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ORGANIZING COMMUNITIES:

Reflections on Addressing Authority-Based Violence in Monrovia, Manila and Johannesburg

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REFLECTIONS ON ADDRESSING AUTHORITY-BASED VIOLENCE IN MONROVIA, MANILA AND JOHANNESBURG

A praxis paper on urban violence prepared in collaboration between Balay, CSVR, LAPS and DIGNITY for the Global Alliance

By Anna Warburg, Kaloy Anasarias, Nomfundo Mogapi, Seidu Swaray and Steffen Jensen

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Foreword

Community organizing strategies have been heralded as an important part of addressing human rights violations by many scholars and activists. We absolutely agree with this point of departure. However, we also agree with critics that community organizing strategies have been under-documented in systematic ways and that evaluation of their success or failure often rests on anecdotal evidence. Furthermore, we also agree that context is everything in community work and that any attempt at modelling or blueprints is likely to fail. However, this should not prevent us from trying to learn from one another. This report addresses both the dearth in systematic analysis and formulates a string of reflexive recommendations to be used by ourselves and other organizations involved in community organizing.

The praxis paper is the product of the collaboration between four like-minded organizations: BALAY Rehabilitation Centre in the Philippines, The Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation in South Africa (CSVR), The Liberia Association of Psycho-social Services (LAPS) in Liberia and DIGNITY-Danish Institute Against Torture in Denmark. The collaboration has been formalized under the heading 'The Global Alliance Against Authority-based Violence', established in 2014. The basic premise of the Alliance is that around the world and across different contexts, groups of people are deemed 'victimizable' by the powers that be – either state or non-state – and hence made legitimate targets of order-maintaining – or authority-based – violence. The risk groups might include young, indigent and criminalized men in slum areas, suspects of terrorism and gangsterism, migrants and refugees, sexual minorities or alleged carriers of disease like Ebola. Their alleged transgressions might be based in a legal framework (like drug peddling) or in moral norms (like sexuality). However, all are likely victims of state or non-state violence. At the time of writing, the Philippine 'War on Drugs' provides a chilling example of the legitimacy of violence against such groups.

As a central element in the collaboration, we produce cross-cutting analyses about different issues relevant to the practice of the partners of the Global Alliance while employing different methodologies. All topics emerge from our common discussions on our different contexts, and include linking human rights, development and violence in the city; legal frameworks for policing poor urban neighborhoods; social work models; psychosocial models and partnership approaches.

Executive summary and recommendations

In this report, we explore community organizing strategies aimed at addressing what we call authority-based violence, that is, violence that is justified by local moral orders against those incarnating or embodying a threat to the survival of a local polity. The analysis is based on 67 data reports describing some of the activities and theories of change of three partners in the Global Alliance – Balay Rehabilitation Centre, the Center for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation and the Liberian Association for Psychosocial Services. The objectives of the analysis were twofold:

> 1) Systematically describe community organizing activities across three different contexts and
>
> 2) Understand what kind of dilemmas and challenges emerge when engaging in community organizing projects and efforts.

The analytical ambition of the report is not so much to understand the extent to which the activities were successful in relation to a strategic plan. Rather, we are interested in exploring, from the bottom up, how and to what extent such strategic planning is sometimes at the mercy of challenges that are integral to community organizing and what we can learn from this in relation to future community organizing work. It is our hope that other organizations engaging in community work may find some of our discussions valuable.

In terms of activities across contexts, we identified a wide array of organizing and mobilizing activities, involving a multiplicity of actors and stakeholders on many levels. Across all activities the most consistent characteristic for activities and theories of change is that they rest on a relational approach that aims to build networks, collaborations and social cohesion on all levels of community, whether it is among at-risk individuals, families and neighbors, organized groups, or external stakeholders. By facilitating intermediate linkages between these actors through organizing activities, social connections are facilitated and networks are extended in the communities.

This approach has been validated in our practices. While these successes are important to document and to recognize, it is equally important to reflect on the process beyond notions of success and failure. In looking through the data reports and the analyses, we identified seven challenges and dilemmas that seemed integral to organizing communities. The seven challenges are:

- The significance of context

- Positioning and framing organizing and mobilizing strategies

- The constitution of community

- Translation and vertical, organizational linkages

- Formality and informality

- Logistical and practical challenges, and

- Community projects and personal projects

These dilemmas and challenges have no easy one-fix solutions; they are often intrinsic to and constitutive of community organizing as such. They cannot be planned or defined away. They must be engaged with and reflected upon during all phases of project planning, implementation and evaluation. The recommendations which emerge out of this report are formulated as a set of questions that might guide such a reflexive process.

The significance of context:

- Is the project design (practical and financial) flexible enough to be able to deal with situations of rupture, maybe even innovatively?

- Does the project design and implementation accommodate less spectacular forms of crisis in the everyday lives of community organizers and beneficiaries?

Positi oning and framing organizing and mobilizing strategies

- Does the project design factor in different points of view as well as different needs as they develop for different stakeholders?

- Do issues around survival and safety feature into the project implementation and design for partners and beneficiaries?

The constitution of community:

- What are the project assumptions about the constitution of the community? Who represents and who constitutes the community?

- Does the project implementation and design allow risk groups and victims of communal and state violence to participate meaningfully and on their own terms?

Translation and vertical, organizational linkages

- What are the different (professional) languages in play in a specific project and what are the possibilities of misunderstandings?

- What are the project mechanisms in place to allow translation between different levels of the intervention?

Formality and informality:

- What informal practices are necessary for the project to work, and how and to what extent are they funded?

- How does the project account for and document informal practices as a necessary part of the implementation?

Logistical and practical challenges:

- What is the relationship between the practical and logistical challenges, the resources at hand and the aims of the project?

- How and to what extent are logistical and practical issues documented as integral rather than as disruptive of implementation?

Community projects and personal projects:

- How does the project deal with personal projects of partners and beneficiaries?

- How can personal projects be merged with community projects as defined by project staff in order to strengthen both personal and the communal mobilization and organization?

Chapter 1: Introduction

How do we address violence perpetrated against groups that is legitimized as maintaining order and producing what local elites, including state authorities, consider moral communities? One answer, often heard in the human rights world, revolves around reforming institutions and training state authorities in legal frameworks such as the Convention Against Torture. While this approach is certainly important, we suggest that we need to complement the legal and institutional approach with one that focuses on community organizing and mobilization. Rather than addressing violence only through working with perpetrative institutions, we have tried to work with communities. This is surely no new approach as many projects have come before and influenced our thinking[1]. However, many accounts of community organizing as a way to address violence have been rather anecdotal and less than convincing. In this report, we aim to explore community organization as a way to address authority-based violence. We ask how can communities organize and be mobilized to address violence across urban contexts and what dilemmas and challenges emerge in doing so?

In this question, there are a number of conceptual issues at stake: What constitutes a community and are communities comparable across contexts? What does it entail to organize and mobilize communities? What kind of violence are we discussing? While these questions are surely important – and we do address them all in due course (The Global Alliance 2017; Mogapi, Anasarias, Masuko, Swaray and Jensen, 2017) – it is not necessarily productive to answer them and define our concepts a priori. In this there is an important methodological ambition of developing conceptual tools for exploring mobilizing and organizing strategies through qualitative and cross-cultural comparison (Melhuus 2002). An important reason for this ambition is that many community-based projects have been ignored by policy makers in both rehabilitation and prevention because they did not conform to evidential standards often formulated around quantitative research frameworks. One part of the problem has been that community organizing projects have often not been designed to allow a rigorous implementation of quantitative indicators and measurements. Another reason has been a reluctance on the part of those implementing these projects to pay the methodological price in terms of, for instance, the difficulty of comparison across contexts. However, it seems as if there is a false dichotomy between quantitative and qualitative analyses (Pearce 2015). What is central is that we employ rigorous scientific standards to both qualitative and quantitative analyses and that we are aware of what we can say based on the material and data we have.

Conceptual considerations on community organizing

Community organizing is a field of practice that is fast-developing, and as such it has undergone numerous shifts and expansions over recent decades. It has been applied, adapted and utilized in a variety of contexts, and consequently there is much literature on the topic, rich in both frameworks and conceptual models relating community organizing to specific outputs. Due to the dynamic nature of the field, community organizing does not have an agreed-upon definition. In short, community organizing is an umbrella term for a field of practice in which local residents take collective action and work collaboratively towards social change and the development and transformation of their communities. The overall aim here is to meet the needs of the people, e.g. changes in policies, employment conditions, public safety, education,

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1   For an elaboration of different approaches see Jessen, Rønsbo and Modvig, 2011; Bantjes, Langa and Jensen, 2012; Berliner et al, 2009; Sloth-Hansen et al, 2014.

and health (Christens & Speer 2015; Brady & O'Connor 2014; Rodgers et al. 2011). In this way, current trends in community organizing still reflect foundational thinking within the field, which emphasizes participatory deliberation, collective action and self-awareness about one's role in society as necessary components in social change and transformation processes (Alinsky 1971; Freire 1970).

In this aspect, the distinction between organizing and mobilizing is important to address as well as how they are used in this context. Due to the rich literature – and consequently wide-ranging terminology – it can be a challenge to distinguish between the terms as they are often used interchangeably, e.g. organizing, mobilizing, development, practice and intervention (Thomas et al. 2011: 338). However, one overarching argument seems to be that organizing is the foundation for social change to take place, because it brings people together in the first place. Organizing typically involves longer-term strategies meant to increase sustained community-based capacity, whereas mobilizing typically is shorter-term, or at least has a faster implementation process, often based on a momentum created by, for instance, events or new policies. At the same time, it is a product of many interrelated activities – both formal and informal. In this aspect, mobilizing aims for active community participation in initiatives that focus on specific steps to achieve social change. Thus, mobilizing occurs within organizing strategies in a process where both are equally important. As such, it raises the question of how to distinguish between activities that aim to organize and those that seek to mobilize.

While this distinction can be important, in this report, the aim is neither to discuss and elaborate on existing literature nor to be rigid about the definitions it suggests. Rather, we will approach community organizing from the bottom up and focus on people coming together, where common ground is established based on issues in the given community, e.g. violence, welfare, unemployment, health and livelihood. Seen in this light both organizing and mobilizing strategies are effective methods for achieving changes at all community levels as they both employ short-term initiatives and long-term advocacy efforts. The literature stresses the combination of long- and short-term interventions as especially beneficial for local residents seeking to meaningfully engage and participate in local decision-making processes that build on relations and networks to achieve local change (Christens & Speer 2011, 2015; Wallerstein 1993; Dale & Newman 2008).

Methodological considerations

To address the overarching ambition to explore community mobilizing and organizing strategies across contexts and develop a reliable, valid and useful system for cross-cultural comparison, we have designed this small research project as an inductive enquiry where our own practices constitute the empirical data. As part of the Global Alliance, each partner organization had defined areas of work and established more conceptual and theoretical ideas about how interventions would work; that is, we had identified theories of change for each of our activities. However, rather than simply presenting these theories of change supported with empirical illustrations, we decided to engage with our practices inductively, that is, from the ground up. Most analyses of intervention move in the opposite direction, i.e. they begin with the strategies that lead to activities. This usually leads to conclusions about efficacy along the lines of theory-driven evaluation indicating that the strategies were correct but badly implemented; correct and correctly implemented; wrong but well implemented; or wrong and badly implemented

(Dahler-Larsen, 2013). We agree with this approach and it does inform this project. However, by reversing the direction for a while, we can understand how a diverse set of practices and contextually based issues impact on the carrying out of a strategic vision without it being put down to faulty implementation. In this way, we attempt to assess the usefulness of the theories of change. Hence, rather than taking our point of departure in the strategies, we get to ask questions about their usefulness.

Over a period of 14 months (April 2016-June 2017), we collected data about activities using a template agreed to and developed by all partner organizations together. These reports in no way constituted the full number of activities or even a large section of them. A certain number of reports from each partner were agreed upon and we ended up with a total of 67 reports covering a variety of different activities. Hence, they are not quantitatively representative of the work carried out. Rather, they must be seen as a partial archive of activities that allow us to explore the nature – not prevalence – of activities. The reports were collected and compiled by on-the-ground staff members, processed by interns at DIGNITY and analyzed in a 'writing group' with members from the four organizations. The data collection group consists of Louie Crismo (Balay), Lebohang Malapela, Modiege Merafe, Tsamme Mfundisi and Gaudence Uwizeye (CSVR) and Shiaka Sannoh (LAPS). Michelle Caibio, Tatiana Jessen and Anna Bræmer Warburg (Dignity) worked on data management at different periods. Dominique Dix-Peek, Thapelo Mqehe (CSVR), Kaloy Anasarias (Balay) and Cartor Tamba (LAPS) oversaw the data collection in South Africa, Philippines and Liberia respectively. Steffen Jensen and Anna Warburg with Kaloy Anasarias, Nomfundo Mogapi and Seidu Swaray were the main drafters of the report. Hence, the project has involved a broad section of staff in the partner organizations.

The data entered consisted of activities around organizing as defined by the Global Alliance project as relevant for understanding organizing strategies and mobilization. The reports recorded target group, purpose of activity, reflections on the activity, what worked and what did not work. Based on the reports, we then induced the theories of change from the activities themselves. This process is more open, bottom-up and grounded than beginning with outlining the theories of change and the models and then moving on to the activities. In this way, we created a database of organizing activities. Through a grounded process, we identified seven themes that seem to influence organizing strategies beyond the theories of change across the three project countries. These comprise the significance of context; positioning and framing of organizing and mobilizing strategies; the constituents of community; translation and vertical organizational linkages; formality and informality; logistical and practical challenges; and community projects and personal projects. While these are clearly relevant for all three contexts, we also discuss in detail the extent to which we may compare the organizing strategies and their dilemmas and challenges. One important caveat we want to emphasize in relation to the data collection on community organizing activities is that, as touched on above, the reports on which the report is based represent far from all activities. Hence, the argument is not that all activities are covered, or even a representative sample. Rather, the data reports that we work with have allowed us to identify and think about some of the dilemmas and challenges of organizing communities.

We organize our argument in three main sections. In the first section, we discuss the activities and the theories of change that are implicit or explicit in them. In the second section, we explore the dilemmas and challenges of organizing through the seven identified themes. This discussion illustrates that while strategic considerations animate and inform activities via theories of change, other factors are equally important in understanding strategies for mobilization. In the final section, we summarize our analyses and present recommendations on organizing based on our analysis.

Chapter 2: Activities and Theories of Change

In this section, we explore and discuss the activities in our partial archive and the theories of change that can be induced from them2. The activities for each organization in the Global Alliance vary in nature from being internally oriented (towards the organization) to externally oriented (towards the community) or any combination of the two along the spectrum. However, across all organizations the activities involve some of the same components and actors, e.g. awareness, advocacy, capacity building and internal training, psychosocial work, play activities, and relational activities. While these characteristics occur in all project communities and are relevant in understanding organizing and mobilization strategies, how the individual organization approaches each activity varies. Taking an empirical point of departure in the activities, we can induce a theory of change for each of them that contributes to the overarching theory of change in a way that addresses authority-based violence. Here, the overarching theory of change is that if we establish and organize at-risk groups and victims in the communities as agents of change through collaboration with local organizations and stakeholders, then we can, through well thought out and reflexive interventions, produce positive relations, networks and collaborations that will be able to contribute to the prevention of authority-based violence3.

In the rest of the chapter, we first present an overview of a selection of the most common activities and theories of change in each project country. The chapter ends with a comparison across contexts.

2   For an overview of a sample of activities and theories of change, see Appendix 1.

3   As we note elsewhere (Mogapi, Anasarias, Masuko, Swaray and Jensen 2017) in our analysis of psychosocial models for addressing authority-based violence, one cannot assume that social cohesion leads to less violence if that social cohesion is based on the exclusion of some, who will then bear the brunt of cohesion so to speak.

Liberia

LAPS is implementing a project in one of Monrovia's slums called Doe Community. The community has an estimated population of 49,000 inhabitants. It is situated near the Freeport of Monrovia in a swampy and seasonally flooded environment. Doe Community is divided into three neighborhoods: Cow Factory, Success, and Hope communities. The Cow Factory is a sub-division of the community that currently hosts the slaughterhouse of Monrovia, contributing to a characteristic smell of dead animals. The Success and Hope communities are named to communicate their aspirations for the future. For Doe Community as a whole, one consequence of the past civil war is that the influx of internally displaced people has meant that the area is overcrowded. As the numbers grew, people began constructing houses in increasingly wet areas, where the single rule for being given permission to stay was if you could dry out the land (with land fill) then you could stay. Thousands have done so, not least because of the relative proximity of the city. During the ebola outbreak, between 50 and 70 people were infected with the virus and about forty people did not make it.

When LAPS started its work in Doe Community it began with a baseline study that encompassed 120 interviews (65 women and 55 men). The data painted a picture of a "fractured community" with a high prevalence of interpersonal violence, youth violence and state violence. Interpersonal violence took the form of child abuse, maltreatment related to early pregnancy; denial/disowning of pregnancy, persistent non-support, domestic violence, and conflicts between neighbors and community members related to alcohol consumption, debts, resources, land, or humiliations. Youth violence took the form of gang violence, criminality, school violence and violence related to drug consumption. Perpetrators of state violence included teachers, police, health staff, prison staff, politicians and local leadership and authorities. During and after the ebola epidemic, collective violence targeted victims of the Ebola disease and was legitimized by authorities and residents. They maintain that ongoing research into Ebola in Liberia has not yet concluded on how long patients remain infectious after their survival. Hence, survivors are persistently targeted.

Furthermore, the data on the spatial and governance structure of the community revealed a slum community that is prone to flooding and lacking in basic social services such as safe drinking water, health centers and police presence. Finally, our analysis of the data suggested that the community was governed by three sets of leadership structures. These structures were reported to be unaccountable in terms of activities and did not create avenues and spaces where residents could freely express issues affecting them for possible redress by central government or other stakeholders.

Activities and ToC

The activities captured in the data reports on which this analysis rests comprise three main areas of community organizing. This does not include all LAPS activities in Doe Community. The three areas involve:

- Play and recreational activities,

- Reproductive health awareness campaigns, and

- Meetings among the Community Developing Facilitators (CDF), the Community Action Committee (CAC) and the Community General Network (CGN).

Play and recreational activities targeted mainly the local youth, both in and out of school, with aims like developing new relations and increasing trust among the participants, as well as building leadership ability. The play activities are facilitated based on the principle of non-discrimination and inclusion of both clients (at-risk groups) and non-clients within the project community. The play activities include songs, games and exercises aimed at enhancing physical fitness and personal hygiene; mental health, including concentration and focus; management of emotions and self-