



SAFER PLACES:
RESILIENT INSTITUTIONS AND
NEIGHBOURHOODS TOGETHER

SPRINT

PRACTICE BRIEF 2

Building Safer Neighbourhoods Together

2021





This Practice Brief draws on the presentations and discussion at the webinar Building Safer Neighbourhoods Together, held on 5 August 2021. The webinar brought together representatives from national, provincial and local government and civil society organisations, and focused on three themes: integrating violence prevention into informal settlement upgrading; how area-based violence prevention interventions (ABVPI) can be funded; and, the importance of partnerships in ABVPI. The event was convened by Isandla Institute as an implementation partner of the SPRINT project.

The webinar was a culmination of the second series of virtual learning sessions on ABVPI for civil society organisations (CSOs). While the first series, held between November 2020 and March 2021, focused on context setting and contextualisation related to safety and violence prevention, the second series (held between April and June 2021) focused on the institutionalisation of violence prevention and ABVPI. More specifically, the following themes were explored in the three sessions: integrating ABVPI in municipal planning, partnerships and resourcing of ABVPI. The webinar combined presentations and interactive engagement with the use of playback theatre as an innovative knowledge harvesting approach.

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VIOLENCE
PREVENTION
THROUGH URBAN
UPGRADING



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Municipalities have a Constitutional responsibility to promote a safe and healthy environment and many of their functions are directly relevant for violence prevention and safety at the micro level.

Introduction

Chapter 8 (Transforming human settlement and the national space economy) of the National Development Plan (NDP) calls for the creation of spaces that are liveable, equitable, sustainable, resilient and efficient, and that support economic opportunities and social cohesion (National Planning Commission. 2012). Similarly, Chapter 12 (Building Safer Communities) stresses the importance of tackling the fundamental causes of violence and calls for a 'whole-of-society' approach to building safer communities. The concept of 'safer neighbourhoods' aligns with the position taken by the NDP. Municipalities have a Constitutional responsibility "to promote a safe and healthy environment" and many of their functions are directly relevant for violence prevention and safety at the micro level.

Area-based violence prevention interventions (ABVPI) are designed to address root causes and risk factors of violence while strengthening protective factors that bolster resilience and improve quality of life. ABVPI can make a qualitative difference to any type of settlement, but particularly to under-resourced areas where risk factors are disproportionately concentrated. This practice brief focuses on informal settlements as a particular type of settlement where public (and private) investment can contribute significantly to safety and community resilience. The upgrading process provides a particular opportunity to embed ABVPI principles and practices. It then focuses on which public funds municipalities can leverage for ABVPI and the importance of co-creating and co-implementing ABVPI through partnerships.

Is safety a local government responsibility?

The objects of local government as defined in Section 152 (d) of the Constitution are:

- a. to provide democratic and accountable government for local communities;
- b. to ensure the provision of services to communities in a sustainable manner;
- c. to promote social and economic development;
- d. to promote a safe and healthy environment; and
- e. to encourage the involvement of communities and community organisations in matters of local government.

These objects align with the core elements of an area-based approach to violence prevention (ABVPI). It therefore means that municipalities have an explicit responsibility to promote safety, address risk factors that undermine safety and bolster the protective factors that enable safety and community resilience.

Many of the matters that municipalities are responsible for, such as municipal planning and local amenities, are directly relevant for ABVPI. In fact, "ABVPI represents a good practice approach for how municipalities should be carrying out their constitutional responsibilities when it comes to providing municipal services to communities, promoting social and economic development, and ensuring safe and healthy environments" (Isandla Institute. 2021a:4).





What does a safer neighbourhood look like?

Violence is commonplace in South Africa and its impact can be devastating and long lasting. South Africa's apartheid legacy means that the incidence and impact of violence affects the poorest communities and most marginalized social groups the most. The COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent socio-economic impacts have increased unemployment, food insecurity, school dropouts and stress. All of these are risk factors for increased violence and crime. The impact of such risk factors is amplified in unsafe, poorly designed neighbourhoods.

There are two key dimensions to building a safer neighbourhood. The first is minimising risk factors. There will most likely always be some risk factors. However, when there are many risk factors present in one space, their impact is compounded. The second dimension is the (growing) presence of protective factors, which help to bolster resilience, reduce risk factors or minimize their impact by providing a buffer between risk factors and the adoption of violent or criminal behaviour.

Safer neighbourhoods have defining characteristics, amenities and services which stop or reduce the impact of risk factors and create or bolster protective factors and increase quality of life. These defining characteristics include multi-functionality (of spaces and of use/activities), visibility, signage and route markers and well-designed movement networks (VPUU.2015). In addition, basic services, social amenities (like schools, hospitals, libraries and community facilities) and social programmes as well as social cohesion are also critical. Area-based violence prevention interventions help to identify, develop and expand such characteristics, amenities and services. Table 1 shows key safety principles for environmental design of an area and examples of what each principle may look like in practice.

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.¹ By virtue of its integrated nature, ABVPI enables “all spheres of government, departments and sectors to come together to focus on lived realities and place-making in a defined spatial context” (Isandla Institute. 2021b:4). Adopting an ABVPI approach is about identifying the root causes of violence and crime and addressing these, rather than just responding to the symptoms. In this way, ABVPI can be seen to shift focus from a dominant security response to violence to a more encompassing focus on safety.

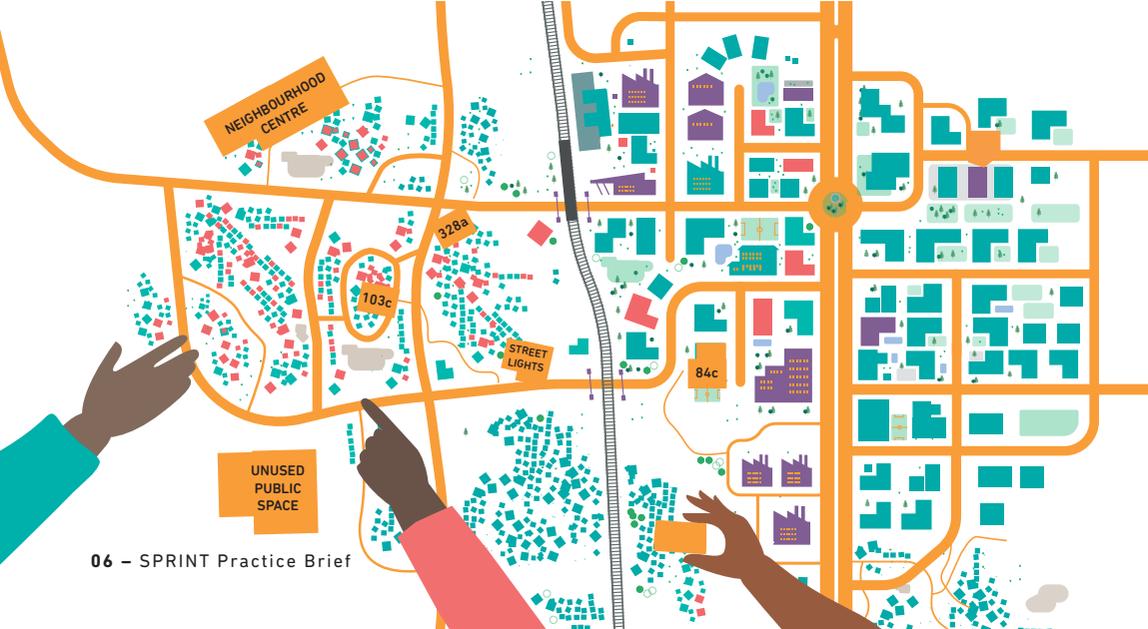
ABVPI can refer to both a set of protocols and methodologies (i.e. a codified practice, in line with the safety principles outlined above) and an approach to spatial development that takes safety and resilience as the intended outcomes. ABVPI includes both immediate actions taken to reduce violence and crime and actions aimed at addressing underlying root causes. As such, applying an ABVPI lens does not necessarily always require new or additional work or resources. In the first instance, it’s about reframing existing perspectives and approaches to integrate issues of safety and resilience. One of the key opportunities to do so is in the upgrading of informal settlements in South Africa.



Notes:
1: 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](#). 



Table 1: Safety principles for environmental design with practical examples



PRACTICAL EXAMPLES

SAFETY PRINCIPLES



Surveillance and visibility

- Encourage active frontages by the appropriate design and placement of buildings
- Encourage street level activities in appropriate places
- Maintain visual connections between activities (both within buildings and on streets) and the street or public space
- Keep clear sight lines
- Multiple storey development to increase visibility
- Avoid blank walls, dense vegetation, large car parks & vacant sites
- Ensure effective lighting standards for night-time illumination

Owned spaces

- Inclusive design informing:
- Land-use management processes via appropriate zoning
- Urban design framework plans
- Precinct plans and building plans

Defined access and safe movement

- Landmarks
- Signage
- Hierarchy of movement routes
- Visibility and passive surveillance of starting and endpoints of movement routes
- Orientation of public facility entrances onto public spaces

Image and aesthetics

- Ensure a human scale in design
- Use of appropriate (where possible local) materials
- Durable materials
- Use of colour
- Landscaping (including seasonal changing plants)
- Adequate lighting
- Inclusion of public art
- Design for high levels of activity

Physical barriers

- Position development on property boundaries to create positive and activated edges
- Block edge development
- Transparent fences to ensure passive surveillance, burglar guards
- Clearly marked transitional spaces from public to private spaces that act as a deterrent for unruly behaviour

Operation, maintenance and management

- Community Delivery of Services (CDS) and dedicated operating budgets from the municipality
- The Sustainable Neighbourhoods concept
- Intelligent design in terms of low maintenance, durability, 'palette of materials', energy efficiency measures
- Development of O&M plans as mandatory requirement for design teams

Inclusive design

- Involvement of range of social groups, with particular attention given to marginalised or vulnerable social groups
- Design responds to variety of needs in the community

Adapted from VPUU, 2015

How can an ABVPI lens be used to transform informal settlements into safer neighbourhoods?

Informal settlements are “areas that do not comply with planning norms and standards, occupied often by poor households who have moved onto land informally for a range of reasons, in a context of severe housing backlogs” (Isandla Institute. 2021b: 03).

There are often many risk factors and very few protective factors present in under-resourced and under-developed areas and as such, an increased risk of, and incidence of, violence and crime. This is particularly pronounced in informal settlements. There is general acceptance that informal settlements are part of the South African urban landscape and that rather than focusing on the removal of these settlements, the focus should be on addressing undignified, unsafe living conditions in a comprehensive and holistic manner through upgrading.

In South Africa, the upgrading of informal settlements is aligned with the Integrated Urban Development Framework (IUDF) which provides a roadmap for the implementation of the vision of the South African National Development Plan (NDP). The NDP and IUDF both highlight safety as a key issue for people living in South Africa. The IUDF identifies urban safety, particularly safety in public spaces as an essential ingredient for creating liveable and prosperous cities. The Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Act (SPLUMA) defines the incremental upgrading of informal settlements as “the progressive introduction of administration, management, engineering services and land tenure rights to an area that is established outside existing planning



Note:

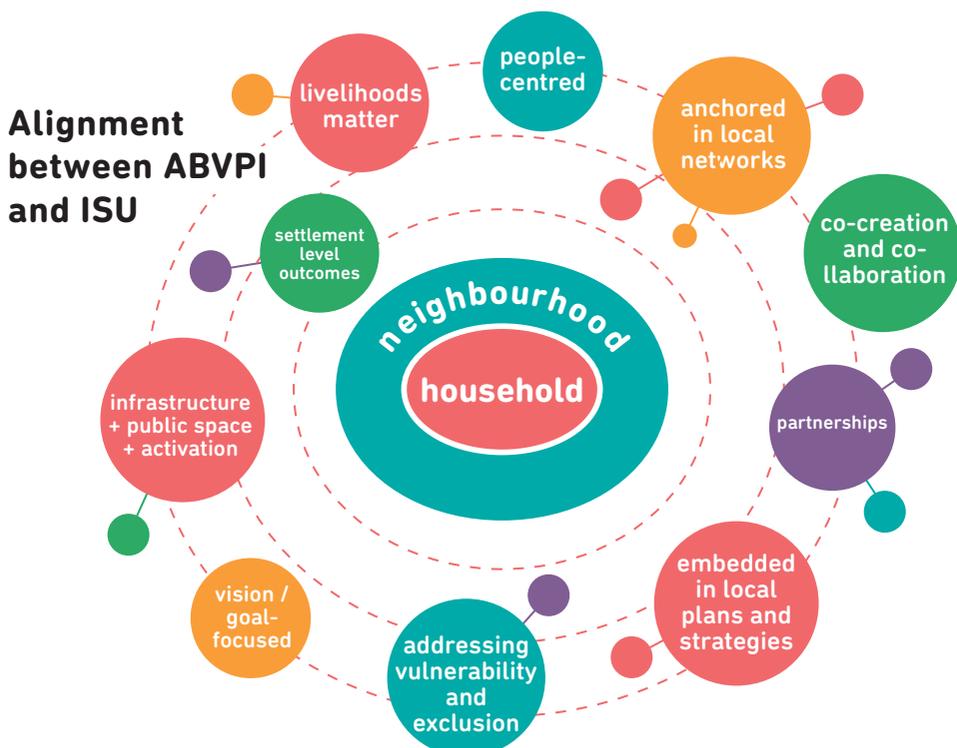
This section of the brief draws on a presentation by Mirjam van Donk of Isandla Institute, which was the basis for the SPRINT Advocacy Output on Embedding area-based violence prevention interventions (ABVPI) in Informal Settlement Upgrading in South Africa (see Isandla Institute 2021b in the reference list).

Informal Settlements: A Growing Reality

The past twenty years have seen roughly a **10-fold increase** in the number of informal settlements (from 300 in 2002 to an estimated 3,200 in May 2020). Informal settlements provide an estimated **5 million people** in South Africa with a place to live.” (Isandla Institute: 2021b:03)

legislation and may include any settlement or area under traditional tenure” (Isandla Institute. 2021b: 06). The basis for informal settlement upgrading is found in the Upgrading of Informal Settlements Programme (UISP) in the National Housing Code.

When examining the alignment between ABVPI and informal settlement upgrading we see a common emphasis on the local – local plans, local strategies and building local networks – as both ABVPI and informal settlement upgrading are concerned with neighbourhood level outcomes. The UISP calls for an incremental, inclusive and participatory approach. This approach is echoed in ABVPI which speaks to co-creation and collaboration with communities and with broader stakeholders. For this to work, partnership is crucial as is a shared vision and a commitment to addressing vulnerability and exclusion. Public infrastructure and public spaces are an important part of upgrading informal settlements and are central points for ABVPI. ABVPI recognizes the importance of livelihood issues including socio-economic wellbeing, which – according to the recently introduced Informal Settlements Upgrading Partnership Grant (ISUPG) – should be addressed in sustainable livelihood plans as part of informal settlement upgrading plans.



Given this extensive alignment, it would be possible and beneficial to use a framework of ABVPI to inform the upgrading of informal settlements. This would help to emphasise investment in livelihoods, in the public realm and in neighbourhood level outcomes – issues that are often missing from discussions about upgrading informal settlements, which tend to focus primarily on engineering services and infrastructure. Such an approach would also encourage responsible departments to move out of silos and work in a more integrated manner, drawing in colleagues as well as civil society organisations and the private sector. To fund such endeavours, it would be necessary to draw on multiple sources of funding beyond the ISUPG, including donor funding, corporate funding and public sector funding. The next section will review which public grants can be leveraged for ABVPI across different settlement typologies.

Below:
 Perspectives from
 webinar participants



Focusing on standards alone does not always result in positive impact. Many existing town planning and design practices have further entrenched marginalisation and sprawl. The term “40x40x40” refers to 40m² homes which are 40 km away, resulting in occupants spending 40% of their income on transport. The civil unrest and associated looting in July 2021 in parts of South Africa highlights – in part, at least – the unresponsiveness of planning and governance processes to the needs of people.

Local Government needs to balance the need for quick responses to urgent needs with the importance of establishing sustainable systems of investing in communities to promote engagement and ownership.



Focusing on service contracts means that once a contract is finished, that’s the end. Anything not covered in that contract becomes a cost that is borne by the community.

Informal settlement upgrading requires innovation and open, rather than just sticking to established rules and parameters that don’t suit the context.

What public resources are available for ABVPI?



Note:

This section of the brief draws on a presentation by Conrad Barberton of Cornerstone Economics, which was the basis for the SPRINT Advocacy

Output on Funding area-based violence prevention interventions:

An examination of the conditional grant system (See Isandla Institute 2021a in the reference list). Institute 2021b in the reference list).



We can build safer neighbourhoods together by:

- ❑ ***Utilizing collective inputs, such as Community Action Plans, throughout the different phases of informal settlement upgrading;***
- ❑ ***Strategically using public investments; and***
- ❑ ***Balancing investing in spaces of shared social and economic good and individual benefit***

As highlighted above, ABVPI falls within the responsibility of local government and as such, public funding can be unlocked to promote ABVPIs. There is also much alignment between the responsibility of provincial and national government and ABVPIs, depending on the parameters of the intervention. As such, these spheres “need to ensure that their planning is informed by safety and violence prevention considerations, and that they support municipal IDPs and community-led ABVPI.” (Isandla Institute. 2021a:13)

Given this alignment, ABVPIs can be funded through the provincial or local equitable share or through the “normal budget process of the relevant government sphere” (2021a:17), such as raising taxes. Relevant funds could be used for direct implementation, contracting out implementation, employment opportunities through the extended public works programme, partnerships using transfers to non-profit organisations or social grants (Isandla Institute. 2021a:17). Given the holistic nature of ABVPI, funding can be drawn from several different departments/units across the different spheres of government. As such, one of the critical components of funding ABVPI is co-ordination across those entities, which implies that plans, budgets and activities are aligned.

In addition to funding through the equitable share (or sector-specific funding to national departments), several conditional grants can be used for funding aspects of ABVPI, as summarised in Table 2. Each of these grants has been developed for a specific purpose with envisioned outputs and specific qualification criteria. In some instances, the grants are spatially targeted towards issues in particular locations. As such, ABVPI needs to be driven by project-based plans that commit multiple role-players to provide funding to the infrastructure and other inputs in a coordinated manner.

CONDITIONAL GRANTS



Integrated Urban Development Grant

Neighbourhood Development Partnership Grant

Informal Settlements Upgrading Partnership Grant

Urban Settlements Development Grant

Early Childhood Development Grant – Infrastructure component

Community Library Services Grant

Social Sector EPWP Incentive Grant for Provinces

RELEVANT ASPECTS OF ABVPI THAT CAN BE FUNDED

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public infrastructure, like parks, outdoor sports facilities, public open space, community halls, libraries
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Precinct development / Built environment upgrade projects (multi-faceted, integrated) Partnerships (to leverage third-party capital investment)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interim/permanent municipal engineering services (incl. lighting, water, sanitation and electricity) Tenure security Social compacts with communities Sustainable livelihood plans
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access to basic services (bulk infrastructure, engineering services) Public and socio-economic amenities Mixed-use development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality ECD services/centres constructed, registered and/or supported (with infrastructure and sanitation support)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build, upgrade, manage and maintain library structures
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand reach and quality of social services Enable work opportunities in the social sector

(Isandla Institute. 2021a:28-29)

It is worth noting, though, that while national conditional grants are an important source of funding for ABVPI, core national, provincial and municipal budgets are potentially larger sources of funding for ABVPI than conditional grants.

Again, coordination is highlighted as a critical component of ABVPI, to bring together relevant national, provincial, local and community entities (and non-public sector stakeholders) to align their plans, budgets and activities. Capacity plays a big role in ability of local government and civil society to fully engage in, coordinate, facilitate and leverage resources to support the ABVPI processes. This coordination will be enabled through strong partnership-building.



Table 2: How conditional grants can be used to fund ABVPI

Perspectives from webinar participants

It is essential that we have evidence of the full costs of ABVPI initiatives. Pilots are important, but they can only indicate the costs of full scale implementation. Pilots that are funded by extraordinary mechanisms, such as outside donors, are not entirely sustainable.



Coordination between different spheres is especially important. There is a danger that too much time is spent on setting up systems and the work doesn't take place. To counter this, it is essential that decision making isn't centralised as this extends decision making processes. Decentralisation could enable district and provincial decision makers to better support local structures, such as local community safety forums (CSF). It would also be necessary to look at the mechanisms used to resource this coordination, including the Municipal Finance Management Act (MFMA) which many CSOs feel is inadequate.

Directing resourcing towards one initiative potentially means those resources are not used for other initiatives. This is part of the reason why it is so important to move away from singular initiatives, such as security from policing alone, to inclusive systems, such as the holistic concept of safety which includes policing TOGETHER with other initiatives.

It is essential that we have evidence of the full costs of ABVPI initiatives. Pilots are important, but they can only indicate the costs of full scale implementation. Pilots that are funded by extraordinary mechanisms, such as outside donors, are not entirely sustainable.

What does it mean to build safer neighbourhoods together?

The integrated nature of ABVPI requires that many different stakeholders from across different spheres of government, departments and sectors are brought together to align their efforts. Depending on the nature of the intervention, ABVPI might be championed by a specific department. At a local level, such coordination might be undertaken by a community safety forum. Partnerships and partnership building are the glue that hold ABVPI together.

Partnerships are complicated and can be stressful. Unhealthy partnerships are those in which there is a lack of accountability and trust, no shared vision, poor implementation, power struggles and a lack of reciprocation. In contrast, healthy, sustainable partnerships can be leveraged to achieve great things. Healthy partnerships are those in which there is respect, shared responsibility and accountability, a shared vision and ongoing communication.

Seven factors have been identified, which are critical for building and sustaining partnerships:

-
- 1 Fostering vulnerability and trust amongst the partners based on respect for one another. This is done by being genuine and open in the partnership, including about intentions.

 - 2 Commitment to communication which requires understanding that different partners or stakeholders will have different ways of working and communicating. This requires knowing that good communication might require facilitation, especially when there are many divergent views.

 - 3 Being open to new ideas, alternative practices and new ways of working. This requires inclusion and being open to change or do things differently. Building diversity also requires a commitment to acknowledge differences, compromise and reconciling different identities and priorities as these emerge.
-



4 Accepting differences and coming together around shared values and goals. Within a team, especially a diverse one, there is the potential to capitalize on differences so that work can be done quicker, better and have amplified benefits and outcomes. This requires compromise and alignment for increased rewards, which ultimately requires coming together around common goals and a shared vision.

5 Assigning roles and responsibilities and working to support one another. Having clearly assigned roles and responsibilities is critical for a working partnership, with all members working to support one another in these efforts. This is especially the case for identifying and supporting the change makers within the team who often drive the process.

6 Working towards implementation and tangible results. Partnerships should become evident in practice, focused on practical actions that lead to visible results. These may be relatively modest 'quick wins' to begin with, to experience the benefits of the partnership.

7 Regular questioning and communication to enable learning. Learning allows for adaptation which ultimately creates sustainability in the team and in the intervention. To do this, it is important that there is regular communication but also that the processes of reflection and sharing are questioned by asking "is there something else we need to be asking, or do we perhaps need to ask in another way?"



The COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on the shape and ways of working and on the possibilities of partnerships. On the one hand, the urgency of the crisis has created opportunities for joint action and the ongoing uncertainty of what the pandemic will bring has allowed for more understanding and support amongst partners. On the other hand, it has limited the possibilities of face-to-face engagements. While technological platforms like WhatsApp, Zoom and Microsoft Teams have proven to be valuable communication platforms, these cannot replace the value of personal connection to build trust and understanding.

Conclusion

Building safer neighbourhoods falls within local government's responsibility and many of its functions and obligations align with the outcomes and practices associated with ABVPI.

Safer neighbourhoods have the characteristics, amenities and services which stop or reduce the impact of risk factors and create or grow protective factors and increase quality of life. ABVPI has value both as a codified practice (following key safety principles and associated urban design approaches) and as a development lens – as can be seen in the application of ABVPI to upgrading informal settlements.

ABVPI can be resourced from multiple sources of public funding – and can be complemented by private sector, civil society and community resources. The complexity of violence and crime and their underlying causes mean that a contextual, multi-faceted and integrated approach is needed when undertaking preventative work. This requires strong partnership between different actors to pool resources and amplify their efforts. Such coordination is the 'glue' that holds ABVPI together, and is essential to building safer neighbourhoods together.



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