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Conflict Management and Peace Building through Community Development

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The Valley Trust is one of the oldest NGOs in South Africa, having started in 1951 to address the problem of malnutrition in the rural communities based in the Valley of a Thousand Hills. A workshop of those NGOs working in rural Kwazulu-Natal was established to share experiences, skills and resources. This paper is an output of this group of NGOs and describes three case studies in which community development helped to resolve serious conflicts.

The situation in Kwazulu-Natal has particular interest because it is a province in which conflict has reached high levels in recent years. It is a province with two circumstances which sets it apart from the other provinces in South Africa. First, it is one of only two provinces which is not controlled by the ANC. Second, it is a province in which traditional leadership in the rural areas is invested in the hands of the *Amakhosi*. However, in the local government structures that are being established, no agreement has been reached regarding the role of these traditional leaders. The traditional leaders of Kwazulu-Natal form the support structure of the ruling party of KwaZulu Natal, the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), which makes the issue one for conflict. This has been detrimental to community development.

It is seldom that we walk into an area where a stable environment already exists; therefore many of our efforts – conscious or unconscious – are towards dealing constructively with conflict and helping to create peaceful communities. Contributing to this issue of the JSDA is thus an opportunity to become more aware of our ability to build peace, and also critically to look at factors in our work which may be detrimental to this process. Since we do not assume that NGOs are the only delivery vehicle for development, we hope that the lessons we are learning may be applicable in a variety of situations and programmes.

Some of the common conflicts encountered in our work result from:

- political factions struggling for power, resulting in unstable communities subject to violence and virtual civil war;
- lack of basic resources and unemployment;
- corruption involving access to opportunities and funds;
- discrimination regarding gender, age-groups, ethnicity, tribal status, etc;
- shortage of organisation and planning;

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- few examples of effective and democratic local institutions;
- lack of common vision;
- limited skills and processes in conflict management;
- histories of unresolved and simmering disputes; and
- little meaningful communication between parents and teenagers, men and women, neighbours, etc.

The Case Studies

(1) The Port Shepstone Conflict and Lima

The first case study described here is a project of the Lima Rural Development Foundation. Murchison and Bhobhoyi are two densely populated peri-urban areas lying west of the industrial town of Port Shepstone on the Kwazulu-Natal (KZN) South Coast. Being close to town with no formal black township serving the region, this became the obvious settlement area for numerous migrants over the last 25 years.

The informal settlement grew quickly with no planning or services, and this put even more pressure on limited resources. Being close to the Transkei border, the migrants included ethnic Zulus and Xhosas. Within the community there were groups that paid allegiance to the local *Inkosi* and those that refused to. All these factors produced the right environment for interpersonal and group conflict. In the mid-1980s political tensions between the major political parties, the ANC and Inkatha, started to play themselves out in the area, ultimately resulting in open warfare between areas identifying themselves with one or the other political party. 'No go' sections were established and government departments and service providers completely withdrew from the area. Existing local institutions, such as the development committee, disintegrated as the wealthier residents left the area. The conflict reached a peak in 1992 and 1993.

Government departments had been planning a water project in the area since the early 1980s, but this had never materialised. The main water purification plant of the South Coast is actually situated within Bhobhoyi, but communities neighbouring the plant had been denied access to water. Local communities had given up hope on the promises made by Government.

Lima were contacted by the Provincial Department of Works in 1992 to get involved in a proposed water reticulation project for the area. At this point it was very difficult to make contact with local leaders. With a local shopkeeper as the only contact person, Lima slowly connected with leadership in each of the 12 sub-wards – each of which paid strong allegiance to either of the two political parties. Small sub-committees were set up in each area and the project proposals explained.

Numerous attempts were made to get representatives from these 12 areas to attend a combined meeting on neutral territory in Port Shepstone. This was only achieved a full year after the initial contact. In the interim, all the detailed planning of the pipe layout and community participation took place separately in all 12 sub-wards. Funds were obtained from the National Economic Forum and labour was hired and pipes laid over the 15 month construction period. The pipe-laying was proof of real delivery and the creation of jobs was pumping R50,000 a month in cash into the area. This resulted in the substantial easing of tensions.

The Port Shepstone Peace Secretariat was busy at the same time getting the same community leaders together to discuss the peace process in the area. These two initiatives happening simultaneously meant that the opposing leaders were getting together more often and being forced to work together to make water delivery in an area happen.

The 12 sub-communities ultimately came together and formed a joint service structure called the Murchison Bhooboyi Water Authority, which has now supplied water in the area over the last three years. The Water Authority has been trained by Lima to carry out all its own administration and maintenance, and hires eight permanent staff from the area in order to do this.

Due to the pioneering work of the Water Authority, a local development committee and other strong institutions have formed which are actively and successfully pursuing a range of development initiatives in the area. The supply of water, creation of jobs and the necessity for leaders to work together have contributed to lasting and meaningful peace. The tensions of the past have all subsided and there is a positive atmosphere of development and cooperation.

(2) The Bridge Foundation and Madlebe

The second case study is a project of The Bridge Foundation. The Madlebe Tribal area is situated outside of Empangeni on the North Coast of KZN. On the death of the previous *Inkosi* of Madlebe, a bitter struggle ensued between factions representing his brother and the deceased chief's wife. After two years, Dr Zungu, the deceased's wife, was appointed *Inkosi* of the Madlebe Tribal Area. There were, however, still certain factions within the community who felt that the late *Inkosi*'s brother should have assumed the chieftainship.

Inkosi Dr Zungu took a maternal/intellectual approach to tribal issues, with the main thrust centring around the upliftment of her people through development projects identified by a strategic planning process. Unfortunately this apolitical approach to Tribal Affairs did not sit well with some members of the Tribal Authority. There were also pressures arising in the communities through political allegiance to the IFP or ANC. Faction-fighting became a major problem with a

migration of people to areas controlled by their political affiliates from the two political parties. While there was a lull in fighting with this migration, the political enmity was still strong with the resulting collapse of both infrastructure and any thoughts of future development as a cohesive tribal group.

The Inkosi invited a representative from the KZN Department of Economic Affairs to help set up a structure – the Madlebe Umbrella Committee – which would assist with the implementation of a project to build much-needed roads in the area. The Umbrella Committee acted as a catalyst to bring all the people of the area together around development issues. Unfortunately some members of the Tribal Authority experienced difficulties with this process of participation, which they perceived as impacting negatively on their own power base. The KZN Bureau of Community Development (BCD) recognised this dilemma and awarded R30,000 to the Tribal Authority for their training and empowerment in the process involved in the development strategy. This initiative was partially successful but a group within the Tribal Authority still did not recognise Inkosi Dr Zungu and challenged her through IFP structures, negatively influencing the communities and project initiatives.

The Bridge Foundation was requested by the Madlebe Development Committee to take an auditor's role over the funds, with other contracted duties. The Development Committee took on the day-to-day management role of the project. This removed the possible accusations of Committee misappropriation that would almost certainly have risen from certain factions within the community. The Committee felt that they needed to be seen as a neutral, fair, development body by the community. Once the correct management structure was in place, the next step was training.

Technical training applicable to hand-constructed roads was arranged to take place on site. A Development Committee member was appointed as a community project manager and, after interviews, a bookkeeper and store person were employed and trained for their future roles.

Delays occurred due to holdups within the Department of Labour over training accreditation, drawing up of contracts and the allocation of resources. During this waiting period, the Development Committee continued with project work at a low level. After encountering lingering resistance from certain wards, members of the Bridge Foundation embarked on a ward-by-ward programme of workshops to unlock and open to the issues surrounding the deadlock between the Development Committee communities and local Tribal structures. It became apparent that the Roads Project was being used as a platform to protest and raise the recent political issues and power struggles.

The facilitation process was a long one but the workshops unlocked and separated the Roads Project from the internal tribal politics. The communities expressed their desire for the Roads Project to go ahead and further workshops brought about consensus between Indunas, Councillors and their local communities on a way forward. The result of this commitment has been the formation of Road Committees for each ward with the blessing of the Indunas.

These committees have received capacity-building around committee skills and to handle the issues they will have to face within the Roads Projects. A meeting comprising of all these Road Committees was held and a Madlebe Umbrella Roads Committee was elected by the delegates, consisting of two members from each ward. This structure has also invited persons from the Madlebe Development Committee and the Tribal Authority to sit on this committee as ex-officio members.

All ten wards have now received technical training and are either presently constructing roads or in the process of establishing themselves to do so. By the end of April, thirteen roads were under construction. The support facilitation and capacity-building supplied by the two service providers was vital to successful implementation of this project, and the formation of cohesive development structures within the communities.

(3) Siyabona and Siyaphana

The third case study is a project of Siyabona, the Creative Learning Trust. The Amanyuswa tribal areas of Vulamehlo lie in hilly terrain approximately 50 km inland from Scottburgh in southern KwaZulu-Natal. Employment is confined to farm and forestry labour resulting in high unemployment and large numbers of migrant workers. There is an estimated 70% illiteracy rate amongst the women. Two primary schools and 1 high school serve children in the area, many of whom attend schools in other wards. Household water is obtained from 2 boreholes or streams and firewood has to be collected from forests some distance from the homes. The centrally sited St Michael's Catholic Mission serves not only the spiritual needs of the surrounding communities, but also provides a telephone service, a legal aid advice office, has facilities for community functions, and has a studio of 10 weavers trained by the nuns.

Siyabona was approached by the weavers to discuss ways that additional skills and knowledge could be introduced into the community. At the initial meeting, the demise of the spirit of *ubuntu*, the lack of communication between the teenagers and adults, and the need for building a cohesive community and families were identified as the most critical concerns.

It was agreed by the weavers that they would encourage their neighbours to join together and that these groups would be called Siyaphana, meaning, "*we share.*"

Cornerstone principles were established, including respect for oneself and others, the sharing of skills and resources, and the consideration of those most in need.

The general structure involves groups selecting members to be trained in sewing, home craft, etc, and then these members returning to their respective groups to share the skills acquired. Representatives from each group meet monthly to discuss needs and problems and report back on progress. Siyabona provides on-going guidance, training, facilitation, advocacy and capacity-building as needed with the aim of assisting Siyaphana to function effectively and independently by late 1997.

From this small beginning two years ago, over 600 women now work together in sewing, knitting and food garden groups. Adult literacy classes are held twice weekly and a comprehensive family health programme is in process with the training of traditional birthing attendants and voluntary community health workers. The creches have formed an umbrella creche committee which has selected a local trainer and will fundraise for her salary and training costs. She will provide in-service training to staff from the creches and will work with the umbrella committee to raise the standard of educare of the children, creche management and parent participation.

When the contentious issues of limited funds, resources, and assistance available for the communities emerge, Siyabona facilitates discussion amongst the Siyaphana women on what principles and criteria should be used to decide who should benefit. A recent issue was a donors grant for the funding of a communal garden. Eight groups had applied for assistance with communal gardens and so a meeting was called with representatives from each of these groups. The questions posed were: *"Should we consider which groups have already obtained sites, which have shown the most incentive, which have had some previous assistance and which have not?"* Lively debate followed and at the end of a few hours consensus was reached that the funding should go to a group that: (1) had had no previous assistance; (2) had spent long hours clearing a potential site only to be told by an agricultural officer that it was too close to the river and yet they had persevered in clearing a second site.

Siyaphana is also still discussing the important question about what beneficiaries should contribute to the community in order to avoid creating feelings of dependency or a sense of not belonging to the community. Where there is little or no income, contributions can be made in kind.

A major recent development has emerged after many community members expressed dissatisfaction about the lack of consultation following decisions made by the local councillors on new infrastructure. Since Siyaphana has such an extensive network throughout the community, they are now planning to approach the Tribal Authority and local councillors to ask that future proposals should be

given to Siyaphana to take to all of their various groups for community consultation, prior to any actions or plans being decided on.

Analysis

In summarising these case studies and the experience of the other NGOs on the forum, common constructive approaches to addressing conflicts include:

- assisting communities to access resources, services and employment opportunities, thus addressing basic needs;
- lobbying or acting as a catalyst for communities to lobby Government and other agencies for the provision of development services;
- initiating ventures necessitating leaders of opposing factions to work together and/or for groups to learn to cooperate with one another;
- facilitating the development of common visions and goals;
- building the capacity of communities and community structures efficiently to handle responsibilities;
- informally or formally mediating between differing parties;
- assisting groups to confront conflict and separate out the different issues, making it easier to address the problems;
- facilitating dialogue and building relationships; and
- delivering on promises and thus inspiring further development – *"success breeds success."*

NGOs also need to be aware of their capacity negatively to impact on communities. Development programmes have the potential to aggravate inherent suspicions and jealousies by bringing money and opportunities into an area. Raising hopes and creating unrealistic expectations without delivering on promises also generates ill-will in communities towards development efforts. Aligning with one leader, faction or political party can exacerbate existing conflicts and enlarge community divisions. Another guaranteed friction producer is where there are hidden agendas with personal or organisational gains placed above the best interest of communities.

NGOs also need to look at their internal functioning: how collaborative and participatory is their organisational structure? How respectfully is conflict handled? What processes are discriminatory and therefore create tensions? Is the

organisational vision truly shared among the staff? How are decisions made?

Added to this are NGOs' relations to each other. Since we are often competing for funding from the same donors, it is natural for territorial and possessive attitudes to develop as organisations become reluctant to share and exchange information and resources. Yet if we are genuinely committed best to serve communities, and to the principles of peace and reconciliation, we need to embrace a larger vision of belonging to an alliance of development organisations, and to remember the adage of *"one plus one is more than two."* In learning to collaborate with other organisations, we not only enlarge our potential, but we also begin the difficult, yet rewarding work of modelling the principles we want to infuse into communities.

In addition, it is vital for organisations to become more aware of themselves – of their internal functioning, their relationships with other organisations, and the effects of their development approaches. Careful assessments need to be done of communities prior to designing and implementing programmes. Knowledge of priority needs, leaders, power-bases, tensions, histories of conflicts, etc, allows NGOs some foresight in their planning and thus increases the chance for successful implementation.

Finally, NGOs can act as role models in:

- participatory decision-making and broad consultation in developing community ownership;
- facilitating the establishment of common goals and agreed-upon principles to guide processes;
- remaining neutral and fair in allocation of programmes and funds;
- encouraging leaders and organisations to collaborate together;
- facilitating careful dialogue around controversial issues;
- ensuring adequate training is provided in financial management to committees entrusted with this responsibility;
- delivery on promises and holding themselves accountable;
- promoting trust, transparency, honesty and compassion; and
- believing in the inherent potential of each human being and each community.

It is our hope that all development organisations will employ peace building as their most important guiding principle, and that they constantly remain willing and open to learning how to further this in every aspect of their work.