Learning from the successes and failures of the Westcliff Flats Residents Association

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Summary

The Westcliff Flats Residents Association (WFRA), a community-based organization in Durban, South Africa, was very effective at ending evictions and disconnections of electricity or water in its community, but had little success in fighting Westcliff's drug problem. This paper seeks to account for these divergent outcomes and, in so doing, to demonstrate that research can be useful in helping civil society organizations to be more successful in their advocacy efforts. We find two factors account for the differing outcomes. First, the fight against evictions and disconnections created a sense of community around a problem, while the drug problem isolated members of the community from each other. Second, although the WFRA was able to leverage the opportunities that democracy creates to end evictions and disconnections, democratic rights have been ineffective at ridding the community of drugs and drug dealers. In addition, our research into the successful campaign to stop evictions and disconnections provides practical information on how the WFRA could fight drugs and drug dealers in the community. First, the community did not end evictions and service disconnections all at once, but achieved incremental successes by breaking a large issue down into smaller ones. Second, small victories created a sense of empowerment, which encouraged people to take more ambitious actions. Both findings provide pragmatic advice on how civil society organizations can be more effective, an area which most research on social movements tends to ignore.

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1. Introduction

The Westcliff Flats Residents Association (WFRA) has achieved some impressive successes. A decade ago the residents of Westcliff, a low-income suburb of Durban, South Africa, were facing mass evictions from their dilapidated government-owned homes, suffering from widespread disconnections of electricity and water, and had an acrimonious relationship with their municipal government. Today, the situation has improved dramatically. Instead of facing evictions from their homes, the community is in the process of becoming owners of renovated homes on their own terms. Rather than facing disconnections of the electricity and water supplies, the community receives these services at prices they can afford. Instead of having a hostile relationship with their local government, they cooperate with it to resolve many problems. Nonetheless, at the same time as the community was achieving these impressive gains, it was unable to resolve an equally vexing problem – the presence of dangerous drugs and drug dealers in the community. As a result, it has largely stopped taking action to combat the problem. Why was the WFRA successful at ending evictions and disconnections but not at ridding the community of drugs and drug dealers?

For many years, scholars and policymakers have recognized the importance of good research to the construction of effective policies. By contrast, studies of social movements tend not to focus on the practical advice research can give civil society organizations. This is both surprising and disappointing. It is surprising because foreign aid organizations have been actively working to build the capacity of civil society organizations for many years. It is disappointing because the people who can gain the most from research on social movements – those engaged in advocacy campaigns – tend to benefit little from studies of them. This paper seeks to demonstrate how research can provide pragmatic suggestions to these people and organizations.

This paper examines the success of the WFRA's efforts to end housing evictions and service disconnections, and its failure to eradicate drugs from the community. We find that two crucial factors account for why they were successful in the former but not in the latter. First, while evictions and disconnections provided a sense of communal solidarity around a problem, drugs isolated members of the community from one another. Second, the WFRA learned how to leverage democracy to stop the evictions and disconnections, but democratic rights have not been useful in fighting the problem of drugs because drug dealers bribe officers of the South African Police Service and the courts not to enforce drug laws.

Beyond identifying the factors that account for success and failure in these two efforts, our research provides lessons on how the organization might be able to address the problems drugs are creating in the community. First, winning the fight against evictions and disconnections did not come all at once, but through a multi-year struggle during which the WFRA achieved many incremental gains – and a few large ones – as well as suffering numerous setbacks. Second, taking action and achieving small victories in the fight against evictions and disconnections created a sense of empowerment that encouraged greater action. By contrast, inaction on the fight against drugs has created a sense of disempowerment and hopelessness that further discourages engaging with the issue. In combination, these factors suggest that while the WFRA may not be able to eradicate drugs and drug dealers from the community at the moment, there are smaller actions it can take, such as working with youth to keep them from starting to use drugs. While such efforts are

unlikely to resolve the problem and may not elicit greater government accountability in the short term, they can achieve incremental successes that might help create a sense of empowerment and thus catalyse more ambitious actions, just as occurred with the campaigns to end evictions and service disconnections. The paper also highlights three more general lessons about designing effective advocacy efforts: achieving greater accountability may be a non-linear process, successes on one issue may not easily translate into successes on other issues, and psychological and social factors can inhibit addressing exigent problems.

Section 2 examines research on civil society in South Africa since the country's democratic transition. Section 3 presents WFRA's two campaigns. Section 4 analyses the practical advice that emerges from our case studies, and section 5 discusses how future research can advance efforts to help civil society organizations to be more effective. Section 6 provides the conclusions.

2. Civil society in contemporary South Africa

Civil society in post-apartheid South Africa is fundamentally different from its anti-apartheid predecessor. While civil society was a major force during the fight against apartheid, many social movements demobilized following South Africa's democratic transition.[1] Civil society re-emerged in the late 1990s as a result of the effects of the African National Congress's (ANC) neoliberal economic policies on the poor. These policies led to a rise in unemployment, falling incomes and less affordable housing and services, such as electricity and water. Those who remain disadvantaged have mobilized to fight these policies, exerting themselves largely (but not exclusively) through sustained protests for the past decade.[2] This section discusses the context in which these new movements emerged, examines their evolution and discusses the state's response to them.

The context for new social movements

When the ANC came to power in 1994 following South Africa's first democratic elections, many of the social movements that were central to the fight against apartheid demobilized. Social movements re-emerged in the late 1990s after the ANC shifted from its original statist platform, articulated in the Reconstruction and Development Programmes (RDP), towards neoliberal policies embracing free market principles and fiscal austerity, as outlined in the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) programme. These policies led to massive job losses, increasing prices for services and rising inequality (Ballard 2005).

The job losses and rising prices for services, such as water and electricity, that resulted from GEAR caused many people to fall into arrears with their housing and service payments. Many municipal governments responded repressively to non-payment by disconnecting people from these services and evicting those who could not afford to pay their rent for state-provided housing (Barchiesi 2004).

The social movements that were at the forefront of the anti-apartheid movement did not come to the aid of the poor who were harmed by these policies after South Africa's democratic transition. Instead, a number of them, such as the large and powerful Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), allied themselves with the ANC. In addition, a number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) sought partnerships with the government and fostered a client-patron relationship with the ANC (Bond 2004). Furthermore, after the end of apartheid, foreign donors largely stopped funding NGOs

directly and instead channelled their funds through the state (Marais 1998). The ANC, in turn, tended to favour organizations that would work to help implement its policy priorities, rather than those that opposed them. As a result of these changes, the poor who were harmed by the ANC's policies had no advocates from the struggle against apartheid to assist them. Instead, they had to find a new way to press for accountability around the issues that concerned them, relying only on themselves.

A new generation of social movements

The dissolution of many anti-apartheid civil society organizations and the ANC's cooption of many others meant that there is little continuity between those that emerged to challenge apartheid and the new generation of social movements. Instead, a number of movements developed in the late 1990s around local concerns and demands, particularly unemployment, the lack of adequate housing and unaffordable services – problems they attributed to the ANC's neoliberal reforms. The most ubiquitous manifestation of these new movements is protests which are now a daily occurrence in South Africa. According to one analysis, 'Just a decade after the streets were burning, analysts are seeing evidence of a new season of symptoms of exclusion and frustration' (Botes et al. 2007: 1). Similarly, Doreen Atkinson observes that: 'For a Rip van Winkle who had fallen asleep in 1988 and awoken in 2005 it might appear as if the "rolling mass action" of the end-of-apartheid period has simply continued into the dawn of democratic government in South Africa' (Botes et al. 2007: 1). While these campaigns vary in their strategies and effectiveness, protest and other forms of social mobilization are one of the most visible and active political forces in post-apartheid South Africa.

The new social movements are far different in organization to their anti-apartheid predecessors. Rather than representing a broad and unified social movement, these organizations are often little more than collections of angry citizens lacking a clear direction and largely working in isolation from each other (Bond et al. 2010). One important reason why they remain fragmented is because they face difficulties in articulating their demands in simple frames that have widespread resonance, such as us versus them or right versus wrong. During apartheid, by contrast, civil society organized to protest against the racist and anti-democratic regime. Communities faced their own problems, but they could all identify themselves as being morally opposed to the regime. After South Africa's transition to democracy, there was no clear enemy and few of these groups are calling for systemic change. Rather, their demands appear more material than moral in nature as they are largely advocating for jobs, better housing and more affordable services. As a result, unlike during apartheid, these new social movements lack the capacity to express their demands in moral narratives with widespread appeal.

Nonetheless, there have been some attempts to improve coordination among these groups. Among the more visible are Johannesburg's Anti-Privatization Forum (APF), Durban's Concerned Citizens' Forum (CCF) and Cape Town's Anti-Eviction Campaign (AEC). However, despite their attempts to broaden and unify disparate local movements, these organizations largely remain umbrella bodies (Barchiesi 2004).

State responses

In May 2000, South Africa's then President, Thabo Mbeki, addressed the Ebenezer Baptist Church, the congregation of the late Dr Martin Luther King. Mbeki argued that although the

fight against apartheid was over, South Africa 'should continue with this struggle…for social and economic justice for the poor' (Bond 2001: 424). Unfortunately, his rhetorical support for reducing South Africa's vast inequalities did not translate into assisting the organizations that emerged to promote this objective.

While some local governments are responsive to the demands of these new social movements (as is documented in detail below in the case study), the ANC and the central government have been generally hostile to them. They see these new civil society organizations as sources of polarization that impede necessary reforms to make South Africa's economy more competitive internationally. In many ways, instead of being responsive to their demands, the state has worked to stigmatize these organizations, casting them as extremist agitators. They claim that illegal tactics and violent protests, although staples of the anti-apartheid movement, are not justified now that South Africa is a democracy. The central government has thus set up only limited space for sanctioned public participation, portraying the new social movements as a disloyal opposition (Ballard 2005). While South Africa's current president, Jacob Zuma, appears to have more tolerance for their criticisms than his predecessor, the policies have not changed in any dramatic fashion.

The Regulations of Gatherings Act is a particularly useful law for the state to employ to manage protests (Memeza 2006). According to the Act, organizations wishing to hold a protest must apply for a permit at least seven days prior to the event. This enables the state to declare protests they do not want to occur illegal, as happened in many of the cases examined below. The state has even come close to banning some civil society groups, such as Abahlali baseMijondolo (Memeza 2006). Furthermore, the seven-day notice period implicitly suppresses dissent by providing time for the state to defuse the force behind protests.

Existing case studies

A number of case studies exist of these new social movements. The analyses highlight their diverse range, the differing strategies they choose and the varying government responses they provoke. Unfortunately, these studies tend not to employ research designs that attempt to identify the factors that account for the success or failure of advocacy efforts. As a result, it is difficult to generalize about why some movements are more effective than others. For the same reason, these studies generally fail to provide clear and practical advice on how movements can be more successful.

Social movements in Durban have received a significant amount of attention (e.g., Desai 2002, Dwyer 2004). These works offer an enormous amount of detail about the various groups working in Durban, including their leadership, strategies and successes. Desai (2002) presents an extremely detailed account of efforts in Chatsworth, an Asian suburb of Durban,[3] to end evictions and service disconnections in the late 1990s and early 2000s, as well as the Durban municipal government's response to these efforts. Dwyer (2004) focuses significant attention on the difficulties the CCF encountered in attempting to build a larger and more unified social movement from the collection of smaller ones in Durban. Although the CCF tried to coordinate and unify the large number of local movements in Durban, there was significant resistance to such efforts among a number of groups and, as a result, it largely remains an umbrella organization. Thus, while the CCF organizes protests, links groups to each other and provides a forum for sharing tactics, civil society organizations in Durban largely remain focused on their own conflicts. For these reasons, the CCF's efforts have

brought visibility to the problems many in Durban face today, but have had little success in creating a unified social movement in the municipality.

Social movements in the Western Cape have also received a significant amount of attention, especially those of the AEC and its affiliates. The AEC formed in 2001 largely in response to water disconnections, evictions and general discontent with the ANC's economic policies (Oldfield and Stokke 2006). Like the CCF, the AEC is largely an umbrella group linking a diverse range of community organizations. The manner in which separate affiliates choose to mobilize varies greatly. Broadly speaking, the most common strategies are protests, engaging with government officials and/or suing the government.

The United Civic Front's (UCF) campaign in Valhalla Park presents a failed example of using protest to foment change, but a successful one of using the courts to enforce rights. The UCF occupied state-owned land because the Cape Town municipal government refused to provide sanitation and water to their informal settlement. The UCF sued the Cape Town City Council to force it to provide these services. The court agreed with the UCF and rejected the council's appeal, providing a major victory for their efforts (Stokke and Oldfield 2004).

The Mandela Park Anti-Eviction Campaign (MPAEC), another AEC affiliate, is a good example of both the desire of some groups to remain autonomous, and the limits of a protest-only approach. While the group mobilized numerous protests in opposition to housing evictions, it was reluctant to participate in actions that would pull them away from the force of their collective mobilization or cause them to lose their autonomy. Their occupation of banks and public spaces, and their violent protests provoked a repressive state response. Despite these setbacks, the Mandela Park activists refused to do anything to risk their autonomy (Stokke and Oldfield 2004: 18–19):

> We don't accept money from anybody for a simple reason: we don't want them to direct us. We are on the ground. We will direct our struggle. So we don't want NGOs to rule us or to act on our behalf, because they don't have our interests at heart. They have their own interests at heart. We understand that and I always make it clear that the NGOs that get paid to be in the struggle - we don't. We are forced to be in the struggle because of our circumstances at home. [See above: Stokke and Oldfield 2004: 18-19)]

Due to their lack of resources and reluctance to work with other organizations, the MPAEC remains weak, isolated and largely ineffective.

Analyses of social movements from other parts of South Africa corroborate that no clear link exists between mobilization and more accountable government:

- Khutsong, a township in Merafong Municipality, Gauteng Province, demonstrates that protests can be counterproductive at times. In Kutsong, protests devastated the community because they caused fear rather than a perception that people were mobilizing for productive purposes, and little changed as a result (Johnstone and Bernstein 2007).
- Protests in Phumelela, Free State Province, show that even when protest leads to a positive government response, creating substantive change remains difficult. Violent Protests in Phumelela did result in improved public administration, but achieved no substantive changes in living conditions (Johnstone and Bernstein 2007).

- Protests in Phomolang, Gauteng Province, are an example of engagement failing to elicit a positive government response but protest succeeding. The community initially chose peaceful efforts to urge the municipal government to improve governance and make services more affordable through a letter writing campaign and attempts to meet peacefully with municipal officials in 2003 and 2004. However, by 2005, the community had changed tactics and begun to protest. This change in strategy was successful in obtaining more affordable services and improving the pace of housing construction (Botes et al. 2007).

Research fails to offer practical advice

It is clear that the effectiveness of these new social movements varies considerably. Many organizations focus solely on protest, while others are open to dialogue with their local government, and still others attempt to use the courts to press their demands. Some efforts elicit a positive government response, others a negative one, and some receive no response at all. Research on civil society in contemporary South Africa has thus provided valuable qualitative accounts of the country's emergent civil society dynamics. While the ethnographies of these movements provide great detail on how they organize and operate, as well as the state reactions they trigger, they rarely provide pragmatic advice outside of broad generalizations, such as acknowledging the importance of coordination and diverse campaign tactics. Because they lack a coherent research design, it is difficult to generalize about what approaches are more useful and why. Thus, we are missing practical research that can help strengthen these new movements. We show how research can make such a contribution in section 4 below.

3. The successes and failures of the Westcliff Flats Residents Association

This section examines the successes and failures of two WFRA advocacy campaigns to elicit greater accountability. After a narrative account of the campaigns, we attempt to determine why the association was successful in one area, securing better access to housing, electricity, and water, but unsuccessful in eradicating drugs and drug dealers from the community.

The WFRA is a community-based organization in Chatsworth, a largely Asian suburb of Durban, South Africa. The Durban municipal government began to force Asians to settle in Chatsworth in the early 1960s as part of a wider effort to create racially homogeneous neighbourhoods (Desai 2002). Chatsworth is comprised of 14 sub-divisions of varying levels of income. Westcliff is one of the poorer ones and the community formed the WFRA in 1998 as a response to housing evictions, electricity and water disconnections, and rising rents. The WFRA is a highly structured organization. Its leadership consists of a Chair, a Vice-Chair, a Secretary and a Treasurer. It also has 12 working committee members. Members of the WFRA elect the leadership and the organization holds weekly meetings that typically 100 people attend. At the meetings, the WFRA leaders present their ongoing work, solicit community concerns and inform the residents of Westcliff about relevant municipal issues, such as changes to the price of electricity or water. While South Africa's social, political and economic context helps explain why the WFRA came into existence, examining the organization's efforts and the government responses they provoked are critical for understanding why they succeeded in one area but failed in the other.

The research design we employed not only allowed us to ascertain the factors that account for the WFRA's ability to achieve greater accountability in one area and its failure in another,

but also enables us to provide practical advice on how civil society organizations can be more effective. By examining the same organization, in the same community, at the same point in time confronting two different issues, we are able to hold constant a wide range of factors that can account for the differing outcomes of these efforts, such as organizational strength, social, economic, and political context, and institutional variations. Such a research design limits its applicability to different contexts (i.e., limits its external validity), but this trade-off is inevitable if we want to conduct research that can provide useful insights.

Success: The campaign for better housing and services

As is noted above, many social movements in contemporary South Africa emerged as a result of the effects of the ANC's neoliberal policies. The WFRA is a good example of how and why this occurred. In the late 1990s, fiscal austerity programmes at the local level led to rising rents and prices for basic services, such as electricity and water, reductions in income assistance grants, and evictions and service disconnections for those in arrears. Combined with South Africa's chronic poverty and unemployment problems, these policies had a devastating effect in Westcliff. A community survey in June 1999, conducted by the Institute for Black Research, the Concerned Citizens' Group and the WFRA, made the scale of the community's economic problems clear:

- 76 per cent of the community lived below the poverty line, at least 62 per cent of households did not have enough income to buy sufficient food and 14 per cent had no income at all.
- 41 per cent of the households received state-provided welfare grants.
- The unemployment rate was 58 per cent (40% officially unemployed and a further 18% classified as 'housewives', but who were seeking employment).
- Housing conditions in the community were appalling.

Because most families lived in dire economic conditions, the residents of Westcliff could not afford to pay more in rent or for services when these costs rose and their social grants were cut. Like many other social movements in South Africa, the WFRA emerged in the context of a local economic crisis. However, it was not an economic crisis alone: economic hardship manifested itself as a political crisis. South Africa's democratic transition was supposed to increase government accountability, but the municipal government was not responsive to their needs but hostile to them.

The campaign to end housing evictions and obtain affordable services began as a reaction to an unanticipated problem: the attempted eviction of Vasie Williams by the Durban municipal government from her government-owned flat in 1997. At that time there was no organization in the neighbourhood that could help her respond. Moreover, as the community had not experienced this type of action since South Africa's democratic transition in 1994, they did not know how to respond. As in much of South Africa, the residents of Westcliff believed that democracy was supposed to end repressive and unaccountable government, but this did not seem to be happening. Despite lacking knowledge of how to make the government more responsive to their needs, members of the community wanted to help, but they had only limited success in attempting to keep Williams in her flat. Specifically, they were able to shift control of the apartment to Williams from her unreliable husband, but this was only a temporary solution as she was unable to afford the

monthly rent. This was the first of many partial successes the community would experience in its fight to end evictions and service disconnections.

At the same time as members of the community were attempting to find a more durable solution for Williams, in 1998, the municipal government cut social assistance and child maintenance grants by one-third, raised rents on government-owned flats, and began disconnecting people who were in arrears with their electricity and water bills and evicting those who could not afford their rent. The government's indifference to the dire economic conditions in the community catalysed the residents of Westcliff into formal organization and they created WFRA. Creating an association, however, was far from knowing how to organize effectively. As a result, the WFRA's efforts at that time were characterized by learning by doing. Their initial strategies were to engage directly with municipal officials and elected ward councillors, to protest, and to learn how to (illegally) restore electricity and water connections after disconnections.[4] These early forms of organization were largely reactive, occurring when the municipality instigated an eviction or a disconnection. The WFRA also began to frame their efforts in simple narratives, such as right versus wrong, and the community versus the government.

Protesting and illegally reconnecting did not succeed in ending the crisis, but it did provide an early sense of empowerment. The former was especially courageous since municipal officials often showed up with the police, armed security and/or attack dogs to evict people or disconnect their services. These events were often violent. Standing up to the intimidation created a sense of empowerment and solidarity.

Engaging with municipal officials and political parties, by contrast, was ineffective and therefore demoralizing at first. It was clear that it was going to take more than elections to bring democracy to Westcliff. In particular, Westcliff's ward councillors, Nunkumar Rajaram of the Minority Front (a largely Asian party) and Sharmaine Morar of the ANC, were not helpful to the community's efforts to stop the evictions and disconnections.[5] More broadly, the WFRA found that working with political parties was not productive as they were generally distant from the community. From the point of view of the community, local politicians were people who came to their neighbourhood just before elections, made many promises and promptly forgot about them after the election. Since elected officials appeared indifferent to the problems in Westcliff, municipal officials also had no incentive to address them.

The relationship between the WFRA and political parties in Chatsworth, however, is more complex than a simple narrative of indifferent politicians suggests. The WFRA encountered two challenges in pushing elected local officials and political parties more generally to be responsive to their demands. First, while the local council was (and still is) dominated by the ANC, Westcliff's ward councillor represented the MF, a weak opposition party. Because their councillor came from a small opposition party, he did not have good access to municipal resources or much political power. Second, Westcliff is a small and poor neighbourhood in a somewhat wealthier ward. As a result, the concerns of the average voter in the ward were rather different than the concerns of the average resident of Westcliff, and many in the ward were unsympathetic to (or ignorant of) their problems. In addition, due to its small size in the ward, politicians could win ward council elections without needing the votes of the Westcliff's residents. Since Westcliff at that time seemed like a political constituency of

negligible interest, political parties felt that ignoring their concerns was not a politically risky strategy. For similar reasons, municipal officials could also ignore the WFRA's demands.[6]

In 1999, the WFRA began to have more visible successes. The catalyst was Fatima Meer's emergence in the community. Meer was a famous Asian anti-apartheid campaigner and in 1999 she came to Chatsworth to generate support for the ANC in the run-up to the general election. Meer was unfamiliar with the difficulties that the residents of Westcliff faced in securing access to housing, electricity and water, and the general government hostility towards the needs of the community. After seeing the plight of the community, Meer decided to stop campaigning for the ANC and assist the residents of Westcliff instead.

Meer introduced two innovations to the WFRA's efforts, helping the organization to formulate clear demands and strategies for engaging with municipal officials, and teaching the community how to use their rights, especially to access to housing. While the former was not successful at first, Meer was able to show the WFRA how to engage forcefully with municipal government officials through her strident demands and refusal to back down in the face of hostility. Even though she did not succeed in achieving any policy changes through her actions, watching Meer empowered members of the WFRA because they learned how to confront their government. By contrast, the latter strategy – using the courts to stop evictions – was a demonstrable success. Meer informed the WFRA that evicting someone who was in rent arrears was illegal according to the South African Constitution, and showed the organization how to file lawsuits to stop it. The lawsuits never came to trial and in 2000 the municipality stopped attempting to evict people in Westcliff. In retrospect this was the WFRA's first major victory, but this was not clear at the time.

Nonetheless, although the evictions stopped after 2000, the disconnections continued and the WFRA resorted to the same strategies to stop them: engagement, protest and the courts. Interestingly, the method that proved most effective at stopping the evictions, the courts, was ineffective at stopping disconnections. Instead, the association's legal advisers suggested that engagement and protest were likely to be more effective because the illegality of the disconnections was less clear than it was for evictions. Thus, the WFRA took to the streets to demand an end to the disconnections and continued its illegal electricity and water reconnections.

From the campaign to stop evictions, the community also learned that elections were a time when they could press their demands more forcefully as elected officials, political parties and the municipal government were more amenable to their demands – or at least less hostile to them – during campaigns. This proved especially helpful in 2004 when campaigning for the next set of elections began. While the ANC did not attempt to gain support in Westcliff, it did solicit votes in Bayview, a neighbouring community.[7] In a community meeting in Bayview, the Deputy Mayor announced that the municipality was going to renovate the municipally owned residencies in their neighbourhood but not those in Westcliff. The WFRA disrupted the meeting, presenting their demands to the Deputy Mayor. Soon after, the municipality held another meeting announcing renovations in a much wider geographical area, including Westcliff, which constituted another victory for the WFRA in achieving more responsive governance. Unfortunately, the municipality underestimated the scale of the repairs the flats needed. As a result, the renovations were not successful and the WFRA kicked the contractors out of Westcliff in 2006.

Moreover, even though the municipality agreed to renovate government-owned housing in Westcliff, disconnections continued. In 2007 and 2008, the municipality attempted to end the problem of arrears by installing prepaid electricity and water meters. Prepaid meters shut off the flow of electricity or water when the pre-paid balance reaches zero. This was highly unpopular in Westcliff as residents understood that lack of affordable water and electricity would now lead to permanent disconnection, and the residents damaged the meters in order to signal their dislike of them.[8] The municipality, in turn, retaliated through widespread disconnections, sparking mass protests from the residents of Westcliff.

Subsequent to these protests, the municipality agreed to a meeting with WFRA. The association offered a compromise to the municipal government: if the latter placed a moratorium on disconnections and evictions, the WFRA would end its civil disobedience and peacefully engage with the municipal government to address their problems. Much to the shock of the WFRA, the municipal government agreed to their demands and to this day has honoured the arrangement. This constructive collaboration has been successful in obtaining housing renovations, establishing a plan for private ownership of renovated municipal flats, and reaching a compromise that the municipality should consider how much people in Westcliff can afford to pay for water and electricity when determining the prices of these services.

From the vantage point of 2010, it is clear that the campaign to end evictions and service disconnections was a clear success. Moreover, the WFRA gained an enormous amount of confidence as a result of securing these gains. Unfortunately, the organization has learned the hard way that success in one avenue does not directly translate into success in a different one. It is to the failed efforts to rid the community of drugs and drug dealers that we now turn.

Failure: The campaign to rid Westcliff of drugs and drug dealers

At the same time as the WFRA was going from success to success in obtaining better housing and more affordable water and electricity, drugs and drug dealers were becoming an increasingly serious problem in Westcliff. To this day, the WFRA has achieved only limited success in addressing this issue. While the threat that drugs pose in the community today has abated somewhat compared to a few years ago, this is a result of factors unrelated to the WFRA's efforts to address the issue and, as a result, the situation could deteriorate at any time.[9] In addition, while the dangers drug dealers create have diminished somewhat, the problems associated with drug addiction remain.

In 2002, a serious drug epidemic began in Westcliff that continues today. This is when Sugars hit the streets of Westcliff. Sugars is a cheap and highly addictive heroin derivative, analogous to crack cocaine. The drug is a combination of heroin and a caking agent, such as powdered rat poison, cooked into small rocks to be smoked. The drug is especially addictive because withdrawal causes intense physical pain. Sugars has divided the community against itself, led to a wave of crime in Westcliff and destroyed numerous lives and families. The WFRA attempted to tackle the drug problem in Westcliff. Unfortunately, it had little success as attempts to protest, use the right to have the government enforce drug laws, and engage government officials all failed to achieve positive changes.

Most important, the WFRA has, for a number of reasons, been unable to frame the drug issue as a simple narrative of right versus wrong or us versus them. As a result, it has been

unable to create a sense of communal solidarity around the issue. One reason for this is that the drug dealers are part of the community. They employ many people, including those (such as pensioners) who do not use the drug, as runners, lookouts and to store the drugs. In addition, their relatives live in the community. Second, fear is an effective deterrent to engaging with the issue in a public way. Drug dealers have guns and know how to use them. This was made forcefully clear to one of the authors,[10] when her family came very close to being victims of a drive-by shooting in an attempt to dissuade her from organizing around the issue. Equally important is the fact that addicts and those employed by the drug dealers can coerce others into not engaging with the issue by threatening retaliation. Third, many people do not wish to talk about the issue because they do not want to bring shame on their families. Parents, spouses, siblings and children are often embarrassed that members of their family are addicted to drugs and do not want to discuss the damage it causes. The stigma that many members of the community who are not using the drug attach to those who are – especially if they are outside their family – reinforces this embarrassment. Finally, there is no consensus on who is responsible for the drug problem. People blame a variety of actors, including the police, the dealers and the addicts. For these reasons, the community has not been able to address the problem of drugs by protesting or engaging with municipal officials in public ways because no sense of unity exists on how to fight the issue.

Using their rights has also been ineffective in addressing the drug problem. Members of the community know where the drug dealers live and drugs are highly visible in Westcliff. As a result, the South Africa Police Service (SAPS) and the courts would have no problem arresting and prosecuting the dealers if they had any incentive to do so. Unfortunately, SAPS does not enforce drug laws in Chatsworth because the drug dealers not only have guns, they also have money and the SAPS officers in Chatsworth are easily corrupted, in part due to low pay and in part due to tolerance of corruption within the police force. This corruption is highly visible in Westcliff, as SAPS officers accept bribes from drug dealers in public. SAPS officers occasionally arrest people involved with the drugs trade, but detainees quickly make bail. In addition, even if cases make it to court, drug dealers also bribe court officials and thus cases rarely go to trial.

The community has little capacity to demand that SAPS and the courts enforce drug laws because these officials are accountable to the central government, not the municipal government. As a result, pressuring municipal officials has not been an effective strategy for addressing corruption in SAPS and the courts. Moreover, because the WFRA is a small community-based organization, it is unable to pressure the central government over the issue. Even though the Durban Metro Police are attempting to carry out a more aggressive campaign against drugs in the community, their arrests are largely ineffective because SAPS and the courts must prosecute the crimes.

For these reasons, the WFRA sees no entry points to fight the drugs problem in the community. Consequently, it has not achieved even incremental victories around the issue and thus no sense of empowerment exists around the problem. Instead, the community feels disempowered as the problem seems too big to tackle. Disempowerment, in turn, discourages action, further fuelling a sense of despair. For these reasons, to date the WFRA has not addressed the issue even though it continues to tear the community apart.

4. Analysis: Why success in one area but failure in the other?

Two broad factors explain the successful campaign to end evictions and service disconnections compared to the failed attempts to rid the community of drugs and drug dealers: community response and democracy. The role of each factor is discussed below. We also examine how breaking a large problem into a series of small ones and feedback loops affected the WFRA's success in pressuring the municipal government to be more responsive to housing and service needs, compared to the failed efforts to rid Westcliff of drugs and drug dealers.

When the housing evictions and service disconnections began, people in the community readily identified with the victims of these actions. They witnessed their neighbours, relatives and friends fight with municipal officials to keep their homes and access to water and electricity. Moreover, many people in the community could imagine themselves in a similar position and wanted to help. This led to a sense of communal struggle and a simple framing of the issue as right versus wrong and us versus them. Both these factors facilitated the WFRA's ability to organize and incorporate the community into their activities. As a result, more intense efforts by the municipality to enforce disconnections and evictions strengthened the sense of communal solidarity and its determination to fight back.

By contrast, drugs have split the community against itself. Although on a cognitive level people are aware that this is an issue of right versus wrong, fear and shame around the issue prevent this cognitive realization from manifesting itself in a sense of communal struggle. Rather than uniting Westcliff around a problem, drugs are tearing families and the community apart. People do not want to engage out of fear of retribution and/or because they do not want to address their family problems in highly visible public forums. In addition, no consensus exists on who is responsible for the problem. Consequently, while evictions and disconnections brought members of the community together, drugs and drug dealers fracture the community.

Equally important, while democracy was critical to securing access to better housing and affordable services, it is not working to rid the community of drugs. Two central parts of the campaign to end the evictions and disconnections were the community learning how to use their rights to keep their homes, and it realizing that elections created opportunities to press its demands for greater government accountability. Unfortunately, democracy is not working to rid the community of drugs because dealers can bribe SAPS and the courts not to enforce drugs laws. Corruption undermines the ability of Westcliff's residents to exercise their democratic rights to have the police and courts uphold the law. One particularly unfortunate consequence of the situation is that it highlights the close links between corruption and insecurity: because the police and the courts are not enforcing the law, the residents of Westcliff live in fear of the drug dealers and the crime that surrounds their activities.

The case studies also highlight that success in the campaign to end disconnections and evictions did not occur at once. Rather, by necessity, the WFRA broke a big problem into a series of smaller, more manageable ones, and achieved incremental success (as well as suffering numerous setbacks). This was not a conscious choice, especially at the beginning. Instead, the community was attempting to resolve certain problems at specific points in time with the resources they had (e.g., how can we block one eviction today?). While the cumulative effect of these efforts was a major victory, it is important to recognize that in

retrospect a large part of the WFRA's strategy was to address a large problem they could not tackle by breaking it up into smaller ones that they could.

Finally, comparing the WFRA's efforts in the two areas demonstrates that problems in the community are dynamic, not static, situations. This is important to recognize because the different reactions to the two problems created virtuous and vicious circles. The sense of community that the fight against evictions and disconnections engendered and the empowerment that resulted from learning how to use people's rights led the WFRA to a series of incremental victories and occasional larger ones. Success, in turn, encouraged more action. Consequently, the fight to end evictions and disconnections was a cycle of empowerment.

Lack of action on ridding the community of drugs and drug dealers, by contrast, created a cycle of disempowerment. Rather than fostering a sense of community, the drug problem has isolated the residents of Westcliff from each other. In addition, because SAPS and the courts are corruptible, people are not able to enforce their rights. Both these factors discourage people from taking action. Inaction, in turn, deepens feelings of alienation and perceptions that rights are unenforceable. Thus, while the cycle of empowerment caused members of the WFRA to feel they could accomplish ambitious goals, large parts of the community perceive drugs to be a problem that is too large to tackle. A sense of resignation exists around the issue. Many believe that the drug dealers have won and the community must do its best to live among them, even as drugs continue to destroy the lives of friends, neighbours, and relatives.[11] This sense of hopelessness is tangible in the community.

5. Providing practical advice

Do the case studies provide practical advice for the WFRA and similar organizations? One point they highlight is that the fight against drugs and drug dealers in Westcliff in many ways is more difficult than the one to stop evictions and service disconnections:

- The struggle for the latter brought the community together, the scourge of the former is tearing it apart.
- The fight for the latter showed the WFRA how to exercise its democratic rights. The fight against the former has shown it the limits of those rights.
- The campaign to end evictions and service disconnections empowered the community, while drugs are disempowering it.

For these reasons, on the surface it may seem that no clear lessons apply from the fight for better housing and more affordable services to the fight against drugs and drug dealers. Tackling the fear and shame that surrounds the problem is not easy. In addition, creating a sense of communal struggle against the issue is difficult when there is no consensus on who is to blame for the problem. Moreover, pressuring SAPS and the courts to enforce the law is beyond the scope of a small community-based organization as tolerance for corruption comes from the senior levels of the government. At the core, a lack of obvious entry points to the issue means that there are no clear ways to break the cycle of disempowerment.

However, this would be an excessively bleak analysis. It is important to recall that a similar sense of hopelessness pervaded in the late 1990s when the municipal government was hostile to the needs of the community. In addition, as with the fight against drugs, the community

initially was very unsure about what to do and achieved only partial successes for the first few years of the campaign. In fact, the first major victory, which was clear only in retrospect, was the moratorium on evictions, which occurred three years after the community began to organize to stop them. Learning how success in the fight against evictions and service disconnections can help in the fight against drugs requires examining how the community responded to the former at the time events were occurring, rather than in retrospect.

Viewed from this perspective, the WFRA did not attempt to resolve all the issues surrounding evictions and disconnections at once. Instead, it did what it could with the resources available to it at the time. An important lesson from the WFRA's success in the anti-eviction and disconnection campaigns is that breaking the cycle of disempowerment began with thinking about how it could turn a big problem into smaller, more manageable ones. The WFRA did not seek greater accountability in all areas, just over the most exigent ones it could address.

In order to examine the drug problem from this perspective, we convened a meeting of a few members of the WFRA in May 2010. Instead of asking how we could address the issue all at once, we asked what smaller actions could the community take to help break the cycle of disempowerment. A few manageable activities did emerge. An important insight was that very few people seek to become addicted to a drug that will ruin their lives and stigmatize their families. As a result, one possible small victory could be to engage youth before they start using drugs. Boredom, in particular, is a problem for youth in Westcliff. Constructive activities, such as sports and the arts, are thus a way to fill their time and offer them activities that provide positive reinforcement. Working with schools to discourage youth from dropping out, and organizing after-school activities would be similar ways to ensure that Westcliff's youth have alternatives to passing time on street corners. While kicking drug dealers out of Westcliff is not a realistic goal for the WFRA at this time, creating drama clubs and sports leagues is a reasonable one.

A second area in which the WFRA could break a large problem into a smaller, more manageable one is working with the Metro Durban police. Although they lack the capacity to prosecute drugs crimes, their arrests have had a positive influence in the community. From our meeting, two potentially constructive ways to work with the Durban Metro police emerged: first, that the WFRA could ask the police to publicize the anonymous crime reporting hotline in Westcliff; and, second, to request the Durban Metro police to set up a satellite police station in Westcliff. Again, while neither of these will resolve the larger problem of drug dealers in the community, these actions could reduce some of the tertiary problems they create.

It is true that these solutions do not address the larger problem of the drugs and drug dealers in the community. At the same time, however, the initial success in the fight against evictions, transferring ownership of Vasie Williams's flat from her husband to herself, did not resolve the problems of evictions. Rather, incremental successes encouraged further action, creating a cycle of empowerment. What the research in this paper highlights is not that community-based organizations/NGOs can translate large victories in one area directly to a different area. Instead, it shows that the WFRA resolved the problem of securing better access to housing and more affordable services, in part, by breaking one big problem into a series of smaller, more manageable ones and building on partial victories. This lesson can be applied to the problem of drugs in Westcliff. It is possible that the WFRA can better address

the problem of drugs by thinking about how to break the cycle of disempowerment, rather than how to resolve the problem once and for all. What is most important is that we learn this lesson by examining the WFRA's own actions. We can apply lessons learned from the fight for better housing and access to affordable services to the fight against drugs. To do so requires viewing the problem from the perspective of what the WFRA can do at this time with the resources it possesses, as it did with evictions and service disconnections, rather than from the perspective of a binary outcome being the only option .

A comparison of the two campaigns reveals three more general lessons about how to design more effective programmes: achieving greater accountability is a non-linear process, successes in one area may not easily be translated into other areas, and psychological and social factors can inhibit a community's capacity to address problems effectively.

- *Greater accountability is a non-linear process.* The case studies show that democracy does not progress evenly. This is most evident with respect to the courts. The same court system that guaranteed the residents of Westcliff their right to housing failed to protect their right to live in a community free of drug dealers. Consequently, not only can accountability vary across units of government (e.g., the municipal government in Durban versus SAPS), but accountability can vary by issue within the same unit of government.

- *Success in one area may not easily be translated into others.* Depending on the issue, one could conclude that the WFRA is a highly effective organization or an extremely ineffective one. That success in one campaign may not easily transfer into the ability of an organization to effect change in another area is important to understand. While practitioners have long recognized the problem of scaling-up, they have paid less attention to the possibility that a similar problem could exist when an effective organization attempts to broaden its focus. This is valuable to understand because failure could be worse than not trying at all if it demoralizes members of the organization, thus frustrating future attempts to organize.

- *There may be psychological and social impediments to confronting a problem.* Practitioners tend to focus on the economic and/or political roots of community problems and the solutions tend to derive from this premise. Thus, action typically focuses on capacity building, changing incentives and similar actions to create pressure to resolve an exigent problem. Yet these were only one constraint in the WFRA's attempts to fight drugs. The WFRA was not able to address the problem of drugs in Westcliff in part because psychological and social factors inhibited the community from confronting the issue. In many ways, the reluctance to talk about the problem parallels difficulties many communities have in addressing HIV/AIDS. People working on the illness have found that before efforts to fight it can be effective, they must first reduce the stigma around the problem. A similar problem exists in Westcliff. Residents do not need the police and/or the courts to get drug dealers out of the community since they could kick them out themselves. Yet, because of the stigma around the issue and because the drug dealers have embedded themselves into the community, psychological and social factors inhibit the WFRA from taking this more direct route to confronting the problem. While there are no easy solutions to this dilemma, it is important to recognize that psychological and social factors may inhibit action on some difficult problems.

6. Conclusions

This paper has compared the WFRA's successful efforts to stop evictions and service disconnections with its unsuccessful attempt to rid Westcliff of drugs and drug dealers. We identified two factors that account for these differing outcomes. First, while evictions and disconnections created a sense communal struggle, drugs are isolating members of the community from each other. Second, whereas the WFRA was able to leverage democratic rights in the fight against the former, those same rights have been ineffective in dealing with the latter. As a consequence, despite the impressive gains the organization made in ending evictions and service disconnections, it has not been successful in fighting the problems drugs and drug dealers are creating in the community. Rather than feeling empowered, residents feel disempowered and believe the problem is too big for them to resolve.

Beyond explaining the factors that account for the differing outcomes, our research also provides practical advice for the WFRA in addressing Westcliff's drugs problem. First, the fight to end evictions and disconnections did not occur all at once, but through many small (and a few large) victories, amid many setbacks. The community could not address all of the issues at once, but could break a big problem into smaller, more manageable ones. Second, achieving even incremental victories created a sense of empowerment that encouraged future action. By contrast, not taking action to fight drugs and drug dealers has created a sense of hopelessness and disempowerment. In combination, these factors suggest that the WFRA can help break the cycle of disempowerment by looking for small victories that can be achieved, such as engaging with youth before they start using drugs. While minor actions are unlikely to resolve most of the larger problems drugs are creating in the near future, they can help break the cycle of disempowerment, which is necessary to encourage future, more ambitious actions.

Although the narrow focus of our research design limits its applicability to other settings, future research can build on the methodology we employed to provide other types of practical advice for civil society organizations. For example, researchers could examine why dissimilar strategies by two organizations in similar communities achieved the same outcome. Moreover, analysts could examine the effects of the same strategies in dissimilar communities. It is also possible to examine why the same strategies adopted by the same organization achieved divergent outcomes at different points in time. Future research might also examine reactions to advocacy campaigns from the perspective of local government. In combination, each of these narrow focuses could generate a significant amount of useful information that could help civil society organizations to be more effective.

For many years, policymakers have understood that good research is indispensable for creating effective policies. Research on civil society, by contrast, tends not to provide such practical information. This is somewhat surprising given the large amounts of money that foreign aid organizations spend on building the capacity of these organizations. In this paper we have attempted to demonstrate how research can provide such practical advice. We hope our efforts catalyse further work in this area.

ENDNOTES

[1] We use the terms civil society and social movements interchangeably.

[22] Civil society has also mobilized around South Africa's HIV/AIDS crisis, but these movements are beyond the scope of this paper.

[3] In South Africa, the term Asian refers to those of South Asian, not East Asian or South East Asian descent, such as contemporary Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan.

[4] The WFRA engaged with a number of municipal officials. Among the most prominent were the Deputy City Manager, the Manager of Housing for Administration, the Manager of Housing for Maintenance and Upgrading, and the heads of the electricity, revenue and water departments.

[5] Voters cast two ballots in local elections in South Africa, a single-member district ballot and an at-large proportional representation (PR) ballot. Rajaram was elected on the single member district ballot and Morar was elected on the PR one. The ANC subsequently assigned Morar to Westcliff.

[6] Westcliff only became a politically important area to address when the WFRA brought publicity to their problems.

[7] Bayview and Westcliff belong to different wards in Chatsworth. Since the population of Bayview forms a significantly larger percentage of its ward population than does Chatsworth, politicians exert greater efforts to solicit votes in the former than the latter.

[8] Although it is possible to illegally restore connections to prepaid meters, it is a much more difficult and dangerous procedure than for non-prepaid ones.

[9] The threat from drugs has subsided somewhat for two reasons. First, turf wars between dealers are no longer occurring. Second, the Durban Metro Police force has started taking a more aggressive stance against drugs (see below).

[10] Orlean Naidoo

[11] In fact, the WFRA has even gone so far as to seek the assistance of drug dealers in fighting some drug-related issues. In the past, many drug users stole the copper water pipes that carry water to people's homes and sold them to smelters in order to purchase drugs. The WFRA complained to the drug dealers and the thefts ended. While this was a victory of sorts (it ended the pipe thefts), engaging with the drug dealers did not provide a sense of empowerment, but rather reinforced the perception that the dealers were stronger than the WFRA.

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