

CHAPTER 6

CHALLENGES FACING THE MORAL REGENERATION CAMPAIGN

Sustainability

There are two (related) aspects of sustainability that face the MRM as it heads towards its fourth year as an independent NGO. The fundamental question is whether this campaign can be sustained as a civil society initiative in the absence of a popular, organic support base. Related to this is the other aspect, that of financial sustainability. The government grant to fund the establishment of the MRM was for an initial period of three years, to the end of March 2005, and it is not at this stage clear whether further funds will be forthcoming. If there were evidence of a significant 'movement' or 'campaign', perhaps government funding would be easier to obtain; but, at this stage, the MRM has to work rather hard to demonstrate the value and impact it has generated during the initial three years.

The new approach of the MRM board—for the MRM to become an advocacy group, rather than a mass mobilisation campaign—may be more strategic, but it is notoriously difficult to fund NGO advocacy work (in part, because its outcomes are difficult to demonstrate); and it seems questionable whether government should fund an advocacy organisation, albeit one which focuses on moral-social advocacy rather than policy advocacy.

In the short term, it is likely that the MRM will receive ongoing financial support from government—who cannot be seen to be abandoning the moral regeneration issue—and also from domestic business, thanks to the support of Business Against Crime (BAC).⁶⁸

Defining and measuring morally regenerative activities

The nature of the MRM's activities will also be a key determinant of its future sustainability. Simply acting as 'co-ordinator' of efforts taking place elsewhere has been seen to be unsuccessful, not least because an external 'co-ordinating' agency cannot *instruct* other organisations to act; it merely relies on goodwill and hence cannot ensure outputs or impacts. (Various attempts at 'co-ordination' on single-issue, inter-agency projects have been undertaken

elsewhere within the crime prevention and criminal justice sectors,⁶⁹ and most of them have been equally unsuccessful.)

In addition to the problems associated with a co-ordinating role, the movement also faces the problem of defining and identifying activities as morally regenerative. While there is a potentially large 'feel good factor' associated with moral regeneration—all manner of activities could be seen as part of the campaign—it will be extremely difficult to empirically demonstrate whether any of these activities actually enhance morality. The range of activities described as having a moral regeneration impact⁷⁰ includes:

- a school feeding scheme and food garden project in Soshanguve;
- an ethical leadership training course run through the University of Stellenbosch;
- a project to promote sexual abstinence run by Diakonia (a Christian organisation) in KwaMashu; and
- a project of the Gender Commission dealing with men and gender, to advocate for gender equality and reduce abuse of women.

However, it is virtually impossible to tell whether any of these activities are having an impact on morality; and which one will have the greater impact (be the best investment for funders interested in moral regeneration).

As long as the entire initiative continues to be conceptualised as a broad movement, with a large number of participants contributing a range of morally regenerative activities, there will continue to be a problem of definition. The tendency to 'double-count' many of the moral regeneration activities may also lead to problems: for instance, the organisation running the school feeding scheme and food garden may want to claim that as a poverty alleviation project or a community development project, as well as a moral regeneration project. Similarly, in the government sector, the rehabilitation of offenders is one of the core functions of the Department of Correctional Services, not a moral regeneration project implemented since the inception of the campaign.

The government is commissioning research to be conducted by the parastatal Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), which aims at assessing the 'social wellbeing' of the nation, and it is believed that this research will also provide some indicators of the state of morality. While this is surely an enormous methodological challenge, perhaps it will generate some data to

assist in demonstrating which kinds of activities actually contribute to improved moral fibre. This will be essential for the campaign, as its new focus on advocacy may lead back to an over-emphasis on 'preaching and speaking'; precisely the kind of activities that are hard to measure and sell to funders.

Government's role in moral regeneration

The type of programmes most recently described as government's contribution to the moral regeneration campaign are also those which are described as government's crime prevention programmes, or victim empowerment programmes, or women's empowerment programmes, or child rights programmes. Again this could result in the problem of 'double-counting'. The MRM might benefit from a more frank approach, which makes clear that some ongoing government programmes are seen as contributing to moral regeneration (and making explicit exactly how this contribution is made), rather than appearing to claim that government has initiated new programmes solely for the purpose of contributing to moral regeneration.

The government sector within the moral regeneration initiative appears to be regaining some momentum, and it will be interesting to see how this is sustained in parallel to the MRM itself becoming a more focused advocacy and communication organisation. Already the relationship between the MRM office, itself an offspring of government, and the national government departments has been a little difficult; this relationship will surely be one of the most interesting dynamics of the campaign in the next period.

Government's discourse around moral regeneration looks set to continue as an ideological campaign, with allusions to the anti-apartheid struggle intended to enthuse and mobilise its supporters. For instance, President Mbeki's remarks relating to violence against women and children during the 16 Days of Activism Campaign in December 2004:

To make a real difference in the campaign to reduce the incidence of violence against women and children, we must work simultaneously to improve the material lives of our people, while working in these communities to convince them that they too must join the struggle to end violence against women and children. In this regard, we must engage in the kind of popular mobilisation we undertook during the

struggle against apartheid, reaching the people directly and showing them that freedom from apartheid must also mean the freedom of women and children from violence and abuse. ... as communities we need to create widespread awareness of how complicity with crime and criminal behaviour promotes crime. We must hold a mirror to the face of our society and demonstrate the cost of sustaining the market for stolen goods; of protecting and harbouring criminals and of colluding with abusive attitudes towards women and children. ... Clearly, if we are to defeat crime we must educate ourselves about our role in helping to stop corruption that steals from all of us and destroys the moral fabric of our society. We must ensure that every South African makes an informed choice whether they are prepared to be part of criminal!n [sic] and defeat of crime.⁷¹

Both government and the MRM in which it participates will need to refine and adhere to their own appropriate discourses around morality and crime. The shift by the MRM board towards a greater advocacy role for the organisation suggests the possibility of divergent approaches between the NGO and government.

The Zuma connection

The mid-2004 proposal for a 'Council of Patrons' could be seen as a response to the allegations of corruption which continue to be associated with the MRM's original patron, Deputy President Zuma, in an attempt to dilute his association with the campaign. It could also be a way of including some of the key religious leaders in the high profile structures of the campaign, but removing them from positions of executive influence over its operations, or simply of adding important representatives from various constituencies into symbolic positions where they will *not* actually directly engage with the operations of the organisation. In any event, the notion of the 'Council of Patrons' seems to have disappeared from the agenda, as only a new board was proposed at the conference at the end of 2004.

For the foreseeable future then, Deputy President Zuma remains the patron of the MRM. No change in this arrangement seems likely. However, if Zuma is charged with any corruption-related offence, the MRM would need to review the situation. Given the predominance of ANC-aligned members of the MRM board, it is likely that the MRM will follow a similar approach to the ANC in dealing with the corruption allegations associated with Zuma.

The religious-spiritual discourse

Although not religious in phrasing, the moral regeneration initiative is still associated with a religious initiative; and perhaps for that reason is still viewed with some discomfort by those who are uncomfortable with the language and practice of organised religion. For those with a left wing intellectual training (such as many in government and even in the MRM), moral discussion is generally considered ideological, hence, perhaps, the content of the moral regeneration initiative finding itself more often in the ideological terrain of nation building rather than the religious terrain of spirituality.

Conversely, however, the moral regeneration initiative may also have been borne out of a recognition by precisely this same group of ideologues that there is indeed an area of individual and social life beyond the material, which impacts on quality of life and the achievement of the government's election promise to deliver 'a better life for all'. As one of the South African experts on ethics put it:

In the heat of the resistance struggle I think a lot of us lost sight of the whole other side; of people's need for religion or spirituality.⁷²

The use of a religious-spiritual discourse has also been on the increase in first world political discourse in recent years. Conservative prime ministers like John Howard in Australia strongly promote 'family values', and UK Prime Minister Tony Blair uses a religious discourse more openly than any British prime minister in decades, but does so largely in the context of justifying and 'guiding' his own decisions. The rise in power of the conservative Christian lobby is widely understood to be associated with the return to the White House of the Republican presidential candidate after years of slightly more liberal Democratic administration.

United States President George W Bush initiated a faith-based approach when he first took office the first time, and created an 'Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives' in the White House. To lead the new Office, Bush appointed Professor John J Dilulio, the Director of an organisation called PRRAY (Partnership for Research on Religion and At Risk Youth). Dilulio was known for an approach that drew links between religious faith, faith-based activities and organisations, and various measures of socio-economic well-being and the strength of civil society. Much of his work has focused on the problems of young offenders and of imprisonment and rehabilitation. Dilulio resigned from the government Office after less than a year, but continued to

lead the PRRAY initiative and advocate for an approach to youth development and crime prevention which is based on 'monitoring, mentoring, ministering' and a "sense of moral obligation to America's children that transcends conventional political pontification".⁷³