"Even though we have many pieces of legislation that actually protect children – it's everybody's responsibility yet it's nobody's responsibility. I think children are still falling through the gaps."

Hollard FOUNDATION

Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Midvaal

Situation, perceptions and dreams for change

A synthesis of the initial phase of multi-stakeholder dialogue interviews to assess the situation of orphans and vulnerable children in Midvaal and explore possibilities for making a positive impact.

December 2007

CONVENE

REOS

Executive Summary

South Africa is facing an unprecedented crisis of growing numbers of orphans and vulnerable children due to the HIV/AIDS pandemic and other social and economic issues. While ultimately the issue needs to be addressed at scale in the whole country, the Hollard Foundation has chosen Midvaal Municipality as a place where innovative solutions can be tested and real impact achieved through a longer-term involvement. The Foundation hopes to make Midvaal an example of what is possible when different actors and stakeholders are brought together in a process aiming to developing sustainable and loving responses to the orphans and vulnerable children crisis.

Phase one of this longer-term engagement has been a research process focused on understanding the situation of children in Midvaal and articulating initial ideas for changing things for the better. To this end we conducted thirty-five "deep dialogue" interviews, seven focus groups, desk research, and several advocacy meetings.

This report is the synthesis of the interviews and focus group work with stakeholders directly or indirectly engaged in work for orphans and vulnerable children (OVCs) in Midvaal. They included childcare and community workers, community-based organisations (CBOs), non-governmental organisations (NGOs), schools, local government, businesses and children.

The report takes as its starting point the child. With the child at the centre, the current reality of life in Midvaal is presented with a primary focus on the elements that most directly influence the child.

This initial assessment can seem quite bleak, as the physical reality for many children is very challenging. However, despite the very real challenges faced by children and their communities in different parts of Midvaal, we also came across many examples of community resilience and commitment for change. These manifest through community organizing and strong individuals and are often more invisible – yet they make up an important part of the social reality of Midvaal. We have included a section looking specifically at these forces of hope and the visions and dreams that are alive for people in Midvaal.

The tangible expression of the dreams is several ideas for change and possible solutions that the many different stakeholders offered. These are essentially expressed at two different levels: addressing the symptomatic level of short term immediate needs, and addressing the underlying situation fuelling these needs and symptoms. The latter most frequently relate to developing healthy families and communities; both need our attention. Indeed, although most of the current work is addressing the shorter term needs, there is consistent clarity among stakeholders that the economic and social situation of the parents and the communities needs to be addressed for any lasting change to occur. Striking was the sentiment that though government is needed, ordinary people's acting in partnership is just as vital.

Areas of leverage that span the two levels of intervention were also identified:

- Mapping the social development needs of orphans in Midvaal
- Improving collaboration for OVCs
- Finding ways of providing all our children with quality education – from ECD through to employment/job creation
- Stimulating community-building initiatives, held and run by the community itself
- Creating innovations in the area of documentation and grants

An overaching requirement to all interventions is that the child remains central. The children helped us realise that we need to develop an integrated response to *the whole child*.

The way forward involves bringing these initial insights to life through a process involving all the major stakeholders and responding to the areas offering the greatest potential for shifting the situation for children in Midvaal. We close our report with our lessons learned, our suggested way forward, and finally – and perhaps most importantly - the ideas and dreams of the children in their own words, alongside questions about how to serve them that are living in people who we have met through this research process.

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1 Introduction

The Hollard Foundation, in partnership with Convene, is embarking on a three year programme aimed at generating a sustainable community-driven multistakeholder response to the crisis of orphans and vulnerable children. The hope is to make Midvaal and example to show that it *is* possible to care for all our children, and to give them an opportunity to achieve their full potential in life.

As part of phase one of this programme, Convene together with Reos Social Innovation conducted an in-depth assessment of the situation of orphans and vulnerable children in Midvaal Municipality. Several stakeholders were interviewed to get a deeper understanding of the different actors involved in the orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) sector and their views of the situation. Simultaneously, desk top research was conducted to assess data available on orphans and vulnerable children in the area, which is available in a separate report. This report focuses on the views of the different stakeholders, aiming to synthesise those while also providing an understanding of the different perspectives on the problems and suggestions for solutions.

It is important to note therefore that this report is primarily written on the basis of the perceptions and opinions of many different stakeholders in Midvaal. It is a snapshot of the situation as seen through the eyes and experiences of the many different people working with and for children. The desk research complements this with the more factual data of the current reality, though we found that there is a large information gap to be addressed.

It is our hope that this report may serve in the work of creating a better life for the children in Midvaal.

2 Through the Eyes of the Child

During interviews done with children in different homes in Midvaal it became clear that what they want and need is quite simple. They ask simply for basic needs to be met, i.e. love and friendship, education, food, clothes, shoes, shelter, and places to have fun – to swim, play sports, and listen to or play music - showing their own experience with the absence of such.

A key element that we learned as we focused on the most immediate needs of the child is that one should keep the "whole child" in mind when considering the type of support they need. A holistic response including a "package of services" may well be the most effective and caring way to address the needs of our vulnerable children.

The following image represents the picture of Midvaal with the child at the centre. The inner circle represents the children's life – expressed as their basic needs and rights. The second circle represents the people and institutions that influence them directly on a daily basis and provide for their most immediate needs and wants. The third circle represents the broader institutional and social service providers, that may serve the children and their parents – thus influencing them, though not necessarily on a direct or daily basis. The outer circle explores the broader context in time and space.

In this section we will explore each of these circles to get a better understanding of the situation for children, and the challenges and possibilities in trying to be able to care for the most basic needs of all the children in Midvaal.

"If I was the president, I would make sure that all children have a safe place to live and good food to eat. I would provide clothing for children, especially shoes. It gets very hot in the summer so, I would make sure there is a swimming pool in each community for the children to go to. Because I love music, I would ensure that children living in homes like this one have an Entertainment Unit where they can play their CDs."

"If I was the president, I was going to help the children have shelter and food and to have a crèche for the little ones for their parents. And I will give love. And I would organize food for the children and support people who are living with HIV and their kids who are living with HIV so they can feel like everyone of us and they must feel comfortable"

Children during children's focus group

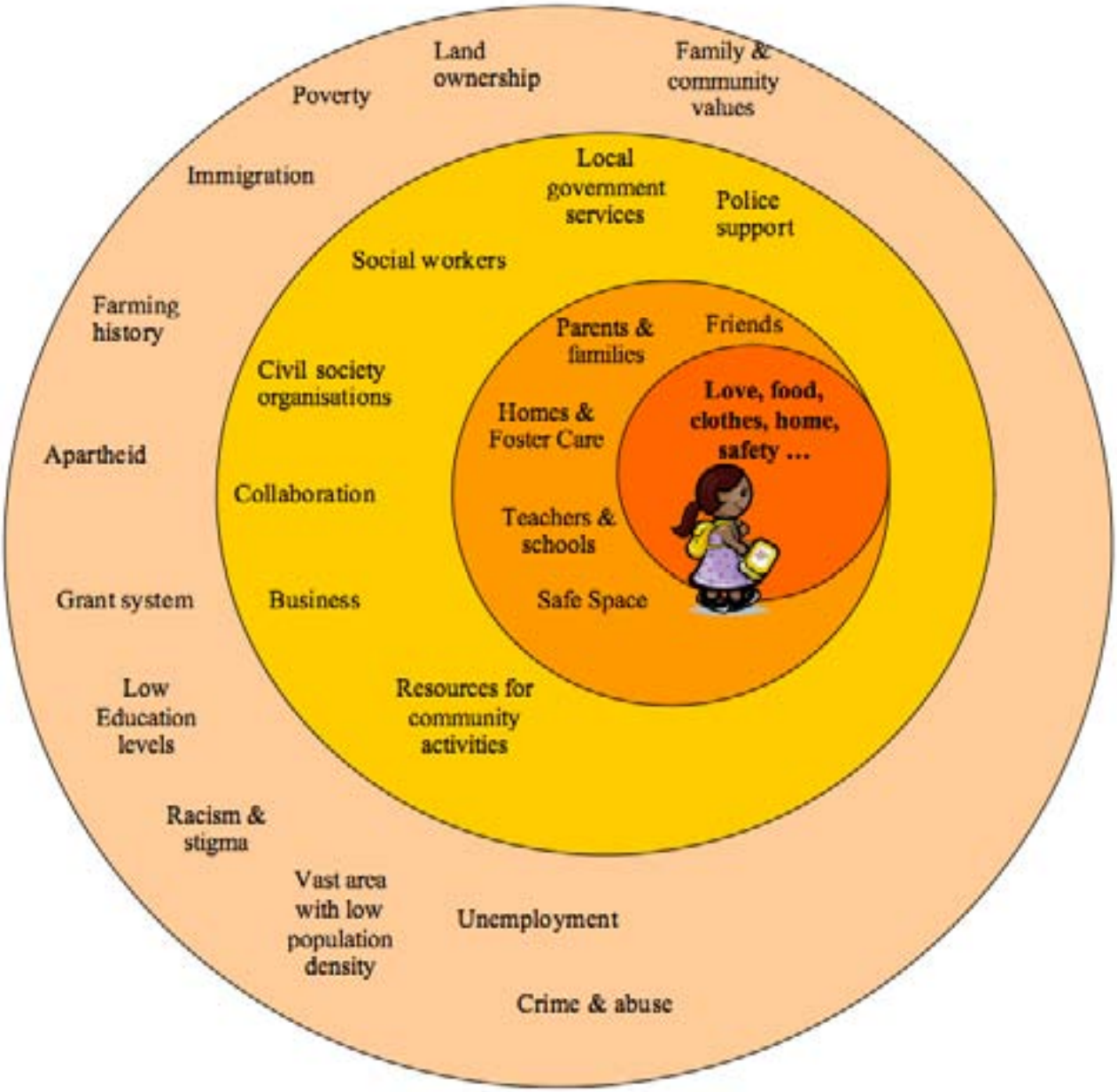


Figure 1: Through the Eyes of the Child

2.1 The Circle of Direct Care and Primary Influence

In the following we will explore the situation of the people and institutions that influence children directly and provide for their most immediate needs and wants – these include parents and caregivers, teachers and schools, and people or institutions providing for care outside of formal school times. These are the people who can directly provide the children with their most basic needs. Let's see how they are equipped to do so.

2.1.1. Parents and Caregivers

This section also includes commentary on homes and foster care, as those who don't have parents, find their primary caregiver in foster parents or in homes.

There are many children who no longer find the security and love from their primary caregivers. Some have been orphaned and are living without any primary caregiver living in child-headed households or with families and relatives (often grannies); some have one parent left, but are getting little support with their one parent struggling to make ends meet, due to a variety of causes. Some have parents who are not playing the necessary role of preparing their child for life due to alcohol, unemployment or resignation. We heard of children with parents where the father or step-father was abusing them, but was not reported as he was the only breadwinner.

More children born into vulnerable situations

Increasing numbers of young people are becoming parents while still teenagers. While many cited this to be a direct consequence of a desire to access the child support grant; some children get abandoned or even left somewhere to die by young mothers who feel they are not yet ready for parenthood. Several examples were also cited of sick or mentally disabled children being abandoned, or left to their fate without caring for them, which increases the responsibility of home based carers.

Another cause of high birth rates is that there is still an assumption that children will provide for the parents later in the absence of a pension.

HIV/AIDS

HIV/AIDS is obviously creating an enormous strain on families' and communities' ability to care for their children. We spoke to homebased care workers who cited several examples of families where the children had to care for their sick parent(s), or families where the children were left alone after their parents passed. In these families the children then become the breadwinners, being unable to attend school in order to provide for their sick parents and/or siblings.

> *"...and then you'll find that children who are heading their homes, you know a child of about 14 years, she's a mother, she's a breadwinner, she's everything. That really shows that, that in the community, it's everyone for themselves."*
>
> *Community Member*

Crisis of Role-models

Many people lamented the lack of role models by parents, which makes them part of the problem. They are said to not teach children acceptable behaviour and good morals, fuelling an already bad situation. Children need the guidance of their parents in order to not become the criminals of tomorrow. As an example, it was felt that parents should stop sending their children to buy them alcohol. The value of moral guidance also came through strongly in our children's interviews, in which they themselves emphasised the importance of learning to treat others the way they would like to be treated.

> *"If children grow up alone, without parents to guide them, tomorrow we will have criminals."*

"We used to call them front door key children – they've got the front door key, the parents aren't there - they go home in the afternoon, there is nobody there and they are at home alone the whole afternoon."

Owing to work and other pressures, parents are also often away from home for most of the day meaning children are left on their own with no supervision.

Problems relating to alcoholism and neglect were a recurring theme. These were described as cutting across all race groups. Alcoholism of adults leads children to experiment with alcohol, as well as dance at the shebeens, where they become easy targets for abuse. Having alcoholic parents is described as taking away the dignity of children, causing them to give up and not care any longer. Children loose respect and discipline; and drug abuse increasingly becomes a serious issue.

"He sees the father, drunk, he looses his self. The dignity is no more there. He will be taught to grow up like this. He gives up everything, doesn't care anymore."

Women are described as having lost their own sense of value and self-love; leading to them being unable to love and care for their children. Women feel disempowered.

Without love and a role models how can children and youth believe that their life will be different than their parents? Many youth were described as de-motivated about their life possibilities and with nowhere to go, making them more vulnerable for gangsterism and crime.

Society is described as carrying a lot of pain, and there is need for healing of all members involved.

"Parents are not involved in the same way as they used to be… There is quite a core of children who are not stimulated, not encouraged, and then we have to pick up those kids and help them wherever we can. But parents are the mainstay of the child's life. They do suffer if they don't have the parent's encouragement and support."

Teacher

Institutional Care

Of the many vulnerable children, few have been absorbed in organisations and institutions caring for children, but even here we often heard of a lack of deeper care. Many children's homes and orphanages are unable to provide family values and love needed by the children.

"But now, the shelters again themselves do not provide the family value kind of system we would like to see."

The foster parenting system enables people to care for orphans with the support of the state, However, the system of foster parenting is highly dysfunctional; and very few success stories were cited. It was said by several interviewees that people foster children for money, and do not spend the foster parent grant for the children, neglecting them as a result. Often, foster parents are not properly screened because of the lack of social workers, and the inadequacy of support services. Some foster parents also take in a large number of children, which defeats the purpose of foster parenting as it does not provide a stable nurturing home for the children. Foster parenting is temporary parenthood, as the grant ceases when the child turns 18. In a context of poverty it becomes difficult to find foster parents who are not themselves desperate for money.

During our interviews it became evident that many caregivers (both in homes and at community level) are

burnt out and exhausted, trying to be mothers to the children. They are insufficiently supported and nurtured. Sometimes they need professional help to deal with trauma. There is also love and recognition missing among the caregivers.

It is not all bleak. Some successful initiatives give hope – Doulos, and TLC were for example mentioned as places that aren't just institutional; where love obviously resides. The challenge here is to reach the scale needed for the growing amount of orphans and vulnerable children.

Child care workers mentioned the difficulty of getting permission to test orphans or abandoned children for HIV in the absence of family members. This means that sometimes sick children in homes or foster care can't be tested, though testing would enable proper treatment to take place. TLC also emphasised a need to make adoption proceed more easily as an alternative to foster care.

"I hate foster care, I think it stinks… I've only ever had that experience"

"Go to DoSD if you want to see success stories of foster care. It's zero…Foster care has not been fully investigated as a strategy. At present we can say it's not working because proper foster care support services have not been implemented."

Civil servant

So although we focused on exploring those children who did not have parents or caregivers, and therefore are not sharing the many examples of children who do have love and care from home, it is clear that there is an enormous need to find ways of providing children with the core support found in a committed caring adult. If these cannot be found in the homes children come from, alternatives need to be explored even it is only having that support through places where children go during the day after school. Also finding ways to support the caregivers to continue to offer their service, and to continue to improve it, is also vital.

"Sometimes you get tired, you do get tired, and you think: [sigh] you know, do we really have to do this? But you know you have to, because without your assistance, somebody is going to suffer at the end of the day…"

2.1.2 Safe Space

Due to their vulnerability and life in disintegrating families, many people emphasised that children are in dire need for safe spaces after school, e.g. drop in centres in the afternoon or access to extra mural activities. They need to be able to be children, surrounded by people who provide care, encouragement and positive influence. An example of a centre set up to provide meals after school for vulnerable children has also shown that a more holistic service offering within the safe space is required – these children need help with homework, games to play, moral guidance and psychosocial support.

A recurring theme in our interviews was the lack of community facilities for children, like halls, sports facilities, libraries, safe entertainment facilities and schools closer to where children live. It was also suggested that centres that for example, offer computer training, were required for the whole community, not only children. It was made clear that communities should have a say in the design of such facilities and own them in order to take responsibility for upholding them and avoiding vandalism. . Some facilities available are not properly used or not accessible for the community, like the 'White House' in Sicelo, a computer centre at Khotulong, recreational areas on farms – only accessible to the children of the workers - or sports facilities owned by private companies.

A large challenge in this regard, is the severe shortage of publicly owned land for housing, community development initiatives and facilities, as most land in Midvaal is privately owned and expensive, and areas that are public are often located on dolomite, which is not safe for people to live on. Another challenge is that so far very few are organizing on behalf of the children. There is talk about child forums but none are happening yet.

"One thing is that most children here don't have facilities, which is the main thing that is breaking my heart. The only things that will be around are the shebeens and the taverns – the places of liquor."

"I've got this big vision where we've got facilities for these young people. And facilities, not just structures that are there, that will be demolished, vandalised. Structures that are monitored by the same youth that understand why they have that. We don't even have community halls, we don't have anything for sports."

2.1.3 Teachers and Schools

Early childhood development (ECD) is particularly important for orphans and vulnerable children, as they need care and stimulation at an early age in order to later be able to cope in life. At school age, many orphans and vulnerable children already are set back in comparison to other children, as their development has not been supported. Many ECD facilities are self-organised community crèches. These have been described as very important assets in the communities, though many of them are providing only very basic care, without much in the form of proper educational facilities, and some are not even providing proper care and may not be accredited by the municipality.

Further, many of the most impoverished people cannot afford sending their children to crèches as they charge a fee (as government subsidies are too low). The municipality monitors the certified ECD centres; while grants come from the provincial department.

"We must put much more money and emphasis on the development of a small child, even before they get to school, because it doesn't help to take a child out of utmost poverty situation, put them in a school in grade 1 and say: 'ok, now you are going to operate normally, now you're going to become this clever…', they start with a backlog, as we can see with our matric results."

Schools have become nodes of support for orphans and vulnerable children, though not able to live up to the growing need of teachers to increasingly replace parent's role. The role of teachers and schools is transforming in response to orphans and vulnerable children needs, without extra time and resource for this much broader role. Often children coming from vulnerable situations are challenged intellectually and in terms of disciplie due to their problems at home, as well as malnutrition and other health related problems.

"I think teachers are finding themselves in a very helpless situation because suddenly they find themselves having to have too many kids in their schools, so for them to be involved in a child's life holistically is very difficult so they just become teachers."

Distance and transport are huge challenges in getting children to school. Several communities do not have schools of their own, which is however also seen as a way of integrating children from different social backgrounds. Far away communities without schools suffer from the lack of a reliable bus service (Elandsfontein and Mamelo) with children sometimes missing school for weeks at a time as a

consequence (example from Mamelo). Often, children from poor communities cannot attend extra mural services in the afternoon, as their bus leaves when school ends.

> *"Children in Walkerville, they struggle to go to the library. Because in Walkerville they don't have libraries so you have to take a bus to where they are and when you come back you have to come by taxi"*
>
> *Child living in Walkerville*

Libraries are used extensively for school activity (homework, projects, etc), though again transport limits access. A mobile library project is being established in Elandsfontein through the WIN project.

Generally, schools are overcrowded. There is no English High School. Poor parents struggle to pay school fees and schools run at a loss. Many schools however don't advertise that orphans and vulnerable children are exempt from paying school fees and many orphans and vulnerable children drop out of school.

Educational levels amongst the Midvaal population are low, due to many people's history as farm and factory workers, where education was not encouraged; and the effects of Bantu education during apartheid. Hence, many parents cannot support their children in their homework, etc.

Thus supporting a shift towards increased access to education for the very young through to employment is an important area of concern. Also important seems to be enabling the schools and teachers to be better equipped (time, skill, resources) to support the broader social needs of the children.

> *"The challenge is, and that's why we need the support from outside, is to give them anything they need to ensure they are equipped to stand their ground when they leave school. Its just the hope that you have, that the things that you put into those learners eventually will come through for them. And that they will realize there is something beyond their situation and that they don't have to fall into that situation and stay there forever, there is something beyond that."*
>
> *School Principal*

2.2 Broader Institutional Service Providers

This section will look at the broader institutional and social service providers, that may serve the children and their parents – thus influencing them and their well-being, though not necessarily on a direct or daily basis.

2.2.1 Government Services

At a local government level, the Midvaal Municipality is said to be very effective and dedicated. However, it has limited budget allocation to support social development and has to rely on provincial or national government, or business partners to fund social development initiatives in their area. At more senior levels of the municipality, little focus is given directly to children.

Government's responsibility for children is segregated, as it is spread across many different departments at National, Provincial and Local level. There appears to be a disjuncture between stated government policy and intention and the reality of experiences on the ground. We were told by representatives from the Department of Social Development that they are supportive of co-funding organisations that are also funded by the Department of Health and cover both social development and health related activities. In contrast, however, we heard examples of organisations qualifying for support from both Department of Social Development (DoSD) and Department of Health, but struggling to get from either seemingly because of the fear of overlap of funding from government's side. Several people and organisations commented on challenges in getting funding either from DoSD or DOH.

"That's the one thing that I've realized that if you are getting funding from Social Services, Health will say no, OK its more like they are getting help from Social Services we can't get involved because they want to have the ownership, they want to say this is our project…"

"I've failed to understand, with Health, because Health is the department that must sponsor or fund home-based care and hospice care, for the past two years, they haven't been funded by them (Kothulong). So they are actually running their hospice care, which makes me very cross, because I know of other people in Sedibeng who are funded, which have got a hopeless service."

Government approaches and the CDWs are working on a Ward basis, which was appreciated by some, but not all. The challenge is that it does not necessarily reflect how people and civil society organisations work in communities. The work of the CDWs is highly appreciated, as they are close to community level, and often more accessible than councillors.

There also appears to be conflict between the roles of the ward councillors and the Department of Social Development staff in terms of monitoring and intervening in DoSD-funded organizations. Essentially, both sides are doing similar jobs yet there is no agreement on specific roles and responsibilities for either side. Social workers are far too few, and there is need for a retention strategy, as their working conditions are often stressful. An interviewee stated that Gauteng has 4000 social workers, and would need 44 000 in order to work properly and timely. The shortage prolongs their processing times of cases and increases their stress levels.

Other promised services by government have not yet been implemented, like for example funding for home-based care initiatives and a hospice. There was some frustration with lack of response to small CBOs collecting names of orphans and vulnerable children, but not receiving subsequent food parcels or support for them. Bureaucracy and red tape seems to slow down delivery.

Again, the need to think about service delivery in terms of providing a "package of services" was brought to

"I wish there was a way of fast-tracking the process where the council and municipality has to be informed of a project and give their permission, because at times it takes too long and by then I have met the community and they are sitting with this hope that there is something coming, and then it drags from the side of the administration."

the fore. An example was given for why the child forums have not yet begun. It was explained that although the first stage of training has taken place at a province level, no budget was provided for further training of those to run the forums at the local level. A further example was offered when considering giving food parcels to the needy – specifically the lack of knowledge of whether they have electricity or a stove with which to cook the food provided.

"How do you prioritise the needs of the poor, and specifically children, if there isn't the specific function or budget allocation to do this?"

The South African Police Service (SAPS) has an active social crime prevention unit, which tries to work at community level supporting families and resolving conflict. There is however no budget for social issues with the SAPS. The beneficial side-effect of the lack of budget is that we found wonderful examples within SAPS of cross sector partnerships for social initiatives.

2.2.2 Grant System

While many government welfare services for poor people are in place, not all of those are working in the way they were intended. Many people are unable to access grants (child support grant, old age grant, disability grant) due to the lack of proper documentation, such as birth certificates and identity documents (ID). Due to a backlog in the Department of Home Affairs these problems cannot be solved timely, and many referrals from community and social workers to the department have been without results. Often, the lack of family members who can testify who the person is increases the problem, as they have no legal means of proving their identity. Many families therefore live in absolute poverty as they have not been able to access grants they would be entitled to. It is said that 70% have no proper documentation.

"Poverty is a mess. Getting identity documents is a nightmare. Without ID docs, no grant. Actually it is heartbreaking."

"And you find in that house there is no-one working. There is no food, no grant, and there are children in that house."

The grant system is also described as insufficiently addressing children's needs. School feeding schemes are only for primary school children. The child support grant only provides for children up to 14 years. In orphanages, children have to leave when they are 18, many of which are not ready at that age to survive on their own and should at least be accompanied and supported with further education. The same goes for foster care where the government grant to foster parents ends when the child turns 18, provided the child is no longer in school – sometimes resulting in being turned out of the home.

"And a 14 year child is a child in high school and there is no grant. Those are the kids that are not covered by the safety net of this government… If the parent of that child are less than sixty, say fifty or forty they cannot access that grant [pension]. It means that family is out of the system and they are not covered and are unemployed so basically they have no means to survive."

Foreigners do not have access to any grants, and many are illegal in the country, which is making their children even more vulnerable.

Children of deceased parents who owned a house can be excluded from rates and taxes and therefore are not forced to sell the house (they get indigent exemption).

One suggestion put forward was that there is a need for a home affairs official whose primary responsibility is for OVCs in the area.

2.2.3 Unintended Consequences of Grants

The accessing of grants (above) has also had unintended negative consequences, as it has encouraged teenage pregnancy to access the child support grant. Similarly, the foster care grant encouraged poor people in taking in many children, but often using the grant money for themselves mainly, and therefore neglecting the children.

In this way, grants do not seem to alleviate poverty, but create an ongoing cycle of dependency, encouraging HIV/AIDS and an increasing number of orphans and vulnerable children.

At the same time, grants are necessary for people who can barely survive, but need to be reviewed. Some interviewees pointed to the idea of a basic income grant instead. This may also take away pressure from people, who at their level of desperation even go as far as contracting HIV for short-term survival.

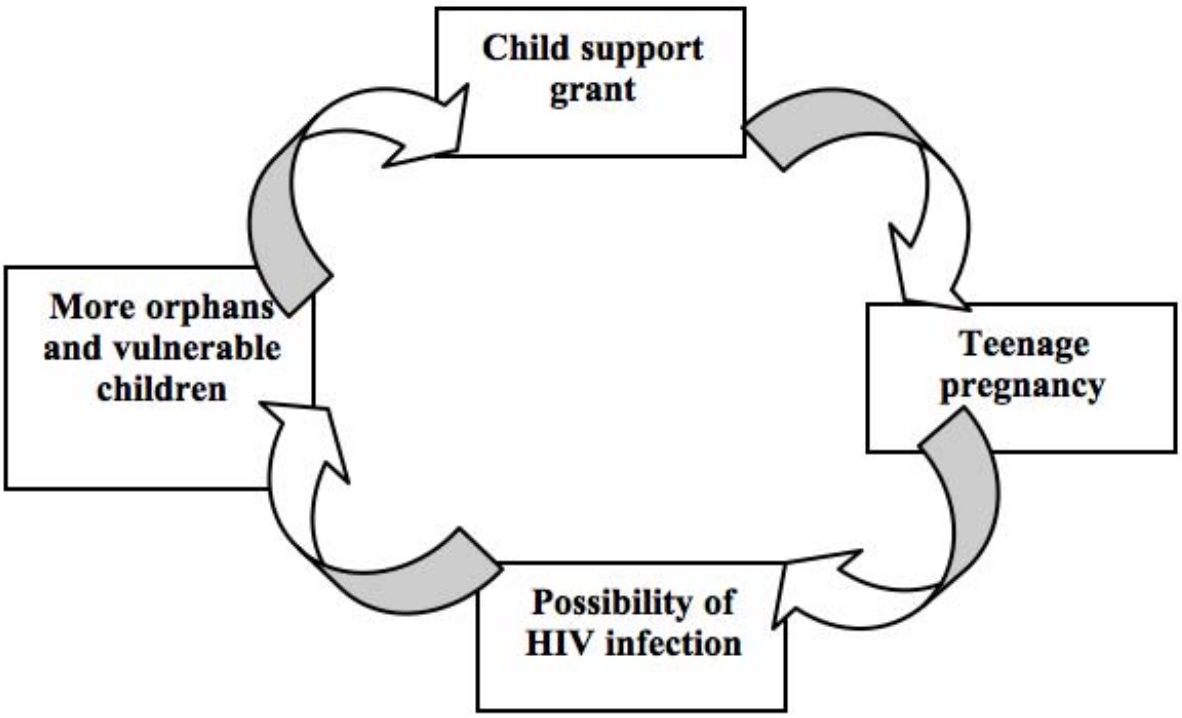


Figure 2: Possible consequences of child support grant

"The unintended consequences of grants is the increase in teenage pregnancy, mainly because these kids think the more babies you have the more grant you get. Government never intended that a grant would lead to teenage pregnancy."

"Rather give a poverty grant – take away the 'you must have children to get it.'"

2.2.4 Civil Society Organisations

In general, we noted, a very low number of NGO's operating in Midvaal – with very few of the national NGOs focusing on HIV/AIDS, or children, operating in the area.

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) struggle with insufficient funding to implement programmes, and many are running at a loss, which is unsustainable. Despite the funding challenges, NGOs are generally more established than smaller community based organisations (CBOs), and therefore have skilled people able to raise funds and support various community programmes and organisations. Partnerships do exist between some NGOs and CBOs, where NGOs act as intermediaries for funding and capacity building (e.g. Community Chest supporting CBOs / CRDC auspicing for UNCEDO, a new homebased care organisation), but there is also competition for resources amongst non-profit organisations.

Many CBO initiatives are entirely voluntary, with people who are themselves poor, using their own minimal resources in support of orphans and vulnerable children. It is encouraging to see community initiatives emerging in response to the orphans and vulnerable children crisis, as CBO members live in the poor communities and therefore respond to crises as they arise, i.e. by taking responsibility for children in need or caring for people living with AIDS. Relying on volunteers who do not even receive a stipend and are themselves poor poses additional challenges for some organisations – specifically in terms of trying to create a stable and committed group of helpers. Several of the CBOs do receive a stipend from the provincial government for their HBC work. However lack of material resources remains a challenge to their work.

A less favourable development is the case of people said to start organisations for social gain and money. This was mentioned several times in different interviews. Organisations receive funding while not actually doing the work they claim to do. It is said that government institutions are not monitoring these 'fly by night' organisations. Not everyone is in the sector for the right reasons, and therefore there may be a general lack of commitment to change the situation.

Most community workers and homebased carers are women, as men are said to feel less comfortable in community work. Finding ways of involving men was a concern to some of the people interviewed. Interestingly, it was reported that boys have started to become more involved in looking after their younger siblings, after a caregiver has passed-away. This was reportedly in response to psychosocial support provided to the boys before losing their caregiver.

Generally, interviewees pointed to a lack of local leadership, with many active leaders coming from outside Midvaal.

"There lacks development of that part of local leaders – even though there is a development policy in place, it is not worked out according to the needs of the individual."

Overall there was agreement of the need to collaborate further, and to have opportunities to collaborate across sectors as well. Less red tape from government came through strongly as did the need to bridge the racial divide in the area through working together more intentionally.

2.2.5 Collaborative Challenges

Support systems for orphans and vulnerable children are fragmented or compartmentalised (within government departments; NGOs, donors, community-based organisations, etc.).

"It's all islands; we don't talk to each other. Everyone works in silos."

Political fragmentation between DA and ANC causes for a lack of collaboration or mistrust in some areas, e.g. by stopping the councillors from working together, or by assuming that a lack of service delivery may be linked to the political affiliation of the community.

Government departments are also fragmented, e.g. health and social services. Contrary to the stated intention of local government, it was reported that on the ground the Health Department does not support an organisation financially if the Department of Social Development has provided some funding, and vice versa.

Because of the lack of follow up from referrals provided by community workers to government services or getting lists for families in need of food parcels, there is increasing mistrust in community workers and CBOs in the community. Supporting the community therefore becomes difficult in the absence of adequate government follow-up.

The CDWs seem to be bridging some gaps, as they are usually closer to the communities and are more accessible, and they have tried to address the documentation issues. The collaboration between CDWs, SAPS and the Midvaal social worker is said to be very strong.

However, many civil society organisations are also problematic. Interviewees stated that many initiatives of civil society organisations focus on making money and compete with each other, not having the interests of children at heart. Programmes are run in isolation, and are sometimes duplicated.

On the other hand, many community initiatives have been successful mainly due to the networking abilities of the leaders, as in the absence of sufficient resources people ask each other for help. Similarly, in all spheres of society committed people have

"Each stakeholder is running their own programmes in isolation of others. As a result there are no comprehensive services for children."

"Because I'm having a list which I referred to government, about fifty. Say, these people they don't have food parcels, this one doesn't have a grant, this one, doesn't have an ID. But at the end of the day, how many of those referrals do I get back? That have been attended to? It gives me a hearth ache, because I can't tell my workers : 'Go back to these people' if they are not answered."

emerged and shifted circumstances due to their ability to collaborate with others and negotiate. As an example, the director of Japie Greyling-school has established a strong network around support for children and school needs.

Supporters (e.g. from Rotary) complained they don't ever see the beneficiary children they donate for, which distances them from who they help. It was suggested that people and children from different areas need to be made aware of the problems that poor people face.

Linked to collaboration challenges, there is a lack of information disseminated in Midvaal about human rights and the rights of children.

No-one in Midvaal seems to have a full picture of the social development needs of the area, and there is no complete database of people, their assets and needs. There is a lack of exposure regarding community issues and ways of addressing them.

It was noted that it is a challenge to get people involved in and motivated to be responsible for their community. The municipality is small, so the same people keep getting asked when it comes to fundraising. There is donor fatigue in South Africa – local funders are tired of funding community projects and some of these are now looking to international donors for funds.

2.2.6 Businesses

Business organisations have played a role in funding community development initiatives through local government and civil society organisations. Most funding so far has gone towards infrastructure, materials and consultants (e.g. farming projects, centres, etc.). It is however questionable whether social issues have sufficiently been taken into account, i.e. to ensure community participation and ownership in order to ensure the project is adequate and welcome, and will be safeguarded by the local community.

There was a general sense of disconnect between many of the NGOs/CBOs we interviewed with the business sector. It was difficult to find many examples of strong partnerships, but the desire for collaboration was there. Small organisations looking for support from "big business" expressed difficulties in accessing the correct people to secure donations. Business expressed a frustration with long turnaround time in working with the local municipality.

2.3 Broader Context Indirectly Influencing Children

The final section in this chapter explores the broader context at play in Midvaal. This is about the way things are, including history, socio-economic reality, and even mindset. Change at this level will influence the earlier circles that we have described, though in some cases it may be a gradual and indirect influence, and it may be difficult to predict the effect of changes at this level on the life of the child.

"If you look at this area in terms of geographical location, is bigger that the other municipalities. In terms of population statistics it's less; it's mainly white plots and industrial so in terms of population is less. So poor people in places like Sicelo are from here and there is no infrastructural building where we can request to put an office. So those people are walking from there to here to access services."

2.3.1 Physical Area

The geography of Midvaal is at the heart of one of its greatest challenges. With 2000 km2, Midvaal is the largest physical area of all municipalities in Gauteng. However, population levels are comparably low, as land was predominantly used as farmland and industrial areas.

"For a person who hasn't got transport, to go from here to Vereeniging is the same as for me to go to Durban in distance, so it's a bit of a drawback."

While government officials stated that poor communities in Midvaal are easier to support due to the comparably low population numbers, the spread out nature of this municipality also means that service providers do not get to remote areas very often and some areas are under-serviced. Including for people living on farms, where often municipal service is limited (as private land owners need to make many of the improvements themselves).

It also means that often rural communities are not chosen by NGOs or funders for community development initiatives, because the numbers of people that can be reached there are 'too low' and there is a trend to focus on higher numbers of beneficiaries. However, the need in those remote areas is as great, and may at times even be greater than in more densely populated communities. The distance also makes community organising harder, as people cannot easily meet. Hence, there is a marked lack of organised groups especially in rural areas. We came across rural areas in which until recently there had been no formal form of organising.

The vastness of Midvaal is further enhanced through the lack of affordable transportation for many people. Many poor people have to walk far distances to access services (clinics, schools, etc.) and rely on mobile clinics once per week. The closest clinic may also not be within a person's municipal area, which causes problems. Even Community Development Workers (CDWs) and Home Based Carers (HBCs) battle with the lack of funds for transport and often cannot get to people in need.

2.3.2 Material Poverty

As a legacy of Apartheid, most orphans and vulnerable children live in poverty stricken communities, with high levels of unemployment. Economic poverty is at a degree, where basic human needs like regular food or proper shelter often are not met. We came across many examples of children not receiving more than one meal per day, which may not even be of nutritious value. Interviewees expressed a need for better school feeding schemes, food gardens and soup kitchens.

"I am shocked sometimes to hear what these people are still earning. It is because we are out of the city. They stay on your property, they have a room on your property. And we exploit them, we do that. Because that is the going rate in the area. You know if they get R600 a month – I promise you that. And the children must go to school, the children must be educated, they must be fed. It is a vicious cycle."

Informal settlements are growing with the influx of population from rural areas and surrounding countries, and children are often crowded in shacks. Informal settlements like Mamelo lack basic service provisions like electricity or sufficient water taps. Housing waiting lists usually do not take into account the growing influx, increasing the general pressure on resolving the land- and housing shortage.

"What grabbed my heart, one day we were sitting in church and one of the girls she was about 11, 12 years got up and went to the bathroom and took so long and I was wondering what is wrong with this child and the service went on and she stayed there and so I went to see her and she had something tied tight onto her stomach – it was the scarf from her head. I said what's wrong why are you so long in the bathroom I said what's that. She said its my scarf – no I'm hungry and if you tie it very tight you don't feel the hunger."

"Ya, and they're very poor and they've been abused and you see them sitting here and I can watch them over the years, the years go so quick. I see them nine years, ten years old, then they get thinner and thinner and by the time they're eleven they're pregnant. They come in here, little things, scrawny little things with these big bellies and they don't get rid of those babies, they hang on to them. It's a horrible situation coz I feel like we're living here in the land of milk and honey almost and ... it's awful."

2.3.3 Unemployment, Crime and Abuse

Crimes committed against children does not start on the streets anymore, they start in the home. People are sitting at home – unemployed – with less and less dignity – and so they drink. Unemployment in Midvaal ranges from 9-38%, with most wards being above 20%. Several people are also underemployed, in that they have a job, that pays less than what they need to be able to sustain themselves and care for their family. In Elandsfontein it appeared that for many most of a very small salary was being drunk away instead of being used for the needs of the children, by men and women alike.

"You see most of the parents, they get paid every week or every fortnight and they get their pay on the Friday and on the Friday night and the Saturday mornings they are at the bottle stores and only a small portion of their income goes for their house. And the last on the list are their children..... The important thing is to address the relationship between the parents and the learners - the involvement of the parents with their children."

It is pointed out that rapes and abuses happen when people are drunk. Male family members or boyfriends abuse young children. Some rapists are the breadwinners of the family; making the people they abuse dependant and fearing poverty when leaving him. Poverty is also leading some children to exchange sex for food as sex workers on the street, showing their level of desperation.

To make matters worse, there is still a belief of sex with a virgin healing AIDS.

"The crime doesn't just start in the streets; it starts at home, you know, from the children to the grandmother, to the grandfather. They've got rapists there of all people, raping the very same child that they were supposed to take care of."

"We need to give the parents some kind of skill, so that they can be able to generate income. For as long as most people are still suffering because of poverty, I don't think we'll ever have a meaningful solution."

2.3.4 Family and Community Values

Due to the lack of government support for orphans and vulnerable children, there is reliance on the goodwill of locals and families to look after orphans. However, the situation in most communities is devastating, and children find themselves at the bottom of a hierarchy of vulnerability.

The complexity of poverty-related issues coupled with a history of racial oppression has led to high rates of violence and social disintegration. In rural, traditional communities resources were shared, and a child was still seen as everyone's child. Children would be taken care of if the parents died. However, this value, also described as Ubuntu, is disappearing in urban contexts, and also becoming less possible to uphold because of the growing numbers of orphans.

"People used to share in the village. We don't have villages any more, we have got townships, and townships have killed the Ubuntu."

Communities are no longer cohesive and little communication and collaboration is taking place to address challenges. People are too involved with their own problems and don't care as much about their neighbours any more. With an increasing lack of belonging people's lives become harder and less supported if wanting to change things for the better. There is an erosion of extended families supporting each other, and people have become more self-serving.

"For me, it's all about apathy. Our communities no longer work hand in hand like they did in the past. It all comes down to a breakdown in communication… We need to have Imbizos and talk to each other about these things."

Communities have taverns in every street. Self-help initiatives are lacking and often need to be initiated by outsiders or CDWs. Dependency on government to provide prevails and was noted as a major hindrance to broader community development.

The disintegration of communities also goes in line with a lack of trust in each other as well as in outside supporters.

HIV education becomes a challenge, as people know about HIV but do not change their behaviour. This is in turn linked to alcoholism, drug abuse and a general sense of hopelessness.

2.3.5 Stigma and Racism

There is still a big divide amongst black and white residents in Midvaal, both geographically and in terms of employment. The exposure most white people have had to black people is as domestic and farm workers. Although perceptions are changing it is a slow process.

Orphans and vulnerable children are being discriminated against and stigmatised (as well as more generally people who are HIV+, as well as people from rural areas and foreigners). This is one of the reasons people do not disclose their HIV status, and therefore may not access help.

Children are teased about many things and being poor makes them easy targets. They are teased about having clothes that do not fit, about being hungry, about not having the necessary stationery at school and about not being able to pay school fees. There is a general fear of the "big boys", the bullies. Being stigmatised for being poor is particularly difficult for children and affects their behaviour. For example, some vulnerable children stopped going to a feeding centre because they were being teased about it at school. It is reportedly the older children who struggle more with this.

Children want to feel accepted and included. Stigma associated with poverty and disease influences their level of self-perception and self-esteem.

Often, children in orphanages or from poor families feel depressed because they cannot participate in activities that more advantaged children have access to. They similarly suffer when they do not have school uniforms or sports clothing.

Some children get classified as mentally retarded, while they actually stay behind in school due to their lack of language background (in English or Afrikaans).

Issues of stigma should be taken into account when thinking about how to support our vulnerable children. It seems that treating children equally is important and that offering a holistic package of services can help reduce the stigma associated with a single poverty alleviation intervention. For example, it is easier for children to attend an after school care centre in which they get help with their homework, they can play and they get an afternoon meal, than just to go to a feeding scheme to get the meal.

"The mindset that we have is that it's the maid's child and that's how far it stays. But if we can just think more broadly, that if I can just help – all these children that are living in our backyards - I am talking about myself as well - If we can just take them in one afternoon and teach them something they will learn a lot."

"There is this boy, he has a little girl sister and she doesn't come to church (that is, the feeding scheme*). I asked his sister, why don't you come to church and she said – because my big brother said he is scared they are going to tease him – the other people."*

"If you were president I will give love and I would organize food for the children and support people who are living with HIV and their kids who are living with HIV…. so they can feel like everyone of us and they must feel comfortable."

2.3.6 Children's Voices and Rights

The answer was the same each time: "Children do not have a voice." Many parents run their homes autocratically. At a societal level, they are not a part of the decisions that are made for them, i.e. children are not asked what their needs are.

The rights of a child (i.e. to education or basic health care) are more than often neglected. Many children do not know their rights. It was explained by an interviewee that teaching children about their rights while they are still in vulnerable conditions may actually increase the level of abuse, as they get punished when trying to claim their rights.

Children are seen to having been given more rights than parents and making the home ungovernable. In many cases, they have become the parents. Some people feel that children's rights are almost a waste of time because the children can be abusive of that system.

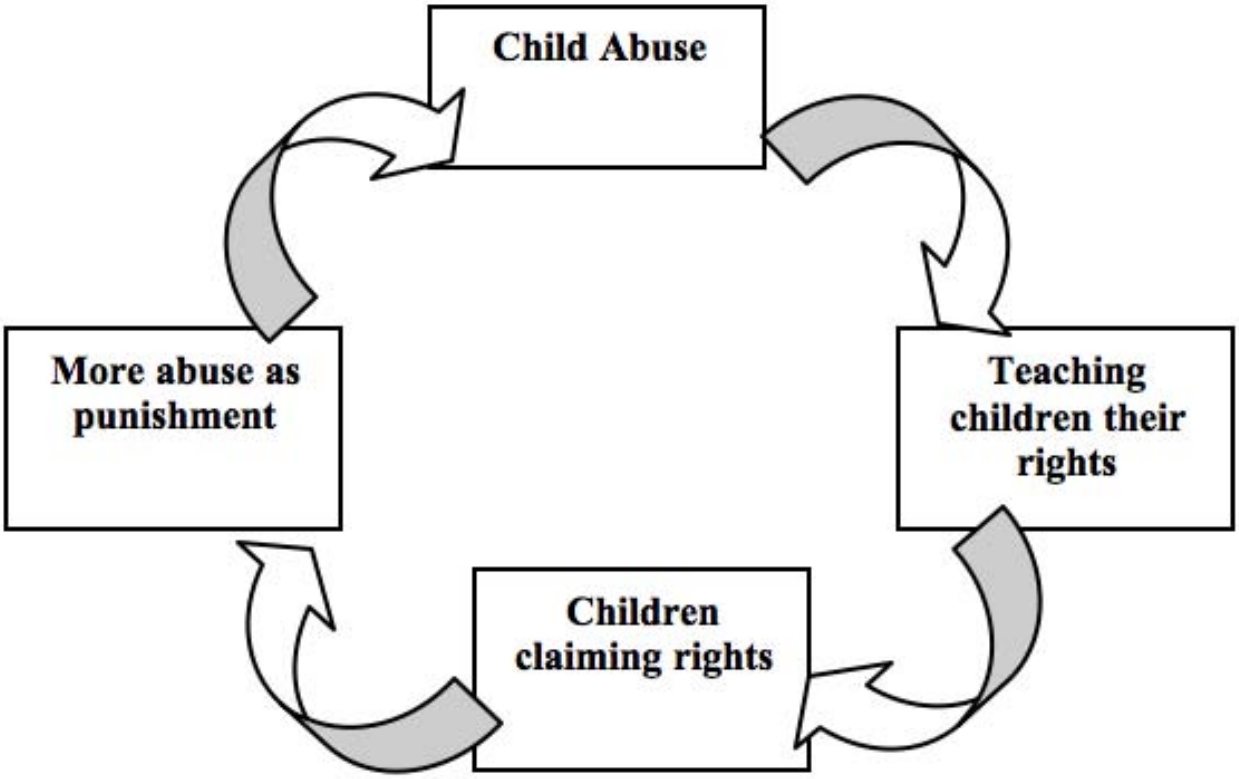


Figure 3: Vicious cycle of child abuse

"This issue of rights is confusing the children, it's bringing frustration to the children. In a sense that, ... whoever is implementing this issue of rights, is only telling the children of their rights The children, they know they've got rights, They tell you, 'I'm 12 years now, I do whatever that I want to do'. Forgetting that, at the age of 12, what is it that you can do?"

3 Forces at Play

The previous descriptions have tried to capture the current reality through the lens of our desire to improve the situation for children. It has not, however, fully captured shifts and changes that are at play that can influence and change the situation. In focusing on current reality it may also come across as more negative than the experience we had in interviewing people, who besides describing the challenges, were full of hope and commitment to make a difference.

In the image below we have outlined the negative forces bearing down on the Midvaal municipality, with the positive forces emanating from within. In the following we will put the spotlight on the forces of hope that are streaming out into the current situation.

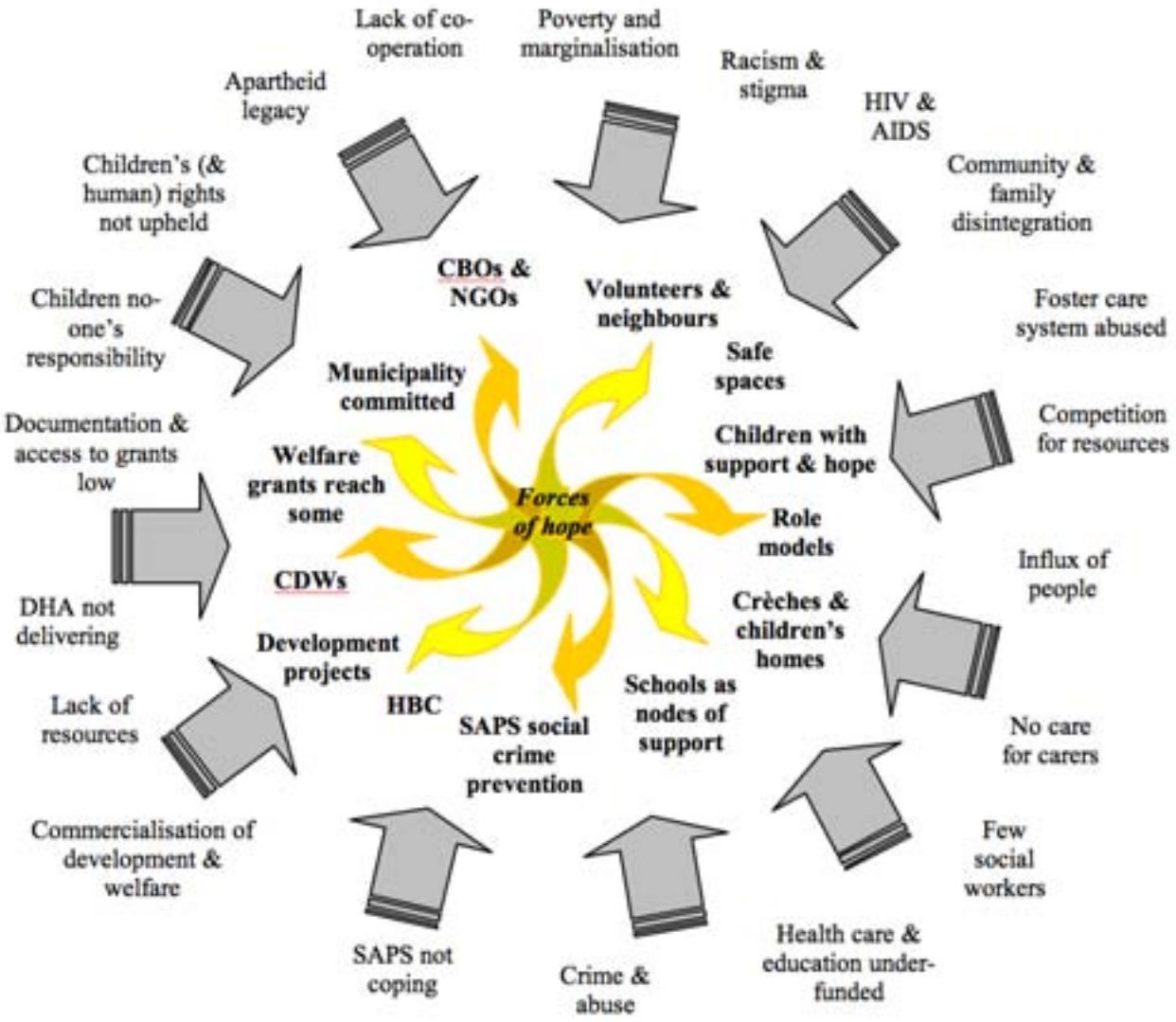


Figure 4: Forces at play in Midvaal

3.1 Forces of Hope

Among the people who were working on behalf of the poor, and vulnerable (both children and adults) we found a strong spirit, commitment to serve, and belief that the only way forward was through rekindling the sense of hope and possibility in community.

We saw initiatives that were fully based on inviting people into making a contribution to their community, and to figuring out together how to make a difference.

We saw grass roots initiatives focused on generating income, with the intention to begin a feeding scheme for the orphans.

We met community organisers saying they had too many volunteers – and that all they needed was more training to engage them all.

We saw projects attempting to involve youth in building their leadership for community development.

We experienced members of SAPS social division, focusing on creating partnerships to learn to care for the children, and to give them a sense of hope.

We met women, who though tired, and under-resourced were working daily to care for infected, and help identify government support for the orphans.

We learned that the Community Development Workers are appreciated in the community, and that there is good collaboration there to possibly build on further.

We met teachers, who are trying their very best to find ways of helping the children in their schools, who are coming from broken homes.

"I would love the community to take hands across all borders and become volunteers and really start to take ownership of their community – and say, 'Listen, let's really start living what we are preaching'. I think that would be absolutely amazing, because then you'd get people with resources going to people that don't have and saying, 'Listen, let us help you.'"

"We don't need fancy places, we need committed people."

We met many whose work was being enabled through municipal and provincial grants.

And so, though on the surface, the challenge may seem insurmountable, there were also enough meetings with people who were working from an assumption that they were the needed resource and that lasting solutions were not going to come from outside, but from within. So though short term measures to feed children, and put them into homes may be urgently needed, the longer term solutions lie within community building initiatives.

The feelings of dignity and self-esteem are crucial in enabling this to happen. Hence, purely material interventions may not sufficiently address emotional and mental barriers, which often draw back to the Apartheid legacy. It will remain crucial to work in a participatory, people-centred way that takes people's dreams and ideas into account on an ongoing basis.

The spirit of Ubuntu should be re-vitalised where people see every child as their child again; and every parent is every child's parent.

Similarly, the communities' will to change negative situations, and belief that collectively this is possible needs to be re-energised beginning with and from those small groups of people already operating from a place of possibility.

"I dream of a community that has solutions within themselves."

So too is there the will and the need for children themselves to be empowered.

"I would like to see maybe children themselves getting involved in the issues that are affecting them, taking ownership of these things."

Before entering into the tangible ideas and suggestions made, let's spend a little time looking at the dreams expressed by people we met.

3.1.1 Dreams…

Dreams of the local communities were rich and vibrant. They included dreams of a rich community with the infrastructures, and facilities needed to engage and sustain the youth and children, and a place to be proud of. In Sicelo people from Esho expressed their desire for their community to have paved roads, a centre for learning, including adult basic education, a library, a park, a play spot for the young, a club for aerobics, and business development.

This is quite a vision, but it was also clear, that they realised that they needed to be a part of making this happen.

Recurring dreams painted pictures of:

- Increased infrastructural interventions from municipal side: i.e. housing, transport and basic services.
- People leading healthy and affordable lives and moving beyond racial barriers
- Safe and fun facilities in each community to prepare the children for going to school. A need also to equip the mothers.
- The community being able to care for children until they're independent – that includes an after care program for those over 18, i.e. business skills development programmes.
- Homes for children who did not have parents (though others felt that institutional homes was not the way to go)
- Ensure quality schooling and education programmes, incl. a career centre.
- Working with parents as primary care givers, and strengthening them in their role.
- Upholding children's rights.
- For children to have hope through people who truly care for them and are positive role models.
- Helping people move from a 'cannot – negative mentality'. With a strong need expressed to promote team spirit.
- Uplifting the community through skills development for adults and youth as well as supporting business development and job creation in a sustainable manner.
- Community centres in the community by the community– including books and learning.

It was expressed in many interviews that communities should find their own solutions for the orphans and vulnerable children crisis as well as other issues, as there was a general understanding that poverty and the loss of values both impact on the communities' ability to address the orphans and vulnerable children issue.

Thus it stands out strongly that the interviewees saw the interconnectedness of orphans and vulnerable children issues with broader poverty-related problems; and that addressing the situation in a sustainable way will require a more holistic approach to community development, taking into account the various positive and negative forces impacting on children.

3.1.2 Dreams in the Voices of People

"There must be an African renaissance – 'you take care of your own' – can only happen with community upliftment."

"... a place of safety, a place of fun, a place of relief from what might be harshness in their life."

"I would like to see a community that is attractive to every child. You find that black and white children don't understand one another...we want to see that changing."

"For me it will be around Early Childhood Development, where proper, proper, proper and world class services are rendered. Because that's where we build the foundation for education for many things."

"If I could feed these children from Monday to Friday, I would be the happiest woman on Earth."

"To see job creation and everyone working. ... Our youths to have more skills and educated and Midvaal is a place where people can stay and not leave for other areas like Jo'burg."

"A building of some kind, plenty of ground for sporting activities, for outside activities. So be it a hall, facilities that allow children to sit and work in the afternoons to do homework, do activities, do creative stuff. A place where children can be divided into their age groups so that they can grow in age related activities, where they don't always have to tolerate the younger children or be bullied or intimidated by older children."

"Youth need people to motivate them – need to dream again – need help to identify and develop their gifts and talents."

"I would like to see an institution to take care of orphans and vulnerable children – normal households with a normal home environment. Like SOS Children's Villages or Avril Elizabeth home. Children need brothers and sisters and parents."

"Poverty is making brother and brother kill one another. We can create a better future for children and a safe environment, if we eradicate poverty."

"We need to give the parents some kind of skill so that they can be able to generate some income. For as long as most people are still suffering because of poverty, I don't think we'll ever have a meaningful solution."

"One's wish is to see business coming to invest in Midvaal... I would like to see eradication of informal settlements."

4 Ideas for Change – Suggestions for Interventions

The scope and type of intervention varied with the interviewees, some of which saw real solutions to be only viable if they have high leverage and change the system; while others advocated for smaller scale interventions which would address the crisis in a particular area.

As mentioned above many of the ideas for deeper change related to changing mindsets, values and ways the community works together, as well as shifting the capacity and reality of the community being able to sustain itself through job and business creation.

In the following image we have divided solution possibilities up into four quadrants, representing high- and low-leverage interventions as well as high- and low hanging fruit (i.e. how easy can they be achieved).

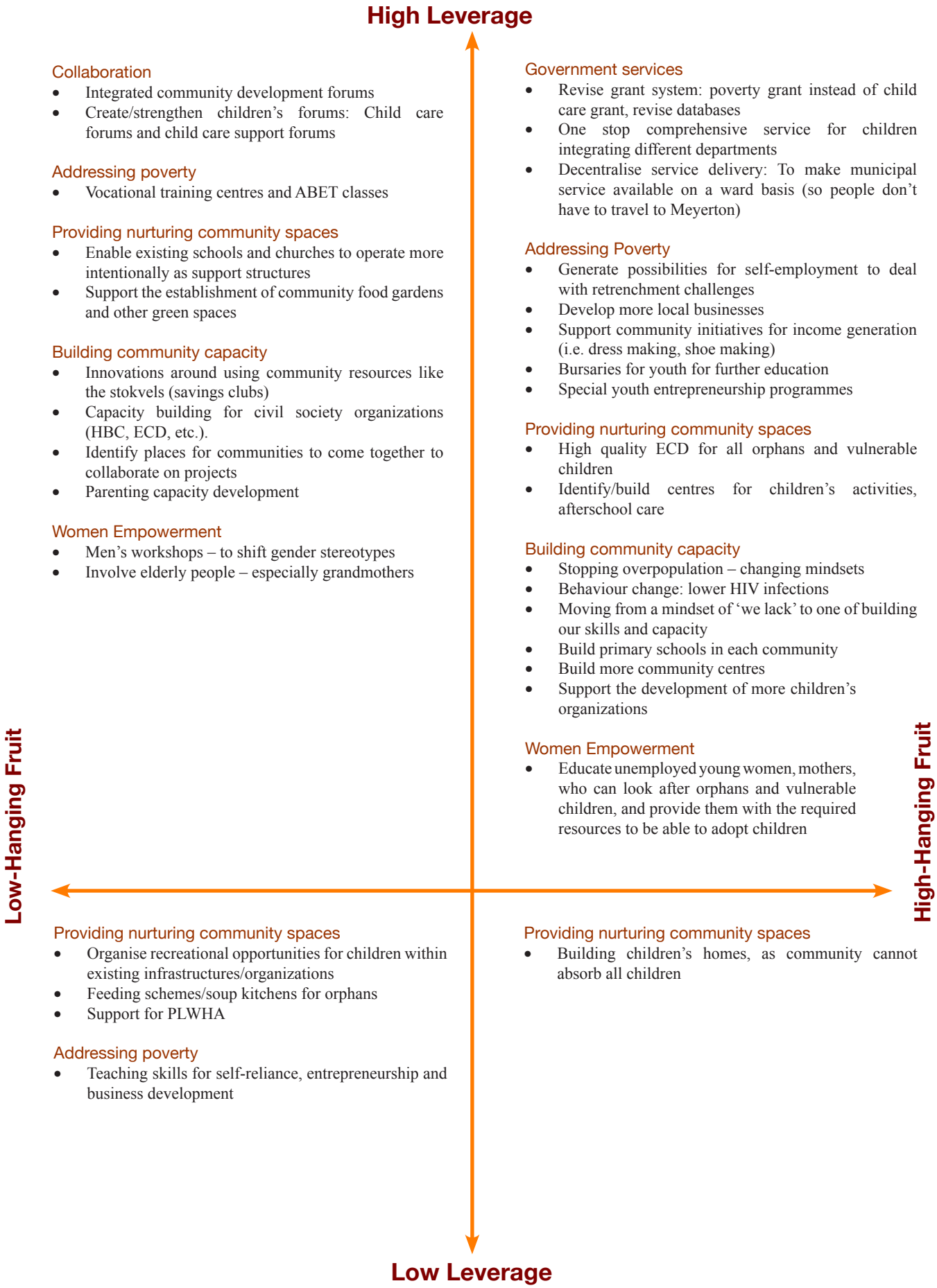
The image shows that many suggestions clearly favoured interventions, which would have an impact at a systemic level, and not only be short-term solutions. The short-term solutions were however also seen as important, as children are in need of food, clothes and safety at this very moment, and cannot wait for a system to change.

Nonetheless, many interviewees clearly promoted a bigger-picture perspective, by understanding the interdependence of many parallel factors for a more sustainable solution as well as the need for collaboration across stakeholders in order to achieve this.

The biggest column on the top right hand side is made of high-leverage interventions, which are less easily achievable, most of them because they involve the collaboration of many stakeholders and potentially changing some mindsets, as well as requiring resources. They address issues of poverty as well as the current lack of collaboration; and also make suggestions of how to transform government support.

The will to address more systemic problems needs to be in place in order to achieve such change, which needs to be tested in further steps of the process.

The ideas gathered here, are simply an early indication of where people see the places needing intervention. However the initiatives and innovations that we hope to create together will be coming out of a collaborative process of learning and co-creating.


High Leverage
Low Leverage
Low-Hanging Fruit
High-Hanging Fruit
Collaboration
• Integrated community development forums
• Create/strengthen children's forums: Child care forums and child care support forums
Addressing poverty
• Vocational training centres and ABET classes
Providing nurturing community spaces
• Enable existing schools and churches to operate more intentionally as support structures
• Support the establishment of community food gardens and other green spaces
Building community capacity
• Innovations around using community resources like the stokvels (savings clubs)
• Capacity building for civil society organizations (HBC, ECD, etc.).
• Identify places for communities to come together to collaborate on projects
• Parenting capacity development
Women Empowerment
• Men's workshops – to shift gender stereotypes
• Involve elderly people – especially grandmothers
Government services
• Revise grant system: poverty grant instead of child care grant, revise databases
• One stop comprehensive service for children integrating different departments
• Decentralise service delivery: To make municipal service available on a ward basis (so people don't have to travel to Meyerton)
Addressing Poverty
• Generate possibilities for self-employment to deal with retrenchment challenges
• Develop more local businesses
• Support community initiatives for income generation (i.e. dress making, shoe making)
• Bursaries for youth for further education
• Special youth entrepreneurship programmes
Providing nurturing community spaces
• High quality ECD for all orphans and vulnerable children
• Identify/build centres for children's activities, afterschool care
Building community capacity
• Stopping overpopulation – changing mindsets
• Behaviour change: lower HIV infections
• Moving from a mindset of 'we lack' to one of building our skills and capacity
• Build primary schools in each community
• Build more community centres
• Support the development of more children's organizations
Women Empowerment
• Educate unemployed young women, mothers, who can look after orphans and vulnerable children, and provide them with the required resources to be able to adopt children
Providing nurturing community spaces
• Organise recreational opportunities for children within existing infrastructures/organizations
• Feeding schemes/soup kitchens for orphans
• Support for PLWHA
Addressing poverty
• Teaching skills for self-reliance, entrepreneurship and business development
Providing nurturing community spaces
• Building children's homes, as community cannot absorb all children

5 Advice and Risks

"Maybe it's the way I introduce a project to the community, the way I involve them in the projects from the beginning. I don't go to them and impose projects, I try and work with them from the beginning and make them part of the process. And once you can have that sense of belonging of the communities, that we belong and this is our project, our baby, then it is easy for you to work with them."

As part of the interviews we asked for advice about how to go forwards and what to be aware of. The following lists the various suggestions (they are written in order of repetition – so the first ones were mentioned several times, the last ones only by 1-2 people).

Advice

- Work with and through the community, consult all the time.
- "Go the long slow way of community. Get to know your small community. You must be approachable, to really get in."
- It is important not to impose – get the leads and direction from the community.
- Work through people the community knows as well as existing organisations in the communities.
- Start small. You can't work in the whole municipality.
- Don't rush it: When we try to move too fast, we end up slowing things down. Some things need cultivation and a chance to stop and reflect.
- Bridge the gap between political parties
- Ensure good cooperation with local authorities.
- Support networking amongst people doing similar work.
- Engage of the agencies dealing with children
- Hold Imbizos / community meetings
- Open communication flow, update people on the project regularly.
- Community meetings – get community to sign they attended and if they agree with proposal they should sign that they agree
- Set up a committee comprising different stakeholders in Midvaal for implementation, incl. task teams.
- Work with committed people.
- Brief all the Ward Councillors & CDWs.
- Explore TASO-model (AIDS support organization from Uganda) & Zimbabwe model

Risks

- Political divisions between DA and ANC may become a blockage – avoid excluding people, as they may understand it in a party political context.
- Look out for people who are claiming to work for children.
- Favouritism (avoid)
- Potential donors make promises in the community and then don't deliver or take too long.
- Donors may decide what they will do in the community without asking the community's opinion on whether this is wanted or needed.
- Listen carefully, and read between the lines: Some groups may see this work as interference.
- Information gaps – particularly bad in Ward 6 (very scattered), 1, 4 and 7.
- We are living in an environment that is changing every day – so even if a community that you met a few weeks ago said one thing, they might not say the same now.

6 Key Learnings

Through our conversations and research it is clear that there is an enormous need to find ways of providing children with the core support that children normally receive from their parents – shelter, care, food, clothes, and support for learning.

We can think of the suggestions and ideas in terms of whether we are addressing the **symptoms** or **the underlying factors**, which if they shifted, they would shift the situation as it stands today.

Addressing Symptoms
The reality today is that much of what children need cannot be found in their homes. We urgently need to explore alternatives for the shorter term – at the symptomatic level, ranging from nutrition schemes to after school care, much of which is in place already but not reaching enough children. Thus in the shorter term the questions are: *how do we scale up small but successful initiatives to reach more children? What is lacking that we need to find ways of providing?*

Addressing the underlying situation
In the longer term, it seems imperative for us to turn out attention to solutions that begin to address the underlying situation. These will therefore typically not only be about the child, but about developing a healthy family and community foundation. Through our interviews we found the disintegration of the social fabric, and a sense of lack of empowerment, of adults and communities waiting to be rescued. How can we build inherent capacity – social and economic?

Combining the two
The question that arises from these two views seem to be: How broadly do we focus? How narrowly can we zoom in on the child to really support them? It seems that many people in Midvaal realise that to really shift the situation for children, we need to shift the situation of their parents and caregivers too.

The process of engaging with stakeholders in the community gave us some indication of areas where we can begin the work of building community capacity to care for the children at both levels of focus.

An area that is both about supporting the children right now, and about building longer term community health and capacity is **education.** Thus supporting a shift towards increased access to education for the very young through to employment is an important area of concern. Also important seems to be enabling the schools and teachers to be better equipped (time, skill, resources) to support the broader social needs of the children. Identifying ways of working with youth and integrating them to become a part of the positive development of their communities is important to break the negative cycles leading to continued lowering of community health and capacity.

Another short term focus, which would have long term implication, was the area of **grants**: To support people struggling with documentation; those who are not receiving grants, though eligible because their papers are not in order. This need is already clear to the municipality. A longer term view on grants was the possibility of shifting the children's grant to become a poverty grant. Although this would need to happen beyond Midvaal, the theme of young people becoming parents simply for the grant was repeated in several interviews, and so deserves some attention.

Overall there was agreement of the **need to collaborate** further around the several different needs and opportunities related to children. Less red tape from government came through strongly as did the need to bridge the racial divide in the area through working together more intentionally.

An important component that might support effective collaboration is engaging in an exercise of **mapping the social development needs of Midvaal**. Currently there is no complete database of people, their assets and needs. There is a lack of exposure regarding community issues and ways of addressing them.

The details of which tangible initiatives to engage and pursue will come through our continued community engagement and be designed with them. A strong message in taking this work further was that the longer term solutions lie within the **community building initiatives** held and run by the community itself.

The feelings of dignity and self-esteem are crucial in enabling this to happen. Hence, purely material interventions may not sufficiently address emotional and mental barriers, which often draw back to the Apartheid legacy. It will remain **crucial to work in a participatory, people-centred way** that takes people's dreams and ideas into account on an ongoing basis.

There were several people who spoke to the power of mobilising people themselves, as opposed to giving hand-outs and help that emphasise their need over their capacity. We need to engage the community to come together to figure out how to shift mindsets, and behaviour and build the capacity needed to care for their children.

An overarching requirement to all interventions is that the feelings of the child remain central and are always considered. The stigma associated with being poor adds an additional burden to the lives of our vulnerable children and points to the need to focus a loving, carefully thought through and **integrated response on the "whole child".**

From this initial exercise of listening into the community we have decided to focus our intention around **building community capacity to absorb and care for orphans and vulnerable children**. Capacity is meant here in its broadest sense. This includes building capacity in terms of skills, as well as infrastructure and initiatives that are able to effectively support the needs of the children.

From this study, it has become clear that the way to do this is through community engagement and mobilisation. The innovations and ideas need to come through a process involving the community. The capacity and leadership of the community will be enabled and strengthened as we support them in implementing their own ideas and desires in new partnerships that stretch across sectors.

7 The Way Forward

As mentioned above, our process of engaging different actors in the community, has led us to the conclusion that our work with them going forward can broadly be defined as seeking to build community capacity to absorb and care for orphans and vulnerable children. With this aim we will be moving forward along several parallel tracks:

Community OVC Innovation Programme

In 2008 we are launching a Midvaal OVC Innovation programme aimed at enhancing leadership, collaboration and innovation to care for orphans and vulnerable children in Midvaal.

We wish to make Midvaal an example to show that it *is* possible to care for all our children, and to give them an opportunity to achieve their full potential in life. We have selected 5 geographical communities in Midvaal in which this programme will begin.

The importance of furthering collaboration came up through the interviews, and our belief is that, we can only address a complex situation as this one through multisector collaboration and innovation. We will therefore be inviting selected participants who are directly or indirectly working in service of children from government, business and civil society to a learning and action process through which they can develop and launch innovation projects that address the challenges facing children and their caregivers in Midvaal, as well as develop the leadership of the people involved.

Participants of the OVC programme will go through a process of seeing what is and what could be; reflecting together on what should be; creating innovations towards the decided goals, and testing these in real time. The most succesful of these innovations will be supported toward institutionalisation.

Mobilising Partnership

Given that one of the findings was a very low level of involvement in Midvaal of other NGOs and institutional funding bodies, the Hollard Foundation is seeking to bring in additional partners to support this process. This has already begun with the DoSD coming on board to be a part of a database project to track all the orphans and vulnerable children in Midvaal, and the NGO Fuel (working with child nutrition) also joining the Innovation Programme with an intention to support initiatives emerging related to child nutrition.

Funding and support of initiatives

In addition support will be available to existing organisations working with children in accordance with the Hollard Foundation's guidelines – though the intention is to channel most of their support through the collaborative Innovation Programme that will launch in early 2008.

Participating in strengthening existing fora and, where needed, establish new ones

To further support the strongly expressed need for collaboration, there is a need to be a part of strengthening existing fora that may not be functioning optimally yet. Of particular interest is the children's fora that have not yet really taken off. There is a hope that Midvaal could be a model of best practice Children's Fora. Where needed it may involve enabling new gatherings - like community assemblies for the wider community to be brought into what is emerging.

We look forward to engaging in this work with the people and children of Midvaal.

A full Way Forward Report has been compiled. Please contact nana@convene.co.za for the Report.

8 In Closing

8.1 If I were the president

We have included quotes of several children who we spoke to during the course of our research – in response to the question of what they would do if they were the president of this country. May we be able to listen to their dreams of what the president should do, and make some of these become a reality for them.

If I were the president…

"I would like the option to make school free for people and then they can go to school for free because some parents cant afford school fees. Like me I go to government school and don't pay school fees. But I won't tell the other boys about that otherwise they will tease me about that."

"I am going to care of people so they have shelter, water, food, clothes – everything and church so that they believe in God."

"I would make sure that all orphans would have food, clothes, water and access to education."

"I was going to build a library so that children who stay in Walkerville don't have to go to De Deur."

"I would say to people that if they find children who are sleeping on the ground they must bring them and we will buy beds and clothes for them. I would give them food, lots and lots of food. And mostly if they don't have parents, you can give them love and care for them."

"I will make sure that other children who live far get buses to school."

"I would say every school must have a bus and the children who cannot pay the school fees they should just have some exemption. And I think they can take the street kids and just build a big building where they can put them and there is everything that they want and need like swimming pool, everything."

"I would build schools for children. I would also build them decent RDP houses. I will also make sure that poor people have food and can get grants. I would bring the children toys to play with and other fun things to keep them busy at play time. I would also build a swimming pool."

"I'm a soccer player and all soccer players need a soccer kit. So, I would organise kits for all the children who play sport and provide them with toys and other things to play with after school. I would also give children a fair opportunity to further their studies after Matric. That is very important to me because I want to achieve big things in life but, I can't do that if I have to stop school in Matric."

"I would give the Management of places like this money so they can buy clothes and shoes for the children living in the home. I would build schools, sports grounds and houses for children. Children also need food to grow so; I would make sure children never go hungry."

"Firstly I would build decent schools. I would give children food to eat and clothes to wear. I would make sure that children have reading and writing books at schools, all the necessary stationary. I would also provide children with free transportation to and from school. ."

"I would visit rural area and see how the people there live. If I were him I would build good, strong homes for the children living in rural areas. I would also build schools closer to where they live so that the children are not forced to walk long distances to school. I would make sure children have clothes, more especially shoes. For those children living in homes like this one, I would build a Recreation Centre

that has at least one television set. Children need to go out for fresh air sometimes so; I would organise trip to the zoo or camping trips for them. We would really like to go out there and meet with other kids. Maybe even make new friends."

"There are so many hungry children in South Africa. I would make sure those children have food to eat and clothes to wear. I would build them good schools and houses. Every child should be able to go to university if they qualify. We need to be given a chance to further our education. All children should have school uniforms, books, pens and pencils."

" When we come back from school we have to take our school uniforms off before we play. So, I would give children play clothes, especially shoes. I would make sure have enough food to eat at school or have some lunch money so they can concentrate in class."

"Before I do anything for children, I would help their parents get jobs so that they're children are not forced to stay in homes. Not every child does well academically so; I would build sports grounds at schools and in their different communities. They too can do something they're good at. Here at Kotulong, I would get soccer kits for those children that play sport. I would also place one computer in each unit because we are not all allowed access to the Computer Training Centre."

"I would build more homes for abandoned children who don't go to school. I would also make sure that they get an education because without it, we are nothing. I would make sure that all children are safe and protected at all times; that no harm comes to them. I think they also need recreation centres and play grounds equipped with swings."

8.2 Burning Questions

We leave you with questions that are alive for people, and that we need to find ways of addressing as we continue in our process of community engagement to be able to work with the challenges and needs of the orphans in Midvaal. We leave them with you to invite you to keep thinking about our challenge as we move forward.

We look forward to being in this quest with you.

"Given that we can't solve everybody's problems, and so, how to tackle something that you can actually cope with?"

"What are we going to do with child headed families? How are we going to help them? Because, they are the future. They grow up without any parents, without any discipline, without any love, without any resources – if you grow up without hope, what are the chances that you're going to be a happy adult?"

"How can we get people to have fewer children because that is the root of the problem?"

"What has gone wrong in the fibre of our society for the things that are happening to children? Why are men assaulting children? What has gone wrong?"

"I was in this community today and this is what I realised, this is what I observed needed to be done – but then I get back to the office and I find we don't have the resources – what can I do? I end up having this tension, saying I have to go out and source something from somewhere to assist this."

"We have lots and lots of youth who are doing nothing. Not that they want to sit and do nothing, they want to do something but they don't know where to go and how to go about it. Even if they do have ideas they always hit the wall and say we don't have any resources."

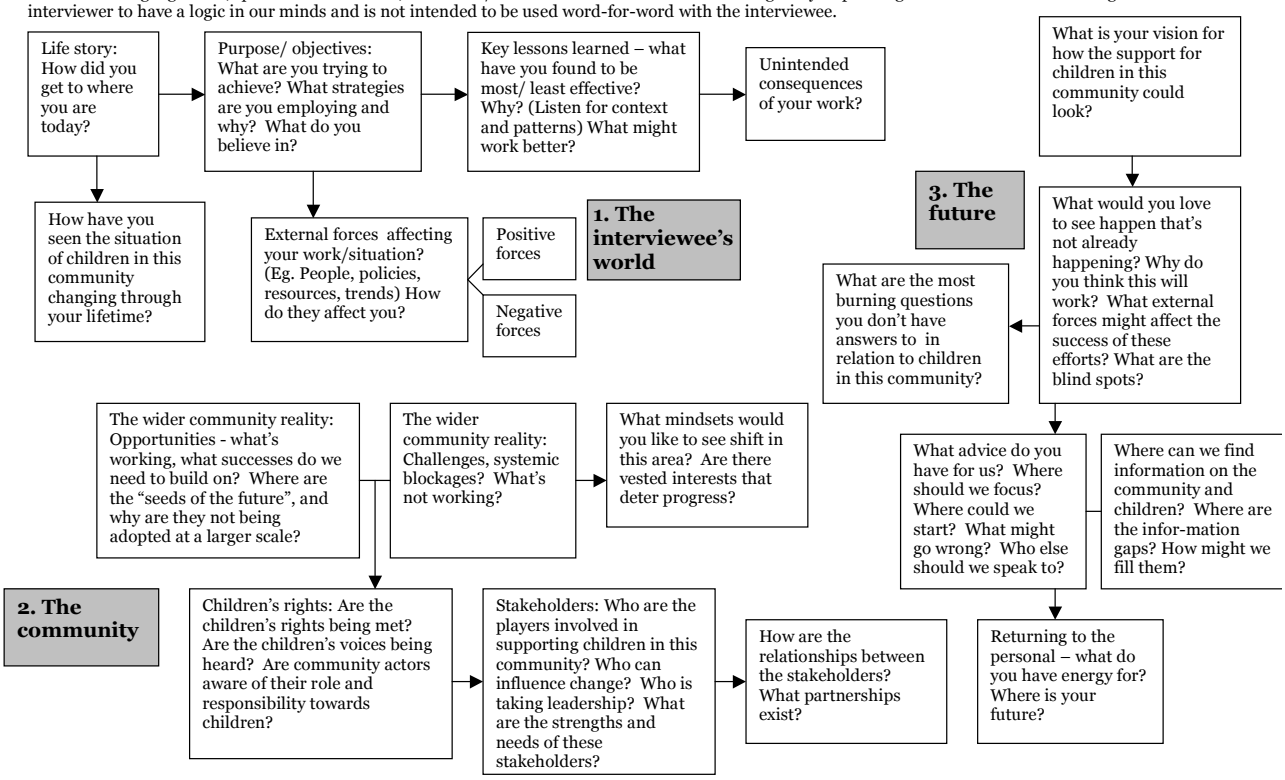
"I'm not saying take the children away from the community (in the case of child abuse), but I'm saying, I don't know what to say to you, I don't know what the answer is."

"As a child-headed household, what is the first step to get help? We need a step-by-step 'what to do' for these children."

Appendix 1: Interview Guidelines

OVC interviews

Note – the language used, questions focused on, and order/flow of the conversation will differ greatly depending on the interviewee. This guide is for the interviewer to have a logic in our minds and is not intended to be used word-for-word with the interviewee.



Appendix 2: Interviewees

Midvaal Project Interviewees List

	Contact	Organisation
	Local Government	
1	Malebese Mkhaza	Midvaal Municipality Social Worker
2	Louise van Aswegen	Midvaal HIV/Aids coordinator
3	Ntswake Matlhare	LED Coordinator, Midvaal
4	Councillor Pat Hutcheson	Midvaal Municipality
5	Mayor Marti Wenger	Midvaal Municipality
6	Nas Hassim	Midvaal Municipality
	Provincial Government	
7	Watson Ramushu	Community Development Worker
8	Jabu Ngeleka	DoSD HIV/Aids coordinator
9	Community Development Workers Focus Group	
	Other government related	
10	Mrs Minki Kaeane	SASSA - Head of Local Office
11	Mr Xolile Majola	SAPS - Social Crime Prevention Unit
	NGOs/CBOs	
12	Emma van der Merwe	Doula's Ministries
13	Chippa Sithole	CRDC
14	Christine Senyi	CRDC and own HBC ngo
15	Billy Mhlambo	ESHO
16	Khumo Kgomoeswana	Khotulong Community Centre
17	Sipho Radebe	Community project in Elandsfontein
18	Soloman Ramasonya	The WIN Project, Elandsfontein
19	Maureen Jones	Rotary
20	CRDC fieldworkers' focus group	6 fieldworkers
	FBOs	
21	Thea Jarvis	TLC
	Business	
22	Business Breakfast	Seven Business Representatives
23	Norah Segoati	Samancor/Billiton
24	Angie Phaliso	Rand Water
25	Veronica Cronje	Community Chest
26	Suzelle du Plessis	UCAR: Local Midvaal Business, HR Practitioner and CSI

Education

27	Lynette Gounden-Emmanuel, Linsay de Beer	Principal and Deputy Principal: Meyerton Primary
28	Mrs Moruthana	Principal: Sebonile School for Deaf and Blind
29	Christine Van Niekerk	Principal: Japie Greyling School
30	Mrs. Mthimkhulu	Coordinator: School Feeding Programme (Ratasechaba Primary)
31	Mr. Rudi Steenkamp	Principal: Voorwaarts
32	Mrs. Wentzel	Coordinator: School Feeding Programme (Voorwaarts Primary)

Community members

33	Children's Focus Group - Age 8-12	Khotulong Orphanage
34	Children's Focus Group - Age 12-16	Khotulong Orphanage
35	Caregivers' focus group	Khotulong Orphanage
36	Benny	The White House
37	Mrs. Eastlyn Hoffman	Edonai Ministries
38	Learners- Ages 10-14	Edonai Ministries
39	Mrs. N Mokwena	Food Preparers: Ratasechaba Primary
40	3 Learners - Ages 12-14	Voorwaarts Primary

Health

41	Sister Nomsa Nhlapo	Meyerton ARV Clinic

Early Childhood Development

42	Maserame Denine Manyefani	

Appendix 3: Way Forward

Principles of Engagement

- Ubuntu as a design principle: We seek to encourage community collaboration

- Working with the wealth and assets that exist in the community already: We need to practice the vision of a community that has its own solutions.

- Involving more of the community: Although working through the smaller change group, we will seek to reach the wider community through them.

- Capacity building is central to the overall process - as opposed to focusing only on *training*, including:

    1. deeper capacities of leadership: good listening skills, ability to collaborate, ability to facilitate groups, ability to imagine and vision, decision making, team work, conflict resolution, etc..
    2. specific training for care-giving as well as possibly income generation capacities; the skills will be defined as needs become clearer through the change lab (some of this may happen separately through Hollard).
    3. personal transformation – enabling a shift in mindset, and attitudes: *'Learning to work with what we have to make it grow.'*

- Geographical focus. In designing the change lab, the following elements are important to achieve in terms of geography:

    - collaboration across wards;
    - to engage 3-5 communities as spaces for experimentation, where practical initiatives and collaboration can occur;
    - inclusion of people who hold a 'Midvaal-wide' perspective as well as a slightly broader regional perspective.

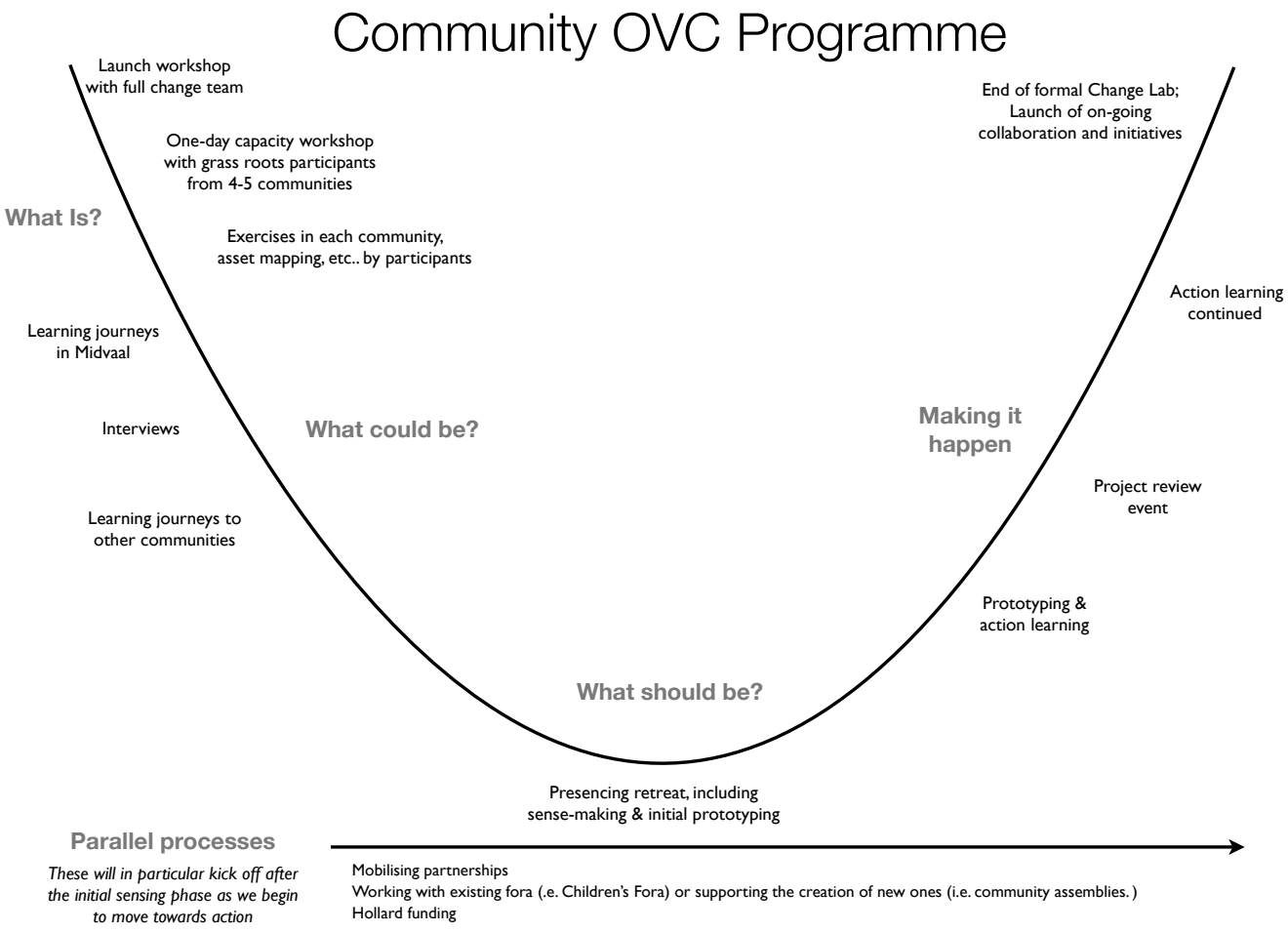
- Attention to Time: To design different time commitments for community members, and Midvaal-wide participants respectively, recognizing that the latter may be able to commit less time to the full process.

- We don't impose our assumptions and ideas - It is important to keep listening and talking

- Politics: important to involve all the relevant people and bodies with attention to transparency and respect.

Diagram of the Collaborative Process

The following diagram shows a visual overview of the process designed to facilitate the OVC innovation Programme following on from the initial research. The bend in the path symbolises the attempt to bring to light latent, inner or other-wise non-obvious aspects of the future possibilities of children in Midvaal from which tangible innovations and actions can flow. This "U-process" and the OVC innovation programme will enable us to navigate the terrain from collective understanding to collective collaboration.



This report was compiled by Marianne Knuth and Schirin Yachkasch from Reos Social Innovation, with input by Marianne "Mille" Bojer from Reos and Laura Poswell from Fuel.