

Case Study “Mediation Training in South Africa”¹

(Quaker Peace Centre)



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1. In April 1994 the first free and fair elections in South Africa took place. After the release of Nelson Mandela from prison in February 1990 and years of hard negotiations the end of the Apartheid system had come. However, the legacy of Apartheid leaves its mark on the South African society up until today.
2. The Apartheid system was based on racial segregation. South Africans were divided into four groups: Whites, Blacks, Indians (who had been brought into the country in the 18th century as cheap labourers) and so-called Coloureds (which include everybody with a mixed background).
3. The Whites form only about 13 % of the South African population while more than 75 % belong to the oppressed black majority. Roughly 3 % are considered as Indians and 9 % as Coloureds. The vast majority of South Africans belong to one of the many Christian congregations while there is a Muslim minority mainly among the Coloured and Indian population.
4. The diversity of the so-called „rainbow nation“ is further expressed in the recognition of 11 official languages. Besides English (the dominant language that was introduced by the British colonialists) and Afrikaans (which is the mother tongue of the descendants of the Dutch

¹ This case study was compiled by Jochen Neumann who was a programme associate at the Quaker Peace Centre (QPC) in 1999/2000 and conducted an internal evaluation. QPC graciously permitted this case study to be used in Do No Harm workshops. For purposes of training this case study only captures a small part of the work done by QPC and also of the programme. It reflects on the state of the programme at that point in time. More details about the work can be found in a research report of the author that has been published by the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation in May 2001 (www.csvr.org.za/wits/papers/papneum.htm).



settlers as well as of many Coloureds in the province around Cape Town) one can distinguish nine African languages (and supposedly ethnic groups).

5. Racial segregation dominated almost every aspect of public and private life. For example, up until 1994 Blacks were denied the right to vote and their children had to attend segregated schools of minor quality. Thus, the level of education of Non-Whites was accordingly low and there is still a high level of illiteracy among them. Racial segregation went as far as reserving beaches and benches in parks only for Whites.
6. In addition, there were residential areas designated for the disadvantaged population groups and as a consequence it was more or less prohibited for Blacks to reside in urban areas. Blacks had to live in so-called “homelands”, far away from the urban and industrialised centres of the country, and often on soil of minor quality. Nevertheless, many were heading for the cities so that illegal settlements were established. Still today, the majority of South Africans live in tin shacks in these so-called townships without proper services like electricity, water and sanitation.
7. The extreme socio-economic disparities are even more obvious since well-developed white residential areas are often in the immediate neighbourhood of townships for the poor majority. In 1994 the unemployment rate of Blacks was estimated at more than 40 % while only 7 % of white South Africans were unemployed. By now, the new government has introduced programmes to empower and promote the underprivileged groups of the population. However, often Non-Whites are still lacking the adequate skills for the few available job opportunities.
8. In the 1980’s the resistance against the Apartheid regime was not only manifested in the armed struggle of the military wing of the African National Congress (ANC) in exile and the so-called “self-defense units” (SDU) in the townships. The opposition was also formed by a broad civil society movement that engaged nonviolent means and included some white initiatives like the women of Black Sash.
9. In the townships parallel administration structures were established since the institutions of the Apartheid system (e.g. police, judiciary and schools) had lost the trust of the oppressed. Committees for self-administration were elected on street and area level who organised not only the resistance but also many aspects of daily life. The opposition of these community activists and ordinary citizens was conducted, for example, through boycotts, mass demonstrations and the conscious defiance of Apartheid laws that were considered as injustice.
10. Still today, violence is incorporated in structures of the Apartheid system that have not been overcome yet. In the Apartheid era direct violence was committed through torture and political killings by the police and other state security forces, the armed resistance as well as internal power struggles amongst the oppressed population groups. The white Apartheid regime tried not only to divide the Blacks into ethnic groups like Zulus or Xhosa, but also to create animosity between their political representatives, the Inkatha movement/party and the ANC. Furthermore, from the mid-1980’s the Indians and Coloureds were tempted with political reforms that granted them the right to vote for a separate chamber of parliament which, however, had only little authority.
11. The conflicts in the townships range from political power struggles among the activists in the



informal structures of self-administration and among the party politicians in the officially elected town councils as well as conflicts between these parallel structures.

12. Development projects of the government or the business sector offer the opportunity to dedicate financial resources to the upliftment of disadvantaged people. However, such infrastructure or housing projects might also feed latent conflicts if the people cannot get involved or if it is not transparent who will benefit from it in which way.
13. The people are very concerned about the deep-rooted conflicts, the high crime rate and daily violence.



Information about the project

14. The Quaker Peace Centre (QPC) in Cape Town was formally established in 1988 by members of the religious society of friends, the Quakers. Even before they had been dedicated to the cause of the oppressed and had informally supported initiatives and self-help projects in the townships surrounding Cape Town. A key area of work of this non-governmental organisation is the constructive resolution of conflicts in the townships.
15. The vision of QPC for a just South African society is based on the model of nonviolent and constructive resolution of conflicts, on mutual tolerance and respect as well as the recognition of diversity and cultural differences as a rich heritage and God-given gift.
16. The “Mediation Training” is one of the programmes of QPC. Here community activists are to become „community mediators“ through a five-month training course which takes place twice a year since 1996.
17. The street committees that still exist in the townships today propose community activists for participation in these trainings. A requirement for participation in the course is such a recommendation by the respective community structure, active engagement in the community and the status of unemployment. QPC conducts a written and oral application process in which the proposed candidates are tested against these criteria. In addition QPC is aiming for a gender balance.
18. For each training course about 25 participants are accepted with three trainers being responsible for the course. QPC tries to ensure that not only single community activists from various townships take part but rather a small group of participants from a township. On average each course consists of participants from around six different townships.
19. The trainers themselves come from disadvantaged communities. They are also trained and active as community mediators. The programme director is female, the other two staff members are male. Not all of them are Quakers, but all three have a Christian background. The training is conducted in English. However, the staff usually also speaks Afrikaans as well as at least one African language, their mother tongue.
20. The training of the community mediators is based on three pillars. Firstly, in one-day workshops that take place fortnightly knowledge and skills are conveyed. Secondly, the course has a practical component in which the trainees work as mediators in the townships. Thirdly, the participants are supported through supervision by the staff members. Thus, the participants apply the knowledge and skills in their own practical work as community mediators. Supervision sessions with one of the trainers are scheduled on a weekly basis and are held in the respective townships.
21. The participants receive a small stipend for attending the course that is a small, but welcome contribution to the family income. Upon completion of the training course a certificate is issued. After the course many participants are actively seeking a job. In case they find employment only little time is left for their voluntary work in the townships.
22. The community mediators are called upon by their fellow township residents mainly in neighbourhood conflicts, theft on a smaller as well as larger scale, but also in cases of physical violence like beatings, murder, rape and child abuse.



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