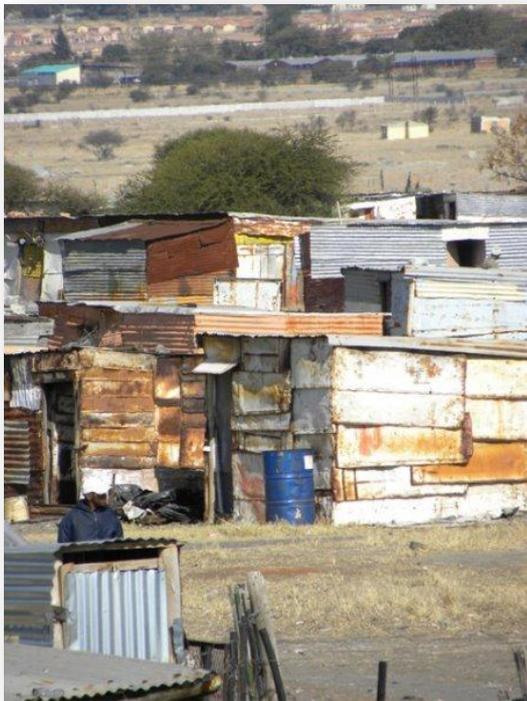




Reducing Violence in South Africa's Squatter Camps

A Case Study of SERVE's Partners in South Africa

In August of last year, South Africa became the focus of international news as violence broke out during a miners' strike at a Lonmin mine in Marikana. This conflict, as devastating and violent as it was, came as no major surprise to many. Volunteers placed with SERVE's South African partners Tsholofelo and Tapologo have long been aware of the adverse conditions that mine workers and others in the surrounding areas are forced to live in. The squatter camps around Rustenburg, including the areas of Mbeki San, Siza and Freedom Park, bear striking similarities to the nearby Marikana mines.



Corrugated iron is commonly used to build homes in the squatter camps around Rustenburg

People migrate from great distances in search of work in the lucrative mines in the North West Province of South Africa. For many, the reality of this means leaving their families and entire lives behind. Many men who are employed by the mining companies are housed in hostels provided by the mines. Others build shacks out of corrugated iron in illegal settlements like Freedom Park, which is home to an estimated 20,000-25,000 people. The majority of children in the squatter camps do not attend early education or primary education. This not only affects their education prospects but their nutritional status, prospects for social interaction and leaves them vulnerable to abuse. Despite the large mining industry, employment prospects for the majority of unskilled men are poor.

Those that do secure employment in the mines are often exploited. There are even fewer employment and

learning opportunities for women. Life on the margins within these camps leads to the family unit becoming fractured and families are vulnerable. They have low levels of livelihood security because they do not have enough resources to cope with shocks or unexpected events. People live on a day to day basis and are unable to plan for the future.

For the thousands of women who arrive at these settlements looking for work or family members, it is even more of a challenge. It is a widely told anecdote that a woman arrives searching for her husband or father, and looking for food and shelter finds herself in a tavern or "shebeen", offering the only thing of value she owns: her body. She may have children with her, and they get a place to sleep and a meal to eat for that night. Of course, many women get caught in this sex work trap, which leads to huge levels of sexual assault and violence against them.



Women wash clothes in Freedom Park squatter camp

These high levels of migration of people attracted by the prospect of mining work, with associated informal housing in enormous squatter camps, means that the Rustenburg area exhibits a disproportionately high HIV/AIDS infection rate in relation to the rest of the province. The spread of HIV leads on to countless other social issues, not least lack of employment and education due to sickness.

Unsurprisingly, these problems manifested themselves in the social unrest and violence which made news headlines around the world in August 2012. As mine workers went on strike over low pay and poor working conditions, the situation escalated to widespread riots and violence between striking workers, protestors, South African police and mine security personnel. Around fifty people died and a further eighty were injured. Some have questioned whether high youth unemployment, active social networks and a growing sense of alienation between young people and authorities could leave South Africa vulnerable to its own Arab Spring? Could Marikana be the random event to turn local anger into national anger?

For the moment, the international media has moved on from the Rustenburg mines. However, we know from SERVE's South African partners that the violence hasn't stopped at Marikana. There have been angry strikes in neighbouring communities – communities where SERVE volunteers have worked alongside local people in the past. For the first time, our partners have to find out beforehand if it is safe to enter certain communities and do their work. Violence is spreading in these mining areas, where the world's most expensive minerals lie under the feet of people living in fierce poverty.

Community leaders in the Mbeki San squatter camp give many reasons for why the area is often struck by violence and crime, other than miners' strikes. These include idleness due to lack of work among young people, lack of safety measurements such as electric light at night time, poverty and desperation. However, the sense is strong there that with better basic facilities, skills training and job opportunities social cohesion

would take form and the levels of violence and anti-social behaviours would fall. Alternative lifestyle options need to be provided for those people living in the squatter camps of South Africa.

What are the practical solutions to these problems for unqualified vulnerable young people who often have very low or non-existent numeracy and literacy? Formal education certainly has a role to play but it would have to be targeted at young children and will not lead to improvements in the short term. Many of these communities do not even have primary schools and unless there is a government run school nearby, mothers are reluctant to send their children on long journeys to and from school each day for security and cost reasons. For those squatter camp communities that do have schools, they are the result of many years of sustained community lobbying to local government. This requires strong



Apprentices at the Tsholofelo workshop

community leadership – something that is lacking in communities where the population is now more transient and often divided along nationalist or tribal boundaries. In any case, lack of education is only one of many development challenges that the South African government must tackle. When you consider that the South African government often does not formally recognise these communities, it is unlikely that they will respond in a coordinated manner to the education, health and employment needs of these people.

Informal **Technical Vocational Education & Training (TVET)** and **Adult Basic Education & Training (ABET)** is one practical solution that can meet the immediate needs of people in squatter camps. The word ‘informal’ is key here; this training must be accessible to people in these camps. South Africa does have a national formal TVET and ABET system (known as SETA) but the entry requirements for these courses automatically rule out many people in squatter camps because they are illiterate. They are also geared towards securing employment in the formal sector. However, adopting more relaxed entry requirements and a flexible approach can be just as effective.

As part of the **SERVE Development Programme (SDP) 2012-15**, SERVE is supporting a programme providing accessible training and education to people living in squatter camps. The SERVE-Tsholofelo Community Skills Training Programme (CSTP) provides TVET & ABET courses in eight disciplines. The CSTP is run in five squatter camp communities. The Tsholofelo Community was founded over twenty years ago with the purpose of working with and for the development of the poor and marginalised people living in squatter camps and informal settlements in the Rustenburg area. They are the only organisation running such programmes in these camps. The CSTP works with approximately 200 people each year. Where possible, the courses are

linked to SETA accreditation. If people work hard, they can secure a nationally recognised qualification. For people with no formal education, this will often be the only qualification they hold. The courses are not a silver bullet – the majority of graduates will not be able to secure a job in the formal sector unless they undertake further study, but it is a start. The courses keep people busy, give confidence, allow people to boost their income by undertaking small jobs in their community and provide important life skills around budgeting, planning and sexual and reproductive health. Young people and adults who commit to the CSTP are less likely to succumb to peer pressure, poor decision making or involvement in violence or rioting.

Mara (second name withheld) took part in the ABET course in 2012 and wrote about the experience –

“My ABET Centre is in the same yard as the pre-school. I was going to pay my niece’s school fee. Her teacher asked me what I was doing at home. I told her that I was doing nothing at the moment but next year I will see what I will have to do. Then she told me that there is an ABET course. She said to me, I must come with her to see what it is all about. She introduced me to the teacher of ABET and we talked about when I was going to start. I was bored at first. I did not understand this thing of levels. I was asking myself ‘where am I going after the ABET?’

I wasn’t thinking about that I could go to the university or to other schools. I remember one day I was writing the mock exam and I didn’t study. I was hardly coming to school because I was undermining the school. When I got the results I had failed. I couldn’t believe that it was me. I wanted to give up but I could not give up because I was telling myself one thing if anyone is doing it why am I not doing it. I started all over again and started to study very hard. After we did write a mock exam I passed and in another I got a merit. I was starting to know where I was going.

My teacher actually helped me to succeed but she wasn’t aware that at home there were very supportive at the time I wanted to give up. My mom was always telling me not to give up and I did listen to her. Look at me now. I am going on 29th November to write my Level 2 exam.”



Freedom Park Squatter Camp

Mara achieved a credit in the Level 2 exam. The piece captures the frustrations of doing the course, and the fact that prior to the course Mara had no plans for the year ahead. It is precisely the lack of future plans or avenues to fulfil ambitions that frustrate people and lead to resentment and violence. It seems that Mara now has some plans for the future and this is just one of the advantages that the CSTP can offer people. Of course, TVET and ABET alone are not enough to meet the needs of all those who are disillusioned in these squatter camps. However, to tackle high unemployment, the response by authorities, mining companies and international organisations must deal with the problem as it stands now – implementing policies that will take 15 to 20 years to be effective will not suffice. The key to any response is accessibility. Those who are poorest or who have never had the chance to develop their education and skills cannot be excluded – they must be able to benefit.

As it turns out, the authorities may be forced to respond sooner than expected. At the time of writing, Anglo Platinum announced 14,000 job losses at its Rustenburg platinum business because operations have been hit by falling demand and platinum prices and serious labour unrest. This is a staggering number of job losses in an area where unemployment is already rife. Anglo has said that it will try to help create 14,000 jobs to replace the ones being lost in mining with initiatives focusing on housing, infrastructure and small business development but this seems vague and unrealistic. Local union leaders have already warned that if any mine shafts close then all operations will go on strike. The dark shadow of Marikana's violence could be returning to these mining communities in the coming weeks and months.

Volunteers placed by SERVE with Tsholofelo in South Africa get to witness first hand the everyday struggles of the people living in the squatter camps. It is at times disheartening to see so many valuable lives with so few opportunities. However, there is an overwhelming sense that organisations like Tsholofelo can provide alternative options to people living in the squatter camps on the outskirts of the platinum mines. Recent events merely reinforce the need for accessible training and education programmes. If jobs are created in the areas of housing and infrastructure then CSTP graduates from the construction, welding, carpentry and brick laying courses are well placed to secure employment. If small business development takes place, CSTP graduates from the sewing, computers, arts and crafts and gardening courses could benefit. Hopefully, the wider availability of accessible education and skills training can lead to better options for young people and adults and ultimately a reduction in incidences of violence and unrest.

Photographs by SERVE volunteers. Written by John McCarthy and Lindsay Cleary.

