



science & innovation

Department:  
Science and Innovation  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



9 June 2020

## CIVIC ENGAGEMENT OF LEARNERS

### REPORT ON QUESTIONNAIRE DEVELOPMENT FOR FREEDOM HOUSE SOUTH AFRICA

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#### Background

The Human Sciences Research Council's (HSRC's) Democracy, Governance & Service Delivery (DGSD) research programme – as of 1 April 2020 the Democracy, Governance & Citizenship research stream within the Developmental, Capable & Ethical State division – initiated a study in late 2018 to understand the attitudes of school learners towards violence and the impact of involvement in civic engagement programmes on mitigating violent behaviour. The project was located within the DGSD research theme on Democracy and Transformative Constitutionalism. The Abstract of the proposal reads as follows:

The intensity and frequency of violence has been increasing alarmingly in South African society, with no prospect of tapering off. As microcosms of society, our schools are potential, and in some cases actual, hotbeds for the fomentation of discontent and the expression of violence. Outside of schools, unemployed and disillusioned youth provide a reservoir for this violence that threatens South Africa's entire socio-economic system. And while clearly the provision of employment opportunities is ultimately the solution to socio-economic disintegration, the stark reality is that youth unemployment, and with it the risks alluded to above, will remain for the foreseeable future. It is in this context that the Democracy, Governance and Service Delivery research programme of the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) proposes a research and development project to understand the factors affecting violent behaviour and the civic engagement measures that might counter such behaviour, normalise school environments for the pursuit of learning, and thence facilitate sustainable employment creation.

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The threefold objective of the study is 1) to generate a set of findings that enhances our understanding of the policy-implementation-impact gaps in the provision of civic engagement programmes that might lead to the establishment of an effective school-based human rights programme, 2) to increase awareness among learners, and by extension in their homes and their communities, of the limitations of violence as a strategy for resolving differences and to promote civic engagement as a means of achieving social cohesion, and 3) to contribute to a normative school and societal environment in which learning can flourish and sustainable employment opportunities can be created.

From a methodological perspective, what is proposed here is a multi-year, mixed-methods longitudinal study that tracks a representative cohort of learners biennially over a five-year period (2020 through 2024), from Grade 9, in order to yield information about the changing impact of civic awareness programmes at school on the learner cohort and the likely impact of such programmes on the post-school trajectories and value systems of these learners. The sample size for the survey will be 10,000 learners across 350 schools in all nine provinces – approximately 28 learners per school. These learners will be surveyed in 2020 (the baseline survey), 2022, and 2024. In addition to making use of surveys, the study will identify a selection of learners across the provinces sampled to participate in individual case studies that investigate in greater detail the responses of learners to the civic engagement programmes offered in their schools and the ways in which their perceptions of their civic responsibilities change over the period of the study. Learners so selected will participate in in-depth interviews in each of the years in which a survey is conducted. Twenty learners across all nine provinces will participate in case studies.

Because Freedom House South Africa (FHSA) had worked in the area of civic engagement amongst selected communities in the country, DGSD approached FHSA to discuss a partnership and a fundraising strategy to pursue the project. FHSA offered to provide seed funding for the study in the amount of \$20,000 – which it did in terms of Provider Services Agreement No. 20-HFA003-12. In terms of this agreement, the HSRC undertook to design a questionnaire for the baseline survey component of the study.

### **Process of questionnaire design**

The HSRC sought, on the advice of FHSA, to include as many interested parties as possible in designing the questionnaire for the baseline survey. Invited stakeholders included Paul Graham and Mpangi Kwenge (FHSA), Sarah Motha, Katherine Brown and Zaid Kimmie (Foundation for Human Rights – FHR), Merle Mansfield (DG Murray Trust), Sibongile Khumalo (The Learning Trust), Krishnaveni Perumal and Jerry Zitha (Department of Basic Education), Uta Lehmann (Hanns Seidel Foundation), and Lolita Winnaar and Alude Mahali (HSRC).

A first meeting to discuss the project and the best way of achieving its aims was held at the HSRC in Pretoria on 17 September 2019. The meeting was attended by representatives of FHSA, the FHR, the DG Murray Trust, and the HSRC. There was broad support in the meeting for the formation of a research partnership to conduct the research and for a longitudinal cohort study of the kind proposed in the project proposal (a five-year study involving surveys in alternate years) as the optimal means of taking the project forward.

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A second meeting of the research partnership team was held on 21 February 2020. This meeting took the form of a workshop. Having received a draft copy of a questionnaire a week prior to this meeting, the partnership team met to workshop the questionnaire in a three-hour session. Participating in the workshop were Paul Graham (FHSA), Zaid Kimmie (FHR), Alude Mahali (Human & Social Development, HSRC), Lolita Winnaar (Education & Skills Development, HSRC), and Gary Pienaar and Michael Cosser (DGSD, HSRC). The contours of the final pre-pilot draft of the questionnaire were mapped out in the workshop; Lolita Winnaar and Michael Cosser then produced a revised version of the questionnaire, which was critiqued by Paul Graham over the subsequent two weeks. The entire research partnership team was invited to comment on various drafts of the questionnaire that were distributed, and after accommodation of the comments the questionnaire was submitted to FHSA together with an invoice for payment of the first tranche (\$10,000) of Freedom House funding.

The present report constitutes the second of the two deliverables in Provider Services Agreement No. 20-HFA003-12: a “[f]inal narrative report describing activities conducted throughout the contract period, as well as a detailed description of all cost-share incurred to date from activities related to this agreement, to be completed by May 31, 2020.”

### **Contents of questionnaire**

The original conceptualisation of the study was that it would mainstream Life Orientation as the subject in which learners learned about the South African Constitution and present the Constitution as a benchmark against which learner attitudes towards violent behaviour would be measured. It became clear in the course of discussion during the workshop, however, that such an approach would not necessarily elicit the kind of feedback anticipated, and that an approach centred around violence in the home, the school and the community and measures to mitigate it (chief amongst which was civic engagement) would both be more accessible to grade 9 learners and engender a better understanding of civic engagement as an embodiment of constitutional principles and values.

The following assumptions underpinned the first (pre-workshop) draft of the questionnaire:

1. Learners are able / will want to distinguish among constitutional values
2. Learners are able to distinguish between physical and emotional violence
3. Learners are able to register the impact of their exposure to violence
4. There is an association between violence and specific values and rights in the Constitution
5. There is a relationship between violence in the home, the school, and the community
6. Learners are familiar with the concept of gender-based violence
7. Learners are familiar with the concept of xenophobia
8. Learners have views about the reasons for and ways to prevent violence
9. Engagement with other people – through clubs / societies and sport – has the capacity to eliminate / reduce violent behaviour
10. Physical exercise has the capacity to eliminate / reduce violent behaviour.

The indicators which the draft (pre-workshop) questionnaire sought to measure were:

1. Aptitude for / attitude towards Life Orientation as a subject.
2. Coverage of Life Orientation syllabus.
3. Knowledge of the Constitution
  - a. As derived from Life Orientation
  - b. In general
4. Attitude towards values in the Constitution
5. Exposure to physical violence
  - a. At school
  - b. At home
  - c. In the community
6. Exposure to emotional violence
  - a. At school
  - b. At home
  - c. In the community
7. Impact of violence
  - a. Physical
  - b. Emotional
8. Comparison of physical and emotional violence
9. Constitutional rights violated by violence
  - a. Physical
  - b. Emotional
10. Distribution of violence
  - a. In schools
  - b. Between school and community
11. Exposure to gender-based violence
12. Exposure to xenophobic violence
13. Reasons for violence
14. Prevention of violence
15. Engagement
  - a. Involvement in clubs / societies
  - b. Involvement in sports
  - c. Physical exercise
16. Future plans
  - a. Next year
  - b. Work next year
  - c. Work at age 30
17. Identity
  - a. Race
  - b. Gender

18. Residence
  - a. Family home
  - b. Current residence
  - c. Residential constellation
19. Travel to school
  - a. Travel time
  - b. Travel mode(s)
20. Socio-economic status (SES)
  - a. Parental / guardian employment
  - b. Social grant in the home
  - c. Self-placement of SES
  - d. Housing type
21. Consent for further participation in study

The workshop of 21 February 2020 challenged some of the assumptions – notably that: the Constitution, its principles and values were accessible to grade 9 learners and could be nicely linked to anti-Constitutional behaviour; learners would be able to distinguish between physical and emotional violence; there was a relationship between violence in the home, the school, and the community; and that physical exercise had the capacity to eliminate / reduce violent behaviour.

The challenging of these assumptions had the effect of altering some of the indicators to be measured and the corresponding questions to be posed. In particular, the understanding of what knowledge learners might be presumed to have of the Constitution was revised, and learners' understanding of what constituted violence was reframed through an initial question presenting eight different scenarios that might constitute violent behaviour – ranging from the (seemingly) less ambiguously violent "A learner stabbing a teacher / learner with a sharp object (knife, pen, etc.)" to the (seemingly) more ambiguously violent "A parent / guardian smacking a child with their hand". On the advice of Alude Mahali, who cautioned that a questionnaire was not the best medium to solicit personal information about learners' experience (and perpetration) of violence, questions concerning gender-based violence (GBV) and violence against people of other nationalities were reformulated. So, for example, the question regarding GBV was revised to read:

Have you experienced gender-based violence? (Please mark one box only)

- 1  Yes, I have seen it
- 2  Yes, I have been involved in it
- 3  Yes, I have been a victim of it
- 4  No

In the wake of the workshop, a range of questions linking violence and engagement to school-initiated programmes to lessen the former and promote the latter were included in the questionnaire.

### **Planning for survey implementation**

The original intention was to conduct the baseline survey face-to-face among learners in classrooms across the country. Fieldworkers were to have captured learner responses on pre-programmed mobile devices that could render data in real time. The baseline survey questionnaire was also to be piloted in schools representing different quintiles (1 through 5) in the province of Gauteng. One month after the February workshop, however, it became clear that the coronavirus would take hold in South Africa and that face-to-face surveying would not be possible. Accordingly, the HSRC research team sought alternative ways of conducting the survey.

The HSRC had initiated a series of surveys in March / April 2020 to gauge the public response to the Covid-19 pandemic, using the #datafree social media platform Moya Messenger to conduct the surveys. This platform allows respondents to participate in surveys using their mobile devices without incurring data costs (which are borne by Moya Messenger's advertisers); and since there is a high penetration of cell-phones in the South African market, the platform provides an ideal mechanism for surveying populations that might otherwise not have been able to participate in a digital survey.

Accordingly, the HSRC research team entered into discussions with the Department of Basic Education (DBE) about conducting the civic engagement of learners' survey via mobile telephones. Protracted discussions have not proved fruitful, however: the DBE is not, by law (the Protection of Personal Information Act), permitted to share personal data with third parties, and giving the HSRC access to learners' (and their parents' / guardians') cell-phone numbers would have infringed the protection of personal learner information. The research team then made a proposal for a collaboration between the HSRC and the DBE in which the HSRC would draw the sample and the DBE distribute the survey; but such a proposal has not been accepted.

Other avenues for conducting the survey are presently being considered. If a digital survey does not prove feasible in any form, the survey will have to be postponed to a time when all grade 9 learners have returned to school (the date for which has been set as 3 August 2020).

### **Cost-share activities related to Provider Services Agreement No. 20-HFA003-12**

The HSRC has not entered into agreements with financial implications with any third parties in fulfilling this contract, and there are therefore no cost-share implications arising from the agreement.