

**GUNS AND MUSIC -  
UMBUMBULU PEACE-BUILDING CASE STUDY  
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The first sounds I remember hearing as a child were gunshots. Our family was always on the run. In this community violence is just in people's blood. I don't know how you are going to change this.

Umbumbulu youth group member, 2002

The dynamics of violence in the rural community of Umbumbulu presented a difficult challenge to *Sinani / KwaZulu-Natal Programme for Survivors of Violence*. The organisation was first invited to work in the area by unemployed, non-schooling youth. What followed was a series of fairly ad hoc interventions over the course of several years, guided by the community partners. The peace-building intervention provided valuable learning for the organisation and this paper represents an effort to document some of the experiences and lessons gained from the partnership.

### **History of Violence**

Umbumbulu is a vast rural area to the South of the city Durban in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The people of the area describe years of violence, as the above quote indicates. Generations of violent conflict between family clans led to strong divisions in some parts of the greater area. This made the community vulnerable to further divisions and large scale violence during the political violence which wracked the province in the 1980's and 1990's. The area is still strongly divided into the two leading political parties of the area, the African National Congress (ANC) and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP).

Following higher level peace processes in the province, levels of political violence initially increased dramatically. However the effects of peace and reconciliation were not followed through at a community level. Ongoing cycles of violence including revenge attacks and so-called faction fighting between family clans continued and began to escalate. Each period preceding the local and national elections saw a sudden increase in tensions and deaths, often along old party conflict lines.

The youth group facilitated by *Sinani* in the area was once asked about the violence during a tense election period. The conversation between the staff member and the group went as follows:

Staff member: How are things in the area at the moment?  
Group member: No at the moment they are quiet.  
Staff member: What type of quiet do you mean?  
Group member: Well there are still gunshots at night, but in the mornings there are no bodies outside like last week.

The recent period has shown a sharp increase in violent crime, sexual assault, domestic violence and abuse of children. Statistics are unreliable and the community regularly describe hearing gunshots at night, finding bodies outside in the mornings, with no trace of who was involved. They say that by lunchtime the bodies have disappeared, unrecorded. *Sinani* staff tried to investigate the number of deaths and types of crimes in the area. However the government has placed a moratorium on

crime statistics and these are grossly under-reported. The staff were told directly by the police that the information they were being given was very different from what is in their computer.

### **Role of Traditional Structures in the Violence**

The participants of the peace-building intervention describe an interesting phenomenon, whereby entertainment events have become a focal point of violence on the area. Traditional music events involve singing and dancing competitions between villages in the area. There are different traditional cultural structures involved in these events.

The traditional army or warriors (Izinsizwa) are involved in planning and negotiating the events. They are present to guard the group. Traditionally their role was primarily that of ensuring proper behaviour of the young people at the event. They would control the crowd and monitor the interactions between men and women. They would be present to prevent conflict, should there be tension about the outcome of the competition, which was judged by elected representatives from both villages.

The leadership of each village (Izinduna) and their advisors (Izinduna Zamacala) would be consulted for permission for the events to take place. They would offer guidance and preside over the events. In times of conflict they may use the events to strategise violence towards a particular group.

The composers of the music (Ababizi) have an important role to play in the events. They describe their role at a broader level as listening to the dynamics and issues of the community. Their songs are carefully composed to offer messages to the leadership and to the community in a manner that reflects these local dynamics. During the violence they have a powerful role to play in instigating violence. They describe how their songs have become oriented towards insulting the neighbouring village and opposing family clan.

The singers (Amagosa) are also involved in the violence, particularly in relation to their conduct and manner of singing at the events. Participants complain that some are even chosen now for their fighting strength, not their musical ability. Even the judges and the selection of the judges at the events has become an issue of conflict. The judges are said to no longer focus on the quality of the music, but use the judging as an opportunity to create violence. They are no longer necessarily respected artists from the area representing the various music groups fairly, but have become polarised and are directly linked to the conflict.

The role differentiation between the various structures involved in the events has become confused. The leaders complain that the army is not taking their guidance and that some of the commanders have their own mission in terms of revenge. The army complains that they are instruments for the leadership's agenda. The singers complain that they are mouthpieces for the composers, and the composers argue that their role of communicating messages that are constructive has been influenced by the leadership. All of the groups complained of a lack of respect for their area of expertise and authority.

### **Sinani Involvement in the Area**

The *KwaZulu-Natal Programme for Survivors of Violence*, or *Sinani*, is a non-governmental organisation that started work in the area several years ago. They were first invited by youth in the area, who heard about the organisation's income generating work with other youth. During the initial stages of intervention, time was spent on introductions to the leadership and consultation about different ways to work in the area. Building the relationship with leaders in the area during the community entry stage was a challenging process. The organisation kept being introduced to different levels and groupings of leadership. Often the leaders seemed to "forget" that they had been consulted previously and demanded why the organisation had started work without permission. It became clear that there were other dynamics at play.

The work with the youth group was also difficult. It was clear that there were divisions in the area and the organisation did not have capacity at the time to start two groups. They were upfront with the youth that they could not only work with youth from one side of the divisions, but that the group would either have to wait until the organisation had the capacity to start two groups in parallel, or agree to form a joint group. *Sinani* staff also explained that there would need to be a minimum of 20 youth. The youth requested a joint group. The early members describe their nervousness in canvassing for the group, saying "We decided to go and visit those youth which were also our enemies. It was so scary. We did not know what they would think about us coming to visit. We could see they were suspicious." Their brave efforts resulted in a large group of youth coming together on a weekly basis at the local school, deemed a fairly neutral venue.

The work with youth kept being derailed by the conflict in the area. Their income generating grass-cutting project was not very successful and it was difficult for them to operate in the areas worst affected by violence. The organisation was eventually approached by some of the youth from a part of Umbumbulu that was particularly severely affected by violence. They were once again being pressurised to join in the violence in the area. The one said "I am just on the edge. I cannot decide between committing suicide or becoming involved in crime." A staff member reported "What struck me was the incredible will they had not to be drawn back into the violence." The fact that the youth were confiding in the staff each time things became tense was also very positive.

It was agreed to help these youth to work on peace-building in their local area. They were assisted in doing a profile of the violence in their area. Their confidence was kept, even when known perpetrators of violence were identified. One of the key emerging issues was that the local police operating in the area were integrally involved in the violence. The youth agreed to approach the police to encourage them to request support from the organisation.

### **Work with Police**

When *Sinani* received a request from the police for training in peace-building it was taken up immediately. An initial "Victim Empowerment" workshop was held, following government policy to scale up efforts on victim empowerment within all service providers. During the workshop with the police key higher level traditional chiefs (Amakhosi) were invited. After some preliminary exercises to clarify expectations and help people to settle down, participants were divided according to their areas and

asked to provide a profile of the violence in their area. They were asked not to mention names or highlight individuals, but to describe some of the dynamics between the various groupings in the area.

The dynamics identified were related to Shaik's Cycle of Violence model which identifies ongoing cycles of revenge, displaced aggression and revictimisation. This process seemed to be a powerful point in the workshop, where consensus amongst participants was reached that they would like to work together to break this cycle of violence. The model was introduced at the end of the first day, and the second day during a reflection on how people were, almost all participants reported that they had not slept that night because of thinking about the ongoing cycles of violence in their community and how it has affected them. There was a strong urge to prevent further exposure of violence, with people saying that they did not want their own children growing up in the same conditions.

The participants were also divided into groups according to their roles. What came across strongly was the way each structure was feeling disrespected and alienated from the community. It seemed to shift attitudes towards each other and promote cooperation.

Sadly, one of the participants who was filled with enthusiasm for the peace-building process, was soon killed. It was hinted that he had declared his position of peace too strongly and hence had been rendered vulnerable to his enemies. They attacked him at home one night. This was a huge shock to the group and the facilitators. It was a difficult lesson in the importance of moving forward carefully with the peace-building process. All subsequent new participants were cautioned by the facilitators who said "Remember that while this workshop may have inspired you to promote peace in your area. This doesn't mean throwing away your gun yet and declaring to the world that you are no longer interested in violence, as this might make you vulnerable. Let us rather think strategically together about ways of drawing in other key people involved in the violence in the area."

### **Work with Traditional Army**

At the end of the first workshop and during subsequent follow-up workshops it was agreed that one key grouping that needed to be brought into the process was the traditional army. Rather stupidly the workshop was again arranged to be held at the police station. Since many of the warriors were known perpetrators of violence the venue created much fear. Those that arrived were extremely scared, and many others did not turn up. There was also a difficult dynamic where the participants were warriors who had trained and dedicated their lives to fighting. Honour and revenge were important principles to them. The presentation of the cycle of violence, for example, led to one participant saying "I lost my brother and I revenged his death. I felt better afterwards and do not regret this." This participant did not return the second day or to any subsequent meeting.

However the workshop with those present was very significant. It shifted when the group began discussing traditional conduct relating to warfare, as apposed to how the violence is carried out at present. The following interesting points emerged:

Competition between villages was not in itself a problem. This hardly ever used to end in violence. The current high levels of violence were

more about other people's agendas being carried out during the entertainment events.

When there was a point of conflict between two villages that could not be resolved, a battle was arranged. This was agreed by both parties who were prepared beforehand.

The fighting happened during this specific pre-arranged time and place. It only involved warriors, who were trained. They were men, not boys or civilians.

The battle had a clear beginning and end. Attention was focussed on reconciliation initiatives after the battle.

The group reflected on the way in which violence has spread into all parts of life and to the rest of the community. There are also currently no measures in place to reconcile after the violence.

### **Work with Traditional Music Groups**

The workshop venue was changed to a more neutral community hall. It was opened up to other warriors. Representatives from the various music groups were also invited to attend. The group grew to over 50 participants. Each time more participants were added, the ones from the previous workshops insisted on bringing them personally and then stayed on as part of the new larger group. The work with these participants from different villages was very tense. People arrived armed. It did not help that this was taking place before a period of high violence over Christmas. At one stage on the first day, things were very tense. During the tea break one of the warriors changed his gun and holster to the outside of his jacket so that it was clearly visible. One of the facilitators reports:

At one point this man stood up to respond to a question posed by the facilitator. As he started speaking a group of youth came back a bit late from the tea break. The door darkened as they entered. This warrior spun around as the door darkened, his hand went to his gun, then he saw it was only the other participants, so he turned back to the facilitator and said "Sorry what was the question again?" It happened in a split second, but my heart stopped.

The work with the various traditional structures continued for several months. It became clear once again that there was an urgent need to work on role clarification in order to rebuild the traditional structures and regain respect and dignity. Each structure came up with a type of job description. Lines of communication and accountability were clarified. The role between the traditional and political leadership was also discussed. Many of the traditional leaders felt undermined by politically appointed outsiders who had legal authority as government representatives.

### **Outcomes**

The initial momentum of the peace-building process was great. The local police super-intendant reported "Since *Sinani* has been working in our area we have had the lowest levels of violence ever before, especially over Christmas. We even received recognition from our national office who want to give us a reward."

However things again became tense before the elections. One warrior said:  
“I am here physically but not emotionally and mentally. Things are tense in my area. I may be called out if there is a problem. But I came here hoping that something can be done together to address this situation.” Others reported at this time:

“Things are politically tense. People are plotting assassinations behind closed doors. We fear finding bodies outside in the mornings without trace of who did it.”

“Personal problems are being politicised. If someone has a grudge against you, you can be labelled.”

“To say that you are politically neutral is dangerous. You may be labelled a sellout.”

“We do not want to carry guns anymore. But we do because we are afraid of being labelled as sellouts since we have been promoting peace.”

However the commitment of the group was high and the elections followed with once again the lowest levels of violence ever experienced at such a time. One participant said it was the first time the Umbumbulu was not in the media for violence before elections.

### **The Role of Music**

One of the key interventions which was completely unplanned on the part of the organisation, was the production of a music CD. Some of the participants asked to work on this and the staff grudgingly supported them, since it was a lot of work and they were coming into the office almost daily to work on this project. The effect that this CD had on building peace in the area seemed greater than the facilitators so-called sophisticated peace-building techniques. People said about the CD and the launch:

“We are the talk of the town since our traditional music was played on the radio. Even the crime levels have dropped. The morale is up - there is excitement and hope.”

Traditional music group member

“At first it didn’t make sense when I tried again and again to explain what we learnt about the cycle of violence to my family. But when they saw us coming together and achieving this CD, it started to make sense to them.”

Traditional leader

“I am happy and excited. The bug that bit us is now biting others and is spreading peace in our area.”

Traditional leader

“I am one of the pioneers of this type of music. I was labelled a perpetrator and an instigator of violence. I ended up being detained. But I am here today hearing that this type of music brings people together.”

Traditional music group member

“We have never had such a successful music event before. Usually an event like this would have ended in violence. But this time everyone supported each other. It was such a happy day for us all.”

## **Lessons Learned**

The following were some of the key learnings from the Umbumbulu peace-building intervention:

1. People in the communities have systems and structures within the community that could naturally facilitate peace processes - eg music, drama etc. These could bring people together. The systems have often been used to promote conflict, so the systems have become corrupt. But they can be organised once again around peace.
2. In doing this work it is critical to take seriously the presenting problems of people - what they see as priorities for intervention. For example, for the youth it was income generation. For the traditional structures it was role clarification leading to respect and dignity. For the music groups it was making their unique style of music known to the world.
3. This means working from the position of their perceptions and starting points relating to violence, peace etc. One cannot use a standard model to promote peace, but need to identify relevant issues for each group in relation to their experiences of violence and its role.
4. This means maintaining a balanced holistic focus on personal development, income generation and community development during peace-building. This enables sustained violence prevention.
5. In KwaZulu-Natal specifically, although there may be new political or democratic structures in place, people still highly respect the traditional structures. It helps to strengthen this, merge the two by clarifying roles and responsibilities and emphasising the strengths and positives of each.

## **Conclusion**

The success of holistic peace-building interventions seems to rely on developing a deeper understanding of the trends in relation to violence. This understanding is most powerfully developed by participants themselves, where the shift often comes about during self-reflection rather than trying to influence people in one direction or another. It would also seem valuable to place attention on relationships, roles and connectedness between people. As one participant said:

“The meetings have encouraged the connectedness and linkages between us. This has resulted in the peace we are now seeing in our area.”

Traditional music group member

We dedicate this paper to the community leadership and partners at Umbumbulu. Their dedication to the project and their reflections have grown us as an organisation and we hope to make use of this learning in other areas affected by violence.