Homelessness and the HSRC

How we got started researching
homelessness: An orientation for
the HSRC homelessness
stakeholder workshop

Metro Health intervenes

- Up to last year, HSRC in Pretorius Street had a large homeless grouping sheltering around the building

- Tshwane Metro Metro Health told us to put up a fence

- HSRC did two things – a shelter initiative, and a national research project

- This workshop reports to stakeholders and sponsors on the interim results of the research work

- We are looking for input to help us forward

Finding sponsorship

- **HSRC itself provided R 1.6 million from** Parliamentary grant funds – it wasn't quite enough

- Department of Social Development's research section is funding the **workshops** and is to sponsor the **survey work** – doing MOU now

- Gauteng Department of Social Development will help to fund an inquiry into **street children** and a **population estimate** – MOU under development

- The Swiss Development Corporation is now funding the completion of the **qualitative work**

Phases of the study

- Starting with (1) **literature** and (2) **qualitative work** to learn what questions to ask about an elusive grouping:

- All chapter teams consulted respondents from **government, civil society and the homeless**

- Preliminary **chapter drafts** based on this work will be presented today

- With our outside consultant we have developed a methods approach for our **upcoming survey**

- We will be looking today for comments and criticism on this **survey design**

Some research questions

- **Who is in the homeless population in SA?**

- Where are they located, how do they **move around** and choose where to live?

- How do people **become homeless** and how do they **escape** from homelessness?

- How do homeless people **support themselves?**

- What access to **services** do they have and need?

- Once homeless, how many ever **rejoin the housed?**

- What are the **aspirations** of the homeless?

Chapters of the book (1)

We put together our sub-project teams around the chapters of a book that will be a product: under *Problematizing* we have

1 An **international review** of our comparative position

2 Movement and **migration dynamics**

3 **Health, life and death** among the homeless

4 **Families**, individuals and communities

Chapters of the book (2)

Under *Responses*, we have grouped:

5 **Metro responses** to homelessness

6 **National departments** and provinces responding to homelessness

7 The response from **civil society**: the NGO and CBO sectors

5 and 6 were once intended to be one chapter, but have stayed firmly separate

Chapters of the book (3)

And under *Experience*, we have grouped:

8 **Life experiences:** homeless history as social and economic history

9 **Self-support** on the streets: homeless economic lives

10 **Social structure:** the stratification of the homeless world

11 **Children of the street:** homelessness at child level

12 The HSRC shelter project: mobilizing city resources.

Some common themes in the chapters

- Origins
- Exclusion
- Experience
- Access to resources
- Disability
- Age categories
- Social, political and economic forces

- Policy vs reactivity
- Official interventions
- Prevention
- Maintenance
- Rehabilitation
- Role of shelters
- Limits and constraints
- Human rights

Stakeholder interaction

- During our qualitative phase we identified **important actors in the field of homelessness** — we need input and advice from this grouping

- Particularly looking for input on **problematizing**

- On government and civil society **responses**

- On the perceptions and **experience** of the homeless

- On how **rehabilitation** ought to be tackled

Before we go into the quantitative survey phase, HSRC is feeling a need to set up a **working group**

Points from the international literature: definitions

- Who belongs in the homeless category depends on **definitions of 'home'** – UNCHS says high-grade shelter, so defines in a billion people?

- The usual working definition is people who **sleep rough** and have **no roof** of their own

- The issues are **dissociation, distancing, stigmatizing, labelling and disconnectedness**

Is it poverty? This is a necessary condition, but we have maybe ten million poor people in SA – very few become 'homeless'

Points from the international literature: categories

- **Women:** Women have been researched here, and appear as those who suffer most, and are most powerless — they aspire to jobs, but have **often** been ejected from a previous home

- **Children:** most of the international literature deals with children, but most street children are **not homeless** — most are in touch with families and doing low-end informal sector work on the street

- **Disabled and Elderly:** The international literature tells very little about these specific homeless categories, but these are **large homeless sectors**

Points from the international literature: youth

- Understandings of street children are changing – UN **Convention on the Rights of the Child**, children's rights as citizens

- Street kids are characterized as **resilient and resourceful**, but career prospects are in question

- Youth may be **forced out** by parents or guardians, leave to **escape abuse**, be taken from abusive homes by government, or may be moving on their own: but

- Street child **health is chronically poor**, and **cognitive development** is slow and impaired

How excluded are street youth really? In South Africa?

Points from the international literature: United States

- There's a lot of American literature on the homeless, including specialist journals

- **Homeless families** are a strong focus — there seems to be no equivalent of the shack option often used in the developing world

- The critical event is when the **family loses housing** — is this chronic, or a catastrophic one-off event?

- Many distressed families try **living with relatives** and are eventually put out on the street

- Some studies show **affordable housing** as the single critical factor

Points from the international literature: Latin America (1)

Latin America has a major problem with **children living on the street** in conditions of hunger, violence, marginal employment and exploitation

Unicef in Brazil defines **three categories:**

- **At-risk children** in very poor households with parents working outside
- Children who are **street workers**, sometimes compelled by parents to earn — shoeshine, etc
- Orphan, abandoned and runaway children who live on the **streets full time** and have broken with society

Latin America (2)

A study in Bogota identifies **causal factors as poverty, family disintegration and physical abuse or neglect.**

The continent is moving from a correctional approach to **rehabilitation and outreach** –

- These **intensive approaches** produce kids so well socialized they can't operate in real society
- They have trouble getting and holding jobs and often wind up **back on the streets**

How can we do rehabilitation that works?

Points from the international literature: in Africa?

Africa may be different – how different?

- In Botswana, a study shows street kids as workers, **purposeful and effective**

- Most were in contact with families and **very few were criminals**

- Nairobi street kids were **less alienated** than South African street gang kids in a comparative study

- But Zimbabwe sees **street children as criminals** and tries to institutionalize them

In other African countries there are signs the cutoff between the life of the housed and the life of the streets may not be sharp – is that true here? And how about the adult homeless?

Some questions for the stakeholder panel discussion

1. **What policies are the metros following now?** In principle? In practice?

2. Can we realistically hope to do **prevention?**

3. How can we best try to improve our success rate for **rehabilitation?**

4. How can the homeless **best be helped?**

5. What are the most serious **obstacles** to real help?

Chapter 2: Mobility and migration

Movement patterns and spatial distribution of the homeless – Catherine Cross and Pieter Kok, IRRD

- How do the homeless choose where to live? How do they move around?

- Where should we look to find them? How are they distributed in South Africa?

Methods

We are tackling this two ways:

1 Case studies of individuals that show how how they
   have moved in space as they became homeless

2 Survey data from the upcoming sample —
   questions relating to lifetime movement patterns
   and to seasonal mobility

Working toward, Where are the homeless going?
   What are the pressures on them, and what are
   they trying to achieve?

Spatial distribution

- Under our inquiry is the urban/ rural question – are all the homeless in the cities?

- To help structure the survey, we first tried to construct GIS maps of the location of the homeless in the major cities

- Difficult – hard to find people who have this information and can give detailed lists of places

- We've expanded our survey method and will use this as one of several approaches to mobility and spatial location

The urban/rural question for the homeless

- Following the lead question from national DSD, we looked to see if there are significant numbers of homeless in the rural sector

- We looked to the eastern districts we know as feeder areas for Gauteng: Middelburg, Belfast, Groblersdal, Nelspruit, Thohoyandou

- Our research inquiry did find numbers of homeless people in the rural cities and small towns

- People are being shed off farms and out of jobs, and finding they can't go home again

How do rural people become homeless?

So far, we are seeing several kinds of crisis events in the lives of interviewees, including:

- Men who leave to get work, intending to support the family, and either fail outright or lose their jobs later

- Women who leave home with a partner to set up a home, and get dumped

- People who become marginal to the household after the death of the parents, and are forced out by the new heir or the inheriting family

Where do rural homeless people go to?

- In rural districts, communities are normally expected to find homes for their homeless

- Once this was usually true, but today it often doesn't happen

- People are no longer able to look after each other – households are now small, and unemployment undercuts mutual support

- With no place in the community, the rural floating population tries the nearest small town or farm work

- *Rural homelessness is mainly a result of extreme unemployment, but also of falling household size*

How do the rural homeless relate to the metro cities?

- When people become homeless, they often start a journey inward toward the metros

- Otherwise, they can try farms, and farms can be an exit from homelessness — but farms are also a trap, usually no permanent housing rights

- In moving on, the homeless are looking for (1) jobs they rarely find, and (2) city areas with crowds on foot, casual jobs and cash flow

- As they move inward, homeless people can be stopped at any point by the various kinds of barriers — then they remain where they are at that point

- If they arrive, they feed into the city homeless population

South Africa's homeless spatial distribution

Ahead of the survey, it looks like:

- Few if any homeless actually inside rural communities – the homeless move on from there

- Quite a few homeless people in rural cities and small towns, and in the rural townships

- The main homeless populations in the metro cities, but not in very big numbers

- Located in the CBDs, but also in parks and open spaces, some in townships and on fringes of shacks

- An unknown number on farms, temporarily sheltered, but with bad prospects long-term