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Children's radio report: Child Safety Measures during the World Cup – how did we do?

Transcript

(Furqann) Hi I'm Furqaan

(Khumo) Hi I'm Khumo

(Khotso) Hi I'm Khotso.

(Furqann) We wanted to find out about child safety during the World Cup

(Khumo) Where better to start, than by talking to children

(Khotso at fan park) We're at a fanpark and I see you guys are having a lot of fun today and I just want to ask you if you feel safe here.

(Girl 1) Yes I'm feeling safe

(Khotso) And why do you feel safe here?

(Girl 1) There are more securities and police that are guiding us.

(Boy 2) Without an adult, no I'm not feeling that safe.

(Khotso) Why not?

(Boy 2) Why? Because most human trafficking mostly happens at fan parks, at malls and where people know they are mostly alone, they don't come with their parents. So yeah, I don't feel that safe.

(Khumo) We spoke to these children at a fan fest in Soweto, where special efforts have been made to keep children safe. Here's Carol Bews from Johannesburg Child Welfare.

(Carol Bews, Johannesburg Child Welfare) We're running a child friendly space at the Elkah Cricket Stadium in Soweto, which is one of the official fan fests. We are concerned that children may be at risk of being lost or abandoned or even abused at the fan park and we are here to offer them services if anything like that happens.

(Furqann) When children arrive at the fan fest they and their parents are given matching wristbands to identify them if they get lost, but that's not all...

(Carol Bews, Johannesburg Child Welfare) Because we are aware that many children would be beneficiaries of school feeding schemes, we are doing outreach activities with the children where they come in at different times of the day and we do an awareness activity on child safety, child protection, and child trafficking and we also give them a meal.

(Khotso) UNICEF works with local organisations, like Johannesburg child welfare, to run these child friendly spaces. We spoke to Stephen Blight, head of child protection services there.

(Stephen Blight, Head of Child Protection Services, UNICEF) There were concerns raised very early around issues of child safety around the World Cup and some of the issues raised were for example around schools being closed for the World Cup period, and fears that with children having nothing to do during that period, having no structured activities, there is more potential for them to get into trouble or be exploited by others. And we think it is important that children are able to participate and have fun and join the festivities, but that they do so in a safe manner, and in a way that doesn't expose them to dangers.

(Khumo) This is just one part of a National Child Protection Action Plan, drawn up by government for the World Cup. Along with Non-Governmental Organisations, or NGOs, it involves government departments, social workers and police. Here's Gyan Dwarika from the Department of Social Development.

(Gyan Dwarika, Social Work Advanced Specialist: Child Exploitation, Department of Social Development) I think for the world cup it was a pressure on Departments per se to have a co-ordinated effort because there was such a focus on South Africa giving a guarantee to FIFA and to other countries in the world that they would be safe and secure in this country and we had to ensure that this happens and this helped everyone to work together. If there is a report of a child being neglected or abused or exploited during this period the response will be immediate. You know, normally everyone is caught up in their own cycle and it's a shortage of manpower, but we planned so everyone is there an available.

(Furqann) While this Soweto fan park has a child friendly space, only official Fifa Fan Fests have them, and not all of them do...

(Stephen Blight, Head of Child Protection Services, UNICEF) You often have to make choices and prioritise according to what resources are available. We didn't have enough resources to put in these child friendly spaces in every fan fest in the country and so we prioritised those where there was a clear demand from the host city and ones that we thought presented risks to children.

(Khotso) We asked the Department of Social Development about the issue of resources.

(Gyan Dwarika, Social Work Advanced Specialist: Child Exploitation, Department of Social Development) Unfortunately there was no money set aside for the protection of children. We worked within the budgets that we had and we used funding, like from UNICEF for example. Funding was available for larger issues of security, like procuring helicopters and strengthening the SAPS capacity, and strengthening the SADS capacity, but on the issue of children, no. But as I said we haven't failed ourselves, we looked within our own budgets and used whatever resources we had.

(Khumo) Gyan Dwarika also explained the government's relationship with NGOs.

(Gyan Dwarika, Social Work Advanced Specialist: Child Exploitation, Department of Social Development) It's a partnership. We, government, always develop policy, frameworks, strategies, that is their core function. And when we talk about partnership with the Non-governmental organisations, we call them the civil society organisations, they are the implementers. They will implement the programme, you develop it at that level and they will implement it at the grass roots level as well, (pause) together with government departments as well, it's a partnership bottom up and up bottom, both ways.

(Furqann) The NGOs identified a number of challenges. Carol Bews of Johannesburg Child Welfare again.

(Carol Bews, Johannesburg Child Welfare) I would have liked to have run more activities; we don't have the manpower or the capacity to run more activities. This has been quite stressful for the organisation, because still have other child protection services to carry out, you know if a child is abandoned in a toilet in Hillbrow we still have to have social workers and staff who are able to go out and respond to that. So if South Africa had the World Cup next year again, I would like to say, yes lets start a little bit earlier, lets get all the services together and get the government on board as well, for funding and for staffing purposes.

(Stephen Blight, Head of Child Protection Services, UNICEF) The involvement with the child friendly spaces has actually been relatively easy because it is a controlled environment in a limited geographic space, so we are able to reach children there. What we worry about are the huge numbers of children who are vulnerable in South Africa and how capacities are inadequate to reach them in every city, in every township, in every suburb, in every rural area in the country. We also worried about a large number of children from neighbouring countries in South Africa, many of them undocumented, they don't report themselves – we don't know who they are, we don't know where they are and they disappear in South Africa, and this is one of the biggest challenges we face.

(Khotso) We asked Gyan Dwarika from the Department of Social Development what she thought

(Khotso interviewing Gyan Dwaika) Do you think there was something that we should have done that we didn't do right now?

(Gyan Dwarika, Social Work Advanced Specialist: Child Exploitation, Department of Social Development) I think we've done enough. I think children were aware of what was done and of what they have to do. But I think that maybe much more awareness raising programmes should have been held, but I think that overall parents need to be empowered, I think that's what should have happened, parents should have been empowered to ensure the protection and safety of their own children.

(back at fan fest)

(Boy 2) Most parents, including my parents, they should accompany their children when they come to fan parks.

(Khumo) We wanted to know where children get their information from, about staying safe.

(Girl 1) At home

(Boy 3) I got it on my parents

(Khotso at fan park) Is that only where you got your information?

(Boy 3) No and at school.

(Furqaan) None of the children we asked mentioned the media; we wanted to know what role it played.

(Khumo) We talked to the adults, views were mixed. Here's Stephen Blight from UNICEF first

(Stephen Blight, Head of Child Protection Services, UNICEF) We're very happy with the attention journalists have paid to child safety issues around the World Cup. We think that journalists have a critical role to play, that we couldn't have raised awareness without the involvement, understanding of issues and commitment of journalists.

(Gyan Dwarika, Social Work Advanced Specialist: Child Exploitation, Department of Social Development) Well I think in general the media did ok, that was also another issue with FIFA, where they didn't, prior to the event and during the event they requested no for negative reporting. So I think the media has done well thus far, but on issues of children I think they focused more on the activities of the World Cup but not much on the issues of children.

(Carol Bews, Johannesburg Child Welfare) I think this is the first time I am being interviewed here from a South African context, most of the interviews that have happened here have been with International media and not with South African media. I would like South African media to take a more proactive stance. There's a lot the media can do, and sometimes I feel that the media is working against us, only looking on sensational stories rather than looking at the proactive, preventive stories, and sometimes the good news stories as well.

(Khotso) All of the people we spoke to said they had learned important lessons from trying to keep children safe during the World Cup

(Khumo) Perhaps there are important lessons here for the media too. Khumo Baduza

(Furqann) Furqann Ahmed

(Khotso) Khotso Zihle, Media Monitoring Africa

Khotso, Furqaan and Khumo are learners from Naturena and Saxonwold primary schools. They were nominated by their peers to represent them at a children's press conference on the 12th June 2010, dealing with issues like children in the media, child safety and human trafficking.

They then participated in a radio project with Media Monitoring Africa where they trained and worked as child reporters. The above report is the product of all their hard work!

They conducted the interviews on Saturday 3rd July (Carol Bews and children at Fifa Fan Fest in Soweto) and on Thursday 8th July (Stephen Blight and Gyan Dwarika).

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