



Victims of violence are buried at a mass funeral.

Natal Mercury

to Natal voters

is far beyond the ability of NGOs. Such development is the responsibility of the government which has access to the resources of the entire country.

The problem up to now has been that both the national and KwaZulu governments have tended to use development as a political tool and resources have been squandered in corruption and waste. The workshop felt that a more in-depth stakeholder analysis of KwaZulu and Natal was necessary. Links should be developed, and support given, to other initiatives such as the recently launched Democratic Development Forum which is engaging the state about development priorities.

Ideas for NGO initiatives in schools and tolerance workshops were also raised. The vision presented in this discussion was one of a 'participatory peace movement that delivers'.

The final key area identified was the lack of political tolerance and democracy. Education for democracy was seen as crucial in building a climate of peace and co-operation rather than of violence and competition.

The forthcoming general election was seen as an opportunity to educate large numbers of people about the basis of democracy and the freedom to choose through the vote.

The idea of 'fighting' through a ballot box, as opposed to physical clashes, was raised as one of the central messages for voter education in Natal. The ideas raised at the workshop will be taken to the Education for Democracy Forum in Natal by many of those at the workshop who are part of the forum.

While the two-day exercise probably raised more problems than solutions, it is hoped that NGOs will incorporate some of the lessons from this experience into their programmes during the next year.

Intolerance: the beast in all our hearts

A culture of looking within is necessary to root out political intolerance

BY ALISON CURRY

MANY of us think of political intolerance as 'something out there'. It is the startling headlines we glimpse as we crawl our way to work. Ensconced in our vacuumed cars and lulled by the sounds of a soothing stereo, we encounter the news as outside of our real lives.

And at night, enmeshed in our secure homes – both sanctuary and prison of our consciousness – the frozen images we see of warring factions are only fleeting imprints on our filofaxed existence.

Yet for many South Africans intolerance is not an 'issue' but an integral reality of their lives. It is an intake of breath at a Soweto station when a body falls onto the concrete and turns red. It is the sight of a woman screaming as flames engulf her body. Not always manifested in violence, it can be the subtle nuance of arrogance which assumes supremacy, which assumes compliance.

But it is a reality to which people adapt, not one they feel they can change. Violence is not theorised or analysed, it is simply adapted to...lived around. So intolerance and its accompanying violence is still *out there* – with the leadership of different factions or *those people* (blacks, whites, management, the union) who are seen as the problem.

We have lived so long in a culture of blame, it has become difficult to envisage any other way of being. Everyone is convinced that the problem is out there. If they (the other group or party, the leadership, members, management, staff) would only see X or do Y, the problem would be solved.

As activists many of us were so busy waging a larger war – against that amorphous enemy 'the system' – that we did not have the time, energy or inclination to look within. The enemy was too large. To

indulge in criticising our leaders or, even less, ourselves, was seen as contradictory to the whole impetus of our involvement.

Even now in a less heightened political environment we tend to mix in circles of people who think like us. Any situation in which we are exposed to people who have very different values or cultures is seen as 'an encounter' or 'an event'. It is something outside of how we mould our values and beliefs – an exposure, not an immersion.

While the flock mentality in which we all live is very reassuring because it validates our core beliefs, we often miss the opportunity to really grow by exploring different perceptions of the world. Only when we are really open to having our beliefs and actions challenged, will others feel okay to do so.

How tolerant are we as individuals in the way we relate to others in our home and at work (before we even begin to look at our broader involvement in society)? Do we

really listen? Do we try to understand where the other person is 'coming from'? Do we give him or her a chance to share or the desire to share the feelings that shape their actions?

A couple of years ago such sentiments would have been regarded as trite or bourgeois intellectualising. Now a culture of openness and tolerance within an organisation is becoming a necessary imperative for effectiveness on the ground.

We can only begin to meet the challenges of the 1990s when we start to develop a new culture – a culture of looking within – which entails a very different risk to facing the teargas of the past.

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