SAFER PLACES:
RESILIENT INSTITUTIONS AND
NEIGHBOURHOODS TOGETHER

SPRINT

LEARNING BRIEF 3

Working with communities

2021

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RESILIENT INSTITUTIONS AND
NEIGHBOURHOODS TOGETHER

SPRINT

An initiative of the South African –
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Implemented by:

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VCP
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VIOLENCE & CRIME
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The intelligence of change

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VIOLENCE
PREVENTION
THROUGH URBAN
UPGRADING

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This initiative will contribute to strengthening and empowering a learning network amongst already well-established civil society organisations, working closely with municipalities and other partners, to apply approaches and tools for violence prevention through urban upgrading, in line with the objectives of the Integrated Urban Development Framework and other relevant policy frameworks, particularly in the human settlement and safer communities sector.

ABOUT SPRINT

The Safer Places: Resilient Institutions and Neighbourhoods Together (SPRINT) Project is a joint initiative of the South African-German Development Cooperation with the support of the GIZ – Inclusive Violence Prevention Programme (GIZ VCP), implemented by Isandla Institute and Violence Prevention through Urban Upgrading (VPUU NPC). The initiative was conceptualised in response to the devasting impact of the COVID-19 pandemic which has amplified risk factors for violence and crime in vulnerable communities. The project aims to support and strengthen institutions and organisations working to build resilience in communities across the country by utilising and upscaling targeted, area-based violence prevention interventions (ABVPI). The project vision is the institutionalisation of effective ABVPIs in the development and management of vulnerable urban communities.

To achieve this, the SPRINT Project has two distinct, but inter-related, pathways:

A Learning Network, which consists of a civil society organisations (CSOs) from a cross-section of sectors, and creates opportunities for peer exchanges resulting in learning and advocacy documentation.

A Laboratory, which involves capacity-building processes with participating municipalities and local CSOs, and focuses on co-designing and implementing practical, area-based solutions to violence-related challenges.

The project's Steering Committee, which is led by the Department of Cooperative Governance (DCoG), together with the Department of Human Settlements (DHS), National Treasury and the South African Local Government Association (SALGA), oversee and endorse this initiative.

To further develop the violence and crime prevention knowledge built up within the South African German Development Cooperation and its partners since 2012 and to work around area-based violence and crime prevention interventions through facilitating its practical implementation.

1

To ensure that the knowledge, tools and practices developed by the South African German Development Cooperation and their collaborators in the field of area-based violence prevention are shared with a wide range of stakeholders.

2

Our key objectives

4

To mobilise local violence prevention intervention thinking, in order to address community violence and crime challenges exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

3

To embed area-based integrated violence prevention intervention approaches institutionally within relevant national government departments, within key municipalities and within civil society to ensure sustainability.

ABOUT THE LEARNING NETWORK

In 2020/21, the thematic journey of the Learning Network is conceptualised in two parts. The first is contextual which relates to the South African VPI context and the impact of COVID-19 and the second part focuses on institutions and systems needed to implement VPI. Critical knowledge from participating organisations is drawn into the Learning Network's outputs and the the multistakeholder events. The multistakeholder events bring together CSOs, municipalities and national government departments and agencies to discuss violence and crime prevention theory and practice. The deliberate and unique cross-section of CSO participants within the Learning Network and their varied experiences, knowledge and expertise is central to the success of the SPRINT Project. Participating organisations include Afesis-corplan, Masifunde, Agape Youth Movement, Ndifuna Ukwazi, Cape Development and Dialogue Centre Trust (CDDC), Open Streets Cape Town, Caritas, People's Environmental Planning (PEP), Planact, Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR), Project Empower, Development Action Group (DAG), Sinosizo Siyaphambili, Violence Prevention through Urban Upgrading (VPUU NPC) and Isandla Institute.

The long-term aim of the Learning Network is to achieve enhanced innovation and evaluation capacity to strengthen and expand violence and crime prevention solutions.

Productive relationships between government and civil society organisations are pivotal in amplifying the impact of responses to the dire consequences of COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdowns in communities across South Africa.

INTRODUCTION

This is the third in a series of learning briefs produced by Isandla Institute under the Safer Places: Resilient Institutions and Neighbourhoods Together (SPRINT) Project. The briefs are developed from the Learning Network sessions. The focus of this brief, based on the third session hosted by Isandla Institute on 21 January 2021, is 'Working with communities'.

This brief outlines the importance of working with communities in planning, implementing and monitoring development. In particular, it focuses on the ways in which civil society organisations work with communities. Some key approaches for working with communities include developing strong relationships with a wide range of community structures, facilitating change rather than driving it, capacitating communities and holding space for communities to engage with government and advocate for themselves. Developing productive relationships with government can be pivotal in amplifying the impact of the work with communities, despite the various challenges around this.

The impact of COVID-19 cannot be understated in South Africa. Civil society organisations (CSOs) are being faced with the devastating effects of the pandemic, and have seen the impact of the national lockdown on communities. The dire situation that communities faced during the initial lockdown, and are facing in its aftermath, requires a reorientation of the core work of CSOs, with many adapting to respond to direct short-term needs, focusing on food security and sustainable livelihoods. Such conditions are likely to worsen before they get better. Continuing to work with communities requires an adaptation of regular methods, with face-to-face engagement being a challenge, and the adoption of various technologies to compensate for this gap. The brief ends with key messages that can assist CSOs practices of working with communities in a rapidly changing context impacted by COVID-19.

With their existing networks and strategic positioning, civil society organisations have the ability to work across many sectors and be strategically responsive to the changing needs in a country. Over time, CSOs have held many different roles including 'watchdog', advocate, facilitator, implementer, and partner.

THE IMPORTANT ROLE AND IMPACT OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS (CSOs)

Civil society, with its existing networks, and strategic positioning has the ability to work across many sectors and be strategically responsive to the changing needs in a country. "Today, commentators of a wide ideological spectrum, both in South Africa and globally, consider the development of an autonomous civil society critical to the successful implantation of democracy in developing countries" (Glaser. 1997) and for all countries worldwide.

Globally, South Africa has one of the highest levels of crime, particularly violent crime with the country reporting 21,325 murders, 332,214 instances of assault, and 53,293 sexual offences as per the annual crime statistics in the 2019/2020 year (SAPS. 2021). The impact of crime and violence includes pain and trauma, economic loss, eroding social cohesion, unfulfilled human potential and a national psyche of fear (Hellmann. 2020). Responding to the complex risk factors that contribute to violence requires urgent focus. CSOs are strategically placed to rapidly respond to intersectional factors that contribute to violence such as: socioeconomic inequality; social and cultural norms that, for example endorse male dominance over women or promote violence as a legitimate method to resolve conflict; high levels of unemployment; the prevalence of drugs or

weapons in communities; poor educational opportunities; poverty; a history of abuse, substance abuse, or unresolved trauma (WHO. n.d.).

Throughout recent decades, civil society has held an increasingly significant role in development, playing various roles, including 'watchdog', advocate, facilitator, as well as directly implementing interventions; more recently, this has changed to a more partnership-oriented relationship with government and CSOs working hand-in-hand to improve the lives of people living in South Africa.

In South Africa in particular, the post-1994 era in the new democracy was characterised by a hope for a better future. Once it was realised that this was not the case, "the civil society sector was once again positioning itself as the voice of the people against the state, an essential role in ensuring accountability in a stable democracy" (NDA. 2008). In this watchdog role, CSOs aim to hold government accountable by advocating for South African citizens' and communities' constitutional rights. Over the last two decades, examples of such a role in South Africa include the Treatment Action Campaign in successfully litigating for the right for people living with HIV to access treatment; CSOs challenging the Limpopo provincial government over their inability to ensure textbooks in schools; and the Legal Resource Centre succeeding in holding government legally accountable for providing housing for people with no land (Corruption Watch. 2018). In addition to CSOs advocating on communities' behalf, more "recently, increased attention has been paid to...strengthening the voice and capacity of citizens (especially poor citizens) to directly demand greater accountability and responsiveness from public officials and service providers" (Malena et al. 2004.).

Social Capital

"The links, shared values and understandings in society that enable individuals and groups to trust each other and so work together" (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. N.d.)

In addition, part of capacity building includes assisting local communities to actively monitor processes to increase accountability (Albisu. 2020). In this way, civil society assists

to "bring to the table a voice that would not otherwise be heard in social, economic, or political processes" (Eizenstat. 2004).

CSOs can also serve as facilitators between individuals, communities, national governments and international organizations. Fostering the relationships with community members and building on the relationships that exist within the community across different sectors can contribute to the growth of social capital. Social capital comprises "the links, shared values and understandings in society that enable individuals and groups to trust each other and so work together" (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. N.d.). Strong social capital can have greater impact in strengthening communities' strategic impact in advocating for change.

While in certain cases it is required that civil society takes an adversarial position to government, for example to litigate for change, it is recognised that working in partnership with government can have a greater impact, across a wider variety of arenas (Stojanović. 2020). Constructive, mutually beneficial partnerships between civil society and government can have a large impact on the development and rolling out of programmes by both government and CSOs. Conversely, "weak political systems and high levels of corruption have the most significant, negative long-term effect on civil society" (Poskitt and DuFranc. 2011).

When directly implementing interventions with communities, CSOs that are "unburdened by governmental bureaucracy and political considerations, move faster and more effectively" (Melloan. 2004). Such agility and flexibility is key, particularly in rapidly changing environments. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this is evident with "the scale and complexity of the current crisis [being] too great for the government acting alone. [Government] is constrained by its prior way of working, which emphasises standardisation and control. It also lacks information about who is in need (beyond grant recipients), and it lacks the supply chains to get help to them quickly" (Hamann et al. 2020). Good working relationships and targeted interventions mean that the needs of communities can be quickly communicated, understood and responded to (CASE et al. 2012).
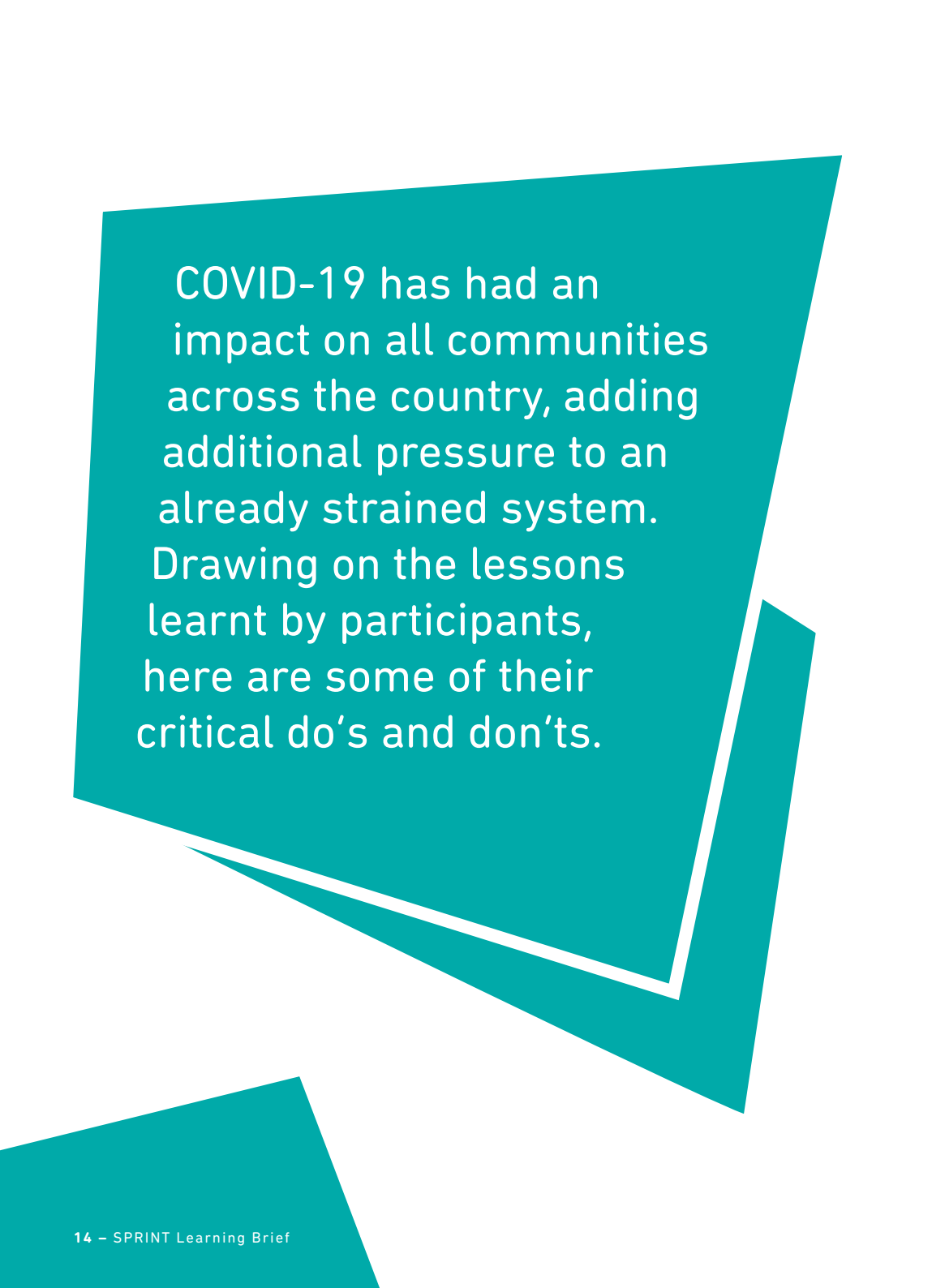
 The influence of civil society has increased, particularly as a result of technological advances that allow better coordination and strengthening of networks in the sector (Eizenstat. 2004). Various technologies such as the internet, social media, telecommunications and even improved travel have facilitated stronger connections between organisations, within countries, across regions and globally. Building stronger allies and networks can assist to increase access to funds (Parenzee. 2021). While the ability to access funds might be improving, the amount of funding available is decreasing (Gumede. 2017; Gumede. 2018; National Development Agency. 2008). In particular, "many industrial countries, led by populist, right wing and ultranationalist governments, have dramatically reduced the

The influence of civil society has increased, particularly as a result of technological advances that allow better coordination and strengthening of networks in the sector. While CSOs have the capacity to have a significant positive contribution, they also have the capacity to hinder progress.

funding for African and South African civil society organisations" (Gumede. 2018). Due to the reduction of funding, greater emphasis has been placed on improved management of funds, and ensuring that various targets and outputs are achieved, which requires a lot of management and administration. Such stringent reporting requirements often exclude smaller community-based organisations, resulting in funds being given to larger, more established organisations, while those smaller organisations are not able to access these (NDA. 2008).

While CSOs have the capacity to have a significant positive contribution, they also have the capacity to hinder progress. There are various approaches by CSOs that can hinder development including imposing their own agendas, without consultation, or the support of communities; in addition, there is often a lack of accountability to the community that allows CSOs to pursue their goals without recourse from the community (Eizenstat. 2004; Kapundu. 2017). Furthermore, a CSO may act as a "self-appointed spokesperson for groups that may or may not endorse the actions taken on their behalf" (Eizenstat. 2004), which can have a significant impact on the community in the long-term, such as damaging relationships with government. Another negative impact of CSOs occurs when a narrow focus is pursued, to the exclusion of all others, and a lack of compromise means that while some issues may achieve progress, overall this may be to the detriment of communities (Eizenstat. 2004). There is also the risk of pursuing goals and targets that, once relevant to communities, have since fallen away and are no longer relevant. Finally, donor priorities sometimes determine the agenda, rather than the needs of development of the communities which can create tension or conflict (Poskitt and DuFranc. 2011) and lead to the breakdown of relationships.

Overall, it should be emphasised that civil society as a whole is not homogenous; rather, it is a "complex arena where diverse and often competing values, ideologies and interests interact and power struggles occur. These can manifest in peaceful, but also violent forces or ways, that may advance or obstruct social progress" (Mati, Silva & Anderson. 2010). The way civil society organisations impact on communities is dependent on the way that they approach communities. Various experiences and approaches are highlighted in the following section.

COVID-19 has had an impact on all communities across the country, adding additional pressure to an already strained system. Drawing on the lessons learnt by participants, here are some of their critical do's and don'ts.

LESSONS FROM THE LEARNING NETWORK

Learning Network participants from across the various human settlement and safer communities sectors shared their experiences of working with communities.

When asked to define 'community,' responses from the participants were diverse:
- It depends on geographical location (people living in the same area, passing through the area regularly, or working there during the day);
- People sharing a common social identity;
- People with common characteristics that are grouped together based on these (e.g. youth, gender, faith-based, challenges experienced etc.); and
- People sharing a common interest.

The inclusive approach in defining community is reflected in the way that the Learning Network CSOs engaged with communities. Discussions around this resulted in several key approaches emerging when engaging with communities.

One of the first steps recommended by participants in working with communities involves taking the time, and **putting in the effort to understand the communities.** When beginning work with a new community, data-based/ desktop research is conducted to assess demography and the history of the area. The findings of the research are combined with engagements with community members in order to identify the various community leaders and the roles they play.

Engaging with these groups around the history of the area also helps add to the contextual knowledge. Also of importance is being inclusive about who is engaged with. Those on the margins or periphery also require engaging with to understand their experiences and insights into the community, but are often overlooked or not sufficiently engaged with by government.

Creating the space for communities to raise their own concerns and co-create plans is vitally important as they are the experts of their own needs and assets.

Following on from taking the time to understand how the community is structured and operates involves **working with and capacitating existing structures within communities.** Communities are diverse and have their own internal power structures. Ignoring these, or creating competing power structures, can result in destabilising the community as a whole. Participants highlighted the importance of facilitating training and capacity building opportunities for these individuals or organisations that operate with the community to build local capacity so that they are able to articulate themselves effectively. This assists with building the social capital of the community and enables the community leaders to be 'boardroom ready' and speak the language government officials are accustomed to. Such interventions also help increase the sustainability of the project or programme, by fostering knowledge on various issues within the community. Assisting with data on the demographics of communities also aids in community members being able to substantiate their positions during dialogues with government. Learning Network participants found that the perception of government officials changes to a more positive one through these engagements, and the relationship has improved overall as a result.

Developing good relationships with the community, built on trust enables a strong foundation on which to implement the work. This is a key step to building social capital,[1] and while it is a process that is usually overlooked in this work, with organisations wanting to start implementation, it is one which is vitally important.

CSOs should be **facilitating change**, and not setting the agenda. When working in a contested space, it is important to realise that there are many different stakeholders all pushing their agendas and each wants their interest to be represented in some shape or form. Creating the space for communities to raise their own concerns and co-create plans is vitally important as they are the experts of their own needs and assets. From the experiences given, communities that participate in setting the agenda and implementing interventions, while CSOs play a supporting role, experience positive, long-term change.

Through facilitation, CSOs should focus on **holding the space and bringing the right people into the room**. CSOs are able to bring relevant stakeholders into the process, so that local actors and representatives of stakeholder groups are linked with government. This is a crucial process as local government and communities have had – and often continue to have – an antagonistic relationship in the past; rebuilding that relationship is important. Forming partnerships and holding space for conversation to happen is a key role that is often overlooked, but is a crucial one if more positive relationships are to be fostered.

Another key approach that was identified was **partnering with the community over the long term**. It was emphasised that for interventions to have a significant impact on the community, developing long-term relationships is important. Journeying with the community as the intervention develops is mutually beneficial as CSOs learn from the experiences on the ground, while the community has the space and time to fully support the process. While CSOs are often tied to reporting periods and funder deadlines, it is important not to rush the process.

Finally, in the implementation of the work, it is important to **acknowledge the repressed trauma that characterises peoples' interaction with space**. The history of South

1: https://www.saferspaces.org.za/uploads/files/200609_VPUU_SEF_BUILDING_RELATIONSHIPS_digital.pdf

Africa, with the impact of colonialism and apartheid, has led to spaces being very contested. In addition, the high levels of violence and crime in the country reinforce the pain and stress that is associated with particular spaces. This trauma should be recognised and taken into consideration in conceptualising and rolling out any interventions with communities.

CAUTIONARY NOTES

While engaging around the work, a few points were raised about the challenges when it comes to implementation in communities. The first to note is that communities are not homogenous entities, nor are they necessarily egalitarian. Approaching communities without acknowledging that they have their own **unique compositions**, with diverse interests and challenges may only result in ineffective impacts in communities.

When looking at violence and crime prevention, there is often a focus on the technical elements of the built environment such as **street lighting**, security, access points, and so on. Such an approach tends to ignore the 'softer' elements of violence and crime prevention such as people's sense of safety and managing people's emotions (trauma and anger). These elements are much more challenging to engage with and are often overlooked, which tends to limit the impact of engagements.

An additional point that was brought up is that mainstreaming **crosscutting** issues (gender, HIV and AIDS, etc.) is challenging for CSOs when this is not the core work of the organisation and they do not have experience with it. While there is acknowledgement that engaging with these will have a positive influence on the communities, sometimes these are not prioritised.

The last highlighted point was that **gatekeeping** is a feature of work within communities. The community council, or those in positions of power sometimes limit access or limit the sharing of information with the rest of the community for various reasons. This makes operating within this situation much more challenging.

EXPERIENCES WITH GOVERNMENT

The participants emphasised that government, particularly local government, plays a critical role as they have a budget for the rolling out of services and are the implementers in communities. Local government's role in the spatial planning and strategic planning of communities makes it key for ensuring that interventions are strategic and sustainable over the long term. In general, Learning Network participants noted that in their experience, CSOs are there to provide support in the various aspects of the strategic framework that government lays out.
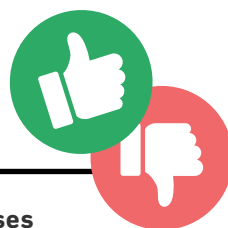
The rigid nature of government programming often means that officials want to set the agenda, control the process and determine the outcome. Such an approach is often a result of the fear that trying new methods of implementation will result in extended delays or implementation being derailed. This means that not only is it fairly difficult to be flexible and respond to the contextual priorities identified by communities, but there is little to no room for operationalising innovation within communities.

Experiences with government are mixed, with more challenges than successes identified, as would be expected in a space where CSOs are attempting to institute change. One of the key aspects of CSO work is to strengthen the relations between communities and government; participants noted that government officials taking the time to show up to community meetings and communicating effectively with both the community and CSOs has a very positive impact on the relationship between the community and government, as well as in the implementation of interventions.

Historically, however, there has been an adversarial relationship between many communities and local government structures. While effort is made to strengthen and capacitate communities to engage with government, it is difficult to have the same impact on government. This adversarial relationship is evident in some interactions with government, as well as gatekeeping by government through which some communities are regularly excluded from engagements due to being perceived as 'difficult' or 'confrontational'.

Mixed Responses

There have been mixed responses about engagement with government during lockdown. For some, officials have been unavailable via phone and email, while others share that they have experienced an increased willingness by local government to engage and to try and understand issues that are experienced by communities

Learning Network participants noted that while some of the reluctance to engage with CSOs is because of the belief by local councillors that they know best, however other experiences highlight that the councillors do not have experience with facilitating and mediating, and that this uncertainty, or inexperience in working in these different, participatory ways is the source of their reluctance. Government needs to be capacitated with the skills to engage with communities and foster partnerships with CSOs.

An additional challenge is being able to have an impact on implementation. The rigid nature of government programming often means that officials want to set the agenda, control the process and determine the outcome. Such an approach is often a result of the fear that trying new methods of implementation will result in extended delays or implementation being derailed. This means that not only is it fairly difficult to be flexible and respond to the contextual

priorities identified by communities, but there is little to no room for operationalising innovation within communities. The inability of CSOs to scale up projects is often due to a lack of funds. Learning Network participants noted that government can hold the answer to this, as they have the funds for broader implementation, but it requires widespread government buy-in, and there doesn't seem to be a strong political will to prioritise a people-centred approach to development. In addition, fiscal constraints and a lack of co-ordination between various government departments further limits partnerships between government and CSOs.

HOW COVID-19 HAS IMPACTED WORKING WITH COMMUNITIES

COVID-19 has had an impact on all communities across the country, adding additional pressure to an already strained system. The following section outlines some of the noted impact on communities, how CSOs have had to reorient the focus of their work and adapt the ways in which they work.

Participants noted that since the COVID-19 pandemic began, and as a result of the various levels of national lockdowns, massive job losses have been experienced by communities due to precarious working conditions, and informal nature of employment in the country, such as the lack of formal contracts. Estimates for jobs losses particularly in South Africa's initial lockdown are 2.9 million (Casale and Posel. 2020). There has been increased marginalisation and isolation of vulnerable groups and undermined access to community and state support systems.

There is significantly less money in households and the inability to provide for one's family affects one's dignity. Not being able to provide what is deemed as a dignified burial for loved ones has also taken a toll on many in South Africa.

Organisations have had to reorient the work in order to incorporate some of the challenges communities are now facing due to the impact of COVID-19 and the national lockdown. Identified as "spontaneous venturing" (Shepherd and Williams. 2019), these immediate, unplanned responses fill a much-needed gap while waiting for government to respond. Community action networks (CANs) that developed across Cape Town, Gauteng and the Eastern Cape are examples of this (Hamann. 2020).

Participants stated that they now have a stronger focus on sustainable livelihoods as this is an area that is most important for individuals in communities, along with focusing on nutritional needs of children and their families.

There is also a difficult balance between meeting communities' immediate needs, while focusing on how to achieve long-term impacts (Hamann et al. 2020). Organisations are also assisting communities to find alternate ways to raise issues around service delivery with government as this is urgently needed during this COVID-19 pandemic.

Due to the impact of COVID-19 in the communities, CSOs have limited the number of people that are engaged with, and they are forced to rely on a core group of people. While there are people who are regularly relied on, when CSOs are unable to have a physical presence in the community there is an additional reliance on a smaller core group of people. The focus shifts to strengthening those individual relationships rather than a community wide network. While there are benefits to this, there is the potential for gatekeeping by community members due to this limited access.

A key part of working with communities is building trust and developing a personal relationship with them. Being able to visit people, see them in their own space, what

Sustainable livelihoods

A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (stores, resources, claims and access) and activities required for a means of living: a livelihood is sustainable which can cope with and recover from stress and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, and provide sustainable livelihood opportunities for the next generation; and which contributes net benefits to other livelihoods at the local and global levels and in the short and long term." (Chambers, R. and Conway, G. 1991)

they are passionate about, gives a lot of insight. When dealing with difficult topics, being able to read body language is important.

Lockdown restrictions, as well as fear of the virus, limit people from joining programmes. Not being able to meet safely in person, and having to rely on online platforms (which are not universally accessible and as such creates barriers to meaningful and inclusive engagement) has really been a challenge and is quite limiting in what progress can be made.

This has the potential to impact the implementation of programmes and the work with communities in the long-run, and the impact is yet to be seen.

There have been mixed responses about engagement with government. Some responses from the Learning Network include that government is using COVID-19/lockdown as an excuse for not engaging with CSOs. It was noted that it has been hard to get in touch with government via the phone or email, and some participants stated that if they visit the offices, they are told that the official is not available/working remotely. In contrast, other CSOs have experienced an increased willingness at local government level to engage more actively during the COVID-19 pandemic and to try and understand issues that are experienced by communities.

There needs to be political will to prioritise a people-centred approach to the urban upgrade agenda. The shift towards a more inclusive approach to development requires an institutional mandate for officials to adopt this approach.

KEY MESSAGES

Implementing area-based violence prevention initiatives in, and with, communities requires recognition that this work is complex and intersectional. To enable the work to have a broad positive impact, there are some key areas to consider in undertaking this work.

The first is to recognise that community-led processes are the key to sustainable development. Fostering positive, mutually beneficial relationships with communities that are built on trust should be a priority of the work, as this sets the foundation for the journey together. Communities are best placed to both recognise their challenges and implement the work; in rapidly changing contexts, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, this becomes even more imperative.

Secondly, it is important to recognise South Africa's apartheid history and the repressed trauma that characterises many people's interactions with space and place. The COVID-19 pandemic is creating additional strain on communities. The SPRINT Project's role is important here, in that it aims to create safer spaces for people so that not only are they not revictimized, but they can return to spaces where trauma has happened to enable healing. Recognising the impact of trauma and accounting for it in implementing work will be beneficial.

Thirdly, CSOs must continue to hold space and create the room for dialogue/engagement, as well as capacitation efforts with communities for them to advocate on their own behalf. In rapidly shifting contexts such during the COVID-19 pandemic, holding space for communities and prioritising their own voices is key. While the relationship between government and communities has in the past been contentious, efforts to repair this can lead to positive change in communities where both parties can contribute to the rolling out of services and infrastructure.

In addition, to scale up work, there needs to be political will to prioritise a people-centred approach to the urban upgrade agenda. The shift towards a more inclusive approach to development requires an institutional mandate for officials to adopt this approach. CSO efforts should include targeted advocacy and lobbying of national and provincial government structures to motivate towards a more sustainable and inclusive approach in VPIs – this is particularly urgent in these increasingly challenging times.

It is also important to actively integrate cross-cutting issues such as (gender, HIV and AIDS etc.) into the work. While often these cross-cutting issues are not an organisation's core work, developing partnerships with others that do have the expertise in working in these areas will assist in building on the knowledge of the assets that are available, in order to have a more positive long-term impact in the communities.

Finally, civil society must have the mandate to be adaptive and responsive to unfolding contexts – the COVID-19 pandemic is such an example. The support of donor organisations to recognise changing environments and to support CSOs is required to enable such responses.

CONCLUSION

The impact of COVID-19 has placed added strain on communities that already experience significant challenges such as high levels of violence and crime, poverty, high levels of unemployment and food insecurity. CSOs play an important role in working with such communities to find methods of negotiating and responding to these challenges.

The COVID-19 pandemic has increased people's risk of experiencing violence, which makes the situation even more severe. The pandemic has necessitated a shift in the focus of the work for some CSOs, but created an additional challenge in having to alter the methods of working with communities, with less face-to-face engagement and a greater reliance on technology. The SPRINT Learning Network offers CSOs the opportunity to learn and innovate together moving forward so as to strengthen the ability to work with communities to respond in this time of crisis.

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