Policy BRIEFING

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# Tackling Urban Violence in Mumbai and Cape Town through Citizen Engagement and Community Action

Urban violence is an urgent and growing problem in many cities across the world. It comes in a multitude of forms such as gender-based violence, gangs and drug-related violence, police violence, religious riots, vigilante groups, and others. This briefing focuses on gender-based violence in Cape Town, South Africa, and juvenile crime in Mumbai, India, to explore how those living with this violence may be enabled to address it themselves. Those living in poverty find a variety of responses to violence and this briefing shares evidence of how citizens can contribute both independently and through collective action to building safer communities.

## Urban violence in Cape Town, South Africa, and Mumbai, India

Juvenile crime in India is on the increase. One of the most dramatic rises has been in Mumbai, where it has risen by over 30 per cent in the last year. Crime records show that juvenile crime is committed predominantly by school drop-outs or illiterate boys aged between 16–18 years, and there has been a 19 per cent rise in cases involving 12–16-year-olds. State-sponsored efforts to curb these trends are severely limited by a lack of resources and capacity, while programmes that support juvenile offenders in reintegrating into society after incarceration are inadequate.

South Africa is regularly reported as having some of the world's worst rates of murder, violent crime and gender-based violence including intimate partner violence. In Cape Town the perpetration of sexual violence by men against intimate partners in the past ten years was over 15 per cent. Cape Town is recognised as the murder capital of the country, with serious violence linked to gangs dealing in drugs and xenophobic attacks. In addition to its social, sexual and criminal forms, violence is also central to political life in South Africa, especially in poor, urban settlements. Recent research on popular protest, usually around the right to settle in the city and access to services, has revealed significant growth in the number of violent protests.

## Both sides of the equation: victims and perpetrators, citizens and the state

Situating victims and perpetrators as opposing categories within violence prevention and mitigation is not helpful. This is because victims may often perpetrate violence, and perpetrators of violence are frequently a victim of it. Recognising that those involved in violence are individuals with relationships and aspirations improves an understanding of how and why violence has become a part of their lives. This approach shows clearly what enables people to take action against violence within their homes,

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"What makes them change the attitude, because we go to them to the police station, and train them what prevention is all about, we want to educate them, because the abuse is falling under them. They have to work with abuse so we are helping them try to stop violence. So if they want this violence to go away or be better than this they must work with us, we just involve them."
(Woman, community activist, informal settlement in Cape Town)

communities, and cities. It requires seeing those living in contexts of violence as citizens, who are able to claim their rights to security and demand greater accountability, as well as act directly to mitigate violence.

Learning from a pilot evaluation in Cape Town and Mumbai shows that informal groups are just as likely to provide security, and therefore enjoy popular support, as police and security agencies. In Cape Town, local democratic activism to prevent and reduce gender-based violence empowered people to assist the police and hold them accountable for working more effectively when responding to sensitive incidents. Locally-led responses to urban violence show that the police cannot solve the problem of violence alone, and neither can citizens. Acute problems of urban violence can be addressed through cooperation between the state and citizens, and in recognising what is needed for both to act effectively together to reduce violence.

## What motivates people to intervene

Opportunities for democratic local-level responses to violence are central to understanding how transformative change is possible, and how violence can be mitigated and prevented through the actions of those living with it.

The pilot evaluation focused on what motivates, inspires and encourages the action of local activists and community workers in response to violence. Empathy, personal relationships and sense of commitment were major contributing factors. However, activists in Cape Town described their struggle to maintain efforts in the absence of livelihood opportunities, and a lack of recognition of their role by official government agencies and their communities: *'We are doing the jobs of doctors, nurses, social workers, teachers, and the police and nobody sees it.'* (woman, community activist, informal settlement in Cape Town).

Local activists connect to wider issues through their efforts to address gender-based violence, such as why the police fail to respond in certain situations, and why local leaders do not address their problems. As a result, they are now asking why politicians and government representatives are not more responsive and accountable.

In Mumbai, marginalised youth, for example those who have dropped out of school and those that face arrest by city police, seemed unaware of their options for pursuing a livelihood with dignity. While many of these youth were only part of vocational training intervention programmes for three to four months, the potential for long-term mentor–mentee relationships was a major motivator for programme staff; gaining respect and an identity in the community was also an important motivating factor.

## Two models of community-level violence prevention and mitigation strategies

In Cape Town, the Prevention in Action (PIA) programme trained and organised both men and women who are local, community-based activists on the issue of gender-based violence. Local activists then developed strategies for responding to violence, including working with influential community members to mobilise their friends and family into action-oriented groups. While action mainly addressed male violence against female partners, and sexual violence, activists also addressed female to male partner violence, inter-generational violence, and other physical violence in their communities. A significant number of incidents that activists engaged with led to police involvement or other legal processes. In the majority of cases, activists used personal engagement to create dialogue with those involved.

In Mumbai, while several government-sponsored schemes exist, in reality, support

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"I realised that I was actually a victim, but that I can do something about it, and I can engage people and open up to other people about my own circumstances and try to show other people that you don't have to stay in a physically abusive relationship, being sworn at and you know being made to feel small."

(Woman, community activist, informal settlement in Cape Town)

for young offenders is largely provided by non-governmental organisations (NGOs). YUVA *Parivartan's* (Youth Betterment) Prison Project is one of the few non-governmental vocational- and training-based support programmes directed at young offenders inside and outside prison who have already been arrested for violent offences. The programme engages youth within their community and includes daily sessions to help bring about changes in attitude, on stress and anger management, and on career choices. The goal is to prevent repeat offending by reaching out to first time offenders who suffer from destructive and negative thought patterns and the psychological impact of being in prison for the first time.

Despite the differences in approach there are strong parallels between the PIA and YUVA models and contexts which show that engaged, active citizens and communities are central to building and restoring socially just relationships, norms and institutions in contexts of urban violence. In both contexts, successful interventions operate along delicately crafted relationships between programme participants and relevant community structures and state agencies, including: the police, prison personnel and NGO sector partners, service providers and community leadership committees. Programme functioning involves day-to-day negotiations over access into prisons, use of state resources, police engagement in incidents of intimate as well as public violence, referrals to support services for survivors of violence and so on. This engagement of both state and non-state actors reflects the importance of working in partnership to support the evolution of democratic outcomes when addressing urban violence.

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## Knowledge exchange between grass roots change makers

To deepen the exploration of innovative community-led responses to violence mitigation, an e-dialogue was arranged between community engagers and influencers from Cape Town and social workers running support programmes for young offenders with YUVA in Mumbai. The dialogue was designed to allow those implementing these programmes to learn from one another's involvement in community-level violence prevention and mitigation strategies. The question of addressing harmful attitudes and norms that act as barriers to self-esteem and confidence was central to the discussion. Community workers from both countries saw working with young offenders and survivors of violence to build their own aspirations for change as critical to personal and social transformation. Working within the community to engage people on their own terms, in their own environment and to build trust through the sharing of personal experiences of violence and violence prevention was seen as a crucial part of this process.

## Policy recommendations

These initiatives provide important insights into how policies can support interventions that strengthen community engagement in violence prevention and mitigation. Central to this is the significance of the link between the role of active citizens in violence prevention and mitigation, and the claiming of democratic rights and responsibilities both individually and collectively.

- Violence prevention and mitigation strategies need to see citizens as partners who can contribute independently and meaningfully to the common project of building safer communities. This is in contrast to being seen as either populations to be educated, sources of information for external decision-making, or individuals who should take more responsibility for themselves.

- Community engagement strategies can generate local knowledge and solutions that help ensure violence mitigation interventions will both engage with and challenge sociocultural and power dynamics that would otherwise impede their uptake and effectiveness. Community engagement is also important for relationship-building within communities where violence has eroded trust and isolated individuals, restricting active citizenship.

- Police responsiveness and accountability on issues of violence within intimate, community and institutional spaces is critical for rebuilding trusting relationships with citizens and in catalysing wider citizen action. Activists in Cape Town emphasised the importance of full cooperation from the police, including more transparency on the status of particular cases of violence, and increased responsiveness of the police to gender-based violence.

- Policies addressing violence prevention and mitigation should make links between local, provincial and national levels. Learning needs to take place between each level to ensure that policies are responsive to the grass-roots reality of how positive social change happens in contexts of urban violence, and that national policy supports this.

- NGOs need to take a longer-term and joined-up outlook, both in terms of the change they are trying to achieve and in their relationship with activists and residents in urban slums. In India, youth are reluctant to engage in state programmes to support young offenders largely due to a deep-rooted mistrust of prison personnel. YUVA's social workers therefore have to rely on their ability to personally connect with individual young offenders, and 'draw them out of their cell'. As important as these personal relationships are, they are nevertheless formed under the duress of high-pressure environments inside prison. More effective change can happen over a longer time frame that allows these relationships to be built.

- Interventions need to include learning and skills building with official recognition, in order to enhance sustainable livelihoods and employment opportunities. In the case of Cape Town, this includes formal recognition for the experiences and skills of activists, and the work they are doing. Similarly in India, this includes creating platforms that officially recognise the training, resource and capacity needs of social workers in engaging with young offenders inside prison as well as upon release.

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## Further reading

Shahrokh, T. and Wheeler, J. (2014) *Agency and Citizenship in a Context of Gender-Based Violence*, IDS Evidence Report 73, Brighton: IDS

## Credits

This *IDS Policy Briefing* was written by **Jaideep Gupte**, **Thea Shahrokh** and **Joanna Wheeler** with contributions from Laurence Piper and Uma Sundararaman. It is based on evidence generated through collaboration with the Sustainable Livelihoods Foundation, the University of the Western Cape and the Western Cape Network on Violence Against Women in South Africa, and the Kherwadi Social Welfare Association and YUVA Parivartan in Mumbai, India. Special acknowledgement goes to the community engagers and influencers from Khayelitsha, Cape Town, for their contributions.

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