Philanthropic and Civil Society Responses to Xenophobia in Durban 2008

Samantha Schwarer and Welcome Mwelase

Young Researchers Philanthropy Initiative •

STEPPING INTO THE BREACH

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Young Researchers Philanthropy Initiative

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The Centre for Civil Society (CCS) Young Researchers Philanthropy Initiative is funded by a grant from the CS Mott Foundation the purpose of which is to entrench philanthropy as an academic discipline and afford young African scholars an opportunity to carry out research and to publish within the discipline. The research upon which this paper is based is that of a small scale research initiative focusing on philanthropic and civil society responses to the 2008 xenophobic outbreak in the Durban area. This paper may be re-worked, peer reviewed and further published at a later date. The research for this paper was carried out by two Masters Candidates in the School of Development Studies (SDS), Samantha Schwarer and Welcome Mwelase.

ISBN: 978-1-86840-705-7

The views presented are not necessarily those of the CCS. All the CCS's research reports are available online at http://www.ukzn.ac.za/ccs.

Edited by Shauna Mottiar and Catherine Sutherland
Acknowledgements to Brij Maharaj
Cover Photograph by Delphin Mmbibya – depicts displaced foreign nationals during the xenophobia crisis spending the night outside Durban City Hall 10 – 11 July 2008
Design and printing by The Library
Johannesburg
April 2010
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Acronyms and Abbreviations

CRC – Children’s Rights Centre
DAAX – Durban Action Against Xenophobia
DHA – Department of Home Affairs
DFA – Department of Foreign Affairs
DSD – Department of Social Development
LHR – Lawyers for Human Rights
MCC – Mennonite Central Council
RSPN – Refugee Service Providers Network
UNHCR – United Nations High Commission for Refugees
Stepping into the Breach

Introduction

After the outbreak of xenophobic violence and conflict in Gauteng in May of 2008, reports began to emerge of a similar violence in KwaZulu-Natal, and particularly in the City of Durban. This resulted in the displacement of approximately 32 000 people, mostly foreign nationals who started to flow into police stations and churches around Durban seeking refuge.

In this paper we focus on the responses made by philanthropy/civil society towards the impact of xenophobic related violence and displacement in the Durban area. We seek to understand some of the ways in which philanthropy/civil society has responded to the xenophobic related violence, conflict and displacement in communities around Durban. We ask if philanthropy, in this context, is a capable, viable, and efficient strategy for social justice. We proceed from the assumption that philanthropy, in this case, embarked upon by various civil society organisations, has the potential to impact on long-term social change by contributing to structural change. We understand philanthropy differently from charity which centres on responding to merely the symptoms of a particular problem:

“Social justice philanthropy involves giving to create a more equitable distribution of power – to truly reform institutions so that the need for chronic charity is eliminated” (Hunsaker and Hanzl, 2003:4).

In this context, the paper explores the perspectives and experiences of displaced people in Durban with regard to xenophobia. We try to gain an understanding of how displaced victims of xenophobia view the response to the xenophobic crisis by civil society and government alike. We focus on victims of xenophobia who were still displaced or reintegrated at the time of the research. We do not include xenophobic victims who were repatriated. We examine the role played by civil society and
philanthropy as well as the role played by government at both local and provincial level in dealing with the xenophobia crisis.

**Methodology**

A qualitative research approach was adopted to understand perceptions of the various stakeholders to the xenophobic crisis in Durban. The research study was limited to particular areas in Durban.

Surveys were conducted with displaced people in Albert Park as well as with reintegrated former displaced people in Cato Crest. Twenty interviews were conducted in Albert Park using a questionnaire and making sure to include both males and females. Five in-depth interviews were conducted with reintegrated people (both males and females) in Cato Crest. The sample size differed between these two groups owing to the fact that the Albert Park displaced were more geographically accessible than those reintegrated in Cato Crest. Most of the displaced who were interviewed requested that they remain anonymous. As the research for this report was conducted during September, October and November of 2008, it was generally difficult to locate and interview people who had been displaced by xenophobic incidents in Durban. According to civil society organisations that assisted during the crisis period, the bulk of those displaced were undocumented migrants, who were repatriated during May and June of 2008. It was therefore not possible to interview those people. However, during the course of the research, it was reported by several community residents and leaders that people who had been repatriated have begun returning to South Africa (October 2008).

Aside from displaced people, in-depth interviews were also conducted with various civil society organisations such as churches and Durban Action Against Xenophobia (DAAX). While most of the civil society organisation representatives agreed to be named, others asked to remain anonymous. In-depth interviews were further conducted with provincial
government at the Department of Home Affairs (DHA) and amongst City of Durban local officials in the Department of Social Development (DSD). In-depth interviews were also conducted with two Durban ward councillors from Chatsworth and Sydenham. These respondents are quoted anonymously.

Background: Summary of Events

**Mid-May 2008** The first xenophobic attacks in Alexandra, Johannesburg are reported in the media.

Within days of the attacks in Alexandra, according to Lawyers for Human Rights (LHR) and the Mennonite Central Council (MCC), the South African Police Services (SAPS) in Durban call in several NGOs to discuss a strategy for prevention of similar attacks in Durban. ‘Hotspots’ are identified and extra policing commenced.

**End May 2008** Before all measures for prevention can be put into place, incidents begin to be reported in the Durban area. LHR and other groups are called to assist a group of displaced people from the Bottlebrush community who are sheltering in the Morton Community Hall. They report that posters have been put up in the Bottlebrush area warning foreigners to leave the community or face attack. Most people request repatriation to their home countries.

Displaced people from the Bottlebrush community are housed at the Refugee Pastoral Care Centre at Emmanuel Cathedral. Before long more displaced people begin to arrive at this and other churches. People come from various communities around Durban, including but not limited to Berea, Umbilo, Isipingo, Red Hill and Inanda. People also start to congregate at the police stations in their communities, notably Cato Manor, Verulam, Mjhebheni, Isipingo, Kwamakhutha and Greenwood Park. The Red Cross begins distributing food, mattresses and blankets donated by the public.
Early June 2008 Several hundred people are voluntarily repatriated to their home countries – mainly Mozambique, Tanzania, Malawi and Zimbabwe. The eThekwini Municipality manages the logistics of repatriation and pays some or all of the costs. Most people travel by bus, and are supplied, where possible, with “care packages” of sandwiches and drinking water by the Red Cross.

End June 2008 Most repatriations are complete. The majority of police stations no longer have people sheltering there. Churches begin to report that they cannot continue to shelter people due to a lack of facilities and resources. Several people begin a re-integration process, with assistance from churches, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), LHR and the MCC. The Red Cross discontinues provision of supplies to churches and other shelters owing to the need to provide assistance to storm victims on the KwaZulu-Natal South Coast.

Early July 2008 The Greyville Methodist Church busses more than forty displaced people to the centre of Durban and leaves them on the steps of City Hall. They claim they can no longer cope with sheltering displaced people and further claim that the City and Province have repeatedly promised to assist but this has not been forthcoming. On 1 July the City moves several people over to the old SPCA site in Cato Manor overnight, housing them in tents but not providing mattresses or other amenities. When a representative of DAAX visits the following morning, there are twenty-seven people on site. It is not known for certain what happened to the others, but it appears that they had voluntarily reintegrated.

Several more people join the group at the SPCA over the course of the next few days. It is clear that the shelter is inadequate, and the City then moves them to a shelter in the city centre. There, they are addressed by LHR and the MCC, who offer financial assistance and guidance in reintegrating. The MCC offers some of the single mothers refuge at a women’s shelter. They refuse. A group of people agree to the reintegration process but subse-
sequently this group splits and, while some reintegrate, others join a group already staying at the shelter. When they hear that the City has paid for their shelter only until the Friday of that week (11 July), this group leaves the shelter on Wednesday 9 July and camps on the steps of City Hall. The Metro Police, apparently under orders from City Manager Mike Sutcliffe, forcibly remove people from City Hall on 10 July, and take them to Albert Park. Civil society groups condemn the City’s treatment of displaced people, and rally around to provide shelter, food and support.

**September 2008** The owner of the tents in which the displaced people are sheltered at Albert Park removes the tents, allegedly after being told that all the displaced people had reintegrated and the tents were no longer needed. A number of people disperse from the site – the MCC reports assisting several of these people to reintegrate. The MCC further reports that this group claims there has been “a split in the leadership” of the Albert Park group and that threats and intimidation have been used to attempt to force people to stay in the park. A group of people, mainly composed of women and children, remains in Albert Park, sheltering under plastic bags.

**November 2008** The police forcibly remove the remaining people from Albert Park, claiming they have been told to clear up the park for an upcoming Imbizo. This raises the issue of xenophobia and the City’s mishandling of displaced people once more.

### Displaced Foreign Nationals

**Displaced in Albert Park**

The first group of displaced people interviewed were from Albert Park. Approximately twenty displaced people (from a group estimated to total around forty five at the time of the research) were interviewed. This group had declined to
reintegrate into the communities they had come from, fearing further xenophobic outbreaks. This group consisted of, by all accounts, the last “holdouts” against reintegration. One week before the interviews took place, the tents in which the group had been living for approximately two months were removed and at this time approximately half of the group opted to reintegrate into local communities. We were unable to locate this “splinter group” in order to confirm their whereabouts.

Most of our respondents were male. Female respondents always had a male present during conversations with us. At times males were presented as interpreters, at other times it was made clear that they were chaperoning the women. This was unsurprising given the highly patriarchal culture of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), country of origin to most respondents in Albert Park (at the time of the research). The majority of the group living in the park, as well as the majority of those who had moved on, were women, many of whom were single mothers. Many respondents indicated that they had other family members among the group, referring to other group members as a sister, brother or aunt. This is consistent with Richard Ballard and Baruti Amisi’s (2006) report that Congolese refugees in Durban tend to organise in ethnic groups and to rely on ethnic and family ties for survival. There were many children living in the park, and we were later told by the MCC that they were requesting the Department of Social Welfare to investigate the circumstances these children were living in. The group may have had some idea that this request had been made, as two respondents mentioned that they did not want their children taken away from them “even by well-meaning people” (Interview Anonymous, Albert Park, September 2008).

Most respondents were Congolese, although two were Burundian. All respondents claimed to have official refugee or asylum seeker status with documentation, although later Sherylle Dass of LHR claimed that this was not true in all cases, and that LHR was assisting the group with applications for refugee status. As Congolese nationals, most of the group should have been eligible for refugee status, so their lack of official documentation may have been the fault of the much
maligned DHA. On average, respondents had been in South Africa for three years, although some had been in the country for up to six years. Most respondents had rented flats or houses prior to being displaced. Almost all respondents said they had run their own informal business, although some had worked for informal businesses run by other Congolese nationals. At least one respondent was doing fairly well in informal importing of clothes and goods from other African countries. Most respondents stated that they had lost their businesses, business stock and all means of earning a living as a result of their displacement. Some respondents claimed to have lost all their worldly goods, having either fled or been locked out of the homes they were renting. Again, this was disputed by LHR, who reported that the couple who claimed their landlord had locked them out of their home and appropriated their possessions had actually removed their belongings to storage but that these could only be retrieved on payment of the storage fees, which LHR had offered to cover (Interview Sherylle Dass, 2008). According to Yasmin Rajah of the MCC, at least two people still living in Albert Park at the time of our interviews were earning a living in informal trading in the Warwick Triangle area, although we could not establish whether these were among our respondents. Nevertheless, several respondents claimed that nobody living in the park was able to work and that members of the group had no means of supporting themselves.

 Threats and Intimidation

Most respondents reported having been threatened or intimidated, and said this was the reason they sought shelter in churches. One respondent said that when he and his brother attempted to reintegrate in the Hammarsdale area, they were attacked and his brother was stabbed. Some respondents claimed that buildings in which they were living had been targeted for “clearing” by locals, and they had fled what they believed to be imminent attack. There is no denying that threats and intimidation did occur, and foreign nationals in Durban had
every reason to believe that violence would flare here just as it had in other South African cities. Fleeing the communities in which they lived was therefore a valid response to the prevailing circumstances.

**Response to Reintegration**

Most respondents indicated that they did not want to return to the communities they had lived in due to fear of attack, saying that they could not be “properly protected” if they returned (Interview Anonymous, Albert Park, September 2008). However, researchers noted that the group remained in Albert Park, in a notoriously dangerous part of Durban, with no security, and had suffered no violence since they had arrived there. While some respondents claimed that passers-by threatened and insulted them, others said they had experienced no xenophobic incidents while living in the park. Several respondents reported that one of the women in the group had been locked into a Portaloo belonging to the church that meets in a tent in the parking lot of Albert Park. However, the details of the story were substantially different each time it was told. This appeared to indicate that an incident did occur, but it is rapidly being mythologized. This mythologizing of xenophobic incidents (dealt with in greater detail below) seems common, and reference was made to it by respondents from civil society organisations as well. One respondent said that he’d been told “Wait until after 2010, then it will be the second wave”. He was unable to give further details of who had said this, where, or when. No other respondents reported such specific comments.

**Assistance**

When asked who had assisted them during the crisis, most respondents replied that the churches had been the only ones willing to assist. They denied any offers of assistance from the City of Durban, and insisted that nobody else had assisted or
offered to assist them. This was directly contradicted by at least one respondent, who later in the interview mentioned having accepted the financial package offered by the MCC for reintegration. When asked why he had not used it to reintegrate, the respondent said “R1500 is not enough to do anything with” (Interview Anonymous, Albert Park, September 2008). The MCC later said that the reintegration package it offered was for rental and food for a specified period, and that it assisted with finding accommodation. It is likely therefore that the respondent in question had received reintegration funding from another party and had confused them with the MCC. LHR, the MCC, DAAX and several other organisations and private individuals had in fact been actively assisting this group of people both prior to and during their time in Albert Park. Respondents’ reluctance to acknowledge this assistance may have been either to further the image of the group as marginalised and abandoned, or as a result of declining relationships with these organisations. All three organisations mentioned above reported that by the time of our interviews they had virtually ceased contact with the group in Albert Park (except in the cases of individuals who had privately approached them for assistance). This was due to a breakdown in relations.

Disappointment in Local Government

Respondents indicated their extreme disappointment at the treatment meted out to them by the City of Durban and the Metro Police Officers who had removed them from City Hall. They had been violently removed, and several members of the group had been injured in the ensuing scuffle. All respondents indicated that at the outbreak of the crisis they had expected national and local government to assist them, specifically by providing “physical protection” (Interviews Anonymous, Albert Park, September 2008). They repeatedly referred to their experience at the City Hall, which seemed to confirm for them that xenophobia in South Africa is directly related to the way government portrays and treats foreign nationals. Several
authors have cited government attitudes towards migrants as a root cause of xenophobia in South Africa; “although state institutions have never condoned violence against migrants and have regularly condemned it, they have provided an environment wherein such xenophobic violence has appeared as legitimised by the state” (Neocosmos, 2008).

The Role of National Government

Respondents were, however, unclear as to what they believed the South African government should do at a national level to prevent xenophobia or to make life easier for refugees and migrants. Most respondents seemed to be unclear about their rights in South Africa, and many did not feel they could turn to the state or to state institutions for assistance on a regular basis i.e. outside of a crisis situation. Ballard and Amisi (2006), in their study of Congolese refugees in South Africa, state that respondents to their research mentioned a lack of knowledge of the Constitution and important legislation in South Africa, and they and others have suggested that most refugees are unaware of their rights in South Africa. According to Ballard and Amisi, Congolese refugees also tend not to make rights-based claims on the South African government, primarily because of their experience of state failure in the DRC. This is consistent with several respondents’ laughter when asked if they expected the government of DRC to come to their aid during the crisis in South Africa. Respondents explained that they laughed because “DRC can’t even look after its own people” and “it is too far away” (Interviews Anonymous, Albert Park, September 2008).

When asked who might be able to assist them at the time of the interviews, one respondent said only the government could help, and only by providing “physical protection”. Another respondent indicated he believed that the government was actively preventing people from assisting them. Indeed, the general consensus amongst the group was that the government had caused the tents in which they were sheltered to be removed in order to force them to leave, although it appears
that the tents had been removed by their owner as he had not expected them to be needed for so long and they were required for business use. The group felt that they had been let down by people who had been assisting them – they named the MCC and a private individual who was a member of DAAX – claiming that these people were now colluding with government to remove them from the park. Again, this was in contradiction to previous claims that no one had been assisting them during this time.

Several respondents felt it was important that the researchers understood that they did not remain in Albert Park by choice or because they were “lazy”, but because it was “impossible to reintegrate” (Interviews Anonymous, Albert Park, September 2008). Rajah of the MCC was adamant that this group did indeed remain in the park by choice, citing the numerous offers that had been made either to assist with reintegration or to provide temporary accommodation in better conditions until an agreement could be reached regarding their future (Interview Yasmin Rajah, 2008).

**Mythologies of Xenophobia**

Respondents indicated that they felt they had been treated as “less than human” (Interviews Anonymous, Albert Park, September 2008) although this feeling seemed to arise more from the treatment they had received at the hands of the police and City, than from their previous experiences with xenophobia. Asked about xenophobic incidents prior to the May outbreak of violence, all respondents were insistent that South Africans were indeed highly xenophobic. However, few had personal anecdotes of xenophobic incidents and several repeated standard stories such as “everybody knows the taxi drivers won’t give you your change”, “it’s harder for foreigners to find jobs”, or “the police will never help us”. When asked if they had ever made a complaint or pressed charges against anybody following a xenophobic incident, they responded in the negative, stating that “everybody knows” the police will not help foreigners. Although there are many documented cases of police being at
best unhelpful and at worst brutal towards foreigners in South Africa, and indeed most of the incidents cited above have been documented in the past, it seems there is a mythology building around xenophobia, in which certain documented incidents are taken to be the norm. According to LHR and the MCC, the police services in Durban are generally more than usually sympathetic and helpful, towards foreign nationals, and played a key role in preventing outbreaks of violence in Durban. None of the people displaced in Durban were, however, willing to lay a charge when invited to do so by SAPS. This creates a vicious cycle in which the police are unable to combat the xenophobia that certainly does exist, because foreign nationals are not accessing their right to be assisted.

There are some inconsistencies in the feedback received by respondents in Albert Park. Initially, the researchers were very sympathetic to their cause, and indeed remained sympathetic to their plight as their living conditions were clearly inhumane. However, during the course of the interviews the uniformity of responses to specific questions made it appear that respondents had been “schooled” in particular discourses around displacement and resettlement. In particular, respondents consistently stressed their need for “physical protection”, but when asked what they meant by this were unable to respond. When we interviewed Dass of LHR later, she mentioned this phrase amongst others as being a “code” for resettlement. Dass expressed the opinion that the group that remained in Albert Park until their removal by police on 1 November 2008 were determined to be resettled by the UNHCR, and that whenever pressed to explain their call for “physical protection” or “feeling safe” they returned ultimately to the request for resettlement (Interview Sherylle Dass, 2008). The issue of resettlement was never mentioned by respondents, and two respondents denied newspaper reports alleging they had asked for transport to Canada.

The abovementioned inconsistencies do not, however, change the fact that there were xenophobic incidents in Durban, and that the people who eventually found themselves in Albert
Park had been displaced from their homes, businesses and communities. Their expressions of frustration and fear were real enough, whatever their motivation for seeking resettlement.

The philanthropic initiatives of the various civil society groups reacting to displaced foreign nationals in Albert Park seem, for the most part, to have been reactive and short term. Efforts by DAAX, MCC and LHR were limited to charitable responses involving the provision of immediate shelter and sustenance. In this sense the efforts are best classified as a response to a critical emergency rather than an effort to bring about long-term solutions to xenophobia. In the Albert Park context, long-term solutions may have entailed advocacy as to the plight of poor foreign nationals, the developing of more strategic reintegration initiatives, the unravelling of some of the mythologies of xenophobia and creating/facilitating dialogue between displaced foreigners and appropriate government representatives. The challenges regarding the possibilities for more long-term philanthropic initiatives through the responding civil society organisations are covered in more detail below.

Reintegrated in Cato Crest

The reintegration process is generally contested terrain. The manner in which the reintegration process was carried out raises numerous questions. This is justified by the responses that were given by the second group of displaced people interviewed; reintegrated respondents in Cato Crest. Reintegrated respondents interviewed in Cato Crest attested to the fact that their main source of support came from civil society and philanthropic initiatives providing food and shelter. They argued that reintegration was carried out in a vague and fragmented manner. There was no consultation with displaced people about their position in terms of returning to the communities from which they had come and no initiative was taken by local government to drive a reintegration process in terms of ensuring that those who had lost their shacks and
houses (through vandalism and vacancy) had suitable living arrangements:

“We stayed in a church nearby, we couldn’t go back. So the church provided us with nice hospitality and other people from different organizations came in. After a month or so, they started taking us by police van again to our shacks. But my shack was burnt, so I had to start again building it. At the same time I was afraid that this people who attacked me, they will come back. But the police assured us that they will protect us from perpetrators of xenophobia violence” (Interview Anonymous, Cato Crest, 9 November 2008).

“The churches, Red Cross, and various other civil society groups were amazing. Even during reintegration they gave us some food to take back home and some clothing’s from other white people that came to us in the church that we were staying living in” (Interview Anonymous, Cato Crest, 5 November 2008).

It is clear that during the reintegration process there were no proper structures in place to ensure displaced people returned to their homes with full counselling in place and forums to engage or rather workshop with the violent community on conflict resolution mechanisms. Again the gap was filled by church initiatives.

“There is a pastor who also runs a church here in Cato Crest, he was very helpful throughout the process, by asking us how we are feeling, we will like to talk about what happened or any help. And he prayed for us and all that” (Interview Anonymous, Cato Crest, 9 November 2008).

The role of philanthropic initiatives through civil society pertaining to reintegrated victims of xenophobia, it seems, extended beyond dealing with the short-term and began to look at the long-term reintegration of displaced people into their communities, in terms of helping them cope not just materially but emotionally. This is evident in the church response, limited as it was, which focussed on the emotional and social needs of
those attempting to reintegrate into communities. Issues arising here would include fear of further attacks, general insecurities and rebuilding a sense of community. These initiatives indicate the need for a policy development aspect with regard to victims of xenophobia. The role of government is discussed in more detail later.

The Role of Civil Society

In conducting this research, we interviewed several representatives of civil society organisations that had been particularly active in responding to the xenophobia crisis in the Durban area. We also drew on notes made by these and other organisations during the course of May, June and July 2008. There is a clear division between those civic groups that provided material assistance to the displaced and those whose work was more “behind the scenes” but nonetheless vital. Most visible were the churches, of several denominations, who took in displaced people, housing and feeding them, sometimes for weeks at a time, with limited facilities and resources. The Red Cross took on the role of collecting, coordinating and delivering material aid in the form of food, clothing and basic hygiene supplies. They were supported largely by student volunteers and donations from the public, and they received financial support from the eThekwini Disaster Management Fund. Several observers noted that the Red Cross appeared under-resourced and unprepared for a crisis of this nature in the South African context. Although this may seem surprising in the context of Red Cross’s international mandate, it is in line with the experiences of other civic organisations in Durban, representatives of which noted their own lack of capacity as highlighted by the crisis.

Civil society organisations played different roles in the context of Durban’s management of the crisis. Most organisations at first acted upon the belief that the City of Durban and/or the provincial government would soon step in to coordinate and
lead efforts. This implies that responses were planned for the short term based on an understanding that long-term solutions are the domain of the state. The state response did not however occur and, as a result, despite attempts from more experienced coordinators, civil society efforts were haphazard, often overlapping and largely undocumented.

The Public Response

As mentioned, the Red Cross was largely supported by donations from members of the public. According to DAAX representatives, in late May 2008, DAAX led a “trolley drive”, placing trolleys at the entrances to supermarkets in major shopping centres all around Durban. Public response was exceptional, and volunteers had to be called upon to empty trolleys several times a day over the week that the drive was on. Several private citizens also took it upon themselves to collect food, clothing and blankets at their places of work and deliver them to the Red Cross, which was headquartered in a small room behind the Cato Manor Police Station. Additionally, parishioners of the many churches that hosted displaced people gave donations and spent time cooking for people. These included members of all communities around Durban, although there was a predominance of upper-middle class people involved, particularly at the volunteer level.

All the civil society organisations we spoke to in the course of this research emphasised the important role the public played in generously providing for the displaced. This response unfortunately seems to have been short-lived. This may have been partially due to “burnout” as the public felt they had “contributed enough” by a certain point. There also seems to have been widespread belief in government announcements that the xenophobia was “over” and that there were no longer any displaced people (media coverage of local and national government announcements).
Two organisations are notable for their quick responses to the Alexandra attacks, which are believed to have prevented many further incidents in Durban and around the country. Nationally, StreetNet put the word out to members of its street vendors’ organisations that xenophobia was not to be tolerated. The organisation subsequently reported several cases where potential incidents had been “nipped in the bud” through members preventing other members or non-affiliated vendors/consumers from threatening or attacking foreign nationals. Pat Horn of StreetNet reports that the organisation includes members who are foreign nationals who have successfully organised vendors associations in their own areas, and these groups were particularly well placed to provide support and education. Similarly, Abahlali baseMjondolo (the South African shack dwellers movement), released a media advisory (Abahlali baseMjondolo Statement, 21 May 2008) and distributed it to all its members, strongly condemning the violence in Alexandra and setting out a course of action to combat xenophobia in Durban communities where it has a presence.

Both organisations were instrumental in halting the spread of xenophobia and continue to provide education around the issue amongst their members. Their responses may be seen as having more long-term impact, as they continue to educate their members around the issue and to actively condemn xenophobia.

The involvement of Abahlali baseMjondolo may have had an added impact as a recent report by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) tied xenophobia to poor housing delivery in South Africa. For both Abahlali baseMjondolo and StreetNet, therefore, there are points of contact between South Africans and foreign nationals, where organisation around common issues can help to bring communities together. StreetNet counts among its affiliated groups both organisations of foreign nationals and organisations that already deliberately seek to include both South Africans and foreign nationals among their number.
Faith-Based Organisations

Churches, mosques and temples around Durban became temporary and longer-term shelters for hundreds of displaced people during May and June 2008. Emmanuel Cathedral in the Warwick Triangle area housed the largest number of displaced people, and was most able to provide care and resources due to its ongoing involvement in refugee service provision in the City. Other churches became involved when the displaced began arriving at their premises requesting shelter. The churches were supported to a large degree by the Red Cross but also relied heavily on their parishes for donations and resources. A number of churches did not have adequate facilities for cooking, so parishioners were called upon to prepare food at their homes and deliver it to the churches. Some churches were reluctant to let it be known that they were sheltering displaced people. In most cases this was to ensure their safety, but there was some suggestion that churches felt they did not have the capacity to accept further displaced people and did not want it known that they were sheltering people for fear others would follow.

In late June of 2008, several churches were contacted to ascertain how many displaced people they were still sheltering and what kind of food and resources they might be needing. At least three church representatives reported that they would not be able to house people for much longer (most stipulated a day or two at most) as they no longer had the capacity. Many churches were losing revenue as they were unable to rent their halls out. All respondents reported that representatives of local and provincial government had visited their sites and had promised that facilities would soon be made available for the displaced, but churches had then heard nothing further. Only a few days after these calls were made, at least one church bussed a group of displaced people to the City Hall and left them on the steps of the building, claiming that they could no longer take responsibility for them and the City should take over the provision of shelter.

The Anglican Church in Durban was able to source funding to provide reintegration packages for all the displaced people it was sheltering (at three church locations). In conversation
with a member of DAAX, a church representative stressed that the Anglican Church would aim to provide ongoing pastoral care alongside the reintegration package. He also emphasised the importance of engaging community stakeholders in the reintegration process and noted that widespread poverty in South Africa is a serious barrier to any reintegration initiative (Interview DAAX Anonymous, July 2008). These concerns were echoed by civil society organisations in interviews and indicate that while the structural causes of xenophobia may be identified, there is no concrete response to them and no initiatives proposed for their alleviation.

The role of faith-based organisations in philanthropic work has been noted by several researchers. Kathleen McCarthy (2002) notes that, in the United States, 40 – 50% of all philanthropic giving goes to religious organizations. A recent South African study on social giving recorded that 80% of respondents in its sample gave money to religious organizations as opposed to other causes (Everatt and Solanki, 2008: 55). The role of religious organisations in the anti-apartheid struggle has been well documented, and there is reason to hope that if religious organisations take up the anti-xenophobia cause they will contribute to long-term community building projects. However, at the time of writing this report, there was no sign of such activity on any large scale.

**The United Nations High Commission for Refugees**

The UNHCR has a regional office in Pretoria with a range of international and local staff. They have a working relationship with the South African government and provide research and policy guidelines for asylum seekers and refugees. In addition, UNHCR has engaged a number of implementing partners in Southern African cities, who are tasked with providing services to refugees. The two key implementing partners in Durban are LHR, who provide legal assistance to refugees and to some extent act as the UNHCR’s Durban representatives when necessary, and the MCC, who assist arriving asylum seekers
and refugees with finding accommodation, schools and jobs etc., and provide ongoing support and assistance to the refugee community. LHR and the MCC are housed in the same complex in Daikonia Street in Durban, and work closely together to provide a range of services to refugees. Both organisations are key members of the Durban Refugee Service Providers Network.

During the crisis, the UNHCR was primarily represented by its implementing partners in Durban, and Dass of LHR acted as a liaison between refugees and the UNHCR offices in Pretoria. However, on at least two occasions, UNHCR staff visited Durban to inspect shelters and speak to refugees.

The Refugee Service Providers Network

We interviewed two organisations that are members of the Durban Refugee Service Providers Network, as well as representatives of the UNHCR: LHR and the MCC. Other member organisations provided an important support network both for “legal” refugees and for “illegal migrants” during the crisis. The Refugee Service Providers Network (RSPN) organised and hosted several workshops during the crisis period and provided a leadership and coordination role (to the best of its capacity). All member organisations have an ongoing commitment to education around xenophobia. It should be noted that member organisations are mandated to provide assistance to official refugees – that is, foreign nationals who have asylum seeker or refugee status in South Africa. Large number of Congolese and Rwandan nationals, as well as citizens of other African countries, live in the Durban area, and LHR and the MCC report that in general these groups are well integrated into local communities.

Ballard and Amisi (2006) note that most refugee service providers in Durban are staffed almost entirely by South Africans and this can be a barrier to effective communication and development work with refugees. All respondents in interviews conducted for this research report were South African, and this may have some bearing on long-term impacts of and responses to xenophobia.
Dass of LHR reports that the management of the xenophobic crisis in Durban was a “hectic process” (Interview Sherylle Dass, 2008). LHR became involved in late May when the SAPS called them, along with the MCC, to assist with displaced persons from Bottlebrush sheltering in the Morton Community Hall. As implementing partners for the UNHCR, LHR normally deals with assisting in local integration and processing resettlement claims; they have no mandate to deal with a crisis of this nature. Thus, as Dass explained, they were “winging it” as the crisis proceeded. When it was discovered that a majority of the displaced people were undocumented migrants, LHR worked outside its usual mandate to aid in repatriation. It engaged with the municipal structures, but reports that eThekwini Disaster Management was “all talk and no action”, despite honouring its commitment to assist with repatriation costs.

Dass noted that the South African government’s official position regarding refugees and asylum seekers is that they are to be integrated into communities, with the same access to services and rights as South African citizens. The South African government is explicitly against the setting up of refugee camps. While this may be due to a variety of reasons, Dass points out that many refugee camps elsewhere in Africa are considered more as prisons than camps, and many refugees in South Africa have reported leaving camps in other African countries in order to come to South Africa specifically because of this integration policy. The UNHCR was not in a position to force government at a national or provincial level to set up camps, nor will the UNHCR interfere with the South African policies as long as they remain compliant with international policy.

According to Dass LHR, along with other RSPN organisations and UNHCR implementing partners, addressed displaced people at several sites and on several occasions. The primary offer on the table at all times was assistance with reintegration into communities. Reintegration is favoured as the setting up of refugee camps was not a feasible option. A very small percentage of Durban’s refugee population (only 1%, according to LHR)
had been displaced during the crisis. Many refugees continued to live within local communities throughout the May – August 2008 period. LHR, the MCC and other organisations were convinced that xenophobia was not as problematic in Durban as in other cities, and that the SAPS were doing a good job of providing services to foreign nationals.

Resettlement, on the other hand, was not considered a viable option as while responding to the crisis had been a challenge for civil society organisations in Durban, in general they had done a good job of providing food and shelter and reintegrating people into communities. It was noted by LHR that there had been some opportunism on the part of people who had claimed to be displaced, mentioning a documented case of a couple who continued paying rent and utility bills on a flat in Arc Royale (a building that houses many refugees) while living in Albert Park and claiming to be displaced. Similar experiences were reported by the MCC (see below). This sense that some people had fraudulently claimed to be displaced to gain access to reintegration financial packages or to push for resettlement was echoed by other organisations and seemed to contribute to a sense of disillusionment by some responding civil society organisations.

The issue of advocating for resettlement had arisen particularly amongst the group of displaced people living in Albert Park after being forcibly moved there by Metro Police in July. When interviewed, members of the group denied that they “wanted to go to Canada”, as had been reported in the press. However, Dass said that several members of the group had applied for resettlement and Canada was one of the countries applied to. The LHR had, she said, explained to this group, along with other refugees, that resettlement applications cannot be considered en masse as applications are processed individually on a needs basis. Dass argued that some people in Durban may have been exaggerating the level of danger caused by xenophobia in South Africa as a means of effecting resettlement.

Dass further argued that, contrary to claims made by displaced people interviewed in Albert Park and to popular myths around xenophobia in South Africa, the SAPS are largely sympathetic to refugees and asylum seekers (at least in the
Durban area) and are mandated to ensure the prevention of xenophobic incidents. While it is certain that not all SAPS members are sympathetic, there are procedures which can be followed to ensure that foreign nationals receive proper service when making a complaint at a police station. Both LHR and the MCC conduct education in various communities around refugee rights, proper reporting procedures and police services. Dass pointed out that several displaced people had refused to make statements to the police about alleged xenophobic incidents even when the SAPS offered to send officers to the shelters to take statements. Several organisations and individuals, including the UNHCR, the HSRC, LHR and the MCC, have stated that education is a key factor in any long-term strategy to combat xenophobia in South Africa.

Notwithstanding the above, Dass agrees that there are problems both with racism and xenophobia in South Africa that need to be combated. She qualified this, however, by pointing out that xenophobia is in fact a worldwide problem and not endemic to South Africa, or Africa.

**Mennonite Central Council**

The MCC assists newly arrived refugees with finding accommodation, often providing financial assistance for months at a time while refugees seek work in South Africa. Rajah of the MCC does not deny that there were xenophobic incidents in Durban, but says that the majority of its clients were safe and did not report harassment or intimidation. She points out that some of the displaced people came from the very same buildings in which the MCC has other clients who reported they had not been threatened (Interview Yasmin Rajah, 2008). This suggests that many foreign nationals in Durban were displaced by the fear of violence rather than actual incidents of threat or violence, although as Meera LeVine of the Children’s Rights Centre (CRC) points out, this remains a valid response.

The MCC did not become involved in donation collection and management, but were able to access supplies as needed.
Rajah reports that they were “impressed” by the quick response of the churches, Red Cross, CRC and others, saying that “it was very good to see how quickly people got on board”. However, she qualifies this by suggesting that there was a certain level of naiveté amongst organisations that may have allowed them to be manipulated by opportunistic people. The mistake here may have been, she suggests, in seeing the refugee community as a homogenous group. She says that “without a doubt, the response was tremendous”, but she worries also that the charitable nature of that response undermines the overall developmental aims of the MCC. This echoes comments made by LeVine of CRC suggesting that the reintegration process was not community-led and may not have had a sufficiently developmental approach. Rajah adds that not enough has been done around reintegration and making structural changes in communities.

In general, according to Rajah, the MCC was “caught with its pants down” by the crisis, unable to perform its regular home visits because of its involvement in the repatriation and therefore out of touch for several weeks with its client base. When it was able to return to normal operations, the MCC discovered that several clients had been amongst those displaced but had nevertheless continued to claim their monthly subsidies towards rental. These clients did not realise until later on that the MCC was collaborating with the churches on the reintegration procedure, and this was when manipulation of the system came to light. Rajah, like Dass, is angered by the level of opportunism, but also acknowledges that in many cases this may have indicated a level of financial distress that causes people to take any measures necessary to relieve it.

Rajah suggests that because of the crisis nature of the situation and the lack of capacity among local organisations, little was done to record what was happening and when. Representatives of several organisations contributed to counting how many people were at each shelter, and taking other details, but no registration was taken at shelters and there was no interview procedure. The churches, in particular, simply accepted whatever story was given to them. This made it very
easy for people to take advantage of the material assistance offered.

Rajah adds that there was a serious lack of coordination amongst organisations responding to the crisis, and that at times it seemed that this was becoming “a competition”, with organisations “pointing fingers at one another”. She feels that local organisations have not learnt any lessons from this crisis, and that it is likely there will be just as uncoordinated a response should a similar crisis occur again.

She is adamant that the reintegration package offered by the MCC was adequate. She says it is hard for refugees, as for South Africans, to find adequate housing, but not impossible. She rejects the suggestion that refugees are denied access to housing rentals, although admits that often they are exploited by unscrupulous landlords.

The Children’s Rights Centre

Meera LeVine of the CRC assisted with coordination and donation drives primarily in her personal capacity, but with the blessing of the CRC. The CRC was concerned particularly with the protection of children who were among the displaced, and considers the rights of refugee children among the children’s rights that they promote. In this capacity, the CRC is particularly concerned about the apparent lack of coherent emergency responses both at a government and at a civil society level in Durban. LeVine also pointed out the lack of coordination and leadership during the crisis, and criticised the failure to bring on board the people affected most directly by the crisis – both the displaced and those within communities – to help craft solutions. She questions what lessons civil society has learned and how organisations can ensure they do not repeat mistakes.

Durban Action Against Xenophobia

DAAX was originally a group of students and university lectur-
ers who rallied via a group created on Facebook, volunteering their time to stand with trolleys at local shopping centres or deliver goods to and from the Red Cross headquarters in Cato Manor. Later, many members of the public joined the group and at its height, in around mid-June 2008, the Facebook group had just under 1000 members, while the database listed around 150 active volunteers. Apart from donations, DAAX assisted in monitoring sites to track numbers of people and donations needed. They also played an active role during the confrontations at City Hall, with members of DAAX confronting City Manager Mike Sutcliffe in a public car park to demand an explanation for the removal of people to Albert Park. DAAX representative Anthony Collins was particularly scathing about the City’s response, arguing it had failed in its leadership role and had made a series of promises to assist which all came to naught.

The civil society response to the Durban xenophobia incidents indicate that social giving in the public sense is strong with members of the public feeling a sense of responsibility toward their fellow human beings. The civil society organisations’ response, largely of a short-term charitable nature dealing with the symptoms of xenophobia, could have been smoother and perhaps more extensive if better structured and coordinated. A longer term philanthropic response dealing with some of the root causes of xenophobia was, however, lacking. While the faith based organisations recognised some of the structural factors leading up to xenophobic related violence, their response was effectively limited to containing the fall out suffered by displaced people. Other organisations LHR and the MCC affiliated with the UNHCR also limited their efforts towards the short term alleviation of xenophobia related challenges. This is largely because responding to a crisis of the 2008 nature fell outside of their remit. In the case of LHR, its mandate is to assist in local integration and process settlement claims. In the case of the MCC its work involves aiding newly arrived refugees to find accommodation and employment. MCC effects this from a developmental aspect i.e. in a way that is community led and entrenched. Responses to the xenophobia outbreak and crisis were not effected in such a way and, as
such, philanthropic contributions were processed in a purely charitable rather than long-term strategic manner.

The Role of Government

The response of local government in Durban to the xenophobia crisis and displacement has been one of denial. This was borne out by the difficulties in securing interviews with local and provincial officials and politicians. The media has labelled local government’s denial of the xenophobic crisis “simplistic”. Another burning issue is that of whether the current state of reintegration will be consolidated in such a way as to mitigate further possible outbreaks of xenophobia in the future.

Government has limited its response to current issues around xenophobia to the role it played in repatriating victims of xenophobia – what it terms a “facilitative role”. A government official declared, “We hired the buses for people who voluntarily wanted to go back to their original countries as provincial government. During the xenophobia out-break we played a more facilitative role, working with churches, Red Cross and other civil society organizations” (Interview Head of Immigration Services Department of Home Affairs, 10 November 2008). This was contradicted by a Durban ward councillor who claimed that, “In Cato Crest we registered all the displaced people who would like to return to their home countries. Hence their own original governments paid their buses to come and take them home” (Interview, Durban Councillor, 26 October 2008).

The limited role of local and indeed provincial government in the Durban area was denied by City Manager Mike Sutcliffe who argued that “The City of Durban has been actively involved in dealing with what has incorrectly become known as the xenophobic attacks”(Mike Sutcliffe City Manager Statement, 11 June 2008). The prevailing view is therefore that the crisis suffered by displaced people was adequately dealt with by local authorities and was not in fact related to xenophobia.

Durban local authorities also noted that, “the City wishes to
express its sincere gratitude to all faith-based organizations, NGO’s and individual citizens who have contributed to the plight of refugees” (Mike Sutcliffe City Manager Statement, 11 June 2008). There is no record however of local authorities attempting to partner with civil society to explore long-term solutions in terms of reintegration packages or to mitigate possible further xenophobic incidents. Interviews with local government officials reveal that the civil society response to the crisis is one that is viewed within a humanitarian, short-term goal framework. A local government representative stated: “In this case the philanthropic approach and civil society were very much of a help in dealing with the displaced people, especially the Red Cross, because it provided a lot of food, shelter and so forth” (Interview Durban District Manger Department of Social Development, 10 November 2008). The view regarding a need to deal with solely the short-term was possibly attributable to the fact that Durban local authorities denied the existence of a xenophobic crisis in general. This effectively means that any efforts towards a long-term strategy for the mitigation of xenophobic related violence and displacement was left in the hands of civil society.

Xenophobia and the Philanthropic / Civil Society Response

In many ways, Durban does not provide a true picture of the xenophobic crisis that struck South Africa in May 2008, nor the civil society response to that crisis. Xenophobic incidents were contained in the City, partly, it seems, because foreign nationals are reasonably well integrated into communities, and partly due to pre-emptive action on the part of the SAPS and the RSPN. Only a very small percentage of foreign nationals living in Durban were displaced by xenophobic incidents, and few of these incidents involved physical violence. Of those displaced a high percentage were undocumented migrants, primarily from SADC countries, who were subsequently repatriated. Moreover,
although some respondents in our interviews claim that more attacks will occur, at the time of writing there have been no substantial reports of xenophobic incidents in Durban since June 2008 – if one does not count the City’s removal of the Albert Park group in early November, which some see as further evidence that the government in fact perpetuates xenophobia in South Africa.

In other ways, Durban was a microcosm of events unfolding nationally, as thousands fled their homes and sought shelter in churches and police stations, civil society organisations struggled to fill a gap left by a government that appeared to be in denial about the depth of xenophobia in the country. NGOs, academics and other organisations sought root causes and long-term solutions to xenophobia. The ever-widening gap between government and civil society that has been noted since the African National Congress came to power (Habib & Taylor, 1999) was highlighted, as the state and various organisations struggled to work together to formulate long-term strategies to deal with xenophobia. The lack of capacity experienced by organisations in Durban echoed similar, if less obvious, challenges for organisations countrywide, as well as the competition for resources taking place between organisations now struggling for a piece of a much smaller pie.

Most notable in Durban was the strongly charitable focus of the response to the crisis, which was necessarily short lived and did not offer any long-term plans. In her paper, ‘Social Justice Philanthropy: An Overview’, Aileen Shaw distinguishes between two models of philanthropy: the social justice model and the charitable model. According to Shaw, “the charitable model reinforces existing power dynamics between the haves and the have nots; giving is concentrated on causes that do not challenge the status quo or on efforts that temporarily alleviate problems” (Shaw, 2002: 3 – our emphasis). In response to this, local and provincial government, which had initially committed to creating shelters, and at one point mooted the idea of a camp for the displaced, reneged on its promises and stepped aside, leaving civil society to take on the task of shelter and reintegration. Rajah of the MCC explicitly questioned the
charitable nature of this response, and indicated that, while the MCC has historically provided primarily financial assistance, it is seeking to move into a more facilitative and developmental role. This is exactly the type of philanthropy Shaw speaks of, “typically engaged in activities around organising, educating and mobilising disenfranchised communities” (Shaw, 2002: 4). Social justice philanthropy offers a much longer-term solution to problems of xenophobia by seeking both to empower refugee and migrant communities, and to facilitate integration through local community forums.

The HSRC in a 2008 report ‘Violence and Xenophobia in South Africa: Developing Consensus, Moving to Action’ has explicitly called on government to establish and support local community forums on migration. However, at the time of the research, there were no organisations in Durban with an ongoing mandate to combat xenophobia, and some respondents suggested this was a crucial gap. The HSRC report strongly recommends ongoing monitoring and management of tensions through local community based structures in order to contain further outbreaks of xenophobic related violence. Local community forums are an essential tool in the management of tensions and in the prevention of xenophobia and violence. Ideally, existing structures should be strengthened. Where these don’t exist, new structures need to be established. Migrant communities and all other stakeholders should be involved in this process. The agenda should be depoliticised as far as possible and leadership and community representation broadened so that the forums are sustainable, proactive and open to all views. Furthermore, it is critical for these discussions to take place at the grassroots level. The HSRC report argues that attacks on foreign nationals will not end nor will reintegration successfully occur until communities have satisfied themselves that grievances have been addressed (Hadland, 2008). The HSRC call was echoed by several respondents from civil society, who felt that reintegration had not been successfully managed and that a key factor was the lack of engagement of community stakeholders in the process. That further violence has not erupted in Durban may be due
to whatever initial factors constrained the violence in May and June rather than to a successful programme of reintegration and community education.

The challenges regarding reintegration are also linked with the state response to the xenophobia crisis. While none of the respondents referred specifically to the response of national government, all expressed disappointment and some bitterness at the response of provincial and local government. All said that both provincial and local officials had made promises that they had subsequently not delivered on. Although eThekwini Municipality had provided some financial assistance in repatriations and to the Red Cross, organisations felt that they had failed to provide the leadership and coordination expected of them and relied far too much on the goodwill of civil society. Whether the will to assist was thwarted at bureaucratic level or promises were empty from the start is not clear, although some respondents argued that some officials certainly intended to follow through on their promises but lacked the capacity or political power to do so. City Manager Mike Sutcliffe found himself under attack publicly and in the press from several organisations, and this may have contributed to his rather negative attitude towards civil society at the time of writing. One respondent reported that the City Disaster Manager never appeared at meetings, although “under-managers” were present, and this implied that issues around xenophobia were not being taken seriously enough. The HSRC, in its own study of the communities where xenophobic violence took place, notes that government is perceived negatively by a number of respondents (Pillay, 2008). Government was characterised as uncaring about its own citizens. Poor service delivery, particularly in the area of housing, was cited several times as one source of xenophobic violence. It may thus be that government is not in a suitable position to resolve issues of xenophobia directly. The HSRC report contends:

“Those who were rioting in May perceive the state as having failed them by not providing jobs, houses, or even basic human security. Why should they now listen when the state tells them to be kind
to people from neighbouring countries? There is also a deep irony in asking the very councillors and policeman who not so long ago scapegoated or extorted foreigners to now promote the reintegration of those displaced during May's violence” (Hadland, 2008).

Poverty is a contextual factor that has dominated the xenophobia debate nationally and in Durban. Respondents from the civil society sector pointed out that most foreign nationals, like many South Africans, are poor. They usually have difficulty finding employment, encounter sub-standard education for their children, receive restricted access to health care and other social services, and they may struggle for daily survival. These are not necessarily factors linked with being a refugee in South Africa so much as they are linked with being poor. While many foreign nationals cite the above examples as xenophobic in character, and while this may indeed often be the case, the fact is that the state is perceived to be failing in providing for poor and vulnerable South Africans as well as foreign nationals. Insofar as this state failure has been cited as one of the root causes of the xenophobic attacks, it should in fact be common ground on which poor South Africans and foreign nationals can meet. However, both the state and local media have portrayed foreign nationals as “stealing” resources from South Africans (Landau, 2004), and this has successfully driven a wedge between the South African poor and the poor foreign national population.

The continued mythologising of xenophobic incidents drives this wedge even further. This is not to suggest that such (mythologised) incidents do not take place – numerous reports by the Southern African Migration Project, the HSRC and others have confirmed that they do, and that incidents have steadily increased over recent years. It would not be accurate however to suggest that a discourse on xenophobia is being created which new foreign national arrivals are tapping into and which colours their experience of South Africa. If refugees have chosen South Africa as a destination explicitly because state policy allows them to integrate and to work while they are in the country, as opposed to entering a refugee camp in a country closer to their
own, then one must assume that integration is not in and of itself a misguided policy. It is the implementation of that policy that is currently misguided, as refugees and migrants are left to fend for themselves in a situation in which even local citizens are unable to do so. In this case again, Shaw’s explication of social justice philanthropy is instructive. She notes that “social change is achieved through influencing and shaping public policy. It works on bringing about changes in laws, public policies and procedures as well as in societal attitude and behaviour” (Shaw, 2002: 5).

There are two major challenges to adopting the social justice philanthropy model in response to xenophobia in Durban. The first is the existing antagonism and “one-upmanship” that interview respondents referred to. This antagonism exists among civil society organisations, NGOs, local and provincial government and the communities they claim to represent. It inhibits communication and prevents participatory development. New ground must be found on which the various parties can meet if they are to rise to the challenge posed by the xenophobic crisis. The second challenge is the difficulty of organising in certain groups. Ballard and Amisi (2006), for example, outline the difficulties of organising among the Congolese community in South Africa, and suggest that Congolese refugees do not seek to find common ground with South Africans, nor to be assimilated into South African culture. Perhaps the solution lies in finding other means of organisation, as StreetNet has done by organising in the informal economy and supporting the formation of traders organisations both specifically for foreign nationals and for particular trades such as barbers. Similarly, Abahlali baseMjondolo welcomes all shack dwellers, whatever their nationality. Both organisations are social justice based movements.

In the long term, solutions to xenophobia may have to come from society, which means that philanthropic organisations will have an important role to play. The established disjuncture between government and civil society is not likely to change in the near future, and for the time being at least, government seems to be continuing to rely on civil society to fill its delivery
gaps. This situation has already led to negative perceptions of government, further alienating it from the population and making it more difficult for government to effectively intercede. Further, if a social justice model is to be pursued, mobilisation will have to come from the grassroots, rather than in a technocratic fashion from above. It is clear that long-term strategies for xenophobia will have to address issues of democracy, access to resources, service provision, job creation and poverty alleviation in the nation at large, rather than focusing narrowly on xenophobia. It is necessary, however, that citizens and foreign nationals alike are engaged in integration processes and education campaigns to ensure that tensions are eased and no further outbreaks of violence occur.

Conclusion

All respondents interviewed during the research were adamant that xenophobia is a very real problem in South Africa, and none denied the nationwide extent of the crisis in May/June of 2008. However, several respondents suggested that issues of race and class are prevalent in the country, and that xenophobia will not be addressed until these, more “close-to-home”, issues have been dealt with. Several respondents felt that problems of racism and class privilege have never been adequately addressed in post-1994 South Africa, and that any long-term solution to xenophobia must include these issues. They also agreed that the incidence of xenophobic attacks in Durban had been low compared to other parts of South Africa, but that there had nonetheless been some serious incidents.

Representatives from organisations responding to the xenophobia crisis partnered with the UNHCR and with the RSPN argued that the majority of refugees in the Durban area were well integrated and had suffered no displacement. They were in agreement that the majority of those displaced were so called “illegals” – undocumented migrants – but similarly agreed that whether or not it was within their mandate they felt it their
duty to assist those people as far as possible. Despite this, various challenges in responding to the crisis were revealed. These included a lack of leadership, coordination and capacity. These were consistently cited as the greatest challenges in dealing with the crisis and developing long-term strategies to deal with xenophobia in Durban. Respondents suggested that organisations had been “polarised”, and mentioned “antagonism” and “finger pointing”. This suggests that, due to the lack of leadership and coordination, the situation deteriorated as the crisis wore on. Many organisations had expected local government to take a leadership role, and expressed their surprise and disappoint-ment that this had not occurred. All organisations reported a severe lack of capacity in dealing with a crisis situation, and several respondents were surprised at the lack of capacity within the Red Cross, given its crisis response mandate.

The research also suggests that respondents favoured re-integration as the only realistic solution in the aftermath of the xenophobic crisis. However, they viewed management of the reintegration process as flawed. This was in light of the fact that several respondents expressed not enough having been done to engage both displaced people and community members in education, response and reintegration proposals. The HSRC has noted that reintegration cannot be successful without engagement with “host” communities and well facilitated dialogue between communities and foreign nationals. In Durban, there was no coherent process to manage such communication, and this appears to have resulted in reintegration being successful in some cases but not others. We note a definite disjuncture between the responses of StreetNet and Abahlali baseMjondolo, who dealt directly with communities within their member base, and other organisations who dealt specifically with displaced people and whose response was instinctively charitable rather than developmental and geared towards effecting social justice.

The research also shows that some respondents were ad-manently against refugee camps, citing their tendency to “just carry on going”, while others saw at least a short-term role for
camps. However, again, camps are seen as a non-developmental response and all respondents acknowledged the need for long-term planning that has a developmental rather than crisis motivated aim. This kind of long-term planning, however, seems unlikely in the face of the coordination, leadership and capacity issues discussed.

As already mentioned, some organisations played a crucial “background” role in campaigning amongst their members to end xenophobic violence. In addition, a number of other groups made use of various platforms to campaign for an end to xenophobia. Notably in Durban, DAAX made extensive use of Facebook and blogging to keep its members up-to-date on events and what was needed in terms of donations and volunteering. Nation-ally, the Coalition Against Xenophobia, a loose grouping of NGOs, civil society organisations and individuals, continued to agitate for better education around xenophobia and clearer government policies. However, there is little evidence as yet that the coalition, or any other grouping of organisations, has formed a coherent plan of action or engaged with government around the issue of xenophobia. The HSRC convened a round table in June 2008, consisting of over fifty government, non-government and community organisations and other stakeholders, to discuss a long-term strategy in response to the May attacks. The report on this event calls for a national indaba on xenophobia, but at the time of writing, none had yet been convened.

Civil society organisations in Durban need a forum in which to reflect on the xenophobic crisis and their own and the City’s response to it. This would provide an opportunity to interrogate strategies for the short-term containment of the symptoms of xenophobia versus strategies which begin to address the structural and systemic causes of xenophobia as well as the limits of these strategies. It would further provide an opportunity to understand some of the opportunistic elements which may emerge from a xenophobic crisis situation, such as those described in the “Role of Civil Society” section of this paper. Civil Society also needs the opportunity to interact with South Africans and foreign nationals alike to discuss their
experiences of the crisis and hear their suggestions for long-term strategies. A local indaba on xenophobia would provide a space for this reflection, and may further provide a space for the creation of broad-based coalitions for long-term strategies. This may require capacity building for a number of organisations. Local government needs to be engaged as well, to understand the breakdown in communications that was perceived by civil society organisations, and to account for its apparent failure to respond adequately to the crisis.

The need to research and bring to light incidents of xenophobia notwithstanding, there may be an argument for research into the mythologising of xenophobia amongst South Africans and foreign nationals. These mythologies occur on both sides of the coin – from South Africans believing that foreign nationals are “dirty”, “backward”, “criminal” and “corrupt”, to foreign nationals believing that South Africans will exploit and physically abuse them, steal from them and refuse to afford them the rights they are entitled to (Valji, 2003 & Pillay, 2008). Education around issues of xenophobia and real communication between affected parties cannot take place while these mythologies form a barrier between them.
References


DAAX website - http://durbanaction.wordpress.com/about-durban-action/


Habib, A and Taylor, R, “South Africa: Anti apartheid NGOs in transition”, Voluntas, 10 (1), 1999


Sutcliffe, M, City Manager eThekwini Statement, 11 June 2008

Interviews

Twenty displaced people were interviewed in Albert Park during September 2008 – they all opted to remain anonymous.

Five reintegrated foreign nationals were interviewed in Cato Crest during November 2008 – they opted to remain anonymous.

Meera LeVine, Children’s Rights Centre, Durban, October 2008

Anonymous, Durban Action Against Xenophobia, telephonic, July 2008

Sherylle Dass, Lawyers for Human Rights, Durban, October 2008

Yasmin Rajah, Menonite Central Council, Durban, October 2008

Pat Horn, StreetNet, Durban, October 2008

Councillor for Sydenham, Durban, 12 October 2008

Councillor for Chatsworth Ward 72, Durban, 26 October 2008

Representative of Immigration Services, Provincial Department of Home Affairs, Durban, 10 November 2008

Representative of Department of Social Development, Durban, 10 November 2008