PRACTICE BRIEF 1

Area-Based Violence Prevention in a time of COVID-19

2021

SAFER PLACES:
RESILIENT INSTITUTIONS AND
NEIGHBOURHOODS TOGETHER

SPRINT
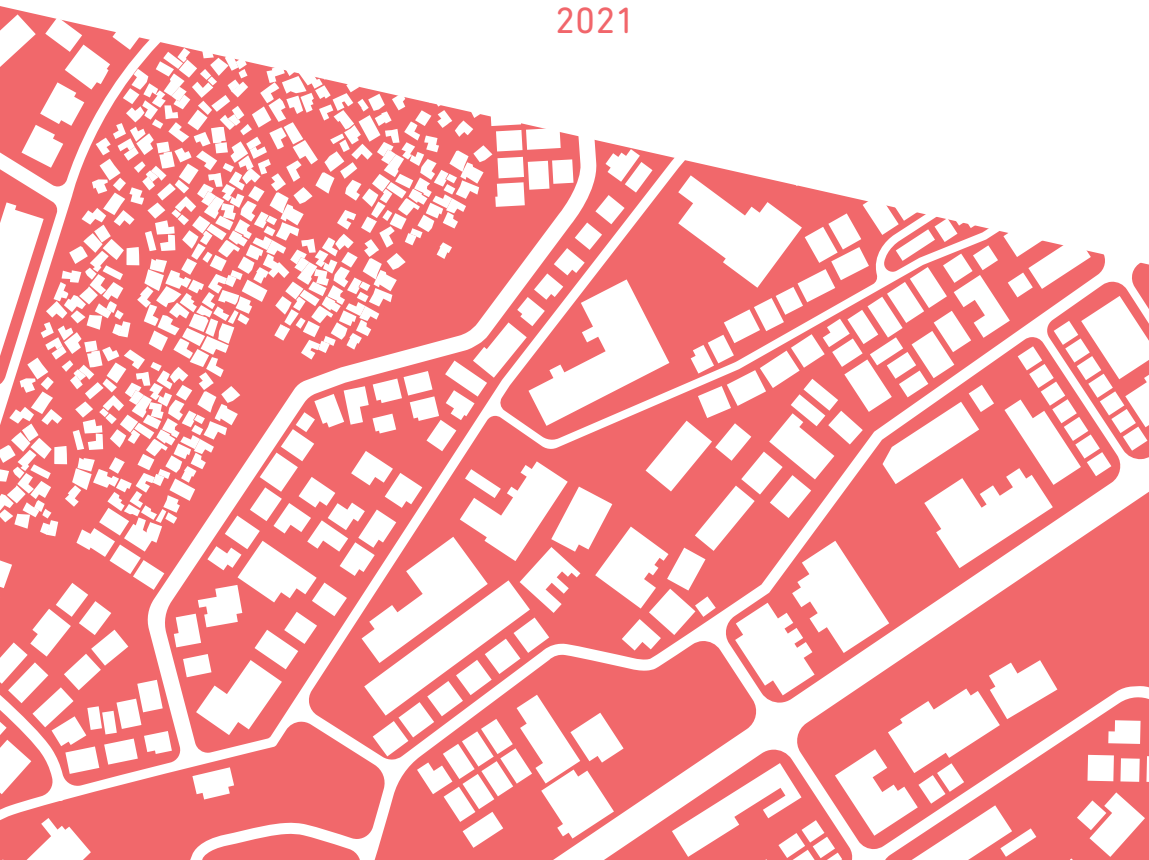
This Practice Brief draws on the presentations and discussion at the webinar Area-Based Violence Prevention in a time of COVID-19, held on 24 March 2021. The webinar, which brought together representatives from national, provincial and local government and civil society organisations, was convened by Isandla Institute as an implementation partner of the SPRINT project.

The webinar was a culmination of a series of virtual learning sessions on area-based violence prevention interventions (ABVPI) for civil society organisations (CSOs). The first series, held between November 2020 and March 2021, focused on context setting and contextualisation, exploring specific themes that are relevant for violence prevention and the promotion of safety and community resilience. The five themes explored were: the impact of COVID-19 on safety and wellbeing; understanding ABVPI; working with communities; gender; and, understanding power. These themes were pulled together in the webinar that facilitated a multi-stakeholder conversation on the role of municipalities in promoting safety, in responding to the increased risk factors to violence and crime brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic and in pursuing ABPVI.

**An initiative of the South African -
German Development Cooperation**

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THROUGH URBAN
UPGRADING

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A one-size-fits-all approach doesn't address underlying root causes and ultimately, doesn't break the cycle of violence and crime.
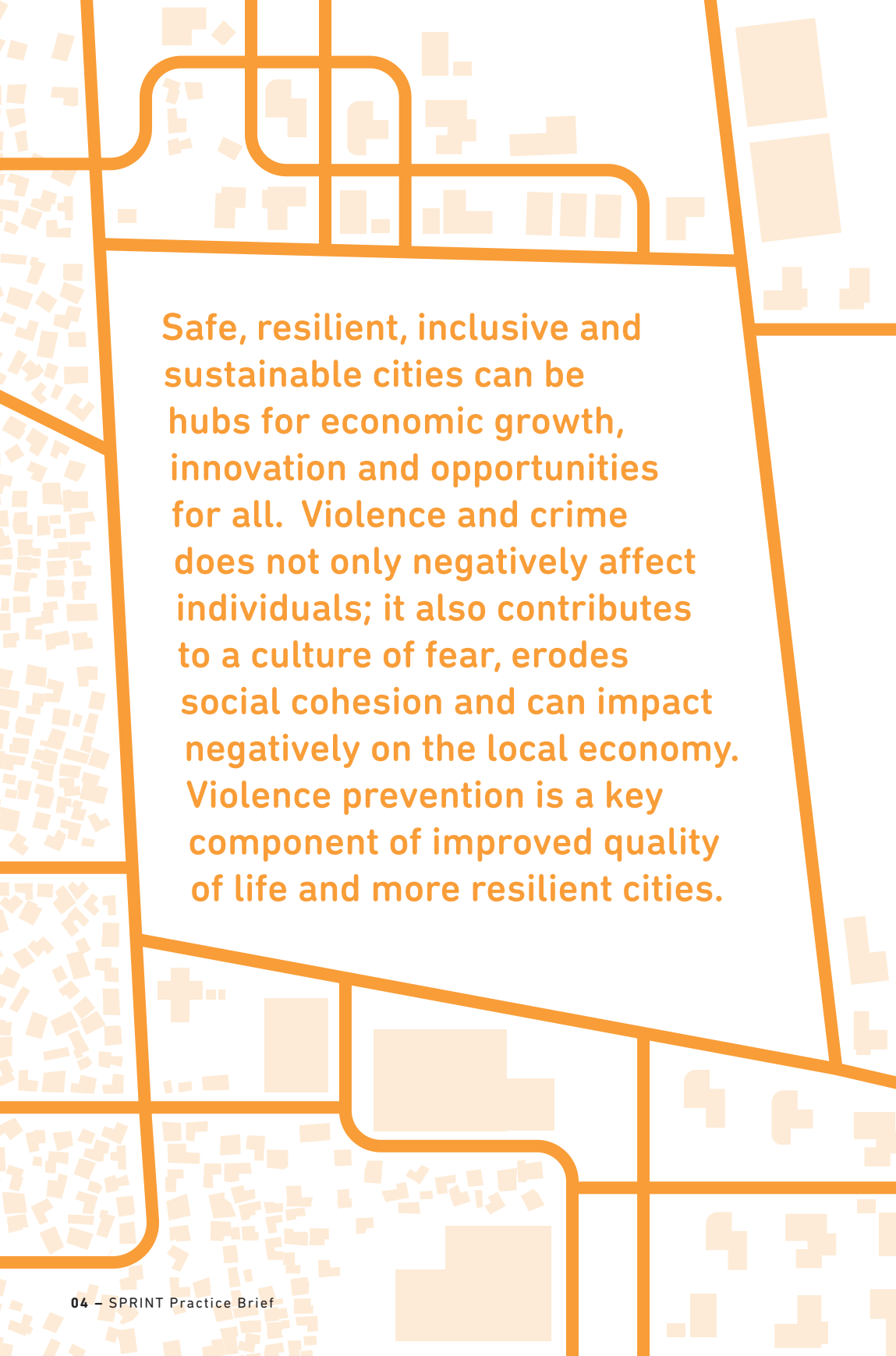
Introduction

Violence and crime are significant issues in South Africa. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and extended lockdown has been more than the health and wellbeing of those in living South Africa; many have found themselves in positions of increased vulnerability such as through the loss of income and livelihoods. As a result, COVID-19 has deepened risk factors commonly associated with violence and crime, such as joblessness, stress and lack of schooling.

Furthermore, protective factors that contribute to overall wellbeing and build resilience and community cohesion have been threatened or undermined. Incidents of crime and violence are likely to increase, leading not only to personal injury or fear, but also adding further strain to existing services.

Area-based violence prevention interventions (ABVPI) offer a unique opportunity to utilise knowledge and various tools from across different social, spatial and institutional approaches. This challenges the one-size-fits-all approach, resulting in an intervention which is unique to the needs and characteristics of a specific geographical area.

> Area-based violence prevention interventions (ABVPI) offer a unique opportunity to utilise knowledge and various tools from across different social, spatial and institutional approaches.

Safe, resilient, inclusive and sustainable cities can be hubs for economic growth, innovation and opportunities for all. Violence and crime does not only negatively affect individuals; it also contributes to a culture of fear, erodes social cohesion and can impact negatively on the local economy. Violence prevention is a key component of improved quality of life and more resilient cities.

Why should cities promote safety and violence prevention?

South Africa, much like in many parts of the world, is increasingly becoming urbanised. According to the Integrated Urban Development Framework (IUDF), "More than 60% of South Africans live in urban areas, and this figure is projected to increase to 71.3% and 80% by 2030 and 2050 respectively" (CoGTA. 2016:4).

Urban areas are hubs for economic growth, innovation and opportunities. However, as the IUDF adds, "South Africa's urban areas continue to be hampered by a legacy of racial segregation, poverty and exclusion from social and economic opportunities (Ibid:15)". These socio-economic factors contribute to an environment of enhanced risk to violence and crime.

The IUDF identifies safety, i.e. living free from threat or fear of violence and crime, as a basic human right,[1] a public good and essential for people living in cities to take full advantage of economic, social and cultural opportunities (Ibid:33). This echoes Sustainable Development Goal 11, which aims to 'make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable'.[2] Issues of safety and violence prevention are important, because experiencing violence or crime has an immediate, and often a longer term, negative effect on those living in the city. Violence and crime does not only negatively affect individuals; it also contributes to a culture of fear, erodes social cohesion and can impact negatively on the local economy. Because the root causes of violence and crime are often found in exclusionary socio-economic systems, practices and conduct, it stands to reason that promoting safety and violence prevention in cities not only addresses the immediate manifestations and impacts of violence and crime; it also contributes to an improved quality of life and the creation of a more inclusive and resilient city.

Notes:

1: As stated in the Bill of Rights in The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 Section 12(1)(c) "Everyone has the right to freedom and security of the person, which includes the right to be free from all forms of violence from either public or private sources;" (1996:6).

2: Goal 11 of the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals (https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal11).

Isn't violence prevention a criminal justice responsibility?

Violence can take many different forms, both in terms of who it is directed at and by, and how it is articulated. Violence might be direct or indirect/structural. Direct violence is "where an actor or perpetrator can clearly be identified", whereas in the case of indirect violence, no actor exists because "violence is … built into the structures, appearing as unequal power relations and, consequently, as unequal opportunities" (SaferSpaces. 2020). Some of the impacts of violence are pain and trauma, economic loss, eroding social cohesion, unfulfilled human potential and a national psyche of fear.

Criminal justice is a critical component of stemming violence and crime. However, making violence and crime prevention the responsibility of criminal justice alone only serves to address the symptoms, while "the underlying root causes of violence and crime are not sufficiently addressed, e.g. inequality, unemployment, poverty, lack of social cohesion, availability of opportunities and motives for crime and victimisation" (CoGTA. 2016:34). Increasingly it is recognized that violence prevention is not just the purview of the police, but rather requires an interdisciplinary, intersectoral and multi-stakeholder approach. In other words, a 'whole-of-government' – and, indeed, 'whole-of-society' – approach is needed to develop holistic violence prevention interventions and bolster community resilience. Such an integrated, multilevel approach to crime and violence prevention and safety is reflected in South African policy.

The policy landscape for safety, crime and violence prevention is shaped by the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996), the White Paper on Safety and Security (WPSS) (2016),

Violence by definition

The World Health Organisation defines violence as "the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation."

the Gender-based Violence and Femicide National Strategic Plan (GBVF-NSP) (2020), the Integrated Crime and Violence Prevention Strategy (ICVPS) (2021), the Integrated Social Crime Prevention Strategy (ISCPS) (2011) and, as mentioned previously, the IUDF (2016). Across these policy documents we find a call for cities where people feel safe and secure; where police and society seek to define and create that safe, secure place together with those living in South Africa; and where both structural and systemic interventions are aligned to ensure the healthy development of human life. The ICVPS works alongside the WPSS to promote an integrated approach to safety and security. The key focus areas of the ICVPS are the six pillars of the WPSS, namely:

1. An effective criminal justice system
2. Early intervention to prevent crime and violence and promote safety
3. Victim support
4. Effective and integrated service delivery for safety, security and prevention of violence
5. Safety through environmental design
6. Active public and community participation

These pillars highlight critical areas for intervention. This is based on the understanding that violence results from a number of risk factors and as such, requires interventions at multiple levels.

What are the risk factors and protective factors to violence and crime?

A combination of individual, relationship, community and societal factors contribute to the risk of violence and crime. Table 1 illustrates some of these risk factors, as well as protective factors. This is not to suggest that the presence of any of these risk factors causes violence; rather, these risk factors – especially when multiple factors compound each other – may increase the likelihood of violent behaviour to occur. Identifying protective factors is as important as understanding risk factors.

When conceptualising, implementing or evaluating a violence prevention intervention, the socioecological model is very useful for understanding how different risk or protective factors interplay. (See page 10). The model presents four levels across which the factors are present: individual, relationships, community and societal. Factors might be present on one level, or across multiple levels. Factors across different levels affect one another and the more risk factors are present, the more likely there is to be an incidence of violence. The "model considers the multiplicity of factors that put people at risk and that need to be addressed, in order to protect individuals from experiencing or perpetuating violence… Prevention strategies must therefore address risk and protection factors at different stages of a person's life and development, in order to increase safety, as each level of human development is associated with different, and often overlapping, set of risk factors" (CSPS. 2020:VI). The model helps to articulate the need for systemic change and shows the importance of coordinated efforts across levels to create lasting change.

Table 1: Risk and protective factors

Examples of protective interventions & programmes:

- Counselling
- Education/ Awareness Programmes/ Campaigns
- Youth Development
- Early Childhood Development (ECD)
- Programmes for groups vulnerable to becoming perpetrators AND to becoming victims
- Gender safety initiatives
- Community Action Groups
- Social Development Fund (SDF)
- Local Economic Development (LED)
- Neighbourhood Watch
- Safety plans
- Anti-GBV laws and campaigns

	EXAMPLES OF RISK FACTORS	EXAMPLES OF PROTECTIVE FACTORS
INDIVIDUAL	■ high emotional distress ■ poor behavioural control ■ history of violent victimisation ■ exposure to violence	■ balanced lifestyle ■ positive social orientation ■ affirmation from peers ■ spirituality / religious beliefs
RELATIONAL	■ poor family functioning ■ one or more absent parents ■ abusive partner relationship ■ social rejection by peers ■ peer pressure, possible involvement in gangs	■ positive role models ■ active parent involvement ■ involvement in social activity ■ ability to discuss problems with friends/family/peers/colleagues ■ relationships based on respect and care
COMMUNITY	■ poor living environments, including lack of lighting and poorly located, low quality basic services ■ inadequate housing (including lack of privacy/over-population) ■ socially disorganised neighbourhoods ■ prejudicial norms and values (e.g. xenophobia) ■ poor policing ■ poverty ■ hunger ■ lack of economic opportunities	■ access to quality basic services ■ well-lit streets and spaces ■ good quality public environment, including public space ■ decent housing ■ community facilities ■ socio-economic development and outreach programmes ■ well-organised community structures ■ community policing/community safety forums ■ employment/suitable work opportunities
SOCIETAL	■ exclusion or victimisation on the basis of gender, race, age, nationality, sexuality, religion, etc. ■ social stereotypes	■ anti-discrimination policy, legislation and campaigns ■ affirmative action

The socio-ecological model takes the individual as the starting point and considers the complex interplay between the individual, their relationships, community and society.

COMMUNITY

RELATIONSHIP

INDIVIDUAL

SOCIETAL

How COVID-19 has deepened risk and vulnerability to violence and crime

COVID-19 has negatively impacted the health and wellbeing of people living in South Africa but also, and some would argue more so, on the economy, on jobs and household income, on food security and hunger, on housing security and homelessness, and on schooling and the quality of education. COVID-19 has had a particularly devastating impact on poor and vulnerable communities in South Africa and on marginalised social groups. COVID-19 drives risk factors that lead to violence while also weakening protective factors. In a context in which violence and crime is already high and institutionalized or normalized, this has had a devastating impact and stretched already strained resources.

Some of the challenges created or amplified by COVID-19 include reduced public and private resources for implementation, and a diversion of capacity and resources towards the COVID-19 response to the detriment of other key areas of work. This situation has been worsened by the incidence of corruption in which COVID-19 response funds have been misused, leaving their initial intention unmet.

The COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdown measures have also resulted in extensive changes in social interaction, including limiting how many people can be accommodated in certain venues, what types of spaces are 'appropriate' for meeting and even, under stricter lockdown measures, whether face-to-face engagements are possible at all. As a result of these changes, it has become all the more important to identify key stakeholders to work with. However, while focused stakeholder engagement can be valuable for important insights and capacity building processes, it can also lead to gatekeeping and exclusion and so needs to be carefully considered. Technological advances have counter-balanced some issues, but offer their own issues of connectivity and equitable access and do not replace the value of face-to-face engagements.

committed health care workers

hunger

domestic abuse

bullying

spousal abuse

sexual abuse of chil

emotional distre

youth out of school

clear role of alcohol

less movement

job losses

rising unemploymen

efficiency

new vulnerabilities

increased frustrations

gender-based violen

"There is so much beauty and nuance and depth in connecting with people (face-to-face). The real challenge is that we can't assume that what has worked in the past will work now (or in the future). We need to lean on our values and principles to ensure that people aren't forgotten."

Finally, the scale and consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic have left many feeling desperate, overwhelmed and frustrated. This has contributed to increased stress, depression, disillusionment and anger, which may increase the likelihood for more violent behaviour.

new support networks

creativity

technological advancements

innovation

poverty

increased compassion

increased crime

stress

loss of income

elderly vulnerable

health and environment

limited intervention

ldren

vulnerabilities exposed

overburdened health systems

ess

increased hunger

limited emotional support

less social cohesion

infected learners

increased gbv

more vulnerabilities

increased inequality

unemployment

crime

positive father roles

uncertainty about future

reduced livelihood support

police brutality

access to basic services

minimal support structure

increased in criminality

nt

increased risk factors

increased burden on women

gbv programmes hindered

unemployment spikes

dependency on providers

alcohol abuse

hunger

increased gbv in lockdown

child neglect

delay in interventions

face to face dangerous

lack of job security

new gang strategies

ce

solidarity

accountability in use of resources

Despite the many difficulties during COVID-19, there has also been a renewed sense of solidarity and innovation in action.

COVID-19: An opportunity to strengthen protective factors

Despite the extensive challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic has created and increased, it has also been a time of impressive responses to vulnerability and risk. This includes that despite the limited resources, the increased urgency has resulted in better use of resources, expedited service delivery (including the extended provision of temporary water and sanitation to under-serviced communities) and innovation in how and by whom initiatives are implemented.

The pandemic has reinvigorated a sense of solidarity and empathy, which is evident in the stronger emphasis on communities, clearer focus on key issues like gender-based violence (GBV) and the efforts to capacitate those leading engagements and change. There has been a significant increase in grassroots mobilisation in response to growing hunger, food insecurity, evictions and homelessness, to mention but a few.

Lastly, scarcer resources have meant that there is an increased emphasis on evidence-based interventions, especially in health responses to COVID-19, which need to be based on evidence and science. The potential resulting repository of lessons learned can be of great value for those wishing to create and implement interventions of their own to see what has worked, where and why.

Community Action Networks

Community Action Networks (CANs) are an example of grassroots mobilization. CANs are community groups that build on existing strengths and ability within the community to collectively design and deliver services and to act, without needing external support.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, there was an increase in CANs who would, for example, organize collection of medication or grocery shopping for vulnerable persons and feeding schemes.

Bolstering resilience in a time of COVID-19

The complex, dynamic nature of the COVID-19 pandemic means that efforts to respond to COVID-19 and its undoubtedly long-term impact require the construction of a robust, dynamic and resilient system. To do this, efforts need to be focused across three points of intervention.

The first is to focus our efforts on **people**, at neighbourhood level, drawing together local government, CSOs and community members in those neighbourhoods to address violence and crime by strengthening protective factors and reducing risk factors. Key interventions include upskilling initiatives, food security and economic empowerment. Through robust monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning systems, evidence from these interventions can be consolidated, analysed and adapted as needed.

The next point of intervention is with **institutions**, to strengthen implementation by building capacity and supporting a multidisciplinary (and therefore multisectoral) approach. For this to be enabled, intergovernmental relations are an essential component of programme planning, execution and evaluation. Such engagements need to move beyond 'tick boxes' and be framed as an essential for drawing together complementary efforts and increasing effective implementation.

The third point of intervention is one that speaks to both the previous points and more broadly. This is a critical reflection of the **values** that underpin and shape our engagements and interventions. For violence prevention interventions to be robust, impactful and sustainable, we need to address underlying power dynamics and inequality, stop corruption and reignite the values of ubuntu.

Bringing together such a complex violence prevention intervention requires integrating social, spatial and institutional approaches and an ability to shape and adapt the intervention based on the information generated from those utilising those spaces. Area-based violence prevention interventions offer such an opportunity.
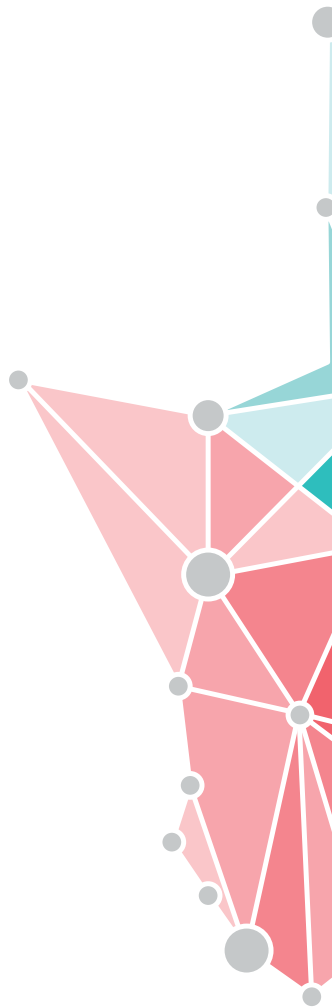
What is area-based violence prevention?

Responsive and preventative interventions to violence and crime are complex. For example, it can be a fine balance to ensure justice for survivors and uphold survivor's experiences, while also rehabilitating and reintegrating perpetrators. Violence prevention requires a range of interventions and support from various stakeholders aimed at strengthening protective factors and/or minimising risk factors.

Area-based violence prevention interventions offer an integrated, evidence based, spatially targeted approach which aims to reduce violent occurrences as well as the underlying root causes. It combines social, spatial and institutional approaches within a specific geographic area. Central to this approach is extensive and inclusive community participation to get a full picture of the neighbourhood characteristics and dynamics and to take into account the local knowledge to co-create and design violence prevention approaches.[3] By virtue of its integrated nature, ABVPI enables "all spheres of government, departments and sectors come together to focus on lived realities and place-making in a defined spatial context" (Isandla Institute. 2021:4). ABVPI are both a set of protocols and methodologies (i.e. a codified practice) and an approach to spatial development that takes safety and community resilience as the intended outcomes. In this way, ABVPI includes both immediate actions taken to reduce violence and crime and the work done to address underlying root causes.

ABVPI can incorporate interventions ranging from infrastructure improvements to community development initiatives, and more. Some examples are reflected on the right. The type, range and sequencing of ABVPI depends on the local context and locally identified needs and opportunities.

ABVPI depends on information which is generated about and within the geographic area of intervention. Strong ABVPI is based on robust evidence-based knowledge, and shaped by iterative learning processes. Such processes encourage learning and adaptation which enables the adoption of ABVPI.

Notes:
3: This explanation of ABVPI is taken from the current draft of the South African Local Government Association and Civilian Secretariat for Police Service's 2021 Pocketbook "The role of municipal councilors in building safer communities." The 2016 pocketbook can be accessed here.

ABVPI can incorporate interventions ranging from infrastructure improvements to community development initiatives, and more.

- In informal settlements, using communal toilets can put women and children at risk of sexual violence. Improving safe access to water and sanitation can therefore make a qualitative difference to their lives.

- Poorly lit roads, pathways and spaces create opportunities for danger and criminal actions to be concealed. Street lighting can contribute to greater visibility and an improved sense of safety.

- Early Childhood Development Centres can play a vital role in children's development, whilst enabling their parents or caregivers to engage in economic activities. Such Centres can also act as places of safety when adult supervision and care is unavailable.

- Public space can play an important role in instilling a sense of community and facilitating social connection, leisure and play. Where public space is absent or poorly designed, these opportunities are lost.

- Similarly, community amenities provide people with access to information, knowledge, services and opportunities for interaction and self-actualisation.

- Economic empowerment programmes and economic infrastructure to enable skills development and income-generating activities are examples of how protective factors to violence and crime can be bolstered.

- Activation initiatives and programmes, such as street festivals, craft markets, after school programmes or vending development zones, are vital to create opportunities for human development, social interaction and community cohesion.

Lessons from practice

In discussions about the practice of ABVPI, a number of key lessons emerged which can be adopted in future interventions. In reflecting on how ABVPI is implemented, ten emerging lessons were identified. The emerging lessons cover issues related to conceptualisation, implementation, institutionalisation and partnership.

- Change requires time. Interventions cannot be considered in singularity, but rather relate to what has been done before and what will happen in the future. Nonetheless, it's important that tangible actions are formulated, leading to visible results. An incremental approach would include long term interventions that address larger, underlying (root) issues and smaller 'quick wins', which address immediate problems and create momentum for the project.
- Rather than sticking to a narrow, 'tick-box' type intervention, an iterative, reflective process that utilizes key questions is essential for "checking in" as it allows the process to adapt and respond to emerging issues by utilising tools and approaches from the ABVPI portfolio.
- Violence and crime prevention "can't be done from a desk" but require on the ground engagements with the people and issues in a neighbourhood. This is especially important for drawing together cross cutting issues, to create the space for community engagement and to ensure that the interventions are owned by the community members themselves. This can be challenging due to issues of connectivity and attendance, especially in less resourced and/or rural communities. As highlighted above, COVID-19 has presented a number of challenges with regards to face-to-face engagements. Innovations in technology, such as WhatsApp or cloud-based apps for field work, offer exciting opportunities for connectivity and engagement – when the context permits and potential barriers to inclusive engagement through technology are taken into account.
- To foster ownership, it is necessary to augment area-based management efforts at a community level to align with the insights and needs of that community, allowing them to come together with local government and co-create the intervention. To reach broad and deep ownership of an intervention, it is essential to reach beyond the early adopters of community action plans that usually
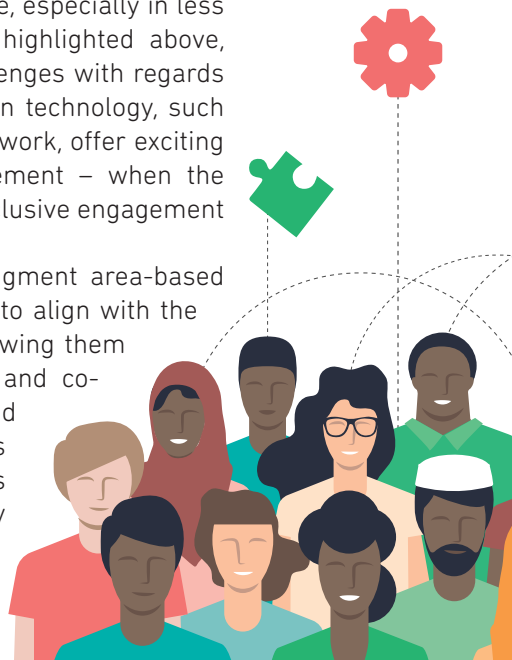
- become the leadership of an initiative and seek out emerging or marginalised voices.
- Ultimately, adopting a broader systemic approach that includes root cause analysis and the development of integrated interventions can be overwhelming. This is partially why it is important to work with other partners and other stakeholders – utilising a whole-of-society or whole-of-government approach.
- Adopting an integrated ABVPI framework gives this approach structure and allows for those who've previously worked in silos to rethink how public participation and development is done. This is especially important for building trust, which is a critical component of working collaboratively and building partnerships.
- The support of key leadership is critical to the success of an intervention and to building strategic alliances and partnerships.
- The issue of safety is fundamental and so it is critical to move beyond pilots to institutionalisation. Integrated ABVPI is a complex, long-term intention which requires a multisectoral approach with multiple stakeholders from different departments and types of organisations, offering both operational and strategic input. Subsequently, institutionalisation of ABVPI can be quite difficult to take forward and, as it stands, is often seen in competition with seemingly bigger, more straightforward or more important or immediate needs. However, integrated ABVPI can have significant positive impacts and as such, is critical.
- Capacity building processes should be designed in a way that identifies key joint reference points or creates a shared framework but also cover a wide selection of issues or topics and identifies potential resources for further learning. This is critical because while there are some shared values or insights, each intervention needs to be adapted to be context specific.
- Monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning are especially important for recognising possible gaps and assessing impact. Community auditing, specifically, results in more sophisticated analysis that can then be collaboratively engaged with. Critical for this to succeed is the need to understand what evidence is being sought and how it can be identified and teased out.

In sum, jointly crafting and implementing an integrated ABVPI framework enables residents, municipalities, civil society organisations and other stakeholders to get to bigger, and better, solutions than previously achieved.

Key take-aways:
8 ingredients of ABVPI

From these reflections on practice, the following eight key ingredients for successful integrated ABVPI can be distilled.

1 The first is to **adopt a community-centred approach** that puts people first. When residents are drawn into the process, when their voices are heard and when their skills and creativity are utilised, active citizenship is grown. In addition, residents know the challenges they face, and so they must be part of co-creating solutions.

2 The second ingredient is to **assemble the various stakeholders** and partners who will be crucial to the intervention. These individuals and groups, including civil society organisations and the private sector, can be identified through stakeholder mapping and there should be significant effort to be inclusive and ensure all voices are given space to be heard.

3 Ingredient number three is using the critical emerging information to **develop a joint vision for the intervention.** This will become the basis for the plan of action, which can include key actions such as the implementation of a local safety audit, the establishment of a municipal community safety forum or the development of an integrated safety plan.

4 A strong team works to build trust and fosters partnerships through active communication, patience and a shared leadership and commitment to the process. Diverse groups and complex interventions require coordination and accountability mechanisms to thrive. As such, the fourth ingredient is to **assign roles and responsibilities.**

5 The fifth ingredient is to **develop a budget and allocate sufficient resources.** Without resource allocation for relevant capital and operational costs, good intentions will not materialise. Similarly, diverse human capital is required to work transversally and across different spheres of government to respond to the multifaceted nature of violence prevention.

6 Sixth, **have an evidence-based, community-informed approach.** This helps identify and mobilise existing assets, skills and abilities that can be grown through the intervention. By aligning with what a community has and wants, the intervention will more likely be cost-effective *and* sustainable.

7 The seventh ingredient is that throughout the project life, the issues of **activation, maintenance and management must be prioritised.** These are the programmes and initiatives that breathe life into spaces and physical infrastructure on a sustained basis.

8 The eighth and final ingredient is a flexible and adaptive **monitoring, evaluation and learning system,** which uses qualitative and quantitative data. The evidence gathered will help assess the sustainability, progress, effectiveness and impact of each intervention. It will also encourage continuous dialogue between government and communities.

Conclusion

The promotion of safe, resilient neighbourhoods is embedded in public policy in South Africa. Municipalities have a leading role to play in designing, coordinating, implementing and monitoring neighbourhood level violence prevention.

Building resilient institutions and neighbourhoods is at the heart of violence and crime prevention. ABVPI offers a unique opportunity to integrate different approaches and create something that is appropriate for a specific area and is adaptable in difficulties – including the unprecedented times of COVID-19. A good place for municipalities to start is to develop an integrated ABPVI framework, involving the local community and other relevant stakeholders.

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