

Deirdre Mooney



Civil Society: The Only Comfortable Meeting Place for the Multi-racial, Ethnic, and Socio-economic Population of Cape Town?

Ikamva Labantu (“the future of our nation”) is a community-based organization that seeks to redress the damages of Apartheid and supports democracy in South Africa by providing educational and economic resources to community members and townships. I worked with the Health Sector to develop a health wellness program and other projects. I also worked with the Youth Sector on the Annual Winter Programme that brings together teens in the community.

Project Goals

- Compile information on HIV/AIDS and TB in South Africa
- Help establish a wellness program for Ikamva Labantu’s office staff
- Co-coordinate the annual Winter Programme for township teenagers
- Collaborate with the founder and director of Ikamva Labantu to develop a program working with boys and male role models in the townships
- Assist with general operations of the Youth Sector and provide evaluations on the Sector’s daily operations

Personal Goals

- Get some sort of grasp on the situation of AIDS, HIV, and other communicable diseases in terms of the educational awareness, general opinion, the availability and use of presentation, and the availability of treatment. In particular, I wanted to understand how HIV/AIDS could spread to the point that one out of three educated college students are HIV+ and the rate of teenage pregnancies is so elevated.
- Gain an understanding of life during and after Apartheid and how it affected various parties and individuals

Activities

- Researched, compiled, and presented information on pertinent health issues and established contacts within the community to develop an internal wellness program
- Attended internal office meetings and civil society discussions relevant to the Youth and Health Sectors
- Organized activities for the Annual Winter Programme focused on survival in the township.
- Worked on activities such as Hoops 4 Hope tournaments, Youth Day celebrations, and Marimba Band demonstrations

Key Dilemmas

- Providing an evaluation of my experience working with one of the sector coordinators called for a dileneation between our personal and professional relationship
- Knowing when to accept that interactions were limited by time and the availability of safe transportation to the townships
- Choosing how to spend work and free time—each sector offered interesting opportunities. It was difficult to focus on two different projects without getting drawn into helping others. “Free time” provided many opportunities: traveling to townships, exploring Cape Town, going to the bird rehabilitation center I volunteered at, or

SOUTH AFRICA



Here is the Nyanga taxi terminus. I took taxis to and from the Winter Programme, the only mode of transportation for those living in the townships.



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spending time with friends. Since township life was very different from the life that my non-work friends led, it was seldom possible to blend work and non-work friends.

Important Learnings

- Location can be everything. Relationships are forged through Ikamva Labantu that might never be forged otherwise because it is a meeting ground for people with the common goal of improving the quality of life in South Africa. Individuals put aside racial, ethnic, and socio-economic differences to collaborate. However, the geographic and economic divide between communities frequently prohibits them from being able to socialize outside of work due to safety, cost, and time.

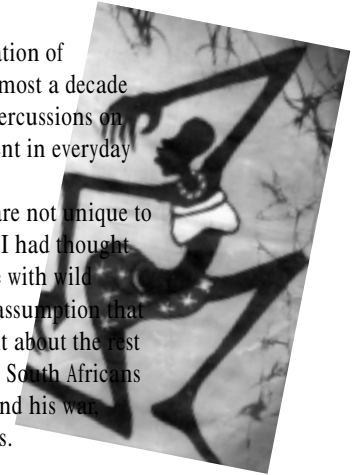


During one of Ikamva Labantu's youth day projects, Marimba dancers entertained the crowd at a Youth Day celebration in Fishock.



Some students elected to create a mural as their final project for the Winter Programme. On the last day, we visited to take pictures and hear how they envisioned "survival" and were depicting it through art.

- Although the legal foundation of Apartheid was eliminated almost a decade ago, it has left profound repercussions on the structure of society evident in everyday interactions.
- Cultural generalizations are not unique to any culture. People asked if I had thought Africa would be a jungle rife with wild animals, poking fun at the assumption that most Americans are ignorant about the rest of the world. However, many South Africans assumed I supported Bush and his war among other generalizations.



(Above) One event at the Grahamstown Arts Festival featured Desmond Tutu and other renowned speakers involved with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. This was the beginning of a mini peace march from Rhodes University to the chapel in the center of town.

From Deirdre's Journal

SOUTH AFRICA

I woke on a Saturday morning to do what a friend told me was a crazy idea—go to Nyanga. An infamous black township outside the Central Business District of Cape Town, Nyanga is known for gang violence. The first time I heard about the township was on my third night in Cape Town when a colleague said he had witnessed a fatal hijacking there.

The car's engine was still spinning when one of the kids in the car eagerly popped out of the car to greet his buddies. We had arrived in Nyanga. The energy was palpable. I saw barefoot boys, ranging in ages six to 20 years old, drilling passing the ball to each other in the parking lot. These kids were pumped! They were pumped to play, to cheer, and to eat!

Over 100 children and coaches watched the games from the balcony overlooking the court. The arena smelled like sweat and oranges. Oranges, the cheapest fruit available, are sold in pockets of ten or more. A few teams brought a pocket; others anticipated that food would be provided. It was refreshing to realize that this was just one of the many ways that Martin, my supervisor, was trying to get township kids off the streets. Not only was basketball fun, it was time-consuming. Daily practices required a commitment by players of which they could be proud. Most teams had a coach and jerseys, sponsored by Hoops 4 Hope. Children were being forced to make life-altering decisions on a daily basis. Was today the day they'd try stealing, prostitution, or hanging out with a gang? Life in the townships is hard and structured opportunities for fun are limited—no pools, game rooms, sports fields, etc. Other places are too far away or too expensive.

After a long day, the tournament concluded with one school winning both the boys' and girls' division. Unfortunately, the term winner implies the existence of a loser. One of the organizers addressed this issue when half of the "losing" girls' team walked out without shaking the hands of the other team. He preceded the trophy presentations with a discussion on sportsmanship. He explained that every team worked hard to get to the finals and that it was an accomplishment of which every team could be proud. "You can't be a good winner unless you can be a good loser."

Shown here is one of the girls' teams from the Hoops 4 Hope program, which gives township youth the opportunity to do something positive after school and on weekends. These uniforms were donated by a school on Long Island, NY, USA. Many players have uniforms, but shoes, sports bras, and other equipment are still in short supply.

