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Strategies for dealing with socio-economic problems faced by men in the Umkhanyakude district of KwaZulu-Natal

Background:

South Africa has amongst the world's highest levels of sexual and domestic violence and an interrelated HIV/AIDS epidemic driven in significant part by gender roles that encourage men to equate manhood with dominance over women, sexual conquest and a range of risky behaviours. Women's greater vulnerability to HIV/AIDS is in part explained by the very high levels of sexual and domestic violence mainly perpetuated by men.

Purpose:

The purpose of this study was to identify strategies for dealing with problems faced by men in Umkhanyakude using a participatory and inclusive approach.

Methods:

Men in Umkhanyakude were invited to a workshop in January 2004 to carefully think through the problems that they face, then to prioritize these problems using a ranking process based on nominal group technique. They then went further to explore strategies of overcoming these problems.

Results:

Problems identified by men in Umkhanyakude range from socio-economic problems such as unemployment and retrenchments, poverty, marriage and family breakdown and men's inappropriate sexual behaviours. Health problems included premature death and illness, violent death and injury, drugs and alcohol and teenage pregnancy. A cultural and traditional problem identified was faction fighting caused by intolerance.

HSRC RESEARCH OUTPUTS

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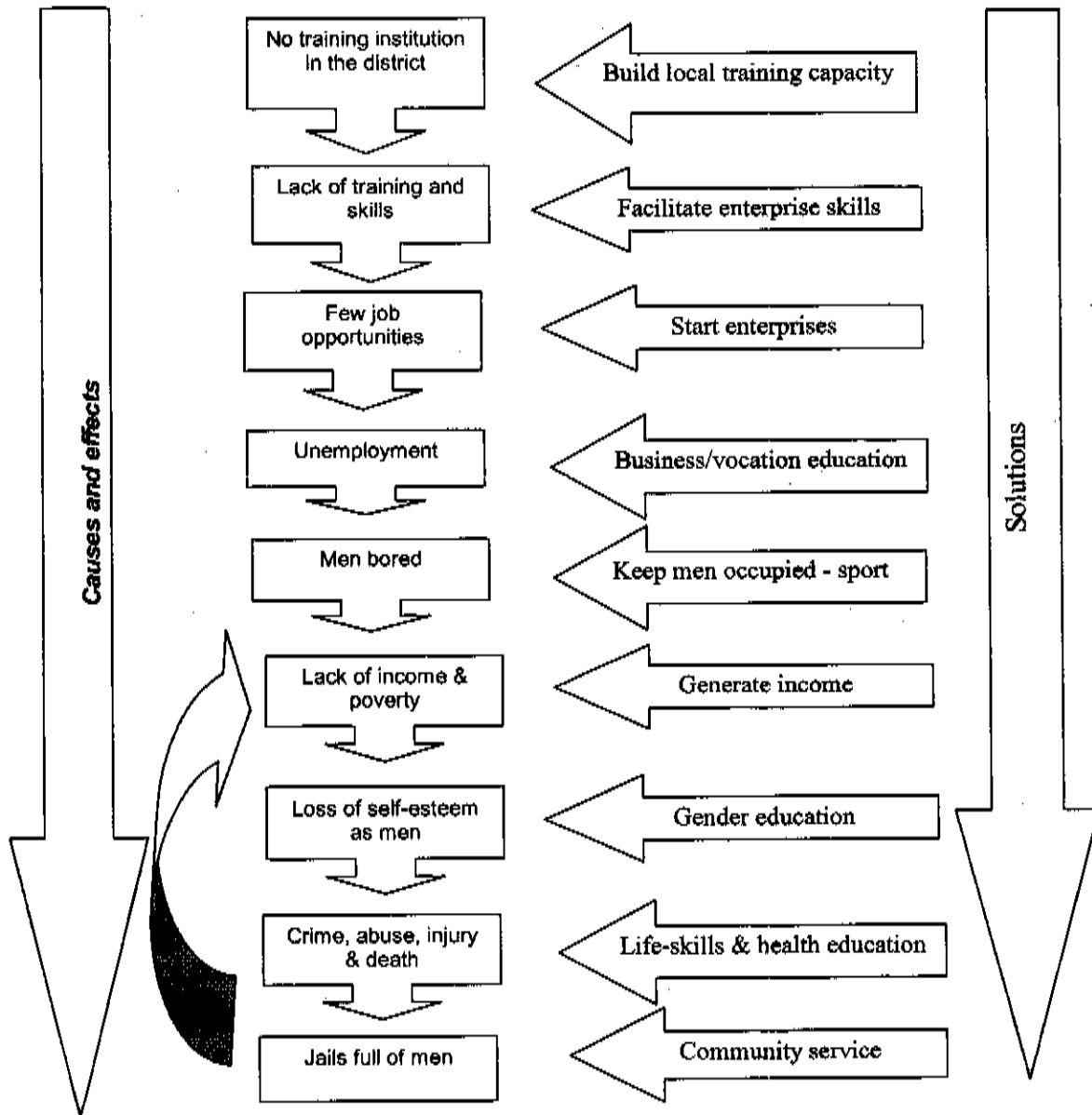
Table 1: Problems faced by men in Umkhanyakude and their causes

Problems	Causes
Unemployment Retrenchment	Lack of skill; Lack of access to technology and machinery No local industries
Premature death/illness Violent death or injury	Various diseases including sexually transmitted infections and AIDS Crime; Activities of gangs; Accidents; Men taking more risks than women; Time pressure
Faction fighting	Intolerance
Drugs and alcohol	Unemployment; Family problems and excessive social drinking
Poverty	Unemployment; Lack of education; Lack of skills; Drought; No food
Teenage pregnancy	Unprotected sex; Lack of sex education; Poverty
Marriage	High cost; Ilobolo (bride price)
Family breakdown	Moral decay/decline
Men's inappropriate sexual behaviour	Lack of sexuality education; No role models Lack of life-skills education & centers of teaching

The four main strategies used in dealing with problems identified by men were:

- 1) using sport as an entry and engagement strategy,
- 2) providing community education for men through public debates and dialogue,
- 3) providing training and capacity development and
- 4) enterprise development

Figure 1: Strategies to deal with problems faced by men in Umkhanyakude



Conclusion:

Socio-economic problems faced by men in Umkhanyakude require broad social, economic and development strategies. One of the major challenges in implementing strategies for dealing problems faced by men was lack of resources and having unrealistic or unfulfilled expectations about the project.

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