

Local Safety Toolkit: Enabling safe communities of opportunity

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Abstract

Crime, violence and the related state of unsafety are issues of deep concern for most South Africans. Criminal justice responses, despite heavy investment and efforts by the state to increase and improve capacity to ensure effective law enforcement remain inadequate to achieve safety. The Local Safety Toolkit supports a strategy for a Safe South Africa through the implementation of a model for a *Safe Community of Opportunity*. The model is the outcome of work undertaken over the course of the past five years and draws from widely inclusive consultation and literature review. The toolkit aims to contribute to preventive approaches to address unsafety. Unsafety is a whole-government and whole-society problem. It is only through a multi-perspective lens and the promotion and enactment of a multi-stakeholder vision at local level that communities are able to shift from being unsafe to improved safe. Local safety approaches must bring together the perspectives, understanding and vision of individual local actors in collaborative, integrative approaches to overcome the fragile social systems that are the legacy of apartheid and that perpetuate vulnerability and increase the risks of a cycle of crime and violence. This requires a systemic approach that embraces the complexity of the problem and delivers a systemic solution. Since it is implausible to expect that all or even most local safety strategies will be able to access and benefit from systems expertise within local environments, the model presented here pre-empts this shortcoming and provides a toolkit in which these concepts and theories are embedded. In line with the systems theory on which it is based, the model reflects collaboration across many disciplines, including systems theory, design thinking and innovation, visioning and ICT. It proposes ways of overcoming shortcomings of human capacity and management at local level, it promotes innovation and it harnesses technology to provide a systemic approach to local safety. The model, a *Safe Community of Opportunity*, is proposed as the core of a national strategy in which what is learned and experienced locally informs an adaptive process that is responsive both to changing needs and to progress towards safety in individual communities.

1. Introduction

This paper addresses three research propositions:

- 1) Crime prevention cannot in isolation move a community from being unsafe, here referred to as a state of unsafety, to being safe, or to a state of safety. Unsafety is an agglomeration of vulnerabilities, of which crime and violence, neglect and abuse are only some – and for safety to exist, there must be a multi-disciplinary, multi-sectoral approach that extends beyond the traditional thematic approaches to crime and violence prevention.
- 2) While there is international wisdom that has bearing on the causes of unsafety and on good practice in the face of multiple vulnerabilities, solutions of developed countries do not transfer well to South Africa, where the social engineering of the past rendered many already vulnerable communities fragile and beset with unique problems. Evidence-led interventions must be strengthened with indigenous learning and problem solving.
- 3) Low capacity at local level to address unsafety is a pressing obstacle to safe communities. It is therefore important to develop enabling tools that offer guidance and support for whole-government and whole-society responses to unsafe communities.

2. Context for addressing safety as a local and community priority

Crime, violence and related unsafety impact the lives of most South Africans; they are experienced at local level. This paper suggests that it is at local level too that the basis for a regional, provincial and national strategy should be found.

The paper demands a paradigm reversal of the traditional representation of government as a pyramid with national at the pinnacle and local at the base (NCPS, 1996; White Paper for Safety and Security; 1998). This model is premised instead on a national government supporting from a pivotal point local government and the people on top, where they belong – in line with the principles of Batho Pele (Holtmann, 2009).

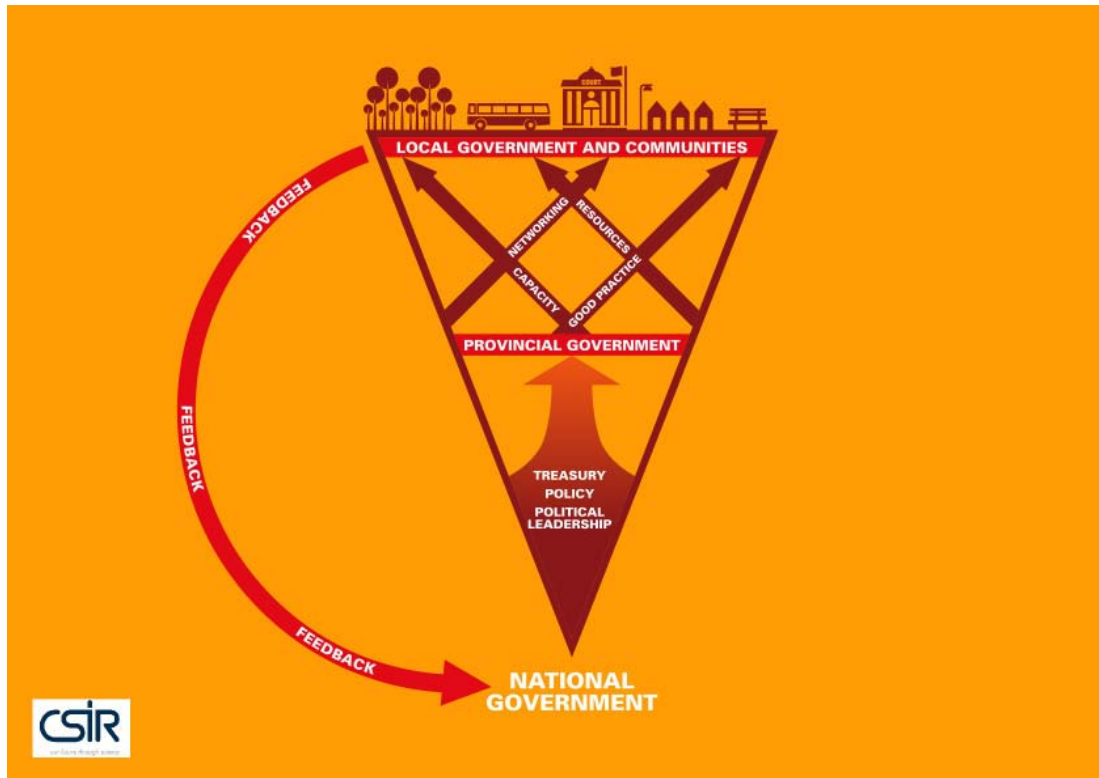


Figure 1: The upside-down three tiers of government model

The role of national government is political leadership and guidance translated and enacted through policy and a statutory and legislative framework, with the treasury function as an enabler of objectives aligned to policy (NCPS, 1996).

Provincial government, a virtual entity, supports this process through:

- The identification, implementation, testing and roll-out of good practices
- Provision of resources for implementation
- Capacity support, capacity building, expertise and guidance
- Networking of what works and what does not work in local communities.

This last is possibly the most important function of all – to ensure that each local environment need not start at the beginning to identify what works, nor travel down every cul de sac of what does not (Holtmann, 2009). Local government is where the impacts of policy and Treasury are best felt and measured. If the fragile balance is maintained, feedback into national policies and Treasury allocations will ensure that the

needs of local communities will be better served. Similarly, policies, budgets and resources will more easily be appropriately allocated according to local needs and opportunities.

The Local Safety Toolkit (LST) was conceived in response to the needs of local governments to address issues of crime and violence at community level. Working with the South African Police Service (SAPS) the UN Habitat Safer Cities programme and various local partners, the toolkit evolved as a process tool that provided an entry point for extensive research, development and refinement over the past eight years.

3. International experience – opportunities and risks

While in the past there have been many attempts to link crime prevention to specific themes such as safe schools, environmental design or domestic violence prevention, current learning casts a safety lens on more integrated approaches. The weight of literature demonstrates the links between social, health, education and local safety services (Frank & Maaki, 2008; Ross et al., 1999; Domingo-Swarts, 2003, etc). International debates suggest that safety strategies in developed countries can likely be attributed more to the safety nets and sophisticated infrastructure provided by social, health, education and local service delivery systems in those societies than to the strategies themselves (ICPC, 2008; Holtmann, 2009). Whereas developing nations often look to the resilient communities of Northern developed states and seek to replicate crime combating, crime prevention and safety strategies in the expectation of achieving similar results, the difference is in the effectiveness and strength of protective layers that have evolved through generations of investment, through service delivery and access to services that are taken for granted in such communities (Holling, 2001). Should any of these fail, there are safety nets that will protect against complete dysfunction and widespread vulnerability such as are prevalent in South Africa (NCPS, 1996; Simpson, 1996; Shields et al., 2008; Seedat et al., 2004; CSIR, 2006).

This is reflected in the *breaking the cycle of crime and violence* model (Figure 2) developed in the course of research conducted in the Central Karoo (CSIR, 2006).

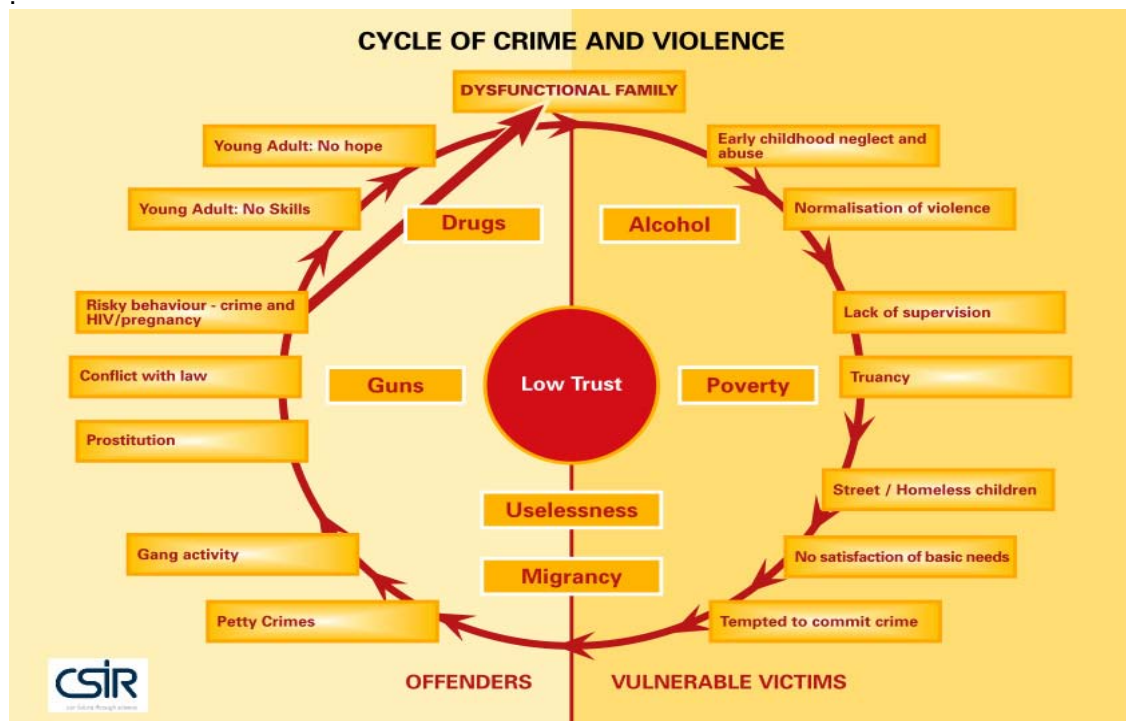


Figure 2: Breaking the cycle of crime and violence

Thus we cannot apply a fix brought in from developed countries to communities and societies whose history is one of conflict, colonial oppression and institutionalised violence and deprivation (ICPC, 2008).

What works in developed countries is unlikely to be anything other than aspirational in developing countries. It is easier to keep a community safe than to restore an unsafe community (Holtmann, 2009).

There may, however, be resonance in developing countries such as those in Latin America and in communities such as the Aborigines of Australia, the Maori of New Zealand and the First Nation people of North America (Capobianco et al., 2009). What these share in terms of unsafety is a lack of social support, low opportunity for education, poor access to health care, inadequate delivery of services, and inequitable criminal justice (Ross et al., 1999). What they also share are high levels of criminality, low expectation of and access to service delivery and high risk of victimisation.

4. Enabling integrated local safety processes

Our aim must therefore be to provide a way of addressing unsafety in communities and societies where protective social layers are not in place. The LST aims to do this by using local experiences, needs and actors to inform a desired future safe society (Dator, 1998). The toolkit is based on a systemic approach to what can be identified as a wicked problem (Conklin, 2001) – unsafety is complex and messy and does not lend itself to a simple solution. The model is activated by the application of information and communication technologies (ICT) designed to support complex systems (Kruchten, 1995).

The LST promotes a shift from prevention of crime and violence to an approach that aims to enhance safety in communities. Safety is not only the responsibility of the police and the criminal justice system, but includes whole-government and even whole-society role players (Waller et al., 1997; ICPC, 2006). As in systems theory, government and society are seen as a whole that incorporates elements of inextricable relatedness, dependent for its sustainability on the collaboration of a wide variety of stakeholders (Johnson, 2005; Allen, 2001; Capra, 1996; Holtmann, 2009).

This recognition of the need for a widely inclusive approach to safety has often in itself been the greatest obstacle to effective strategies and implementation plans (NCPS, 1996). Complicated coordination mechanisms, interminable reporting hierarchies and organograms have left otherwise promising policies to wither on the shelf, too difficult to implement (White Paper, 1998). The need to engage communities in both the design and implementation of strategies similarly adds to the complexity and difficulty of creating sustainable strategies for safety (Husain, 2007).

The challenge for the LST is therefore to support both local government and communities to design and implement a local safety strategy to build the protective layers that will ultimately lead to resilience and safety through a balance between criminal justice and prevention approaches.

5. The Safe Community of Opportunity model

To articulate the individual roles of government and civil society players and their relationships with one another, the LST uses the model of a Safe Community of Opportunity as the basis of a systemic and organic toolkit that comprises the following components:

1. A visual representation of a Safe Community of Opportunity. This is based on primary research in many communities over a period of eight years, eliciting from ordinary citizens, service providers, community leaders and politicians a view of 'what it looks like when its safe' (Holtmann, 2009).
2. A tool for practical development of the network of collaborators essential to a Safe Community of Opportunity.
3. A data-gathering tool for the capture of local demographic and criminal justice data.
4. A data base and data capturing tool for the mandates and programmes of the stakeholder groups aligned to the elements of the model. The programme is designed to respond to the different stakeholders according to known mandates and objectives.
5. A tool for the facilitation of a shared vision for a Safe Community of Opportunity guided by the Breaking the Cycle of Crime and Violence model and defined by the inter-related 48 elements and multiple stakeholders of the Safe Community of Opportunity model.
6. A data-gathering tool for the capture of contextual and specific local needs, goals and objectives, within the 48 elements of the model.

7. Proposed indicators for the measurement of performance towards the achievement of a Safe Community of Opportunity (Holtmann, 2009).

6. Context

Although there are many public and private agencies that contribute to safety, police are still perceived to be primarily responsible for prevention policies (Badenhorst, 2008), despite their mandate for law enforcement and their inevitable resource constraints. It is, however, often in the definition of roles for other sectors that the complications arise, with burdensome demands for coordination functions (NCPS, 1996; Du Plessis & Louw, 2005). It is important that government departments act according to their purpose-directed mandates. When they are measured, it is against indicators related to these mandates. It is not therefore realistic to expect all sectors to focus on safety; health will always focus on health, education on education. It is the role of the safety sector to understand and articulate the connections between those individual mandates, the programmes and actions of other sectors and safety. It is further the role of the safety sector to maximise the impact of such actions through appropriate collaborative and supportive relationships with those in other sectors. The safety sector can be further strengthened by identifying ways in which its own actions support the objectives of other sectors. This will create the opportunity for partnership and collaboration based on mutual dependencies and benefits (Holtmann, 2009).

Systems thinking (Ritchey, 2002; Capra, 1996) provides a theoretical context for the model: *"In systems thinking the orientation is on social systems, i.e. social systems that are purposeful systems containing purposeful parts and are themselves contained in a larger purposeful system. This puts the focus on properties of systems that their parts do not have, on the functions of systems within the larger systems that contain them, and on the effects of the properties of the system on the parts. It is more concerned with the way parts of a system interact than act, and, most importantly, with purposes of the parts, the system, and the systems that contain it"* (Pourdehnad et al., 2002: 8, quoted in Holtmann, 2009).

This frames an approach in which the safety sector can support the need of the social sector to intervene, for instance for pregnant teenage girls so that they become better mothers, because in terms of safety this will contribute to the safety of the unborn and newborn child and reduce the risks of immediate victimisation as well as later problematic behaviour (Marais & Eigelaar-Meets, 2009). It can, for instance, support local government in providing access to water, sanitation and functional public spaces because of the contribution that each of these makes to reducing the risks and increasing the likelihood of a safe community (Frank, 2005).

These relationships will be sustained when safety is understood as a system made up of inter-related and overlapping elements that lose their significance without the contexts in which they exist as the whole (Ritchy, 2008).

This suggests that safety strategies require true collaboration across disciplines and outside of the safety sector, and should not be drafted by crime prevention experts in isolation of the tools of design thinkers, innovators, systems practitioners and creative thinkers steeped in ideation and technologists who enable access to and activation of safe communities of opportunity.

A major shortcoming in previous attempts to drive safety at local level has been the lack of leadership, capability and capacity both to develop strategies that reflect this complexity or to implement them. It is therefore important to pre-empt this and provide a toolkit in which these concepts and theories are embedded. The LST is based on systems theory (Capra, 1996), and reflects a number of schools of thought and methodologies including systems theory (Ritchey, 2008), design thinking and innovation (Pourdehnad, Maani & Sedehi, 2002; Brown, 2008), visioning (Weingand, 1995) and combines these into a simple process by harnessing ICT (Kruchten, 1995).

The Safe Communities of Opportunity model at the core of the LST goes beyond Pourdehnad et al. (2002) who envisage the use of technology as a learning aid for systems behaviours in organisations. Here ICT is used both for learning and to support practical implementation through the introduction of the ICT toolkit. *"The user is prompted to behave in a systemic way, interacting via the relationships plotted in the software*

system. In this way the ICT toolkit demonstrates to the user the benefits of integration and collaboration through practical use” (Holtmann, 2009).

7. The components of the model

Systems theory requires that complex problems are not deconstructed into individual or discreet parts. The Safe Communities of Opportunity model (Figure 3) is true to this notion rather than to a more business-like, simpler approach that may have clustered the elements into seemingly more manageable groups (Brown, 2008; Pourdehnad et al., 2002).



Figure 3: Safe Communities of Opportunity – a Strategy for a Safe South Africa

The model is the outcome of the PhD thesis *Safe Communities of Opportunity, a Strategy for a Safe South Africa* (Holtmann, 2009). Whereas it was originally seen as being a safe communities model, it was expanded to articulate the need for opportunity. In the course of research, it became clear that in many communities, the lack of opportunity feeds upon itself; where people believe there is no hope, for instance of their children receiving a good education, they send them to schools outside of their own community, putting them at risk in transit, wasting essential resources, distancing themselves and the child from any additional activities or benefits the school might offer (CSIR, 2009). For many poor communities, the constant search for opportunities beyond where they live is an inherent part of their lives, an endless process of assumed uncertainty and lack of permanence. Thus the model became the safe communities of opportunity model. This does not assume that it is inherently better for people to stay where they are forever; it does, however, suggest that without choices of where they are, they will migrate regardless of associated risk to themselves or the communities they leave behind (CSIR, 2009).

8. The elements of a Safe Community of Opportunity

The 48 elements in the façade of the model do not represent an action plan. They rather reflect inter-related elements and stakeholders that contribute to a community that is sustainably safe and that allows

members of that community access to opportunities that will result in growth, peace, dignity and poverty alleviation within their community, rather than their needing to seek it elsewhere.

The model links the objectives, policies and programmes of 34 government departments, as well as the non-governmental sector and various community-based groupings to the elements. It allows stakeholders to visualise the contribution that their existing roles play in achieving safety, rather than requiring an identification of new roles and responsibilities. Thus for instance the model relates existing local government mandates for 'safe and clean public toilets', 'well-managed public parks', and the management of liquor licenses, 'no illegal shebeens', to a Safe Community of Opportunity.

The model makes obvious connections between the police and elements such as 'transparent policing' and 'victim support', but also makes less obvious connections, for instance between Home Affairs and 'access to grants' because without documentation there can be no access to grants and this intensifies unsafety for children, the disabled and the elderly.

"Each element of the model shares mutual dependencies with some, although not necessarily all, of the others. For instance, if there is a local housing problem that disables the shelter for all elements, this will impact 'empowered parents', 'children's basic needs met', 'old people safe' and other elements. If there are not 'many leisure choices' this will impact 'children busy', 'young people make good choices', 'reduced alcohol' and 'safe transport'. The impact on each will have a consequence for others and the system will not sustain a Safe Community of Opportunity" (Holtmann, 2009).

9. Applying a safety lens across other sectors

The model can be viewed from many different perspectives. Safety can be seen as an issue that relates to family, in which case elements such as 'safe sex', 'parents empowered' 'nurtured children' and 'peaceful home' will be clustered together. All departments and other stakeholders having responsibility for these elements would have cause to collaborate to achieve them – but not all will necessarily have a mandate for all of them, and some will have a mandate for other elements, for which others will not. For instance, the police, the Department of Social Development, the Department of Health and the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development all have a role to play in achieving peaceful homes, some through welfare and preventative actions and others through implementation and enforcement of the Domestic Violence Act, but the police have no mandate to deal with issues of safe sex or nurturing children, and the Department of Social Development has no mandate for visible policing.

Other perspectives relate, for instance, to school as a site for vulnerability or protection, to the burden of substances on safety issues, to youth and to the elderly, to access to services and to the infrastructure that underpins all matters of unsafety and safety (ICPC, 2008).

In line with systems theory, the 48 elements do not claim completeness (Capra, 1996). The model is intended as a dynamic system and there is an assumption that it must be adaptive both as the needs of stakeholders change with time (Brown, 2008) and as progress towards safety changes the needs and priorities of the community (Husain, 2007).

10. Using ICT to enable collaboration

The model and the ICT toolkit actively promote extensive collaboration among local role players, but do not require a coordination mechanism or function. Evidence points to coordination as a stumbling block in local interventions; it has already been mentioned that there is low capacity for safety interventions, and there is even less capacity for coordination. Data gathered in the toolkit will be used by those for whom it has relevance, rather than the toolkit requiring users to share all information with all stakeholders (Husain, 2007; ICPC, 2008).

The toolkit acknowledges the wide diversity of factors that contribute to crime, violence and insecurity as a vehicle through which to reach inclusive but limited consensus, a vision that has enough commonality across stakeholders to build on shared concerns, needs and common understanding, and to motivate collaborators to seek joint funding and resourcing, to develop, implement and sustain a local safety

strategy. The toolkit provides for data gathering and analysis that favours prevention and early intervention over enforcement, but does not exclude effective enforcement as a tool for achieving safety (ibid).

Central to the value of the toolkit is the way in which it enables the user to mainstream safety and crime prevention into policy and institutions. The tool prompts the capture of data to the extent that it will be useful to the users; it is sensitive to the way in which data collection can become an activity that serves to delay real action, rather than to support good decision making. In prompting the collection of a wide range of data, however, the toolkit recognises that safety is merely a subsystem of social systems and that the boundaries between safety and other subsystems is porous and hard to define (Holling, 2001). The data collected will also often reflect what is available, the integrity of available data, and the relatedness of the data to community needs and desires (Husain, 2007). Some data that are captured here and viewed from a safety perspective will overlap with other data collection functions – for instance, it may be captured in the health sector from a health perspective and in the education sector to inform education programmes and interventions (Frank, 2005).

The toolkit also prompts the capture of a wide range of relevant stakeholders on the system so that they can be engaged in the process when necessary. There is no compunction to capture all of the suggested stakeholders, nor to engage all at all times. The idea is to encourage a database that grows on a needs-driven basis and with whom partners communicate as and when it is useful. In practical terms, this tool requires the capture of names, contact details and functions of the individuals who will represent each stakeholder in the local safety process.

In prompting both data collection and the establishment of a partner base, the tool demands a certain level of engagement of stakeholders outside of the immediate and obvious safety sector. The data collection thus plays its part in making the connections, prompting the understanding of why demographic information is important to a safety strategy, what the link is between recreation opportunities and safety (CSIR, 2006), etc. It is also often only possible to source this information if contact is made between sectors, and this can spark the beginning of collaborative approaches.

In line with international practice (Husain, 2007) this tool prompts the gathering of some data such as:

- Social and demographic information pertinent to the community.
- Reported crime and crime prevention programmes and activities of criminal justice agencies (sources: SAPS, Justice, NPA, Correctional Services).
- Social and health data, including service delivery (sources: Department of Health, Department of Social Development, municipality, NGOs, CBOs, FBOs, etc.).
- Education information (sources: Department of Education, NGOs, etc.).
- Infrastructure and Housing (source: municipality).
- Public transport services (sources: municipality, provincial and national government, transport companies and associations).
- Business and trading (sources: government, businesses, trading associations, etc.).

Not all data that has relevance to the understanding of unsafety or safety comes in quantifiable form. In some cases it can only be assessed through consultation with people who experience it first hand – and interventions can only be properly framed through the interpretation of such information. This is particularly true where, for instance, an intervention relates to services that must be rendered to and/or by community members, such as victim support or interventions in the family (Crawford-Browne, 2008).

An important element of the toolkit is a series of suggested indicators for the measurement of performance towards the achievement of each of the elements of the Safe Community of Opportunity. These tools bring the various means of data gathering together into an integrated, although inevitably incomplete (Capra, 1995) data base that connects objectives and mandates from national to local, sector to sector, stakeholder to stakeholder, generic to specific, within the system described by the Safe Community of Opportunity.

The toolkit aims in all that it does to emphasise the systemic nature of unsafety and of safety interventions. An example of this emphasis is that in some cases the indicator of progress towards one element may be another element. For instance, an indicator for 'children fed' may be 'peaceful learning', whereas an indicator for 'peaceful learning' may be 'young people make good choices' (ICPC, 2005). The indicators themselves are thus used to reinforce the inter-relatedness of both elements and stakeholders. Thus even where users of the toolkit may lack an understanding of the web-like nature of these relationships and the inextricability of mutual dependencies (Capra, 1996), an integrated approach must be taken.

11. Application of the model

In South Africa any reliance on technology for local implementation still draws the criticism that not all communities have access to ICT, nor are they equipped to utilise ICT. This model is developed within the context of a strategy that promotes the use of community-based ICT to straddle the so-called 'digital divide' that otherwise broadens the gap between the first and second economies of South Africa and similar environments. The toolkit, while encompassing sophisticated principles, does not require sophisticated or advanced computer skills and is designed to guide users through the simple steps involved in the process. The need for capacity building at local level offers the opportunity to network community-based facilitators from different communities who share the training workshops and build valuable relationships that will hopefully provide much-needed support as implementation spreads and is sustained. The model is being used in some pilot communities in South Africa, under the guidance of the Open Society for South Africa and Khulisa Services, in Kenya supported by UN Habitat Safer Cities and in Namibia and Mozambique led by the Open Society Institute.

12. Conclusions

The Safe Community of Opportunity model is not a crime prevention toolkit, it responds to community needs for safety as articulated over a number of years, in the course of various research processes. The elements, while not definitive, have resonance in the communities where the research was undertaken and where research continues. The complexity and oppressive nature of unsafety and the deep systemic failure of many communities demands a practical response: the toolkit provides one.

The model responds to literature on the causes of crime and violence and on crime prevention. This literature demonstrates that crime and violence can only be prevented through a whole-government and whole-society integrative approach (ICPC, 2006). It also demonstrates that much is known about both the causes of crime and violence (Hobdell, 1996; Karr-Norse & Wiley, 1997; Garbarino, 1999; Domingo-Swartz, 2003; HSRC, 2006, etc.) and about interventions to prevent crime and violence (Frank & Maaki, 2008; Burton, 2008; Biersteker, 2008; Dube & Kirsten, 2008; Griggs, 2002; Marais & Eigelaar-Meets, 2009; Muntingh, 2008). However, communities remain unsafe (SAPS, 2008).

The model and the toolkit have, however, benefited not only from the literature on crime prevention but also from systems thinking (Capra, 1995; Holling, 2001; Brown, 2008), the literature on wicked problems (Ritchey, 2002), visioning (Weingand, 1995; Dator, 2002) and design thinking (Pourdehnad et al., 2002). A Safe Community of Opportunity is described in terms of interwoven, multi-related elements and stakeholders in an organic and adaptive web.

The toolkit is particularly useful in the light of low capacities and the limited understanding of the complexity of systems that are required to sustain local safety. In South Africa today, there is all too often no rich weave of social fabric, no protective layers to prevent vulnerability, resulting in deep, often repetitive victimisation and offending behaviours.

The model is enabled through an ICT toolkit that assists even the least qualified facilitator to an integrative approach (Krutchen, 1995) based on a shared vision of a Safe Community of Opportunity. The ICT toolkit aims to prompt and guide local activists through the process of local safety strategy design, incorporating a wide range of stakeholder perspectives, to implementation and measurement of progress. The more it is used, the more useful it will become, constantly alert to the need for adaptation and refinement (Holtmann, 2009).

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