

# Applied Research Partnerships with Developing and Transition Countries

Swiss Universities of Applied Sciences and Universities of Teacher Education

## Project title

# Woods and Friends: Street soccer, peer education approach and a free instant messaging application to communicate effectively

Foto: Daniel Pitter

### Thematic focus

street soccer, peer education, prevention

### Year

2012



### Project location

Masiphumelele, Cape Town, South Africa

### Swiss Institution

University of Applied Sciences of Southern Switzerland  
Department of Business and Social Sciences

### Partner Institution

Cape Peninsula University of Technology  
Faculty of Education and Social Sciences

### Description

The project aims to prevent drug and alcohol abuse and the spread of HIV/AIDS through counseling and the promotion of citizenship values using a Peer Education approach. Street soccer will be used as a hook to gather the intended age group (10-13 years –Senior Primary School grades) in the Township of Masiphumelele. The novelty of this project lies in using a free instant messaging application (Mxit) as the vehicle to deliver messages amongst peers. Mxit is the largest social messaging network in South Africa and on the entire Continent. This pioneering model is intended to be replicable in developing countries since it capitalizes on the overall wide use of social messaging networks amongst new

generations, and sidesteps a major obstacle to the spread of social media in developing countries; namely Internet access and the comparative high cost of a PC.

### Development relevance

Relevance in terms of Millennium Development Goals (UN declaration): According to the 'Gini Coefficient' South Africa ranks very high: that means that the inequality among incomes is the highest in the world. Poor education, HIV/AIDS, apartheid heritage, chronic delay in welfare resources and addiction problems are among the most important causes of poverty. Therefore the belief that enhancing citizen

awareness, delivering HIV and substance abuse prevention through peer-education is going assist the process of eradicating poverty. The relevance for development of this project has a potential to be reproduced in other countries, especially in Africa and South America.



Into the narrow avenues of the informal settlement in Masiphumelele.



Mobile phone company's box in Masiphumelele.

## Main features of the project

Masiphumelele, is a community township in Cape Town. It saw its beginnings in the early 80's during the South African segregationist regime known worldwide as 'Apartheid'. The newborn Township was originally called 'Site 5', later renamed Masiphumelele (which is a Xhosa word meaning 'We will succeed') after the first democratic election in 1994. The population has been growing steadily reaching an estimated number of 40'000 people (2011).

Children and adolescents, confronted with a very impoverished environment, fall into alcohol abuse, drug abuse (mainly 'tik', which is crystal methamphetamine), and hopelessness. In addition, not protected sexual intercourse leads to HIV transmission (a strong cultural, tribal imprint still prevents HIV prevention and information campaigns from being effective).

Recreational facilities for children and youngsters are also very scarce: the community does now have two new soccer fields and a basket ball court. The Desmond Tutu Foundation - as mentioned above - offers spaces and activities in the newly built structure. Two soccer fields for a soccer mad population are definitely not enough to enable ca. 8'000 children and youngsters to play their favorite game.

Within this context children and youngsters, exposed to Western ideologies and the strong influence of social media develop expectations, dreams and illusions. Soccer itself is a double-edged sword: on the one hand it delivers a healthy alternative to the above mentioned challenges but on the other it creates, false and destructive illusions.

Besides this philosophical hypothesis there is a practical inability to promote soccer as a healthy vehicle for endangered children/youngsters: not enough facilities to train and play, due to the scarcity of land and inefficient sport policies.

The existing facilities and organized championships are also not enough to allow the majority of the age group to get involved in their favorite game (soccer). Street soccer doesn't need any specific facility as by definition it is played in the streets or squares.

Street Soccer moves the age group away (in part) from the illusions created by the traditional soccer game and its myths. Therefore Street soccer could become the container through which to promote citizenship values and relevant counseling through the Peer Education approach.

The chosen street soccer players might become the first peer-mentors. We know that the traditional peer to peer approach needs a definite setting and face to face interactions; therefore we question ourselves on the best instrument to reach as many children/youngsters as possible.

We must take into consideration that nowadays, even in an impoverished South African community, cell phones are the most used communication tools. Children and youngsters own second hand cell phones. Several Mobile company cabinets are present in the most strategic spots in the Township.

Young generations, all over, make large use of social messaging networks as communication and interaction devices. In South Africa (University of Stellenbosch) a platform of instant messaging services, which might be downloaded on cell phones, has been developed. MXit is the most sophisticated one. A mobile instant messaging and social network service, which has about 50 million users, most of them in Southern Africa, and is acquiring an average of 43 000 new users a day, which makes MXit the biggest social network in Africa. The system sidesteps a major obstacle to the spread of social media in developing countries: Internet access and low incomes. In much of Africa, weak infrastructure limits access to electricity, phone lines and the Internet, making surfing the Web often an expensive luxury.

The novelty of this research-action project relies on using a free instant messaging application (MXit) as a means to deliver messages amongst peers in addition to the traditional face to face approach. The type of messages which might be delivered will be focused on the social hardship context in which children/youngsters are in: prevention of substance abuse, alcohol abuse and HIV/AIDS. Moreover, access to a 'chat room' (directed by the peer-mentor) is a secretive 'place, where youngsters may disclose information without fear of being seen or heard.



Two youngsters playing soccer on a street in Masiphumelele.



Former only soccer field in Masiphumelele.