

# Homelessness and the HSRC

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

### Presented:

- Presented at the homelessness project stakeholder workshop. Deep in the Berg Conference Venue  
Pretoria. 26 July 2005 ↳ Dept of Social Development.
- Presented at the HSRC Internal Seminar Series. HSRC, Pretoria
- Presented at the Joint Population conference. University of the Free State  
Bloemfontein. 29 September 2005

# Metro Health intervenes

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

- Tshwane 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 *Problematising* 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 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