

Poverty alleviation and urban violence prevention: Exploring the impact of the Community Work Programme on urban violence

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Abstract

The Community Work Programme (CWP) is a government programme implemented in recognition of the structural nature of unemployment and intended to assist the 'poorest of the poor'. At the sites where it has been established the CWP offers two days of work per week to participants in return for which they are reimbursed at a rate of R67 per day. CWP members do work in their own communities. Community representatives make decisions about appropriate projects for each CWP site. A study by the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation explores the ideas that the CWP impacts on violence through building social and civic cohesion in communities that face a high risk of collective and interpersonal violence. Based on preliminary fieldwork carried out in a Gauteng township, this paper explores questions that are raised by the study including general questions about the relationship between poverty alleviation, job creation and the prevention of violence, the implications of the predominance of women in the CWP, issues of the relationship between social cohesion and inclusion in urban settings within a context of high levels of inequality, poverty and unemployment, and the relationship between accountability, transparency state legitimacy and civic inclusion.

Key words: Community Work Programme, Violence, Urban violence

1. Overview of the Community Work Programme (CWP)

The Community Work Programme (CWP) developed out of the Extended Public Works Programme (EPWP), which was initiated by the South African government to alleviate poverty and unemployment through providing short-term work opportunities and training to unemployed individuals (Nzimakwe, 2008; Philips, 2004). According to Philips (2004) the main objective of EPWP was to provide people with skills, while working in order to increase their chances of getting long-term job opportunities. Nzimakwe (2008) in his article notes some of the achievements of EPWP in the last five years that it created more than 661,000 work opportunities at a cost of 12.8 billion rands. Despite some of these achievements, there are some key challenges facing the EPWP. This includes lack of support from other government departments (except the Department of Public Works which is seen as the main driver of the project), lack of capacity in many municipalities to implement EPWP-related projects, lack of leadership to comply with all EPWP guidelines and poor training and skills transfer. Moreover, one of the major challenges of EPWP was the failure to create long-term job opportunities with long-lasting impact on communities (Nzimakwe, 2008). One of the recommendations was the formation of the Community Work Programme inspired by rural development programme in India as an anchor to support EPWP and reach marginalised people in semi-urban and rural areas. CWP was first piloted in 2008 in Bokfontein and Munsieville. During 2009/12, it was adopted as part of the government strategy (EPWP II). Since then, CWP has been rolled out to forty-nine sites. It has reached 70,000 people and aims to reach 250,000 people.

In this context, the CWP was instead designed to be an ongoing form of ‘employment safety net’ in the most marginal areas, where economic alternatives of any kind are the most constrained. Rather than offering full time work on a short-term basis, the CWP is designed to offer ‘regular and predictable’ access to work on an ongoing basis: two days of work per week – or 100 days per annum – to provide an earnings of R67.00 for participants..

CWP’s primary goal was to offer work opportunities for the most marginal communities, on the understanding that formal sector jobs would take a long time to come, and that opportunities for self-employment were extremely limited. The programme aimed to impact on poverty not only through creating access to income, but also ‘to instil the practices and disciplines of work, to institutionalise and embed the causal link between work and remuneration – currently often

absent; to give people access to the dignity of being productive rather than being dependent, and to rebuild their sense of economic agency' (Philip 2010:7).

2. Methodology in the implementation of CWP

In terms of its methodology, CWP is based on community participation, identifying and prioritizing 'work opportunities' in their respective communities (Philip, 2010). Unlike EPWP, which takes a top-down approach, CWP is driven mainly by community members at a grassroots level with the support of the implementing agencies called Seriti, Dhladhla Foundation, and Teba. Community members decide on projects that they would like to implement. In most cases, projects that are commonly chosen include home-based care for HIV and AIDs patients, care of orphans, social programmes to deal with alcohol abuse, crime, violence, gardening projects, campaigns to clean the environment and road maintenance (Philip, 2010). Members of the community are encouraged to participate actively in processes of decision-making in respect of all issues that affect them. Philip (2010) noted that CWP also empowers local leaders in terms of programme management skills.

3. Impact of the CWP on social cohesion and violence

It seems reasonable to argue that the CWP advances social cohesion within Kagiso on the basis that it strengthens

- Economic & social inclusion
- Social bonds & networks
- Social capital and collective efficacy

The significance of income from the CWP varied for different participants depending on their different backgrounds and circumstances. For instance, participants who had never been employed before joining the CWP had different experiences to participants who were either retired and were receiving pension money or participants who are the sole bread winners in their family compared to those who have partners with formal jobs. However, regardless of the participants social and economic standing there is evidence of participants having a sense of

being economically and socially better integrated. For instance, for some people the benefit of the CWP was in supplementing other less reliable sources of income

There seems to be little doubt then that one of the benefits of the CWP is that it enables many people, and their families, to be more self-sufficient. Being self-sufficient in turn enables people to have greater self-respect, and in turn feel that they deserve to be regarded as equals and are worthy of respect from fellow community members.

At the same time it should be emphasised that the nature of ‘economic and social inclusion’ that people are able to achieve as a result of participation in the CWP is a qualified one. This is firstly because, as already noted, the monthly income that ordinary participants receive is relatively modest.

A second reason why inclusion is qualified is because, though the CWP is seen to have the potential to provide people with skills, and thus enhance the potential that they will be able to make the transition to more formal employment (should this be available) or, individually or with others, develop their own small scale enterprises, the level of training and skills.

On the other hand it has been argued that ‘the team work approach and working in different places allows participants to get to know about events in their communities, work and educational opportunities, and new knowledge and skills. Even though government agencies may fail to provide access to work opportunities to CWP participants, the nature of the CWP may facilitate the access of some participants to information about work opportunities.

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4. Does the CWP impact on violence in Kagiso?

Violent crime is a serious problem in Kagiso. Though police statistics suggest that overall levels of violence may have declined somewhat in recent years it is not possible to say whether or to what degree the CWP may have contributed to this.

In its conception, the CWP was developed as an ‘employment safety-net’ and not as a violence prevention initiative. Nevertheless it appears that there are several ways in which the CWP may potentially contribute to preventing violence in urban settings such as Kagiso.

i. Addressing poverty and unemployment

Firstly it is possible that the CWP contributes to reducing violence by reducing unemployment and poverty and therefore impacting on the ‘root causes’ of violence. A World Bank Report (2010) has found poverty and unemployment to be two major risk factors in putting young people (mainly young men) at risk of being perpetrators as well as victims of urban violence. In Kagiso poverty and unemployment are identified as major concerns and are identified as increasing the risk that of young people using drugs (especially *nyaope*) which in turn lead them to commit petty crimes such as housebreakings and muggings.

However, it not only the incomes earned but participation in work itself that potentially has transformative and beneficial impacts for individuals. Some work provides not only material rewards in the form of an income but also non-material rewards including ‘[norms of fairness], ideas of status, and the value derived from belonging to groups and forging social ties through a variety of interactions. Related to this the relationship between employment and violence is not necessarily a linear one. Available research appears to suggest that ‘unemployment has a statistically significant correlation with property crime but not with violent crime’ (Poutvaara & Priks, 2007). Violence may for instance in some cases be a response to work that is experienced as demeaning. The potential of the CWP to directly contribute to preventing violence may thus partly depend on the degree to which the work that is done by CWP participants is acknowledged and valued by other community members, or at least by the CWP participants themselves.

However, taking into account the fact that the vast majority of CWP participants, in Kagiso and elsewhere, are women, and that many of them are mothers, a key role that the CWP is playing may be understood as that of elevates the position and resources of women and thus strengthening their abilities to take care of their children. The fact that the CWP is community based also has advantages in this regard as it means that women (and men) who are involved in caring for children can work in relative proximity to their homes. This in itself is potentially likely to have crime prevention benefits as children from stable home environments in which parents are attentive to their children are less likely to engage in crime.

At the same time the existing literature shows that many violent activities of crime and violence are committed by young males (Field, 2001; Glaser 2000; Salo, 2007). Many of these young males are more likely to be unemployed and be living in poverty-stricken homes. So their

involvement in crime is often seen as a response to personal feelings of emasculation, disempowerment, marginalization and economic exclusion (Barker, 2005; Jensen, 2008; Kinness, 2000). It was therefore argued in many of these studies that creating job opportunities for these young men may help in reducing violent crime in communities. However, it seems in Kagiso there has not been a concerted effort to recruit young men to be part of CWP. Furthermore, the CWP was not seen as an option by many young men interviewed in the study linked to the low status that they attached to participation in the programme. It seems involvement in criminal activities was still seen as an alternative means of accumulating wealth. Research shows that many young men who engage in criminal activities enjoy a kind of guarded respect and status. They are often seen as role models due to their ability to achieve some of the ideals of hegemonic masculinity, such as owning a car, wearing expensive clothes and having access to multiple girlfriends (Barker, 2005; Jensen, 2009; Langa, 2012). It is therefore important that more creative means are explored to make the CWP more attractive and appealing to young men who are at risk of engaging in violent or other criminal behaviour. In turn, this may help in improving the effectiveness of the CWP in reducing urban violence.

5. Work that is intended to address crime

The ‘useful work’ that some CWP’s engage in includes activities that can be understood as directly contributing to addressing crime. In some communities for instance the CWP is involved in community patrols or clearing bushes and long grass in crime hotspots. In fact in one of the wards in Kagiso (Swanieville), the cleaning project which involved cutting of long grass was initiated as a community response to the increasing levels of crime in the area before the CWP was implemented in 2009. However, the link between the cleaning of the environment as a crime prevention strategy disappeared immediately after the CWP was implemented. CWP participants did not see their cleaning work or involvement in schools as crime prevention strategies. They tended to reject the idea that the CWP should play a role in addressing crime, partly because they tended to assume that this would require that the CWP participate in patrols or other policing type activities, and that this would require, for instance, that they carry out arrests.

“No, CWP does not deal with crime. This is something beyond CWP. We only clean streets. Crime is the responsibility of police and not CWP”. (Kagiso CWP staff member)

I do not think that we can play any meaningful role in addressing crime unless we are given firearms and training to deal with crime. As CWP we cannot confront criminals because they will kill us. People who are involved in crime are dangerous and if we got involved in preventing criminals from crime they will kill us as we walk about cleaning the streets and doing our work (Interview with a CWP Participant, 3/10/2013)

These kinds of views were echoed by many participants interviewed in the study. However, this does not necessarily mean the participants were opposed to being involved in programmes aimed at reducing violence and crime in their communities, but their main concern was about lack of skills and training to deal with the problem of violent crime in the area. Some CWP participants were eager to be organized and trained on skills and possible violence prevention interventions as part of the CWP.

However, some concerns raised in Dixon’s (2006) article need to be taken into account about what he calls the ‘criminalization of social policy’ or turning all social policies into violence prevention initiatives. Dixon argues that “crime prevention may indeed be a legitimate goal of social policy, but that a principled approach to deciding its relative priority in the development process is needed if crime is not to be allowed to trump all other social problems” (2006, p.169). It is therefore important that in exploring issues about the potential of the CWP to reduce urban violence, we do not allow our focus on violence to exclude other social problems that the CWP is able to address. As Dixon (2006) argues “wherever and whenever crime is identified as an unavoidable priority, the nature of the measures (social and/or situational) taken to reduce it should also be taken with the ultimate goals of development in mind” (p.186).

Rather than forms of policing it may be the involvement of the CWP in activities that are essentially developmental in orientation but also constitute forms of ‘social crime prevention’ that should be regarded as the CWP work that is most relevant to addressing crime. Thus some of the home based care work such as support to child headed households, as well as work that is undertaken in schools, should be recognised as potentially having beneficial impacts in terms of crime prevention. If the contribution of the CWP to addressing crime and violence is to be

strengthened then it may be most appropriate to focus on supporting participants at CWP sites in strengthening their 'social crime prevention' role.

6. Promoting community resilience against violence through social and civic cohesion

This study was intended to explore the possibility that the CWP may contribute to promoting community resilience against violence through promoting social and civic cohesion. Civic cohesion implies greater trust between community members and public (and other) institutions and that there is an active and reciprocal relationship between them that takes place through various institutions in which values of accountability and transparency are emphasised. Social cohesion implies not only greater social and economic inclusion, trust between community members, and tolerance of differences but also the potential that the social capital of community networks and bonds may be translated into a greater capacity on the part of communities to take purposeful action to advance their collective interests. In Kagiso the CWP has clearly contributed to the multiplication of social networks, and appears to support attitudes of tolerance within the Kagiso community. It also appears to have promoted a level of economic inclusion.

In Bokfontein, the CWP was initiated through the process of organisational workshop (OW), a powerful tool for addressing potential sources of conflict within a community and for building a common vision around development and the role of the CWP. In addition OW helped to bring to the fore credible community leaders who have played a profound role in shaping the character and direction of the CWP and who have turned the CWP into a vehicle of collective efficacy.

However in Kagiso the CWP was implemented in a hasty manner with participants being recruited by ward councillors. Rather than community members being involved in identifying priority areas of work for the CWP, cleaning work was prioritized in Kagiso by the politicians who had the most influence over the programme. Kagiso was strewn with litter and informal rubbish dumps and the politicians were concerned about the potential for community mobilisation around these issues. Related to the absence of a proper inception process, and the inadequacies of systems of governance therefore the CWP in Kagiso has failed to realise its full potential as a vehicle for mobilising the Kagiso community, and local government, around the achievement of its developmental objectives.

7. Concluding remarks

In conclusion, we anticipate that the CWP may enhance social cohesion by increasing socialization, social capital and the capacity to care. In turn, social cohesion may have an impact on interpersonal violence by enhancing the community's capacity to exert social control over violence. In Kagiso, CWP was largely channeling resources to women many of whom have young children. In doing so it channels resources to the people who are most likely to use these resources to the benefit of their families. There is a possible crime prevention benefit in that this may support a sustainable and stable family environment for raising children. As a result crime prevention benefits of CWP should not simply be equated with participation of young men.

Furthermore, CWP is more than a straightforward poverty alleviation programme. It involves the decommodification of labour, the provision of desired public goods, the formation of social capital, and the concrete imagining of alternative futures, which profoundly have a transformative impact in the community, empowering active layers of leadership to work towards development.

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