly intimate partner violence and/or sexual violence; alcohol abuse; illiteracy and the stark realisation of the skill limitations that ‘lock’ people into poverty.

Against the backdrop of such intractable challenges, it is unsurprising that interviewees – whether beneficiaries, staff members or trustees – said that if the organisation had to close, the communities whom they serve would once again be unsupported and susceptible to the reversal of several gains.

Such an acknowledgement is testament to the depth of vulnerability within these communities. In Touwsrante, interviewees also confirmed that the impact of closing the organisation’s doors would be significant. However, there was a greater sense of belief expressed in the resilience of the community, due in large part to the strengthened position of other institutions that have worked closely with the SPI over the years, namely the local school, clinic and library.

Analysis

To consolidate the insights from the application of a community-based ecological model, the data is examined with respect to a continuum that recognises the tension between community work and community activism. Thereafter, the analysis draws on social disorganisation theory, with attention given to social capital, network density and collective efficacy.

Community work or community activism

For the purposes of this research, ‘community’ has been understood broadly to refer to the geographical location of the community-based initiatives as well as the sub-groups (youth, parents and children) that are the focus of the interventions. In order to better understand the community-based initiatives, a distinction is made between community work and community organising and activism. The former is defined as that of ‘working with a community to render a service’ and the latter as ‘working collaboratively with community stakeholders to transform/develop the community.’

The vision and mission of each of the community-based initiatives reflect a commitment towards transformation in their communities. Invariably, these organisations, in responding to the expressed needs of the communities, have to carefully manage the tension between service provision and community transformation. For example, only in the past two years has the SPI been in a position to move towards explicitly addressing racial divisions, but even in doing so, it has to carefully navigate community dynamics as well as the dynamics among the staff team.

The organisations have illustrated that time and strategic efforts are necessary to foster change and that it is too simplistic to categorise their actions as either community work or community activism. The reality is that each community-based initiative continuously moves along a continuum shifting between community work and community activism. Initiatives therefore require consistent reflection to determine how to structure interventions so that the commitment to transformation is not discarded.

As evident from the suite of interventions provided through SPI, NvP and HCET, the complexity of the contexts in which these initiatives are located positions community work – ‘rendering of services’ – in the forefront, with initiatives aimed at transformation assuming a subtle form. The implications of the more visible presentation of community work has meant that the initiatives intended to support transformation generate the intangible gains – expressed as ‘more hope’ and ‘a greater sense of trust’.

In communities that consistently bear the brunt of oppression, these gains, albeit hard to measure, are significant as catalysts for change. The gains in trust and hope require tenacity, consistency and an ongoing investment of time and energy as circumstances arise that erode or shake trust and hope. For example, during the first months of COVID-19 lockdown the provision of food parcels (to specific families in need) nearly broke trust in Touwsrante because of the perception that they were unfairly distributed.

Social capital

Social capital has to be thought about along two dimensions, namely within the community (geographical

and/or targeted) as well as with external stakeholders (local and/or international).

The ability of an organisation to sustain itself appears to be greater when social capital exists in both these dimensions. The NvP has strong social capital within the Barrydale community that it has historically served. This is a consequence of its establishment by two respected community members who reside in the area and through nurturing relationships with the organisation’s targeted youth community.

While NvP has some social capital among more affluent people within Barrydale, this is limited when compared to that of SPI and Hantam. In both these organisations, there is a strong balance of ‘rooted’ community members who provide the social capital within the community and access to an external network of stakeholders. This social capital with external stakeholders is possible due to the number of better positioned members of the community each accessing their networks.

In these contexts, the key role that community-based initiatives fulfil is as catalysts for change

The SPI in particular has identified external local stakeholders as important partners and invested in these relationships. The HCET has invested in external international stakeholders as well as local stakeholders. The access to external and international stakeholders has facilitated access to jobs, learning opportunities and ease of access to services that were ordinarily out of the reach of the communities whom these organisations serve. The extent of each initiative’s social capital has influenced the scope of its work.

For the SPI and NvP, because of racial divides, the social capital in communities beyond those traditionally served is tentative. These initiatives therefore have to weigh up how best to maintain existing relationships, as well as how to strengthen new relationships that sustain rather than compromise the transformative agenda articulated in their visions and missions. Further engagement with the HCET would be worthwhile for an in-depth exploration of how transformation has been managed within a community that also struggled with segregation.

In the findings above, reference was made to reported observations of greater trust currently within communities compared to when an initiative was first introduced. The perspective of greater trust is also elaborated upon through examples of the number of children, youth, parents and families engaged in community interventions as well as the confidence of community members to articulate their needs and request specific services.

Each of the community-based initiatives shared examples that depict strengthened network density. However, the NvP, HCET and SPI each acknowledged that there are those within the geographic and targeted communities who are neither interested in participating nor are aligned to the ethos of the initiatives. The lack of interest or reluctance of some community members to participate has not stopped the community-based initiatives from being active in the community.

Each of the community-based initiatives shared examples that depict strengthened network density

Network density is inconsistent within the communities that have traditionally benefitted from the interventions in Hantam, Touwsrante and Barrydale. However, beyond the racial divides, as evident from SPI and NvP experiences, no solidarity exists. Instead, network density is notably weak. The NvP initiative of lighting a Christmas tree that is purposefully located at an intersection between the racially divided impoverished communities may be a non-threatening way to begin to foster relationships and build trust.

According to social disorganisation theory, collective efficacy refers to the willingness to intervene for the collective good. Collective efficacy is closely linked to social capital as well as network density – if there is a sense of trust and strong relationships that are mutually beneficial, there is greater willingness to intervene.

Using the COVID-19 crisis as an example, each initiative spoke of actions taken to support communities with food and related needs. In fulfilling this intervention, community members, staff and trustees rallied together to secure families during the lockdown. While such actions may hint at strong collective efficacy within a

community, the conditions under which willingness to intervene is applicable are not obvious.

When taking into account incidences of violence, there is less certainty about the willingness of a community to intervene. For example, in Barrydale, when violence was perpetrated against a young girl, the community retreated within itself. Parents with young girls no longer accessed the after school services provided by the NvP. In the absence of strong local networks (notably a problematic relationship with the police) and a lack of skills necessary in addressing violence, this community-based initiative is uncertain how to assist the community in these circumstances, more especially the children and young people whom it serves.

The experiences of the SPI also reveal that there is a hesitancy within the broader Touwsrante community (including staff members) to intervene when there are reports of corporal punishment, for example. But when a case of bullying was exposed, there was a greater inclination towards collective action within the local community.

It therefore seems that even when a community has high levels of trust; recognises the importance of ‘relying on one another to thrive’; and has access to strong external networks, if an issue emerges that is against a strongly held community norm, collective efficacy will be low. Also, when confronted with a violent incident, a community that has limited internal resources and no access to external resources is likely to be fearful in the absence of support and thus display a reluctance to intervene.

In the same way that a response to a crisis can be unifying, the reluctance to respond can damage trust and cause relationships to falter. Hence in an interview with HCET the statement: ‘When the organisation makes a promise to the community, (it) fulfills the promise.’

Discussion

Drawing on the findings and analysis above, the experiences of these long-standing community-based initiatives can be collated into a ‘common elements’ framework that contains the following guidelines:

- Consistently build knowledge and skills (soft and technical)
- Work collaboratively and in ways that are empowering

- Promote values of respect, care and appreciation of each other (as people and in terms of the contribution made)
- Respond to the immediate needs of a community and be flexible
- Provide interventions that are not one dimensional but also provide access to other opportunities
- Role-model positive behaviours
- Build relationships and expand networks (locally and external to the community) in ways that establish and maintain trust
- Identify allies who are well-resourced and /or have access to resourced networks

Within community development practice, none of the above are unknown characteristics as they are directed at ‘building solidarity and agency ... (to address) social injustice and inequality in marginalised communities’.³⁴ In fact, what is important to consider is how these are translated within complex contexts such as those faced in Touwsrante, Hantam and Barrydale. It is the management of this complexity and the accompanying unpredictability that these initiatives have had to navigate in order to continuously act as catalysts for change. The ‘intangible’ that has been raised in each interview and focus group is what is imperative to understand.

When confronted with a violent incident, a community with limited resources and support is likely to be fearful and reluctant to intervene

While overarching conditions – poverty, unemployment, violence, alcohol abuse – are spoken of in broad terms, the way in which these challenges manifest in each context is unique. Furthermore, the CBOs are each differently positioned, and thus the way in which solidarity and agency are facilitated varies quite significantly. The process therefore of building hope and fostering trusting relationships has to be matched with the contextual dynamics, including the relative capabilities that these community-based initiatives have at their disposal.

In the South African context, the way in which ‘...(past and present) ... unequal and unjust set of broader social, cultural, economic and political relations ... shape local lived experiences’ is important to understand.³⁵ Making sense of these hierarchies of power and knowledge provides insight into the parameters available to give effect to solidarity and agency.³⁶

The challenges and opportunities confronted by Hantam, Touwsrante and Barrydale, although different, reveal the multiple hurdles that under-resourced communities confront and need to overcome in order to make any progress to improve their circumstances. The key role that community-based initiatives fulfil in such contexts is as catalysts, working against

COVID-19

COMMUNITY MEMBERS,
STAFF AND TRUSTEES
RALLIED TOGETHER
TO SECURE FAMILIES
DURING LOCKDOWN

macro- and micro-level conditions that erode solidarity.³⁷ In the case of these initiatives, it is apparent that their longevity is the result of the patience and tenacity of committed people in the community.

Cognisant therefore that a catalytic role may be key for community-based initiatives, the expectation that sustainability is the responsibility of overstretched community-based initiatives is unrealistic. In fact, such expectation creates additional hurdles that more likely lock initiatives into survivalist mode – mirroring the dynamics of the communities in which they are located and whom they serve.

As such, other stakeholders – government agencies, national NGOs, private sector partners and donors – have an important role to play in creating conditions for the sustainability of these initiatives. For example, the lack of government responsiveness as experienced in Hantam, Barrydale and Touwsranteen jeopardises the sustainability of these initiatives and compromises their capacity to enable transformation.

The expectation that cost-benefit can be shown in challenging contexts, particularly for donors, limits initiatives' ability to respond and innovate

The capacity for community-based initiatives to enable transformation is not only compromised by the nature of their relationship with other stakeholders. The expectation that there is a measurable impact to reveal cost-benefit relative to the resources expended is also problematic.

There are several examples of benefits derived from the work of the three organisations profiled in this report, some of which include:

- Among the community of 30 farms with whom HCET works, over the past 10 years there have been no reported cases of stunting, no children born with foetal alcohol syndrome and no new HIV infections.
- As a consequence of these community organisations, access to services has been expanded for community members. Young people have access to computers on which to do their CVs and apply for study or work opportunities and receive educational support.
- Photocopying services are easily available and not costly.
- There is access to a locally based health facility in Hantam.
- Young people have been enabled to access tertiary education and job opportunities in Hantam and Touwsranteen.

However, these benefits are not possible to report or even appreciate within a two-, three- or even five-year period. It is only after more than five years (closer to 10 years) of intensive, consistent work in these communities that SPI, HCET and NvP have been able to observe transformative trends.

AMONG THE

30

HCET-LINKED FARMS,
NO FOETAL ALCOHOL
SYNDROME AND NEW HIV
INFECTIONS WERE REPORTED

Determining a timeframe in which notable change should be observed is difficult, if not impossible, to establish within communities that are so under-resourced.

This is most starkly described in the observations pertaining to the unlearning of negative behaviours. These organisational teams have indicated that positive relational traits and practice are in short supply. And to bring about behavioural change requires many, many years of exposing the communities to life skills that demonstrate, without any form of violence, the resolution of differences – and even then, change is slow.

Intangibles such as trust, hope and pride are central for facilitating meaningful transformation

These organisations also emphasised that intangibles such as trust, hope and pride are central for facilitating meaningful transformation. However, it is not possible to ascribe a value to trust, hope and pride. Again, building trust or instilling hope and pride takes time and even for

these organisations, there remains an acknowledgement of the fragility of these vital components to enable positive change.

In reality, the expectation that cost-benefit can, or should, be demonstrated in challenging contexts with the level of complexity that characterise Hantam, Touwsrante and Barrydale, particularly if linked to donor funding, limits the ability of initiatives to respond and exercise innovation.

Rather than placing more demands on these organisations, the most significant lesson to identify models of practice in order to prevent violence would be to dismantle power dynamics between struggling CBOs and better positioned stakeholders. Therefore:

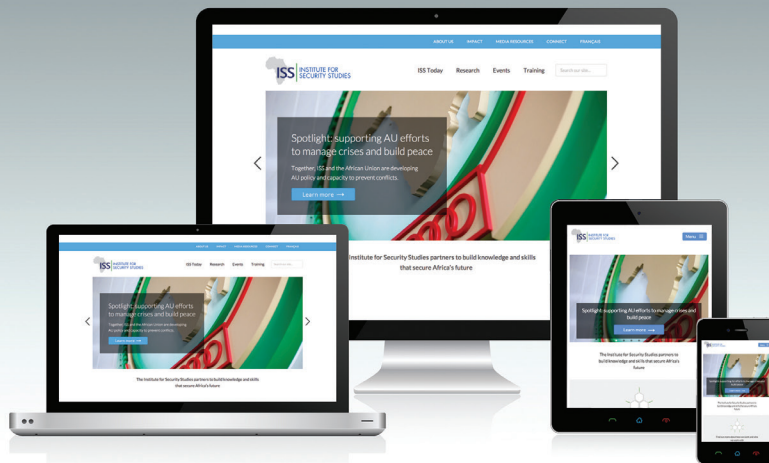
- Government agencies, national NGOs, private sector partners and donors should determine how to create conditions that enable CBOs located in impoverished communities to sustain their transformative interventions.
- Government agencies, national NGOs, private sector partners and donors should review how to adjust their practices to better allow for innovation.

Notes

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- 4 Within the Violence Prevention Forum, there have been ongoing discussions about examples of interventions that have yielded impact. See the minutes of the Violence Prevention Forum, specifically the discussions of the sixth and seventh meeting, at www.violence-prevention.org/vpf-library/#vpf-meeting-reports.
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