



Summary Feasibility Report on the BULLET PROOF PARK

Gun Free South Africa, 14 May 2024

In early April 2024 [GFSA](#) proposed building a [Bullet Proof Park \(BPP\)](#) in Mitchells Plain on the Cape Flats as one way to protect children from being shot and injured or killed in crossfire. Everyone had something to say about the proposal: community leaders and activists, CPF leaders, criminologists, gang experts, health professionals, child rights experts, politicians, policy makers and safety and security officials.

GFSA wanted to know more about people's responses and so interviewed many of those who had commented on the idea of the BPP. Most people we spoke to had talked about the BPP across their organisations, networks, circle of friends, and so drew on these conversations when speaking to us.

Summary of Consultations

Almost everyone is intrigued and interested, with responses ranging from horror at the idea to support for it. People questioned 'is this what we have come to, is this what we have to resort to, to keep our children safe?' on the one hand to 'this is a concrete solution to a real problem' on the other. One suggestion was that we at least build a prototype by piloting a BPP in the grounds of a school which has had problems (over the last 10 days two girl learners – 12 and 16 years – were shot and killed outside their schools, both in crossfire).

A few people saw the BPP proposal as a way to focus attention on the issue of children's rights and to raise awareness of the extent of the gun violence problem and how it impacts on young children and to then get people talking about solutions.

Feedback

Overall feedback was critical of the BPP proposal, raising problems both about the approach to crime prevention and about the flawed nature of the park design, 'it's completely insane and not sustainable – either to build or maintain this park' were the blunt words of one person.

Key responses included:

- The most powerful critique was this: the message we are sending with this proposal is that we are OK with gun violence, and this is our only solution. We accept gun violence as normal. This means we are giving up!
- If this is a situational crime prevention strategy, then the positioning of the BPP in the park will be critical as parks are used by gangs to position themselves in opposition to each other; parks often mark the boundary between rival gangs, which is one of the reasons that parks are dangerous places for children to play.
- Who is going to monitor the park, not just the going in and out, but things like preventing theft of solar panels, vandalism, and graffiti, etc?
- One of the most frequently raised challenges was the risk of gangsters taking over the park and using it to continue their fight against a rival gang. Concerns were raised about a gang using a young child to gain access through the facial recognition system as well as the potential of the BPP to escalate violence between gangs as it is seen as an asset to conquer resulting in inevitable acts of reprisal.
- The negative psychological impact on children was raised: a sense of being boxed in, flying bullets over the structure while they are inside; getting hurt inside the park; pressing the panic button and the cops



or EMS not being able to access the park because of the facial recognition restriction; and questioning, ‘what message are we giving our children – that this is the only solution we adults can think about to protect them and keep them safe?’

- Another factor to consider is that children are already living in confined spaces in many of these communities and the street provides them with unrestricted space to play, so playing in a confined BPP space may not be appealing.
- Children do not necessarily fear the gangsters; they have a relationship with them, they are known, some of them are neighbours or related in some way.
- There are cameras inside the BPP, but they also need to be outside to monitor gang or other related activity outside of the park.
- When the gang wars start, everyone is going to want to run into the perceived safety of the BPP – we can see mothers running with their children to seek shelter in the park when the gangs start shooting.
- Liability issues: ventilation being insufficient on hot days and children suffering medical conditions while inside. Who is liable for their safety while inside the park?
- The park is extremely limited in so many ways:
 - Limited interior space in one location in one community
 - Limited number of children it can accommodate
 - Limited time period – only when playing – not when walking back home, to school, to the spaza shop, etc.
 - The cost is a major limiting factor; this money could best be spent on socio-economic development, creating jobs, etc.
- The park will not be well received as a safety measure because it seems like a middle-class solution, i.e. throwing smart tech at a real problem in Cape Flats communities.
- The building of the BPP does not address the root cause of gun violence: this differed depending on who we spoke to and included the impact of SA’s history of colonialism and apartheid, marginalised and poor communities with little opportunities for job creation, desperate socio-economic conditions, high levels of gun availability, drug use, gangs and corrupt police officers.

Most people acknowledged the outrageous nature of the proposal to build a BPP, offering this as a last resort solution to the problem of children getting shot in the crossfire. It shocked people and made them pay attention to the enormity of this problem, giving rise to a lot of conversations at every level. One person said, ‘You have turned things on their head and reminded us that this problem is very real, and we need lasting, effective solutions to keeping our children safe’. ‘Building a Bullet Proof Park cannot be a solution to this problem of guns and gun violence,’ said another.

Some Solutions

- Most people liked the idea of making parks, and other spaces in the community, [Gun Free Zones](#), almost as a logical outcome of the discussion generated by the BPP – which is ‘how do we keep our children safe?’, for at least part of the day.
- Creating corridors of safety where community members, especially children, can safely move between different spaces such as home and school.
- Taking an approach which champions the idea that we can and must find these solutions together; we all need to be involved.
- Being clear that we will no longer accept this as normal: we are going to do something about it.
- Locating any action within the bigger context of crime, poverty, inequality within the communities in which we work.
- Developing a campaign on children’s right to safety.

Ends