Stories of collective learning and care during a pandemic

Reflective research by practitioners, researchers and community-based organisers on the collective shifts and praxis needed to regenerate transformative futures

Edited by Injairu Kulundu-Bolus, Gamuchirai Chakona and Heila Lotz-Sisitka

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Foreword

From the beginning of the year 2020, we have all been acclimatising to the reality of a global pandemic presenting itself with great intensity in our local contexts. In a sudden and sustained way, COVID-19 has required that we halt our daily rhythms to consider how to keep each other safe whilst generously considering the lives, livelihoods and sustenance of the most vulnerable amongst us.

In South Africa, a country that has to be critically hyper-aware of the social dynamics that reproduce inequality, one could palpably feel the collective gasp last year as we wondered what would appear in the wake of the pandemic here at home. COVID-19 did not surface anything new around the polarised tensions that South African society is locked into. It simply magnified the social inequalities that we have perhaps become too accustomed to, offering a strong moment for their reflexive consideration, and thus also possibilities for regenerative action.

Many have lamented in the past that South Africa has lost the spirit of collective service that made the fall of the apartheid regime inevitable. Perhaps what we have lacked is a galvanising force beyond the mode of politics proper to jolt us back into expressing the urgent responsibility we have to each other, whilst also surfacing the substantive and challenging learning needed to reconcile our efforts with securing a sustainable future on earth.

As quickly as a collective psyche of fear arose in response to COVID-19, so too did an indomitable spirit of collaboration and learning that sent itself down many unknown and generative pathways. This was a time of initiation, a time to convene in new ways, and also, very crucially, a time to properly recognise and weave existing old relationships into new configurations of solidarity and hope.

The losses have been too numerous to count, and the collective grief that is unexpressed lies waiting in the wings, held back by safety protocols that have disrupted many rituals of comfort and mourning. Nevertheless, there has been an outpouring of care and a sustained voice of freedom resounding through the many collective experiments that ask us to 'stay with' and go deeper into 'the trouble'[1] as it presents itself and to forego what we considered 'normal' before the pandemic struck. There have been countless collectives that have risen to this call through concerted efforts to learn together at a very high speed.

New concepts of 'a just response' and 'a just recovery' became significant during and following the lockdown period(s). This is because the rapid lockdowns produced such immediate fissures, losses for many, and revealed the real-time inequalities in our society. These continue to have a massive impact, especially on what is normally referred to as the 'informal' economy, leaving many in hunger, without work, and without any safety nets. Early on, we tried to make sense of these fissures, not only in our own country but also throughout the southern African

1 A phrase encouraged though the work of Donna Harraway (2016).

region,[2] realising through this that we were not alone in these challenges, and that we would need to form collaborations of various kinds to face the future together and to mobilise the power of learning and education as a process of an emancipatory 'just recovery' or 'just response' to the pandemic's many effects on our society.

The social fissures that the pandemic has magnified have been challenging us to clarify aspects of educational research and practice that are needed in this time and also going forward into the future. This includes a strong focus on more responsive and contextualised approaches to skills development, vocational education and training for employment, enterprise development and job creation for young people and those who are unemployed. This needs to be done while also re-defining the parameters of what is seen as 'legitimate work', and 'enterprise development' because, currently, concepts of 'work' and 'enterprise' are not inclusive enough of the work and enterprises (and cultures of enterprise and work) of those most marginalised in the economy. This issue relates particularly to the concept of 'just transitions to sustainability'. In this context, there is a need for further action research that can highlight the types of social skills ecosystems that are needed to support basic livelihood development and new forms of work where many have collapsed as a result of the economic impacts of COVID-19.

Another area of relevance is the need to probe what can be learned from the COVID-19 crisis for re-building societies in better ways under the concept of 'building back better' or 'just recovery' with empathy, inclusion, and an ethic of radical re-generation and care. There are many options for such a process, such as examining the potential of solidarity economies and how these are learned, how learning networks can sustain cross-boundary activism and learning, and how a politics of empathy combined with strong science can help to mobilise new cultures of engagement and praxis, and how these can help to build societies and cultures that do not reproductive the less than attractive current status quo found in fossil-fuel capital and its aftermath of deep inequalities and exclusions. This theme also includes issues such as 'unlearning privilege' as much as it involves supporting the marginalised to access new forms of power and capability for just transitions and just responses.

At the time of writing, we are in the midst of the third wave of the pandemic and the illusion that we can ever return to the complacency and comfort of the 'normal' are fast being outpaced by urgent adaptations of old modalities tracing their way forward, grappling to create relevant spaces for collaboration and care.

Transforming Education for Sustainable Futures (TESF) was launched in February 2020, at a time when we had no idea what global reality would persist through this pandemic. TESF is a network plus scheme funded by the Global Challenges Research Fund. It is coordinated out of the University of Bristol and works with partners in India, Rwanda, Somalia/Somaliland and

2 In partnership with the TESF programme, UNESCO and JET Education Services, we undertook an online regional research project with student researchers from eight southern African countries, via an #OpenUpYourThinking research challenge, to probe the scope and implications of people's immediate experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns in the eight countries for transforming education for sustainable futures. This research helped us to develop insights and a methodology to support the emergence of the South African COVID-19 learning projects reported on in this monograph. It also helped us to consider some of the emerging concepts – such as 'just recovery' and 'just response' – and fed into a call for an emancipatory approach to educational policy and praxis for transforming education for sustainable futures (cf. Lotz-Sisitka et al., 2021) that is deepened and matched by the research presented in this monograph.

South Africa. TESF is an educational research project that addresses the role of education in climate action, decent work and sustainable cities. The project keenly keeps its eye on addressing cross-cutting inequalities, including poverty, gender and the status of indigenous knowledge. It seeks to promote the foregrounding of marginalised voices and the ethics and practice of decolonial research.

Whilst metabolising the many breaks and shifts to our anticipated schedule as the South African TESF Hub, it became apparent to us that the strongest pulse for the beginnings of our TESF work lay within the corollaries of high-speed learning and response-ability that the pandemic was generating. Many efforts underway were marshalling values and collective intelligence to address the critical challenges that the country was facing, challenges that pointed to the need for education and learning to be adapted to meet this heightened landscape of uncertainty.

One year later on 29 January 2021, the South African TESF Hub made an open call across the country for proposals around 'Learning pro-actively from the COVID-19 pandemic for Transforming Education for Sustainable Futures', with an emphasis on:

1. Skills development – developing skills that are needed to support basic livelihoods and new forms of work.
2. Finding better ways to support children's learning in the COVID-19 pandemic period (contextualisation, mediation, learning at home and school).
3. Learning lessons from informal learning for a just recovery from COVID-19 to inform climate action and longer-term transformations for sustainable futures.

The main research question that we were seeking to address was:

- What can be learned from the COVID-19 crisis for Transforming Education Systems for Sustainable Futures?

Sub-questions included:

- What kinds of skills development and skills ecosystems are needed for a 'just recovery' amongst those most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic?
- What kinds of support is required for 'learning at home' during the COVID-19 pandemic, and what will be needed when educational institutions re-open?
- What can be learned from informal learning in community engaged programmes for 'a just recovery' from COVID-19 to inform climate action and longer-term transformations for sustainable futures?

The eight projects that responded to the call, and that were interested in undertaking this reflective research project, included the work of:

- Iqonga loThungelwano, an Eastern Cape-based COVID-19 learning and solidarity network which researched the links between learning, solidarity and care arising in their network activities that were responding to reliable information on COVID-19 in rural areas and other related needs that arose as the pandemic hit.

- The Tsitsa Natural Resources Management Research Project in the Eastern Cape, which undertook to assess the implications of COVID-19 on the facilitation of transformative learning in rural contexts.
- Ground Truth, an organisation in KwaZulu-Natal which co-researched transformation within training processes for 'environmental champions'.
- The Batlhabine Foundation, a non-governmental organisation (NGO) based in Limpopo, which researched rural women's reflections on the learning needed for transformative futures.
- A 'Technological Transformations' collaboration which explored inclusive digital responses for a vocational education system in crisis.
- The Amava and Spaza Hub collaboration in Cape Town, which reflected on how young people and NGOs have been collaborating and learning proactively from the pandemic.
- Ubuntu from the West Coast in the Western Cape, which assessed the work conducted by the Ubuntu Rural Women and Youth Movement in building relationships among rural women, living both in coastal and in-land areas, with respect to their access to land and the natural resources they depend on for their livelihoods.
- The Cape Town-based Environmental Monitoring Group, which reported on the action learning that they underwent as an organisation to better respond to the crisis of the pandemic.

From 29 January to 21 March 2021, this varied group of practitioners, activists, young people, researchers and community-based organisers met online bi-weekly for two months to share their emerging thoughts around the reflective research that they were undertaking. The emphasis on *reflection* both within the research and during each collective call resonated with the teams as an incredibly timely activity in the midst of such prolonged social upheaval and urgency. Creating the space to reflect on what each team was witnessing in their contexts helped us to gain a picture of the dynamics at play during the progressing pandemic. It was powerful to witness the different ways of being that the act of reflection as a research process fostered, moving teams away from the burden of production towards carefully finding meaningful ways to listen and bear witness to what was already under way. It did so in part because it created a space outside the demand to produce something new; instead, each team was tasked with carefully making meaning of what had already transpired, seeking to assess the contours of praxis under way and the lessons that could be gained from this evaluation. The gesture of reflection taught us so much about the kind of inquiries that research can make if it is to stay faithful to the unfolding present moment and the possibilities that lie entangled within everyday praxis.

For some teams and their collaborators, this was the first time that they had engaged in a formal research process. For all those who participated, the act of reflection as the core focus of the project generated an open playing field for sharing their thoughts and contributing their thinking around the work that they had undertaken together. Fostering a space of reflection invited those often marginalised in the historical record of research to arrive at being legitimate knowers in whose reflection visions of the futures rest. We enjoyed the push back around ideas

of research that emerged in some of our calls and the stated requirements for a collaborative, co-engaged ethic that research cultures ought to foster. We were particularly thankful to the young entrepreneurs and activists that arrived on the call in beautifully irreverent ways, asking us to broaden our language during our gatherings in order to more radically anchor the expression of all those present.

Hosting an online conversation amongst such a diverse group of voices was an interesting and appropriate challenge as it mirrored the call for inclusion that continues to be at the heart of conscientious responses to the pandemic itself, and to the need for considering what transforming education for sustainable futures might involve. It was such a powerful reminder of the ways in which our language as researchers and practitioners often gets cordoned off in ways that do not transmit interest, curiosity and authenticity for all those present.[3] In turn, each team went back into their contexts and worked to find ways to create reflective spaces of their own. The results and knowledge gained from this has been very heartening to witness.

Some highlights of the collective conversation included questions around how each team was mobilising capacity in their contexts, and issues around sustainability surfaced as an urgent response in some cases, but as collective burnout in others. Across the different teams, questions emerged around what innovation looked like, as well as a pertinent look into what the role of technology and communication looked like for each project during the pandemic.

In some instances, the calls provided the platform for particular skills that proved useful to name and share amongst the teams in their continued learning. Teams were also encouraged to extend the ethic of inclusivity into their thinking around the representation of their research, augmenting the reflexive narrative reports found here with other media that they generated before and during the research process in ways that could bring the stories to life. The intention here was to make sure that when it was time to share these stories, they could travel far and wide and speak for themselves in many ways to all those interested in hearing and learning from them.

This monograph is the harvest of their collective efforts and learnings. Team Iqonga has created an earnest and thoughtful reflection on what it means to mobilise a radically diverse community of actors to share high quality, contextually sensitive, relatable and reliable materials among rural Eastern Cape citizens. Their ongoing work points to the configurations of solidarity that have been able to attend to the glaring gaps in COVID-19 communication whilst also giving us greater courage and sensitivity in understanding why care and trust are such an essential part of the kind of learning that can save lives during a pandemic. Their work anchors an understanding of what is possible when we prioritise relationships and culturally relevant responses whilst leaving us shocked by how these vital aspects continue to be so easily overlooked when they are needed the most.

Team Tsitsa gives us a picture of a rapidly evolving training environment focused on integrated landscape management during a pandemic. Their offering gives us insight into how to keep the learning alive through carefully integrated online and face-to-face practices. It shows the need for responsive facilitation in action that can adequately scaffold new learning landscapes, especially amongst those who are traversing online technological platforms for learning for the first time. Their work also gives us a glimpse of a community of practice digesting

3 Rose-Antoinette (2015, p. 125).

what working online means in a rural community. The weaving of the value creation framework methodology[4] helps us stay close to the meaning these practices have had for those who we have been journeying with, leaving us with a richer outlook on how we can continue to do this better together.

Team Ground Truth opens up a way of seeing into the massive potential that mobilising an environmental champions movement can have on the prospects of sustainable development and a green skills economy in South Africa. It zooms in on the kinds of facilitation and training approaches that make this vision possible during a pandemic. Here, we gain a syncretic outlook on how we can do the critical work around learning together in ways that surface indigenous knowledge, a sense of ownership, pride and connection, all marshalled towards the protection of communal resources and landscapes. All of this was done whilst additionally navigating technological platforms in relevant ways. Here we see how interactive and collaborative social learning can take us towards an enhanced future for sustainable and regenerative landscapes mobilised by environmental champions.

Team Technological Transformations thoroughly inducts us all into understanding how to rise to the issues of the digital divide that have been a painfully obvious feature before and during the ongoing pandemic. They bring these issues to bear in the context of a Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) system in crisis that is failing the current generation of young people. They carefully look at technology as a tool for supporting home-based or distance learning. They explore and appraise a great range of options available to us in ways that help us make better informed decisions on how to harness online learning. This piece supports our ability to generate critical digital inclusiveness through criteria that one might not even know to consider! They give us a superhighway into seeing into the plethora of options that are out there, and how to scaffold them adequately for the desired outcome of your learning intervention. This piece takes us much further than our over-used general knowledge by highlighting the possibilities that sit in the choices we make. This is a pertinent lesson on how to face up to the issues of the digital divide in considered ways.

Team Amava and Spaza Hub slow down the pace of the monograph by taking up the space visually and through personal reflections that share their experiences of the reflective research project. These valuable insights show how the young activists and entrepreneurs that started a food kitchen during the pandemic have grappled with the idea of research and the questions around what they are longing for. Their voices continue to reflect on what the year 2020 meant for them, what it brought up for them, the frustrations, the beauty and the hopes that they hold. This is a poignant space for metabolising the tender and discerning thought processes of youth change drivers grappling with a future worthy of their longing during a pandemic. The report shares their burgeoning thoughts around the present horizon that exists between their past experiences and the future they are leading themselves to, and what needs to change in order to move towards this. This piece also surfaces the behind the scenes grappling, courage and vulnerability of those willing to run alongside them as they articulate their valued being and doings. Amava and the Spaza Hub ask us to consider how collaborative, creative safe spaces that concentrate on youth futures are an essential part of imagining sustainable futures.

4 This is an evaluation methodology developed by Wenger, Trayner and de Laat (2011), adapted for the purposes of finding value in social learning processes.

Team Batlhabine shares what rural women in Limpopo are longing for in order to create sustainable futures. It paints a historical picture of how the underserved communities of Mudimeli and Batlhabine have evolved over time. It puts a spotlight on the massive gap in adult-based education that existed in the years preceding the fall of apartheid, and how there are few platforms that embrace the massive potential of women and other actors in rural areas. This puts a focus on the greater need for NGOs and TVET providers to provide contextually relevant education for livelihoods. There is a hunger out there to learn in ways that generate a sense of sovereignty and interdependence whilst firmly anchoring the futures of the young people in ways that create sustainable futures. This piece points to a massive gap in potential that exists for those who are underserved in these communities. Its reflections on this vital oversight are a steppingstone for further action in rural communities.

Team Ubuntu continues the conversation about rural women's development by deeply reflecting on the work that they have been doing over the years and how critical this work is right now with the economic pressure that the pandemic is accentuating. They share what is possible when women with similar problems, histories, heritage and identities come together; how they influence each other in potent ways to take up the initiative to access working land. The stories of women's struggle for sovereignty from being enslaved labourers to restoring their connection to the land as co-owners are often underreported in history. The spirit of rural women is alive in these pages, whether they are gathering to share seed or stories, or when they come together to march for their collective rights. Critical questions around how women learn best are also surfaced, bringing to the fore the need for more work in grassroots popular education, agro-ecology and paralegal training.

Lastly, Team EMG shares the many questions that the pandemic raised for them as an NGO in collaboration with others. Their report is packed with charged learning observations in process that show how they grappled with their core work as an organisation in a time when the pandemic was showing other important aspects of the work that urgently needed to be responded to. The external shock of the pandemic created the space for more localised responses that needed to be flexible to the growing need for food security. This piece reflects on the action learning they struggled to undergo as an organisation in heightened times. Their reflections bring to focus what critical responsiveness towards sustainable futures means within institutional settings that are grappling to maintain internal coherence, whilst being fit for purpose during a pandemic. It is vital reading for organisations asking themselves existential questions in the face of the pandemic.

The insights gathered by each group open up vistas of the kind of knowledges, practices and collaborative efforts needed to work towards transformative futures. Through the stories they tell, they offer us fertile steps forward that we can learn from and leverage in our own corners of praxis. Their earnest reflections open up the space for us to metabolise the issues that this pandemic has magnified. They challenge us to continue to struggle to respond in considered and expansive ways for the common good. They also challenge us to witness what is happening around us with greater care so that, as educators, practitioners, activists and researchers, we continue to work in ways that do indeed bring a vision of a just recovery or a just future into view. They also point us towards more fully embracing the meaning(s) of what an emancipatory

education and learning processes might look like, how they are grounded and emergent in and from the lives of people, and what this might mean for transforming education for sustainable futures. Too much research and praxis on transforming education for sustainable futures fails to ground itself in the lives of people. In this monograph, we share how this might be done via reflective and care-ful research that offers a challenge to traditional notions of research.

Injairu Kulundu-Bolus
Gamuchirai Chakona
Heila Lotz-Sisitka

October 2021

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Abstract

This monograph gives insight into the collective learning under way in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. As the first series of work emerging from the South African Hub in the network plus project on Transforming Education for Sustainable Futures (TESF), the monograph explores and demonstrates what kinds of collective learning support, skills ecosystems and capacity mobilisation are needed for a 'just recovery' from COVID-19 that can inform basic livelihoods, new forms of work, climate action and long- term transformations for sustainable futures. Eight South African based projects – ranging from the work of long-standing non-governmental and community-based organisations to newly formed constellations of practice in social solidarity – and research that occurred during the first wave of the pandemic, undertook to reflect on the collaborative efforts, ethics, knowledges, practices and technological scaffolding that are needed for education to respond faithfully to these times. These eight reflective stories encourage us to learn from the current praxis under way in ways that can strengthen the efforts of social practitioners, activists, educators and researchers navigating the systemic issues that the COVID-19 pandemic has magnified.

CHAPTER 1

iQonga loThungelwano loLuntu

Care, trust and learning

Reflections from iQonga loThungelwano loLuntu, an Eastern Cape based COVID-19 learning and solidarity network

Based on conversations and reflections with many friends, colleagues and champions

Written by Monde Duma, Taryn Pereira, Lawrence Sisitka, Monde Ntshudu, Buhle Francis and Thomas Salmon

Video editing by Lukhanyo Matshaya and Maletje Mponwana

Contents

1 Introduction

This report is the product of a unique, three-month small grant, awarded by the Transforming Education for Sustainable Futures (TESF) network, 'to allow groups that have been doing substantive education, training and/or social learning work during the COVID-19 pandemic to reflect on and write up the work that they have been doing to identify lessons that could be helpful for TESF research and praxis over the next few years'.

As coordinators of the iQonga loThungelwano network, we embraced the invitation to spend time deeply and collectively reflecting on the journey we had been on together, throughout one of the most challenging – and rewarding – years of our lives. This project was also a valued opportunity for us to reach out to our community-based partners ('community champions' in the terminology of our project) to ask them to reflect on what the iQonga loThungelwano network has meant for them over the past year, and in so doing to carry out co-engaged re-search into the collective social learning that has been enabled through this network. For all of us, this invitation to just reflect – supported by stimulating questions and bi-weekly co-learning sessions facilitated by the Environmental Learning Research Centre (ELRC) TESF project leads – has been a rare and precious space, too often missing from the tight-timeframe, deliverables-driven, exit-strategy-constrained project paradigm of our working lives. The thoughtful and open conversations we had with the community champions about what this project meant for them was an experience – the first experience for some of us – of truly ethical research practice, which brought justice to the voices of those we work with.

In this report, we will share some of the contexts out of which loThungelwano loLuntu emerged – the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Eastern Cape, the governmental responses to the pandemic and the gaps in that response, and the prior relationships that formed the fertile soil for this network to grow from – as well as reflections on what we have learned as coordinators and participants within the network, what the impact of the network has been so far, and what the future holds.

Since a significant aspect of our work has been in grappling with the shortcomings of most mainstream modes of communication, particularly with regards to meaningful communication with marginalised, rural isiXhosa (and other more-than-English) speakers, we have gone to a lot of effort to include audio-visual materials in this report, and to write in plain language for ease of translation. Reflective interviews with community champions were filmed and then edited into three videos – links to these videos are to be found in the section on the 'Impact of the network'. We also facilitated a Photovoice process with some of the champions, and some of the shared images are also presented in this report.

It is our intention to share a version of this report with all of the iQonga loThungelwano members, as this report is about us, and for us.

In-person at last! A reflection meeting in Makhanda Botanical Gardens, in preparation for the writing of this report

2 Background and context

The first South African cases of COVID-19 were reported in February 2020, and President Cyril Ramaphosa moved quickly to invoke the Disaster Management Act (No.57 of 2002), declaring a State of Emergency in March 2020. The State of Emergency kicked off with a complete lockdown of the country as Alert Level 5 was declared.

The hard lockdown had huge implications for every South African regardless of their socio-economic status. It affected livelihoods, health, education and every other aspect of life. Many people lost their jobs, and this was devastating for most poor households who relied on a sole breadwinner to scrape by. Many poor South Africans depend on temporary employment as house hands or doing odd jobs. These jobs were the first casualties during the hard lockdown.

This was a dire situation considering that South Africa is one of the most unequal societies on earth. Like anywhere else in the world, the pandemic exposed and amplified these inequalities (Marmot and Allen, 2020). Poor communities, as always, were the hardest hit and burdened by the outbreak of the pandemic. Furthermore, the risks of a devastating COVID-19 death toll in the Eastern Cape were very real given the weakness of the public health sector, the high incidence of poverty-related co-morbidities amongst Eastern Cape's citizens, and the absolute lack of reliable and accessible public health information for rural isiXhosa speakers. Kapiriri and Ross (2020) reflect on the vulnerability of poor communities during pandemics and the accompanying response to such pandemics and argue that their experiences and narratives must be better represented.

This reflective narrative report captures how a group of volunteers, composed of academics, students and community champions responded to the pandemic, particularly to the information gaps with regards to the pandemic and its social impacts. The perspective of the affected communities is at the heart of this reflection, with some additional reflection on the internal working dynamics of the coordinating team.

The philosophy that drove this work is CARE, TRUST and LEARNING. We worked with communities that we had previous relationships with, and with whom we had built solid TRUST, and we then extended this approach to other communities through our community action network. Wherever we tread, we have always made sure that empowerment comes through sharing knowledge, respect, and making ourselves vulnerable to the needs and concerns of the poor through their lens. That meant surrendering our map and taking direction from the communities we work with. This philosophy also underpinned the relationships within the coordinating team.

We realised that together through careful sharing of experience and knowledge we can co-creat 'new' and relevant knowledge that is contextually relevant. We therefore have made

Saturday Star poster

sure that CARE is the underlying motive when we engage with communities where we felt there was a need to intervene. CARE is the foundational principle of ubuntu – the acknowledgement that we need to take care of each other and life in general, as that is what makes us human. Our interactions in life are a life-long journey of LEARNING. Such learning is only possible within the context of TRUST both within the coordinating team and, most importantly, between the team and the community partners. During this pandemic, our virtual interactions further strengthened all our learnings as we shared information to potentially save lives.

The team and its existing networks

We are a collective of educator activists and community activists working in well-established food and water learning networks, including Imvothu Bubomi Learning Network, the South African Water Caucus, the Coastal Justice Network and the Tsitsa Project. We are students, farmers, activists, academics, parents and educators. We have joined together to form an Eastern Cape Community Action Network (ECCAN), affiliated with the Cape Town Together initiative and other COVID-19 civil society response groups. Our interest is to strengthen responses to the COVID-19 pandemic in the rural Eastern Cape. With coordination support from the Environmental Learning Research Centre (ERLC) at Rhodes University, we are working to establish a learning and solidarity network that supports rural Eastern Cape citizens to keep their communities healthy and safe in the time of COVID-19.

We have over a hundred ECCAN members throughout the rural Eastern Cape, who are small-scale farmers, community activists and educators. Our network is mainly clustered around Makhanda, King Williams Town, Middledrift, Willowvale, the Kat River Valley, the Tsitsa catchment, Kokstad, Mount Frere, Port St Johns, Lusikisiki, Centane and much of the Wild Coast.

We also have links to similar networks throughout South Africa and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region. We are learning from the Cape Town Together initiative, which has shown significant leadership in mobilising neighbourhood solidarity networks to facilitate safe and caring local responses to COVID-19. We are also linking up with other civil society organisations that are supporting local-level responses to the COVID-19 situation.

COVID-19 in the Eastern Cape

The Eastern Cape province, in particular the extensive rural areas of the previous 'homeland' areas and the burgeoning peri-urban areas on the fringes of the major urban centres, is home to some of the most impoverished and marginalised communities in South Africa. This impoverishment and marginalisation involve not only a desperate lack of any material wealth (financial and other), but also limited meaningful access to information about events or issues taking place beyond the local community. It also includes a dearth of opportunities for employment, education and for most other routes out of poverty. The situation is exacerbated

by the signal and serial failure of government at all levels to respond effectively and positively to communities' pleas for help in dealing with appallingly low levels of delivery of basic services, such as water and sanitation.

One critical outcome for many people living under such constraints is the loss of faith in their ability to deal with the existing stresses in their lives, or with new challenges. This loss of agency represents an extension of the impacts of the many years of impoverishment and marginalisation under the previous colonial and apartheid regimes. Understanding of and access to the internet is very limited, with even the more tech-savvy younger people unable to afford smartphones or the high costs of data in South Africa and facing a constant battle with unreliable networks. Even though most areas are reached by radio and TV networks, a large number of households have neither.

The degree of marginalisation experienced by most rural and peri-urban communities renders them particularly vulnerable to the impacts of universal challenges such as COVID-19. The lack of information on and understanding of the situation makes it almost impossible for people to make informed decisions as to how they can deal with it in terms of protecting themselves. The extreme lack of resources, often including no safe supply of water, makes it very difficult even for those who want to take the necessary protective precautions. A further exacerbating factor is the deeply felt need to observe cultural practices requiring large assemblies of people to share in momentous events such as initiations, weddings, funerals and various forms of worship. This is especially poignant in rural communities, which are to a large extent held together through shared cultural beliefs and identities. The requirements of protection against the coronavirus fly in the face of people's understanding of their roles and responsibilities in the collective, even to the extent of prohibiting visiting the sick, or day-to-day interactions with neighbours and family.

However, despite these almost overwhelming constraints, there is a growing number of young people, in particular, who are working to improve the situation of their communities. They find ways of accessing the internet and connecting with people in other communities and with various activist networks, and they welcome engagement with and support from outside organisations and networks such as the Each 1 Teach 1 Eastern Cape Community Action Network, known as the iQonga loThungelwano network. These young, committed activists, the 'champions', have become the life-blood of the network and are central to the whole process of information sharing.

Gaps in the pandemic response in the Eastern Cape

The outbreak of the pandemic globally was characterised by an avalanche of (sometimes contradictory) information. There was a clear recognition by most governments, including that of South Africa, that there was a need to share information widely on this new and intensely disturbing threat to humanity across the world. One major challenge was the fact that the information needed to be accurate and reliable and explain quite complex scientific concepts in ways that could be understood by most people. Generally, the information initially

came from the scientists who had been brought in to research and advise on how to deal with the pandemic, and they themselves were treading new ground. Translating this information into layman's terms was itself never easy, but within a relatively short space of time, fairly accessible and useful information was being produced, mostly by international organisations, in particular, the World Health Organisation (WHO), national governments, academic and research institutions, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

In South Africa, information was available from both international and national sources, and it seemed as though this challenge was being met. However, with only a few exceptions, the information most readily available to the South African population was and still is in English and, almost exclusively, is only available on the internet. The few exceptions include the Provincial Government of the Western Cape, which produces information in both isiXhosa and Afrikaans, some of which has been taken up by the Knowledge Translation Unit of the University of Cape Town Lung Institute, which also posts original materials in these languages on their website. A few NGOs, such as CovidComms SA, also produce materials in various languages accessible from their website. Much of the information produced in this way is in the form of 'infographics', with short, focused messages supported by colourful illustrations. Other NGOs produce videos in the languages of the communities in which they work, and these are accessible on Facebook sites, YouTube and websites. The reality is that, however well thought out and designed these materials are, they are not reaching the majority population in either the rural or peri-urban areas as they require internet access and capability, nor are they situated in the cultural contexts of the majority of the population, except for some videos that have been culturally located deliberately.

Even the most professionally designed materials tend to draw on 'western' scientific iconography. A perfect example of the former is the almost ubiquitous use of the phrase 'flattening the curve', which makes sense to those with an understanding of line graphs, but very little to the large number who do not. Concepts such as 'exponential' and 'logarithmic' associated with such analyses are also foreign to probably the majority of the population who have received very (and deliberately) limited education. In terms of the iconography, graphics of multiple graves marked by crosses have little relevance for people who mark their graves with stones; while the image of an hourglass (or egg-timer) to indicate time running out is meaningless to most, for whom the idea could be better expressed by a departing bus or train.

A further limitation of the infographic approach, in particular, is that the focus on short sharp messages (a typical 'comms' approach) overlooks the need for people to understand why they are being enjoined to do whatever it is they are expected to do.

At the other extreme, much of the information produced by the government is not only in English but in long-winded and scientific/technical English, rendering it almost incomprehensible to most people, even to many English first-language speakers.

Perhaps most disturbing in this province is that the Eastern Cape Provincial Government, which governs a province with 78.8% isiXhosa speakers, 10.5% Afrikaans speakers and only 5.6% English speakers, produce information only in English, and mostly information from the national government re-branded for the Eastern Cape.

The lack of good quality, verified and accessible information reaching the majority of people in the province (and presumably elsewhere) opens the gate to endless waves of spurious, inaccurate, misleading and often dangerous and harmful information. This arrives via social media or rumour and is then transmitted by word-of-mouth throughout communities.

It was in response to the very clear need for accurate and reliable information on the pandemic to be shared with the marginalised Eastern Cape communities that the iQonga loThungelwano network was formed.

Development of iQonga loThungelwano

One year ago, almost to the day, on 26 March 2020, a group of seven students, staff and friends of the ELRC held a Zoom meeting, from our newly enforced 'working-from-home' situations, to discuss possible responses to COVID-19 in the Eastern Cape. The invitation to this meeting read:

> Thanks for your interest in meeting to discuss how we can support and show solidarity with our food and water networks in the rural Eastern Cape to respond to Covid-19 and the related major social disruptions. [...] this afternoon we could discuss the particular needs, challenges and contributions of rural EC citizens, and how we might support networks such as the Imvotho Bubomi Learning Network (and others); and to consider whether new coalitions are needed at this time, to prepare and respond.

The initial group quickly grew in numbers, as students, academic staff and community-based leaders stepped forward to volunteer. We were closely following the Community Action Network (CAN) social movement emerging in Cape Town, and simultaneously speaking and listening to our friends and contacts in the rural Eastern Cape about the situation in rural communities.

Our concern from the outset was that information and understanding about the COVID-19 pandemic was very thin on the ground in a lot of communities, meaning that many people did not know how to protect themselves from the virus, how to ensure they did not spread it to others, what the reasons were for government measures such as the lockdown, or how to safely access essential services such as water, food and healthcare during this time. In the absence of accessible and reliable information, dangerous misinformation spreads very fast. Rumours started to swirl, for example, that this was a 'whites-only' disease, or a disease from the cities; that it was spread by foreigners; and that the lockdown was a distraction from some sinister military activity.

There was a huge amount of COVID-19 awareness material available, but, as mentioned above, all in technical English or with confusing graphics. The gap we identified was for high-quality, contextually sensitive, relatable and reliable materials for rural Eastern Cape citizens, such as the food growers, water custodians and citizen scientists from our networks.

We aimed to establish a learning platform for the development and sharing of such materials, information, ideas for action and practical responses to COVID-19 risks as well

as impacts. We did this, using social media platforms such as WhatsApp, through working closely with CAN champions, who are active leaders within existing networks able to reach a wide range of people in different areas, networks and communities of practice.

Significance of our name – iQonga loThungelwano loLuntu

Clay containers for the sharing of traditional beer

We are guided by the principle of 'Each One Teach One'/'Each One Reach One', whereby care and knowledge are passed from one person to the next, while maintaining a safe physical distance, in a wide-reaching network of solidarity and learning.

We started out calling ourselves 'Each One Teach One – Community Action Network'. This was later translated into the isiXhosa name iQonga loThungelwano, and it is this name that we now use most often. As we reflected upon this name through this TESF-led reflective exercise, we realised that there are layers of meanings and metaphors carried within this name.

IQonga loThungelwano loLuntu, literally means a 'network forum/platform'. *Ukuthunga* signifies 'unity in action'. When hosting a function, the beer or brandy is shared around in one container – using a single container is very symbolic of sharing and unity.

Through iQonga loThungelwano, we are following the practice of *ukuthunga*, but through 'virtual' (online) means. Ironically, *ukuthunga* – as it refers to the sharing of a single vessel of beer or a single pot of food – is unthinkable in COVID-19 times; nevertheless, we are upholding the symbolic essence of that gesture in our network. *iQonga* means to take to the stage, and for this you have to be very confident. It is like saying, 'Here is the mic, we want to hear your voice!'. It is a space for an *imbongi* (Xhosa praise poet) to communicate a message, and invitation for others to have their say.

Ukuthunga can also be used in the healing sense. As an operative word it means healing – ukuthunga amanxeba – healing of wounds. Not one of us has emerged from this pandemic without being wounded in some way. Virtual communication and solidarity platforms like iQonga loThungelwano have become platforms for healing and 'building back' together.

3 iQonga loThungelwano in action

As iQonga loThungelwano loLuntu, we have adopted a reflective approach to the sharing of information, making sure that it is responsive to the needs on the ground. The process of sharing information has a feedback loop, through which communities can describe how they found the information, whether it meets their needs and standards, what the current situation is in their community, and what their information needs are. This two-way sharing of information creates space for learning, re-learning and co-learning. In addition, developing the information materials is embedded in an ongoing reflective process.

The team producing the information materials first researches and then reflects on the content of the materials with respect to their accuracy, relevance and socio-cultural appropriateness. This process goes way beyond simply researching and producing information materials – the team has to be consciously reflective to make sure that information uptake and its use are immediate in response to the urgency of the situation. The production team treats the information materials in the same way a pharmacist would treat a dose of life-saving medicine. And in order to save lives, information must be clear, concise and relevant. How we did this is discussed next.

We recognised at the outset that the information needed to somehow get directly to the people themselves and the model of two 'lines of champions' who could disseminate the information through their own networks was adopted. The first-line champions (all volunteers) comprise some of the team members themselves and key community contacts developed by team members through many years of engagement with communities and community-based organisations. Each of these first-line champions have their own networks of contacts in communities across the province, and these contacts were asked to become second-line champions (also all volunteers), and to share the information they receive within their communities and with their other networks. At the peak of network activity between April and October 2020, there were in the region of 36 first-line and 84 second-line champions recorded in the champions' database. Subsequently, connections were made with champions and amaXhosa communities in the Western Cape (Cape Town and George), and in Gauteng. When it was learned that Afrikaans-speaking communities also needed information in their own language, an Afrikaans champions group was established. The core coordination team active in this period comprised 20 people, of whom eight were also first-line champions.

The medium chosen for sharing information was WhatsApp, as this was the most familiar and easily accessible for the majority of the champions. Funding from the ELRC is used to provide data for all the champions who require this, and to support the employment for two days a week of a champion's coordinator – an absolutely vital role. TESF funding is continuing the support for this role.

The core team divided into three specialist teams: one to source, develop and share materials and information with the champions; another to focus on broader communications approaches; and the third team to focus on advocacy. Cross-fertilisation between these teams was ensured through team members being involved in more than one team and through regular full team Zoom meetings.

Information is shared by the 'Materials' team on a wide range of issues and topics, with the most important being the pandemic itself, and how to deal with the actual and potential impacts of the coronavirus in communities. This has included developing an understanding of how the virus works, its effects and symptoms, and how it is transmitted. There is a strong and repeated emphasis on the precautions necessary to reduce transmission under all circumstances. Information has also been shared to clarify the roles of healthy eating and indigenous medicines in helping people withstand infection and cope with the illness if infected. One aim of this information is to counter ideas being circulated on social media and in communities of the supposed curative properties of indigenous or alternative medicines, and of certain herbs, fruit and vegetables. Currently, there is much information sharing on vaccines, the vaccination programme and how people, including community health workers, can engage with this. An ongoing focus is on the need to continue to take precautions despite the recent decline in infection rates, with discussion of the probability of a '3rd wave' of infections if people drop their guard.

A second key focus is on sharing information on the changes in the Alert Levels. This involves keeping people aware of which Alert Level is currently in place, the regulations associated with this, and in particular what they actually mean to people's lives. As these changes in Alert Level take place almost instantaneously, with the President addressing the nation in the evening and the level changing at midnight the same day, this requires an almost immediate response.

A poem against COVID-19 stigma by Akhona Mafani

Information is also shared on other issues, in particular, the availability of social grants, including the Social Relief of Distress (SRD) Grant, and the payment dates of all the other social grants. The sharing of these dates has proved enormously helpful to many people, who were previously unsure of the dates, and could spend their last cents on a trip to town only to find their grant payment was not due on that day.

Various sources are drawn on for information to be shared where appropriate, but the majority is produced by the materials team themselves. While most are in the form of text documents, supported when possible by infographics or videos from other sources, in some cases, we develop our own videos. One example is the video here, with an *imbongi* from Makhanda, in which he urges people not to stigmatise others. This reinforced a message from a speechby the State President on the same topic.

Such reinforcement through different media, from different sources and in different forms has proved very powerful in helping people understand the importance of certain key messages.

A critical aspect of the approach has been to avoid hectoring, bullying, shaming or blaming, or of course assuming any superior position. Rather, the tone is one of calmness and clarity, as if from a trusted member of the community. The first-person plural 'we' is used to locate the messages within the community, in the way that we see ourselves as part of the broader community with everything we share being as relevant for ourselves as for others.

An innovative and central element of information sharing, and something which emerged almost organically after a few months, is the use of voice-notes to introduce the messages, giving an outline of the focus of the particular message. This has proved enormously powerful in contextualising the information being shared, and in enabling sharing of the key ideas with a wide range of people – mothers could play them for their children at mealtimes, neighbours could listen to them over the fence, and they could be played and replayed to let the messages sink in. The voice-notes – created by the coordinator, the voice of iQonga – are greatly appreciated by the champions and their communities. Two examples of these voice notes are shared here: voice sample 1 and voice sample 2.

At least one piece of information has been shared with the champions almost every week since the formation of iQonga, and feedback from the champions and communities indicates very strongly that the network has become an important part of their lives. They are all very keen that the network continues its work and supports communities to address issues concerning as well as beyond the COVID-19 pandemic.

The comms team developed a website and set up a Facebook page on which the materials shared with the champions and from other sources can be shared as well. The team has also developed a number of videos of community activists and entrepreneurs in Gqeberha (formerly Port Elizabeth), in which they describe the impact of the pandemic on themselves, their families and their work, and how they are working to help others understand and address the situation – our YouTube channel is available here.

Profiles of some of the first-line champions were also created for sharing on the Facebook page, and this was a really valuable and affirming exercise in raising the profile of the volunteers involved. Initially, use of both the website and the Facebook page was quite limited, but more recent postings of the iQonga materials on the Facebook page have elicited up to 5,000 views, with the majority of these also indicating they had shared the post on their own and other pages. This suggests that, although it has taken some time, the information is now reaching a new, perhaps more internet-savvy constituency, and many more people through them. The comms team also wrote some articles for the mainstream media to try and raise awareness about the network. See for example this *Daily Maverick* article here.

The comms and materials team worked in partnership with *Grocott's Mail*, Makhanda's weekly newspaper, on a number of special editions, in which the informational material and the perspectives of community champions were shared in isiXhosa, Afrikaans and English.

Montage of *Daily Maverick* and *Grocott's Mail* articles

The advocacy team has been involved with establishing and maintaining contact with the Cape Town CAN and other organisations. In particular, they linked the network with the Eastern Cape Water Caucus and others in submitting representations to the national Department of Water and Sanitation on the dreadful state of water provision in the province, and the impact this is having on people's capacity to adhere to the strict hygiene requirements for reducing transmission of the coronavirus. A series of co-learning sessions called 'The Inspired Futures Dialogue' were held, which included inputs from iQonga members and Gauteng Together and Cape Town Together members, with the aim of sharing information and experiences on networking with communities. These were valuable networking experiences, and the knowledge and experience of the iQonga champions was always celebrated and deeply appreciated by colleagues from other provinces.

There have been several attempts by the team to establish informal partnerships with other groups involved in sharing information. These groups include the Solidarity Fund (which requested our collaboration), the Knowledge Translation Unit (KTU) of the University of Cape Town, CovidComms SA, and local and provincial radio stations (one

team member presented several radio programmes focusing on COVID-19 and traditional practices, funerals and initiations). These partnering attempts unfortunately met with little success.

However, the same team member represented the network at a virtual meeting for civil society representatives, hosted by the Civil Society Forum and the South African National Aids Campaign and with the ministers for Health and Social Development in attendance. At this meeting, the iQonga representative raised the need to provide relevant, culturally appropriate information to communities in the various vernacular languages. The suggestion was received positively by both ministers, with the acknowledgement that the lack of translated information was a major failing in current communications. Indeed, the Minister of Health in his next press briefing, some two days after the meeting, summarised his presentation in isiZulu and apologised for not being able to do this in all the official South African languages.

Following the meeting, it was proposed that working groups should be set up, including one on communications. However, nothing more was heard on this subject despite an email being sent to the course convenors requesting the minutes of the meeting and further information on the working groups. Similarly, no response was received to an attempt to contact traditional leaders at provincial and national levels (copied to the Deputy President and Minister Of Health) to offer support in communicating with their communities about the vaccination programme, which the leaders had said they would be supporting. There are ongoing discussions with the Know Your Rights organisation, which is piloting a programme to educate rural and peri-urban communities about their rights under the South African Constitution.

Montage of three *Inspired Futures Dialogues* posters

4 Reflections on what we are learning

Lessons learned as activist-educators

When we were encouraged by the ELRC-TESF project facilitator at the outset of this three-month process to find an image that somehow expressed our work over the past year, our team settled on this image, of a woman stirring a large pot of communal food over a fire. A fundamental part of what we achieved last year through iQonga loThungelwano was to build trust through sharing. There is strong mutual respect, and a strong rapport built through ongoing multidirectional communication.

This process starts within the coordinating team and is carried out through the lines of champions into the communities – with a reverse flow of feedback and ideas from the communities. Each of us brings some ingredients that are meaningful to ourselves and the communities we work with. We stir the pot, share and invite each other to share all our views on this dish of knowledge. We continue with the cycle of co-creating, in other words, adding the ingredients from both community champions and the communities we work with.

For us as the activists or volunteers who are students, academics, facilitators and practitioners, the pandemic invoked a sense of duty. We understand the privileged position we hold in society as members or associates of a world-renowned academic institution. Our position in society means that we can access information more easily than anyone else in the community.

What we have learned as activist-educators

We are fully aware that the behaviour of the virus and its epidemiology needs to be communicated as soon as reliable information is available. This is not surprising, as the disease can only be pushed back through whatever information is available at any given time. Since information on the coronavirus is gathered 'on the go', the knowledge landscape is like shifting sand. As a new disease, nothing much was initially known about its epidemiology. New information has been passed on, by medical experts and epidemiologists, into the public arena as soon as it has been gathered. This situation has afforded the team a rapid but reflective learning space that has required rapid adaptability and responsiveness.

During this process, we have learned the importance of simplifying and explaining phenomena. We have re-learned the importance of explaining certain things (such as how the virus spread) instead of simply telling people what to do or not to do. We have worked carefully to ensure that materials are, to the best of our knowledge and ability, accurate, relevant and appropriate, and that they make sense and will help people.

We are moved by CARE and we have care-fully learned how communities, through the champions, allowed us into their lives as

they establish trust in the information we share, and in us. It is trust – the trust that this information comes from trusted people, trusted sources and a trusted institution – that encourages our partners to share the information we share with them. So, we conclude that trust was established because of, as one of us said, 'both the way we made an impact, because that was how it came to be that people used it, but it was also an outcome of what we did that deeper trust was built'.

The project is not funder-driven; it responds to the real needs of people on the ground. The importance of sharing public health advice during the pandemic cannot be over-emphasised, especially when the advice responds to the burning need to share information about staying safe. This has been and continues to be a time when a lack of information could mean that lives are lost.

We know that rural communities are isolated and the much talked about wireless connectivity through cell phone networks, radio and TV is still a huge challenge. From our other experiences, we know that there are communities who are extremely isolated and struggle to get information, with only a cell phone signal coming to the rescue. What's more, not every household owns a radio or TV set.

We have also learned that we are actually in the process of creating and participating in virtual communities. The traffic of messages, the queries about these or those messages, create a conversation of which we and our participants have been deprived, especially during the higher Alert Levels of the lockdown. As one of us put it, 'You're so desperate you can't, like, go to a neighbour. You just have these messages coming through and that's the only thing you have at that point.'

From our perspective, we continually witnessed solidarity between citizens across South Africa during this pandemic – and this includes between ourselves. Mobilising to use our time to create as much awareness as possible about the pandemic, and sharing the information we think is best suited to keep people safe from the infection, gives us a sense of purpose and fulfilment during this painful and sometimes overwhelming time of the COVID-19 pandemic. There was powerful unity in action until the fatigue of the virus set in and people went back to their normal duties; but a core group has continued to keep the network alive as we grapple with the transition and transformation it must now undergo.

Our response to the pandemic contributes to a better understanding of how we can change the environment around us. We have come to realise that meaningful change does not necessarily need huge resources. Dedication, respect, integrity, care and the conscious building of relationships through the cultivation of trust is the best recipe. We have realised there are synergies that can be harnessed among us. While we are all at different life stages, we see the confluence of a burning desire to contribute to a better society, together with an increased agency among the champions who are proud to serve their communities. There is a clear urge among many to stand up and be counted during a time of trial. The younger and older generations have both brought their experiences and strong viewpoints to the table. On one hand, the younger members bring energy, agile minds and tech-savviness; and on the other, the older generation contribute immensely through their experiences and careful, reflective ways to approach issues.

Throughout the process, we have grappled with traditional and indigenous knowledge, and its role in the context presented by the coronavirus. We have always been very sensitive to this; recognising the real value it has to people's wellbeing. We have always acknowledged its importance and potential contributions, and only expressed caution in relation to any absolute dependence on such knowledge during the pandemic. The same applies to the value of good nutrition, which is massively important in keeping people strong, but, on its own, almost certainly is not enough to fight the virus. Through this careful and sensitive approach, we appear to have managed to maintain a reasonable balance within these quite complicated and often contested spaces, Nevertheless, we recognise the need to be ever-vigilant in ensuring that all knowledge systems are given the respect they deserve.

At the core of the project is CARE as its driving force. The project embodies a human solidarity that demonstrates care, and there has been no outside pressure to fulfil other project objectives such as log-frames. This attitude of care persists as a written and consistent voice in our messages.

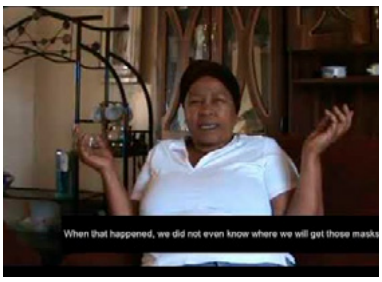
We have also learned the importance of thoroughly explaining things instead of relying on the kind of 'short, snappy' communication favoured for most public communication campaigns. We shared contextualising voice notes that helped to mediate the knowledge along with substantial textual documents that carefully explained the relevant issues. We think that people are encouraged to read and learn through these long, but easy-to-understand messages. There was already a motivation to stay safe and a hunger for information, which we believe were good enough reasons to read. Our somewhat text-heavy and graphic-light messages seem to resonate with the champions because they carry explanations. We believe that virtual communities have created a learning space and people have invested time in reading accordingly. This understanding goes against the general assumption that people are not interested in reading. By providing accessible information, we support this desire to know and learn.

Compared to regular funded research projects, the iQonga loThungelwano network is driven by a different ethos. There is no drive to push our branding or image, and no deliverables other than being present, accountable and delivering on our commitments to the community champions and their communities. We constantly seek creative and meaningful ways to work together without the usual constraints of donor-driven projects.

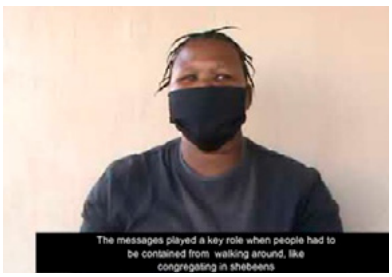
Lessons learned and valued by community champions and their communities

To enable a shared reflection and re-search process with our community partners, Monde Ntshudu and Monde Duma spent some time travelling around the Amathole District, visiting and speaking to some of the community champions who have been actively engaged with iQonga over the past year. Here, some of these Champions share their reflections.

iQonga Champions Reflect,
Part 1: Babalwa and Vuyokazi



iQonga Champions Reflect,
Part 2: Nombuyiseko and Lukhanyo



iQonga Champions Reflect,
Part 3: Tina and Nonzima

Click on the links to access the videos

The voices in these videos articulate strongly and clearly the impact of the network and stand on their own as powerful reflections from which we have learned a great deal. This is ongoing work, and we look forward to speaking to more champions because this has been an extremely rich and rewarding co-learning process. We now discuss some early themes that emerged for us as the writers of this report – but there are many more insights to be drawn from these conversations.

Map of Amatole District

Access to information

Lack of access to information is a huge impediment to many rural communities' quality of life. Wireless connectivity is not reliable, and in some instances, transmitters still operate with outdated technology such as 3-G.

Despite these imitations, the champions have shared that they find the informational messages useful in various ways. The information not only explains why they cannot carry on with their lives as normal, it also asks them to think in relevant ways about what people can do for themselves through their own agency.

The messages are not prescriptive – the 'dos and don'ts'. Instead, they present information so that people can make the best choices. The champions also say that the messages contain useful resources, such as videos demonstrating practical skills on how to make masks, which many people in rural communities could not afford to buy. As isolated communities, buying a mask also meant spending resources to go shopping in town. Access to practical information has alleviated this pressure and motivated people to be resourceful and make their own masks.

Representations of themes and insights from co-learning process

Loation, information and trust

Rural communities are isolated in the physical sense but also because their access to general information is limited. Our network was, and still is in many instances, the first and only initiative to provide educational information about the disease. And the fact that the information comes direct from the source is hugely appreciated. Information is as trustworthy as the source it comes from and as discussed in previous sections of this reflective report, it has become clear that the iQonga network is a trusted information source.

Education and awareness

The information messages are viewed as useful because, in some instances, they represent the first time the people receive any explanation of what the virus is and how it spreads from person to person and why long-held cultural and social practices and events are being postponed. People need to understand why they cannot go to a neighbour's funeral, shake hands, or hug a relative, or why they have to constantly sanitise. Culturally, it is a huge toll on people's emotions as many of the preventative measures against the virus go against all their social and cultural protocols of being a good neighbour and community member.

We gather from reflections with community champions that sharing information created learning spaces where dialogues were generated, creating a virtual learning community. The materials generate discussions as people seek more explanations about the virus, thus generating meaning-seeking dialogues.

The feedback loops used by the co-learning process involved communities in the reflexive process of using Photovoice messages to share their insights. Here are two such examples captured during the team's research.

Le miyalezo indincedile kakhulu mnakuba andinayo ne Tv ne Radio.bekubanzima ukufumana incazelo ngesisifo,ndingayazi ukuba yeyiphi into ekumele yenziwe nemayingenziwa kodwa ngoku yonke into eyenzeka elizweni emalunga nesisifo ndiyazi kuba ndincedwa yilemiyalezo yeQonga lothungelwano.isinika ithemba nendlela elula yokumelana nalemeko sijongane nayo.

"I do not own a TV set or radio, so these messages were very helpful to me. Initially, it was difficult to get an explanation of what the disease is all about, what to do and not to do. However, now, I am up to date with what is happening about the disease, nationally, because of the messages from iQonga loThungelwano. The messages make it easy for us to cope with the situation. It gives us hope."

Ngokumane uthumela lemiyalezo ye covit 19 idlale indima enkulu nebalulekileyo kwindawo endihlala kuyo, ndikufutshane nomakhulu osele endala onguyena bendimlum kisa kakhulu ukuba azikhusele njani ngokwemiyalelo le umane uyithumela. Mna kuqala edlini ndihlala notatomkhulu nomakhulu baye bazinakekela kakhulu bencedwa yilemiyalezo. Akubanga lilize nakubantu abatsha kuba utshintsho babeluva kusekwangoko bakwazi ukwenza ngendlela. Engathi ingaqhubeka lemiyalezo kude kube iphelile icovit 19 kuba besifumana ukhuseleko ngayo.

"These COVID-19 messages had a huge impact on where I live. I stay close to an old lady with who I shared the messages with to make sure she is safe. The messages are also helpful to my grandfather and grandmother, who I share the house with. The messages were also helpful to the youth, who would change their behaviour once they hear the messages. May you continue the messages until COVID-19 disappears. The messages kept us safe."

Agency

There is evidence that the champions gain insights from the information and use it to change the situation around them. This evidence is captured in all the videos that we produced for this project. There are clips of champions relating how they left their homes to intervene where the regulations were ignored or where they acted as advisors to make sure that other households were actively responsive to the advice laid down in the regulations.

Elevation of the champions among community members

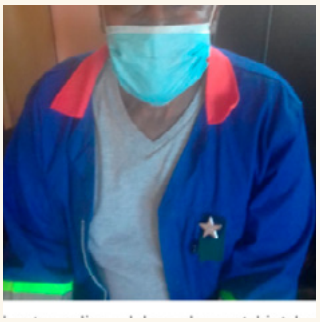
The care champions showed in supporting communities with useful information is reciprocated by the communities, who expressed their appreciation of the champions as sources of reliable information. As iQonga, we connect with community champions at a personal level. People are appreciative and value first getting reliable information and then passing it on to friends, family and people around them. To be the source of useful and relevant information, elevates the champions' status in the community to be *oomaqal'azive*. This refers to someone whose situation or position privileges them to get the news first. To be such an individual is an honour and everyone wants to be associated with them. And in this manner, iQonga creates such a nurturing environment for o*omaqal'azive*.

Delivering the message in the mother tongue

Our champions show immense appreciation of the messages delivered in isiXhosa. They express feeling re-connected and that others care about them. IsiXhosa makes it easy to share the messages as well and to explain them when people are unable to read. It is also very important to share the messages with the older members of the community. That the messages are written in isiXhosa makes sharing easy and boosts the self-confidence of those who go on to explain what the messages are about.

Changing individual responses

The champions' reflections demonstrate to us that the network and the messages have impacts on different levels. Champions tell us of the behavioural changes they have themselves made after receiving and learning from the messages. For example, two of the champions had difficulty using masks, but upon receiving the relevant messages, they realised they must adapt their behaviour to lead by example. They began to understand the consequences of not wearing a mask. The messages have an impact on influencing individual behavioural change. Behaviours are adapted to reinforce the preventative measures, especially when reinforcing good hygiene practices.



Umntu endiye ndalenza kuye utshintsho Ngu Malume wam u Vuyisile Hans ngomfundisa ubungozi balobhubhane we Covid 19.nokwabelana naye nemiyalezo ephuma kwiqonga loluntu. Umalume ngumntu ongakwazi ukuthetha kwaye akeva ngendlebe. Kubelula kuye communicator nam ngezandla njengoko kulula kum uthetha naye ngezandla. Eligonga libenolutho kum kakhulu najegoku ndiyendafunda kwi miyalezo ediye dayi fumana yandivula neqondo nangendlela bandiyibona gayo lameko yesisifo sigububhane. Nokubaluleka lokuzikhusela nokukhusela nabanye.

"I managed, through these messages, to influence my uncle who has a hearing disability to whom I explained the dangers of this COVID-19 pandemic. He's a close family member whose behaviour I strongly influenced. I shared the messages from iQonga with him. We use hand signs to communicate with iQonga is very helpful and I learned from these messages and it gave me new insights about the pandemic, importance of staying safe and making sure that others are safe too".

Observed changes in the community

The champions go beyond just sharing the messages. There have been real instances when receiving and understanding the messages involves strengthened agency. Champions relate stories of going to traditional ceremonies and seeing individuals where the preventative measures and regulations are ignored. They then explain the situation and explain what it means to comply with the regulations and the consequences of not doing so. Their intervention is often successful, resulting in an immediate change in behaviour in these communities.

In fact, champions observe that since sharing the messages, people have started to take the preventative measure more seriously. They observe people wearing their masks all the time, and people have started to observe the required funeral and meeting restrictions.

Molweni kweli qonga lonxibelelwano luyincedusile kakhulu apha kuse Boomplas community Hall kulapho sihlala khona indibano qho ngenyanga ukufundisa nokuba mamelisa le miyalezo ebenze bazazi nendlela zokuhlala xa kukho indibano

"Good day to you all. iQonga was of great help to us. The photo was taken at Boomplaas Community Hall (Cacadu). We always use the hall for our monthly meetings where we share the messages and videos which have helped people know and understand social distancing during meetings".

iQonga loThungelwano's future – challenges and opportunities

Our community champions feel strongly there is a huge need to continue creating awareness around the disease to make sure that people do not drop their guard. They feel there are still aspects of the pandemic that need to be explained to the public, such as the rollout of the vaccination programme. They feel that the process of vaccination – who, where and when – will still need to be explained given their isolated location.

The champions feel iQonga should continue providing this information and other service delivery-related information (such as social grant payment dates) because these issues have huge implications for them. Access to information as provided by iQonga on matters such as dates for social grant payments means that they can save themselves from disappointment and prevent financial losses.

Information is shared with family, close friends, community members and other villages. The sharing even goes beyond the Eastern Cape, as it is passed on to family members and friends wherever they find themselves, for example, in Cape Town, Gauteng and other urban areas.

5 Conclusion

At the time of writing, there are discussions concerning the future of the network. There is complete consensus both among the core team and the champions that it should continue, although in what form is not entirely clear at present. While the COVID-19 pandemic is still with us, and may be for some time, there will be a continuing need for related information. However, team members and champions are suggesting that a broader focus taking in other vital issues affecting communities will be necessary.

We have learned that leveraging carefully built relationships and acting with care and integrity builds trust. This trust is reciprocated in many ways throughout the partnership chain. The sources of this trust are acting with care and integrity, and in association with reputable institutions and people.

We are beginning to understand that the careful explanation of facts in clear and simple language, preferably in the mother tongue, is very important when delivering informational messages to fight pandemics. This makes sharing and learning from these messages easy and boosts the confidence of those who explain and question alike.

Deep comprehension of messages plays a critical role in the cultivation of agency because people feel confident to stand in front of others and explain issues when they fully understand them. Sending messages in the mother tongue eliminates the possibility of feeling embarrassed if the content is not fully understood.

Social media, in this case, WhatsApp, is very helpful if used responsibly. In our case, we have made sure that we are a reliable source of trustworthy information. None of our informational messages has ever been challenged despite wide circulation in social media groups. Social media communication that is supported by long-term interpersonal relationships can benefit broader society if underpinned by CARE, TRUST and integrity. It can also provide a platform for real LEARNING between people.

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CHAPTER 2

Tsitsa Project

Assessing the implications of COVID-19 for the facilitation of social transformative learning in rural communally-owned landscape contexts

Case study of the Tsitsa River Catchment, Eastern Cape, South Africa

Written by Matthew Weaver, Mateboho Ralekhetla, Bukho Gusha, Nosiseko Mtati and Ntombekhaya Mti

Contents

1 Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has foregrounded the complex nature and severity of complex of social-ecological problems threatening future sustainability of the world (Holfelder, 2019). Education plays a critical role in ensuring future sustainability for the society and the environment that it depends on. It is important that role-players in education understand the types of skills and knowledge(s) required to move towards a sustainable and socially, ecologically just future. Education for sustainability in a dynamic context (rural and pandemic context) requires adopting and integrating new technology and innovation. Also, key to realising education sustainability in these contexts are resilient stakeholders and communities with strong agentive capacity (Purcell and Lumbreras, 2021). This is also more achievable in an integrated system, where education is used as an enabler to offer adaptive solutions to meet shared goals for the common good (Holfelder, 2019). In education, the future also determines the decisions made in the present for the future. For example, if future education was to be predicted to be the same as the present education, then it would seem very easy to predict the kind of skills and technology needed to equip the future generation. However, the uncertainties of education that we are currently facing, show the need for the development of necessary skills and knowledge that can better equip and direct the future of education, which are currently not easy to determine.

Education was initially mentioned as one of the contributions to the sustainable development of the Agenda 21 (Holfelder, 2019). This ultimately resulted in the Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) campaigns that were initiated by UNESCO, which were promoted worldwide during the UN decade of education in the beginning of 2005 for sustainable development (Holfelder, 2019). While this has been developed, the major challenge was that the traditional education system, which is understood as an enabling factor to learners in acquiring certain competencies, was mainly influenced by policies developed by outside actors, resulting in an uncertain future for education. This meant that political, social and economic decisions challenged the ability of even remote communities to better prepare and educate the younger generation to work towards sustainability and find innovative approaches to learning. Sustainable development has mostly focused on natural resources and has little focus on the role of education as a critical enabler of sustainable practice (Holfelder, 2019).

The South African higher education sector saw a crisis as it found itself being thrown into the social, economic and health crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic when the country recorded its first positive COVID-19 case at the beginning of March 2020. This saw a state response to curb and contain the spread of the virus moving to a complete lockdown later in the same month, resulting in almost all economic and social activities being brought to a complete halt. Schools and institutions of higher learning were closed and social distancing, sanitising and wearing of masks were imposed. This meant that institutions of higher learning had to suddenly move to conducting teaching, learning and even graduation ceremonies

completely online. These measures to contain the spread of the virus required massive changes to the education sector, where learning had to be delivered online in order to continue with education, regardless of how unprepared most contexts were, including the context that this study is situated in.

Similar to other African countries, education plays a significant role in enabling South African rural communities to move towards a more socially, economically, environmentally and culturally sustainable future. However, communities face a wide variety of challenges that hinder accessibility to education. Communities located in remote rural areas are particularly disadvantaged due to the terrain (mountainous landscape) and long travel distances to schools and other basic amenities (Purcell and Lumbreras, 2021). Rural areas have experienced a legacy of non-access and exclusion, from land, education, healthcare, water and electricity. This legacy has led to social and ecological injustices still being highly prevalent in these areas. It is in these rural contexts that learning and agency for sustainable futures is critically needed.

The Tsitsa River Catchment is located in the rural communities of the north-eastern part of the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. Here, community members have been involved in several learning interventions from the Tsitsa Project. These interventions were conducted face-to-face prior to the COVID-19 pandemic to build knowledge, skills and capabilities required for supporting the practice of environmental and community monitors. Interventions co-developed by the Tsitsa Project were also implemented to build participatory governance and sustainable landscape management capabilities within the catchment. However, due to the COVID-19 outbreak and the restrictions that were imposed to contain the spread of the virus, there was a need for these learning interventions to be moved and facilitated online. This was important as these learning interventions were facilitated for community members who are key contributors to local natural resource management and governance processes. However, challenges with online learning arose and saw community monitors struggling to attend, participate and engage with the course materials, leading to the need to understand and reflect on facilitation activities and ways that can be adopted in order to improve learning during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

It is for this reason that our project aims to assess the implications of COVID-19 for the facilitation of social transformative learning in rural communally owned landscape contexts through the case study of the Tsitsa Project, Eastern Cape, South Africa. In this study we hope to explore and reflect upon learning processes undertaken in the COVID-19 context with catchment residents employed as community and environmental monitors in the Tsitsa Project. Through this reflection process, we will develop contributions that will inform transgressive learning praxis in rural settings that will be gleaned from enabling and constraining factors and lessons learnt on designing and facilitating learning processes. These learning practices will further inform and grow transformative and transgressive learning for the current and future Tsitsa Project work (into the 2021–2024 project cycle).

The reflections will also help to draw lessons learnt from moving to online learning. The reflections are envisaged to further improve our understanding of the challenges/constraints faced by Tsitsa Project catchment residents in facilitating online learning and provide a way

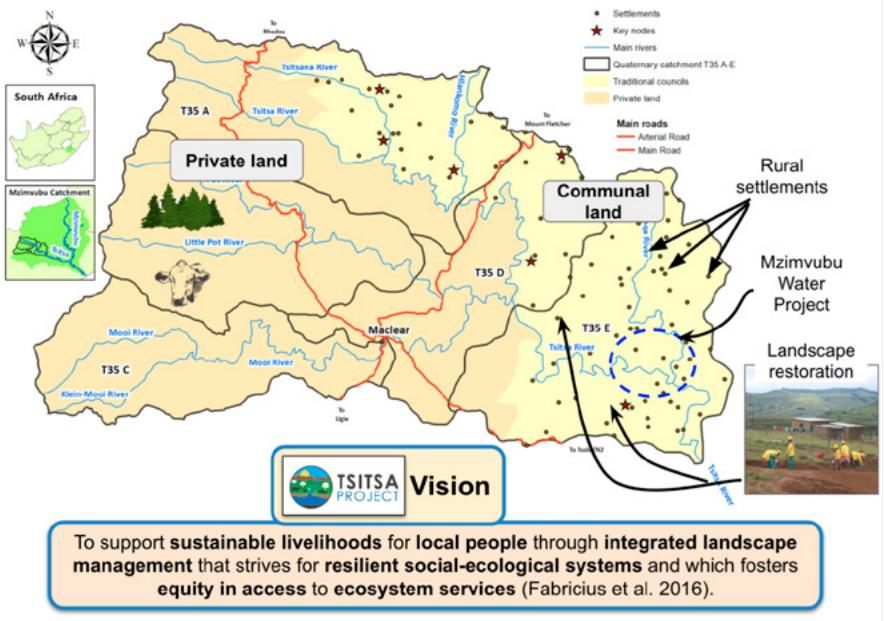
forward for future education or learning in light of COVID-19. The report is subdivided into different sections, from contextualising the Tsitsa Project and its learning interventions, methods, results and key insights and recommendations for future learning.

Contextualising the Tsitsa Project

This Transformative Education for Sustainable Futures (TESF) Narrative Reflection Project draws on learning processes conducted in the Tsitsa Project. It is helpful to provide a brief overview of the larger Tsitsa Project, before exploring each of the learning processes focussed on for the Reflection Project.

The Tsitsa Project is being implemented in the Tsitsa River Catchment (referred to as the catchment) (Figure 1). The catchment is located in the Eastern Cape province in South Africa, a province struggling to keep up in an urbanising country (Ruiters, 2011). Half of the catchment falls within the former homelands of Transkei, a homeland in the Eastern Cape during apartheid. The former homelands across South Africa are still plagued by poverty (Hebinck and Shackleton, 2010).

Figure 1:
The Tsitsa River Catchment showing land use types, urban and rural settlements, land ownership and governance, and the location of the gazetted uMzimvubu Water Project (blue dotted circle). The photograph insert is of Expanded Public Works Program (EPWP) employees, the main labour force implementing restoration activities in the catchment.



Click here for Matthew's description of the Tsitsa River Catchment and Tsitsa Project

The Tsitsa River forms part of the upper reaches of the uMzimvubu River, the largest unharnessed river in South Africa (DWS, 2014). The uMzimvubu Water Project (MWP) has been proposed by the Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS) to alleviate the severe poverty in the area through job creation, water supply and hydroelectric power (DWS, 2014).

The Tsitsa Project is an initiative by the South African government's Department of Environmental Affairs' (DEA) (now called the Department of Environment and Forestry (DEFF)): Natural Resource Management (NRM) division. The Tsitsa Project was developed in response to the realisation that the dams being built as part of the MWP would prematurely silt up if there was no attempt at land restoration or sediment management upstream of the dam. Taking a holistic approach to the problem; the project aims 'to support sustainable livelihoods for local people through integrated landscape management that strives for resilient social-ecological systems and which fosters equity in access to ecosystem services' (Fabricius et al., 2016); Fry et al. (2019, pp. 1–2).

The Tsitsa Project work and implementation is based on research conducted through Rhodes University, University of Fort Hare and the University of the Free State. Research and research-informed implementation work toward realising this vision is affected by six working groups labelled as communities of practices (CoPs). The CoPs are primarily comprised of a core group of researchers and students who interact with implementing agents, government officials and catchment residents employed as environmental and community monitors by the Tsitsa Project. The CoPs are largely discipline-based and include a Sediment and Restoration, Grazing and Fire, Livelihoods, Systems Praxis, Knowledge and Learning, and Governance CoP (Figure 2).

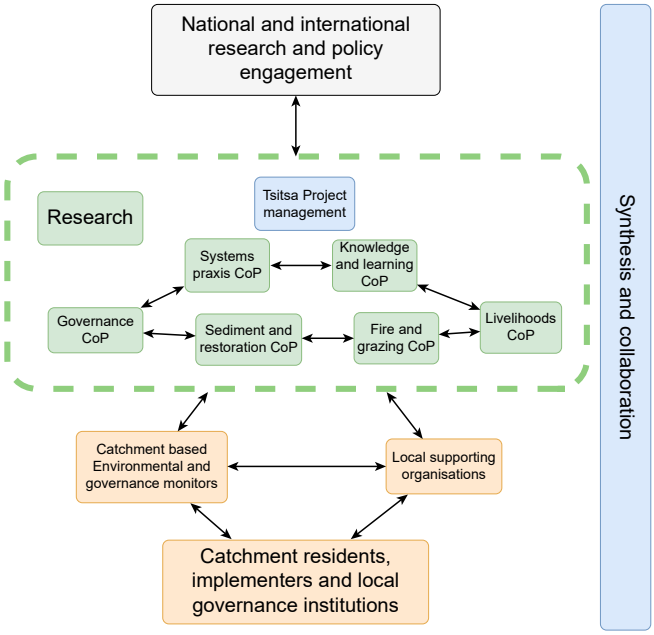


Figure 2: Interrelationship of collaborating actors working in the Tsitsa Project in order to achieve its vision of holistic and inclusive integrated landscape restoration and management of natural resources. Participatory governance and supporting sustainable livelihoods development are key integrative components to social and ecological justice and sustainability in the Tsitsa River Catchment.

Click here for Bukho's explanation of the interrelationship of different stakeholders linked to the Tsitsa Project.

Capacity development and learning interventions in the Tsitsa Project

A foundational participatory action research component of the Tsitsa Project has been (and is) to catalyse and enable learning, capacity and capability development of partners and beneficiaries to meaningfully participate in, influence and drive sustainable landscape management. These partners and beneficiaries include (Figure 2):

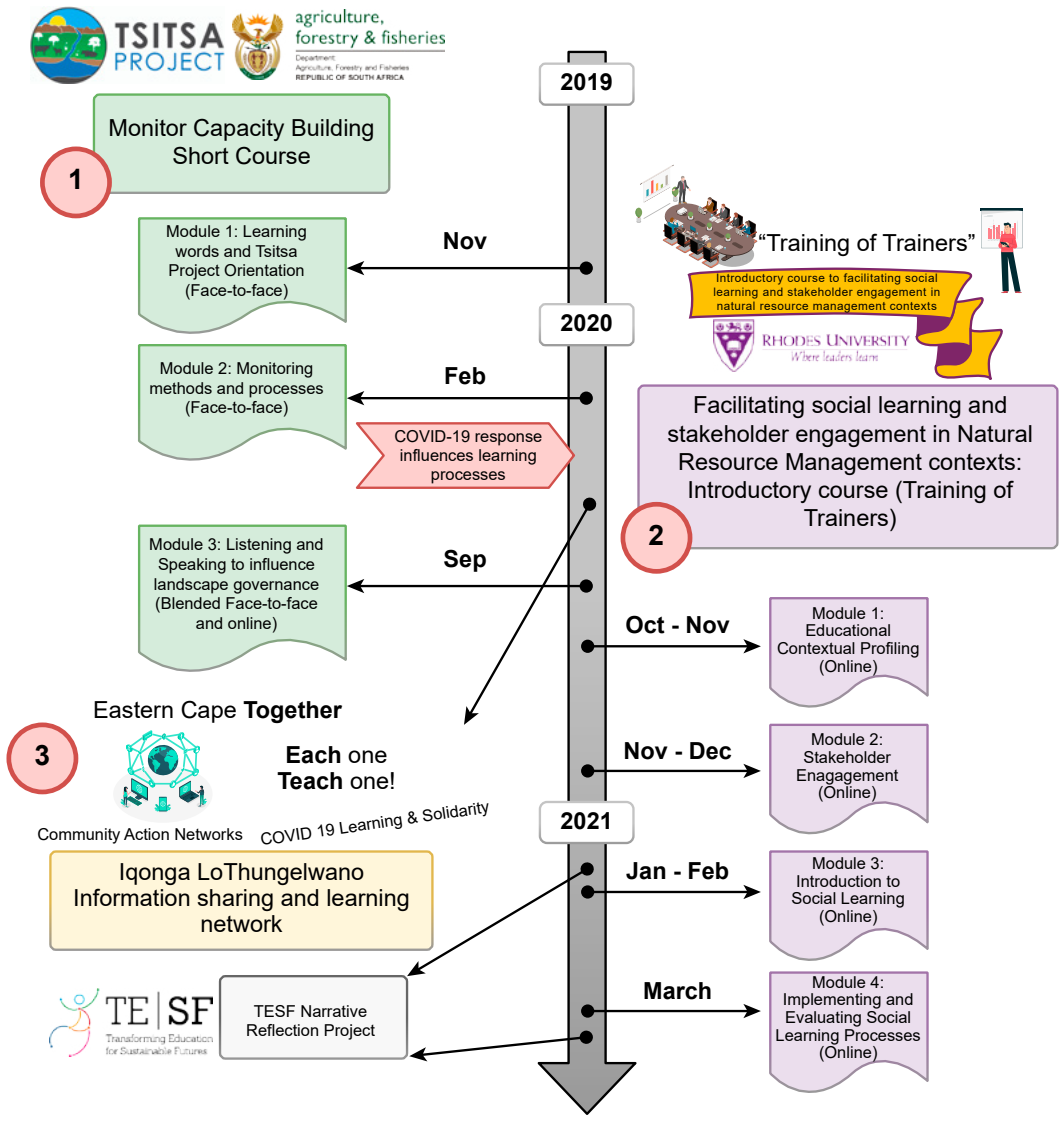
- Residents of the catchment where the Tsitsa Project is being implemented.
- The Tsitsa Project restoration implementers in the catchment.
- The Tsitsa Project managers and researchers who work on the project from outside the catchment.
- Learning interventions. The Tsitsa Project has co-developed and implemented a number of learning interventions over the five years of the Tsitsa Project to build participatory governance and sustainable landscape management capabilities within the catchment. These learning interventions were implemented and led by the capacity development division of the Knowledge and Learning CoP. However, it is also important to note that other CoP's provide facilitation support to the Knowledge and Learning CoP, through collaborative training and workshop facilitation. In this report we have included three learning interventions that overlapped with the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Monitor Capacity Building Short Course – a face-to-face course to build knowledge, skills and capabilities required for environmental and community monitors. (Two Modules face-to-face, one Module adapted for online and contact (six days in total).
- Training of Trainers Short Course – online course to build social learning and stakeholder engagement facilitation capacity in Natural Resource Management contexts (Four Modules completed (200 notional hours)).
- COVID-19 Iqonga LoThungelwano learning and solidarity initiative.

These interventions needed to be adapted to be sustained through the COVID-19 pandemic, yielding numerous lessons learnt (e.g. blending presence and distance learning, innovative use of mobile phones and maintaining regular personal contact). This Reflective Project is embedded within the ongoing Tsitsa Project.

Figure 3 below shows each of the learning interventions, what they were, how they were conducted and how they were facilitated.

Who are the Tsitsa Project Monitors –
Click here for Bukho's reflection on who the participants of these three learning interventions were.

Figure 3:
Timeline of learning processes assessed for the development of the Tsitsa Project reflective narrative project. The timeline indicates the three learning interventions, the Monitor Capacity Development Course, Training of Trainers Course and Iqonga LoThungelwano learning and solidarity network, when they were implemented in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic and the TESF Narrative Reflection Project.



Click here for Matthew's explanation of the three learning interventions in the context of COVID-19 and this reflection project.

Monitor Capacity Buidling Short Course **Purpose:** Short course comprising three Modules to support Monitor capacity development for the Tsitsa Project.	**How:** As part of supporting a reflexive and applied knowledge creation, the course used a reflexive 'work together'/'work away' structure which allowed for participants to apply what they had learnt in between course sessions through tasks and assignments. The course was conducted in English and isiXhosa. The first two Modules were conducted in person in Maclear. Learning facilitation methods combined information transfer (presentations and written handouts), arts-based, role-playing and embodied methods. The third Module was adapted to a blended learning facilitation approach due to COVID-19 restrictions – a facilitation team with participants in Maclear taking COVID-19 precautions while others connected and shared presentations and activities via Zoom. We designed and facilitated processes to create an enabling environment and respected and valued different ways of knowing and forms of knowledge.
Facilitating social learning and stakeholder engagement in Natural Resource Management contexts: Introductory course (Training of Trainers) **Purpose:** An online introductory short course comprising four Modules to inform and strengthen the existing and future learning and stakeholder engagement facilitation practice of educators, trainers, facilitators (and people interested in these roles) in Natural Resource Management contexts with up-to-date theory and methodology.	**How:** In response to COVID-19 pandemic, the course was offered remotely through a combination of mostly asynchronous and some synchronous components (Zoom). The course was conducted in English. Materials for each module were pre-prepared as handouts, narrated presentations and videos and made available via a course website, email and a course WhatsApp group. A tiered mentorship structure was employed, where high-level mentors, dual participant-mentors and participants engaged in group feedback sessions as well as smaller tutorship group sessions to mediate the course materials. The course had strong practical element as participants engaged with their tutors to develop assignments. Four assignments that built upon one another with the ultimate goal of designing, implementing and evaluating a learning and/or stakeholder engagement process.
Iqonga LaThungelwano Information sharing and learning network **Purpose:** To build collective solidarity and an understanding about the COVID-19 pandemic and ways to deal with it.	**How:** Collective sharing of information and coping strategies via WhatsApp and Facebook (materials, voice-notes and videos) by a collective of educator activists, with strong links to well established food and water learning networks with members throughout the rural Eastern Cape. Information included up-to-date, verified information about initiatives and processes set in place to support communities in dealing with COVID-19.

Click here for a reflection on how we tried to create an enabling environment for learning.

2 Methods

Sampling approach and size

The participants were selected from a group of Tsitsa Project Monitors who had participated in at least one of the learning processes (many of the Monitors were involved in all three learning interventions) and were available for the focus group discussion. The Tsitsa Project Catchment Coordinator, who is also an author on this reflection project, helped with sending out invitations through her typical communication channels (phone calls, WhatsApp messenger and SMS). Her job as a Catchment Coordinator placed her well to act as the liaison for motivating participation in this reflection project. Through her day-to-day job linking community members with researchers, she had built strong relationships with the Monitors, so she had no difficulties in motivating and encouraging buy-in to participate in this project. We managed to get nine Monitors who confirmed their availability; however, only eight managed to join the focus group conducted via Zoom on the day. Network connection issues meant one person could not join.

Data collection

Document analysis

Previous reports were analysed by all four team members with shared duties. The idea was to identify pedagogical processes, enabling and constraining factors, lessons learned and recommendations. These categories were divided among the team members to code. Two reports from the pre-COVID-19 and two from during COVID-19 period were analysed. The analysis of the documents was done remotely, with the team working remotely on a live Google Document to paste points from the reports under relevant sections of the live document. On the given date to work together, the team met up and each person reported some of the points which stood out for them in their sections. These meetings also served as a space to reflect on the analytical process and standardise and consolidate the coded results. The document analysis results were then used to formulate mirror data and prompt questions for the focus group and key informant interviews.

Focus group discussion

This was initially going to take place in a half face-to-face setting, with some team members in the field, while others were going to join remotely. However, due to COVID-19 restrictions being more strict against personal interactions, and the safety of our community members, we had to change to doing it completely remotely with everyone connecting in from the comfort of their own homes.

On the morning of the focus group discussion, the team joined the Zoom session an hour earlier than the start time to get a chance to go over any last minute preparations. Monitors were encouraged to start joining 30 minutes prior to the start time in order to manage any technical challenges that arose. The team was ready to welcome the early birds with some catch-up chats about their well-being. Warm up reconnection chats served as an icebreaker for everyone to be mentally ready and comfortable to contribute during the actual reflection time. Before we started, those with adequate network connectivity put on their videos in order to connect more personally. Information was simultaneously shared onto a WhatsApp group platform for those who were struggling with network connection issues during the focus group.

Key informant interviews

For the key informant interviews, two of the isiXhosa-speaking members of the team conducted key informant interviews following the focus group discussion. The purpose was to elicit more reflections that may not have been properly addressed in the larger group due to time constraints. It was also to get more explanation on certain issues that came up/out in the discussion. Three Monitors who were also part of the focus group discussion were asked to answer the questions to obtain reflective narratives about their personal experiences that may not have emerged in the focus group discussion.

A reflective approach is useful for highlighting human experience. The recounting of past events in one's life is a useful learning feature in a narrative approach to research (Paschen and Ison, 2014). Knowing their experiences through both group and individual reflections will give the team a chance to correct some of the assumptions they tend to make about their community partners, especially about their preferences (Riessman, 2008).

Analytical approach

Initially, learning report documents were analysed deductively for the following predetermined themes: enablers, constraints, lessons and recommendations. Results from the initial document analysis were developed into mirror data for the focus group prompt questions, and a key informant interview schedule for a second round of empirical data collection came out of analysing the focus group data. Raw data from the focus group and three key informant interviews was transcribed, translated into English and analysed deductively for predetermined themes. Emergent themes were included inductively as sub-themes. We acknowledge that some meaning may have been lost through the translation process.

Data from the key informant interviews was further analysed deductively for evidence of different forms of value. For this component we drew on part of the Value Creation Framework (VCF), namely value creation stories (Wenger-Trayner et al., 2019). The data was analysed for evidence of the seven cycles of value creation: immediate, potential, applied, realised, transformative, enabling and strategic value. We used the value creation story component to enrich our analysis and present three personal narratives of value creation of Monitors that participated in the Tsitsa Project learning processes.

Ethical considerations

Rhodes University's ethical clearance was obtained by the general Tsitsa Project to work with human participants. The following considerations were used:

- Informed consent was obtained to record both the focus group discussion and key informant interviews.
- The facilitators explained to the participants that the project was funded by the TESF, which was about enhancing learning. So, the focus of their engagement was to reflect together about their learning experiences in the Tsitsa Project, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, in order for the team to know how to improve future learning processes.
- Participants were also made aware that the information could be used for reports to funders and other academic publications and/or obtain academic qualifications.
- Participants were also told that their names would be kept anonymous unless they would like for their names to be used (they mostly do not mind using their names).
- Participants are aware that participation in any Tsitsa Project research process is voluntary (this was indicated by some of the Monitors not participating in the focus group).

3 Results

This section presents the results from the three methods that were used to collect data. Data from the document analysis process was used to develop the themes. For some reported results, direct quotes have been included, and each quote ends with a reference of where it came from. Therefore, if a quote came from a focus group discussion, it is referenced FG in brackets, while those from key informant interviews are KII 1, 2, or 3 respectively, depending on who said it among the three key informants. KII 1 refers to quotes from the first key informant interview, and so on.

We also present the three value creation stories from each of the key informants interviewed to showcase the progressive value creation across the different cycles of value creation catalysed by the learning initiatives. In the presentation of the written results, we draw attention to the different forms of value (immediate, potential, applied realised, transformative, enabling and strategic) that emerged from Monitors participating in the learning processes. The progressive development of value through the different value creation cycles are then represented as a value creation story/trajectory using three diagrams presented at the end of the results section (Figures 4–6). We flag these forms of value by referencing the value and representative value creation figure in brackets through the results, for example: (immediate value, Fig 4).

Lastly, our insights gleaned from the findings are presented in boxes after the results section.

Enabling factors to learning

When asked to mention some of their experiences with COVID-19, participants started with mentioning some challenges. Most of the challenges were a comparison of how things had changed from the learning period before the COVID-19 pandemic hit. However, the facilitator asked them to try to think of some positive experiences of learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The most prevalent theme was how the facilitation team enabled their learning (enabling value, Fig 4, 5 & 6), and the other themes were frequent use of Zoom, and adhering to the COVID-19 regulations.

Another aspect of enablers was how face-to-face interaction was enabled for the participants, which came out inductively from the focus group data, and feedback from a direct question asked during key informant interviews about how learning was enabled through face-to-face learning.

Frequent use of Zoom

Under the theme of factors that enabled learning during COVID-19, many sub-themes came out of participant responses/reflections. Some were about how the frequent use of Zoom had enabled them to get better at using the app, and the ability to use the internet to access other information, 'at the beginning it was difficult, but the more we get an experience of connecting on Zoom, the better' (FG) (potential and applied value, Fig 4 & 5).

Being given pamphlets to guide participants on how to use Google and have access to a Gmail account enabled further online access and learning. Another participant felt that if they had access to good network connectivity, online learning would be a useful skill for future purposes, 'Online learning is also useful in situations such as the ongoing pandemic where face-to-face interactions are limited, as it keeps people connected and able to work regardless' (FG) (potential value, Fig 5). This is in line with the emphasis Nadikattu et al. (2020) place on the importance of technology and having access to the internet as something that brings huge change in people's lives in various fields of learning. Furthermore, technology has been found to be a critical tool that enables continuity in teaching and learning processes during lockdown, with the internet becoming one of the important mediums of learning that opens doors for people to access education easily and affordably.

Adherence to COVID-19 regulations

Another sub-theme was about how everyone's adherence to COVID-19 regulations of wearing masks and maintaining recommended social distancing reduced their anxiety of either contracting the virus or infecting others, 'We maintained social distance and in a big space with open windows, I was not anxious about infecting others or getting infected by COVID' (FG). In addition to behaviour, some participants also mentioned that they were happy that information about COVID-19 was constantly shared with them (immediate value, Fig 4 & 6). Another person went on to say that it was good to see people practising what was shared with them (realised value, Fig 4 & 5).

Tsitsa Project facilitation team

The sub-theme about the facilitation team enabling effective learning received the most mention among the participants. The main one here was how facilitators treated everyone equally, and with respect. The other words and phrases that were used to describe how facilitators enabled participation in the Tsitsa Project learning processes included: 'no bigger person ... unity ... building good relationships ... given information ... opportunity to stand in front of people ... speak without fear ... everything said is important ... no one laughs even if I can't speak English ... boosted my confidence ... give feedback ... patient ... encourage us ... amazing people ... humble ... down to earth'. For instance, here is a direct quote from one participant, 'Workshops are helpful, especially that there is no bigger person, everyone is treated equally, especially from people working for [Rhodes University], they are always humble and down to earth making people feel comfortable' (FG) (enabling value, Fig 4, 5 & 6).

The participants also mentioned that they felt supported by the Tsitsa Project team since they are able to speak to any of the facilitators about different issues, and if they could not help, they could direct the issue to the relevant person. The participants also felt that the sharing of the information related to COVID- 19 by the Tsitsa Project team better enabled them to use their cell phones and open pdf documents related to the Training of Trainers Course (potential value, Fig 4 & 5).

Face-to-face vs. online learning

Table 1: A comparison between participants' learning experiences in face-to-face vs. online learning processes

Direct quote	Online	Face-to-face
'I prefer meeting with people because I learn better when I am with other people sharing my ideas.'	Removes the aspect of relating with other people.	Easy to relate to people when in the same room.
'For example, I am experiencing problems with the network due to weather, which I think if we were in a face-to-face space, I wouldn't have been experiencing.'	Network constrains their learning when it is done online because it cuts many times	Did not have to worry about network issues
'I want to have someone in front and teach me, so that they can see if I am lost. Just by looking at someone you can tell that they are following and that is now a challenge. It's difficult to see people's reactions like smiles, confusion, etc.'	Miss out on important facial expressions, which leaves others behind.	Facilitator easily identifies or notices people who don't understand through facial expressions.
'Some of the things get easier with face to face because they are practical, while if online, things don't happen as they used to and it is frustrating, even people's participation is not much as opposed to face to face'.	Lack of practical demonstrations to enhance learning, which also drops their participation.	Practical demonstrations enable faster understanding, as people can observe and participate in the application of concepts.
'Family chores or community related work is an issue, people don't understand when you say you are working, while you are constantly busy on the phone. It's unlike when you are at school or workshop where you put all your focus on what you are doing at the time.'	People mistake working on one's phone as an excuse to play on their phone and not participate in certain activities	People understand better when one leaves home for work, instead of being in the house and not helping with house duties.

Since participants seemed to enjoy talking about their face-to-face learning experiences during the focus group discussions, one of the questions during the key informant interviews asked participants what some of the enablers of face-to-face learning were. Most of these factors were things already mentioned when comparing face-to-face processes to online learning during the focus group discussions. We present a summary of these comparisons in Table 1.

Of highest importance was the ability to relate with other people, that is, other participants and facilitators in a face-to-face interaction, which encouraged participation. They also mentioned that being around people from different backgrounds also meant learning new things from them. 'As much as we come from different backgrounds, the fact that we grew up in different areas makes it easy to learn from other people, than to act as if you know everything. People do things differently and that helps improve your understanding as we come from different areas. I leave home with excitement, just because of the change of environment, from villages to town and when I get there, I find people who show us that we work as a team, people are happy laughing and people who facilitates are patient and pay attention to questions. So, you are always looking forward to learning' (KII 1) (immediate and enabling value, Fig 1).

In addition, some participants experienced the benefit of interviewing people from their community and enjoyed hearing them talk about how they felt about their area in terms of Natural Resource Management. This also made them feel empowered and encouraged to work on environmental solutions.

Challenges/constraints to learning

This section presents the challenges that participants mentioned in association with learning online. The main themes were technological challenges, missing out on facial expressions, things placed on hold, and family not understanding. The most prevalent one was about technological challenges presented by working online, which could be expected due to the rural setting and the constraints associated with living and working in a rural environment such as network issues. However, an interesting finding was the participants' near unanimous agreement on the importance of facial expressions for communicating, and how learning online has removed that important aspect of their learning.

Technological

Under technological constraints, the highest occurring theme was that of network issues, where people mentioned that it made their connection to Zoom quite difficult and frustrating. One member said that weather conditions also made connecting to the network difficult for them to participate in the learning processes. They said that network issues become even more of a challenge when it came to trying to connect via video. Issues with phones also came up in terms of having faulty batteries, not enough space to download some learning materials and documents that are too small to read.

The second most occurring theme under technological constraints is non-familiarity with the whole online experience, especially using Zoom for the first time. One person went on to say that their age also had an impact on how fast they could learn, '... some of us are slow learners ... Other people need time to digest and remember what they were told' (FG). One participant even felt that they did not get enough guidance on how to use the application at first, while another participant felt like their reason for not learning faster was because they were not used to being on their phone much before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Missing out on useful/communicative facial expressions

Missing out on important facial expressions was the second most occurring theme under the constraints of learning online. The main concern here was that the facilitators hardly ask if participants can follow due to time constraints when working online and can easily leave others behind. Whereas in face-to-face settings, they notice expressions such as frowning, smiling, confusion, nodding of heads, etc. 'Learning during COVID-19 is challenging, it is not easy to learn online because it is difficult to see if people don't understand. In ToT [Training of Trainers Course], you would find out that the tutors/facilitators are teaching in high spirit, but online, and cannot see if you are following' (FG).

Another challenge to participating is when participants are unfamiliar with the subject of discussion. For instance, in an online learning process, it is easy to keep quiet because if one person says they are okay, then others feel like their problem is not important enough to raise. Another participant went on to say that they found that with online learning they could easily get bored and distracted due to not seeing the people they are talking to, as opposed to face-to-face interaction where they enjoy relating to other people. 'I was enabled by the fact that I could see the people I was talking with, unlike now, it's a little bit boring to talk to people who you don't see. Sometimes you just keep quiet because you know that someone is going to answer anyway. Sometimes if you don't understand something, you just lose interest and start doing other things, unlike when I know that you are talking in front of me and you can see me, then I will have to focus and listen. Also if you are not interested in a topic, then you can easily not pay attention. Having ground rules also helped in shaping how people put in time and contribute to workshops' (KII 3).

Low confidence in online learning

Participants also mentioned not having enough confidence to raise their hand in an online scenario as they feel like they are distracting others whom they assume understood what was being discussed. This lack of confidence is brought about by participants' non-familiarity with Zoom and network issues.

The use of English for online learning has also impacted on participants' confidence as they end up being in meetings with people from different countries, which makes them uncomfortable to speak 'broken' English as it is not their first language. The difficulty of pronouncing the names of people from other countries also forms a barrier to how much they can contribute in such spaces. One participant also felt like their marks dropped due to not understanding tutors who assisted in English. 'One of the barriers to online learning is being with people who come from different spheres of life. For example, there are people from Lagos, so I don't feel comfortable speaking my broken English when there are people from other countries. I feel comfortable talking to people that I am familiar with, people who know me and those that I also know. In the bigger ToT, you find out that you even struggle to call their names because it's difficult to pronounce them, so it's not easy to contribute to such a group' (KII 1). The presence of people who speak better English makes others feel scared to speak, especially when English is the main medium of communication in a workshop. This shows that the Monitors were not comfortable to speak in the presence of people they had not built relationships of trust with (strangers), meaning that relationship building and trust form a vital factor in these learning spaces.

Things put on hold

Another challenge that was brought about by COVID-19 was that of things being put on hold. Participants felt like they have been constrained from sharing the informative lessons that they learned with their communities. Someone went on to say that even the practical side of their learning has been placed on hold, which they feel has led to a decrease in people's participation, '... things were very practical, which no longer happens and one of the disadvantages of online learning is that things don't happen as they used to. It is frustrating working and learning online, even people's participation is not much as opposed to face-to-face' (FG).

Family and community not understanding working from home

The last constraint was mentioned by only one participant, but worth raising as it may have been a challenge for others who were not comfortable to talk about it. The constraint was that family members and the community sometimes do not understand when one excuses oneself from performing certain tasks or activities while still in the house. People in their community perceive working on one's phone as an excuse to be on social media and not being useful, '... a challenge on learning at home is that, family, people in the community, they don't understand why you are saying you are busy. Since you are around, you are expected to do this and that, while you are busy it's either with the online meeting or studying, it's unlike when you are at school or workshop where you put your all focus in what you are doing at the time' (FG).

Other people's behaviour

Participants felt like some people don't take the COVID-19 regulations seriously, as they don't wear masks or sanitise when attending meetings. Some participants felt exposed, especially in gatherings where they were supposed to be in attendance, 'In terms of the community response, we normally have different views as people. For example, if we are going to meet at a certain household for funerals, there is a need for people to sanitise and wear masks and keep social distance. There are instances where other households don't pay attention to the restrictions, then if you are brave enough, you continue to stay until it is the time for you to leave. I normally don't leave early sometimes if it's a relative's household, but I make sure that I encourage everyone to sanitise and wear masks' (KII 2). One participant also feared not knowing where they would have contracted the virus. For instance, another participant felt uncomfortable when doing a door-to-door survey, where she could not ask people to wear a mask in their own home, which probably left her feeling exposed to the virus.

Another challenge for the participants is the misconception or misinformation among rural residents. For example, because it was recommended that a sanitiser with at least 70% alcohol content could protect against the virus, people who drink alcohol feel invincible to the COVID-19 because they believe they consume enough alcohol. Some of the risky practices include putting their masks under their chin, just in case the police come. They mentioned that for things like funerals, where the people from the morgue wear heavy personal protective clothing, people became scared and adhered to the rules.

Local issues sometimes become a barrier in participants' ability to apply new knowledge learned from the Tsitsa Project, such as a dispute between village leaders. Another challenge was when people did not understand the chief's reasons for not attending funerals during the pandemic; the participant said that one family was hesitant to assist the chief with a list of attendees of their funeral as required by the Department of Health. The participant used her knowledge gained about COVID-19 in an attempt to explain why the chief was isolating from social gatherings (potential, realised and applied value, Fig 4).

Lessons learnt

The lessons that the participants learned, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic and being pushed to learn online, are that technology helps them, especially with phone-related things. They also gained some experience of using the internet and accessing other online platforms (potential and realised value, Fig 4 & 5).

Participants feel like they have learned a lot from the Tsitsa Project and have applied the skills either for their work or personal purposes (potential, applied and realised value, Fig 4, 5 & 6). For instance, participants are now able to use Google to search for things that are beneficial for their lives; they learned to speak respectfully with others, and capacity development learning tasks catalysed participants to get in touch with their innovative sides:

> Now that I can use Google, I can use the information that I learnt ... to search other things that are beneficial to my life. Another thing I learnt is how you talk to people in a respectful way because we work with people. Also, if you know certain information, you must share it with people and not keep it for yourself such as the COVID-19 teachings which I shared with people. I also learnt creativity, in terms of coming up with ideas of the activities that you want to see in your communities i.e. introducing lower Tsitsana agricultural co-op with Lima, and introducing shearing shed committees with Lima to come and help them with anything they might need.

(KII 1) (applied value, Fig 4)

Another participant was able to assist other people in her community with information, such as the importance of rangeland management, and how to divert water away from one's home to prevent it from cracking (applied and realised value, Fig 5 & 6).

Preferences/recommendations for learning processes

Face-to-face

Most participants mentioned that they preferred to learn face-to-face. Some of them learn better when they are around other people, while others learn better when someone is standing in front of them and able to notice and react to their facial expressions, 'Personally, I prefer meeting with people because I learn better when I am with other people sharing my ideas'. Others even suggested ways to organise workshops without exposing any of them to the virus. 'Even though there are restrictions, the government states that the capacity should be less than 50, of which the Monitors are less than that because some of the things get easier with face-to-face'. Someone even suggested that if more people than the regulated number are needed to participate in an activity, they can then alternate attendance.

Make more practical

Participants emphasised the importance of including practical elements (demonstrations, real examples and practical exercises) to better support learning from online material, 'online learning, in the ToT, if there were things that were done practically, it would have been nice' (FG). Technical support to resolve problems with technology and providing sufficient data was seen as important and valued (enabling value, Fig 4, 5 & 6).

Ways to improve online learning

One participant suggested that in order to improve online learning, a group of people could be available just for responding to their questions because their tutors were also students in the course they were doing, and they sometimes took more than a week to respond to them. So, if people are dedicated to just one task, they will respond quickly or even let the participant know that they got their message and will respond. 'One thing that could have been done was to get dedicated people who are not also learning the course. Have people who constantly attend to questions and respond quickly than people who respond after a week.

Also get tutors who are good with communication, for example let the participant know that they got their messages and they will respond later' (KII 3).

Talking in the larger Zoom meeting was perceived as hard, but one participant felt that during breakaways, it becomes better because the facilitator tells the group about everyone who is in it. One participant also suggested that facilitators should hold one-on-ones with participants as that might provide a better environment for some people to open up. Network issues were also raised as a challenge to think about, normalising online learning in their context. However, the participant felt that without the network issues, it would be better for them to practise their English-speaking skills with the Tsitsa Project team in order to increase their confidence to interact in the diverse online environment.

Topics, skills and concepts they would like to learn

When asked about any other topics, skills or concepts they would like to learn about, participants showed an eagerness to learn more, both about the Tsitsa Project and specific requests to improve their livelihoods and communities. We include some of their requests:

- *'Vision and the mission of the Tsitsa Project, if I can have enough knowledge that I know to tell my community or other stakeholders. To be able to answer when someone asks. I would love to have a clear definition and know more about when the Tsitsa Project started, what are we doing as a project and how can the Tsitsa Project be involved in our communities'* (KII 1).
- *'Animal husbandry information [livestock related issues] so that I can help them improve their productivity. Rangeland management to help them become more productive. Importance of good rangelands and livestock health'* (KII 2).
- *Anything that you think is relevant such as forestry related topics like Take Note [restoration implementing agent] and wattle clearing. Provide information for career guidance to the younger generation that is still in school'* (KII 3).

Coping strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic

To cope with challenges of other people's behaviour, the participants mentioned adhering to the regulations themselves in order to protect themselves against being in contact with those who do not adhere to the rules. They wear a mask at all times, especially in public, and keep a distance between themselves and others. One participant even said they carry their own sanitiser, just to be safe. Those visiting home from other big cities like Cape Town would want to hug them, but because they knew better, they would politely tell them no.

Another way to cope has been trying to reach their community using the information they had received from the Tsitsa Project (through the Each One Teach One programme) about COVID-19. One participant said that she was able to explain to the community as to why their elderly and therefore vulnerable chief did not attend funerals anymore. His absence was very upsetting to the bereaved family and community. Traditionally, a chief is supposed to speak at the funeral, and so people get upset when their loved ones do not get a 'proper send-off' from the chief.

Receiving information from the Tsitsa Project has helped them to know what to do in order to protect themselves. They were also fortunate enough to have received training on how to use certain phone applications which allowed them to open the information in different formats from which it was sent to them in. 'All the hygiene measures helped me, and I was able to share with other people. It also helped me to learn how to use my cell phone better and get used to switching it on and was able to open content sent in a pdf format' (KII 2).

Some participants have found ways to manage working from home without making people around them feel like they just want to avoid certain responsibilities by assertively explaining the nature of their work to them. They have told their families and make sure to commit to finishing family duties at a certain time so that they may not be disturbed. Others ask to be late for some community events, and people understand. For those who stay alone, there are no issues. For those who come unannounced, participants said they usually promise to go to them after they have finished whatever they are working on. But the best way to overcome the challenge is to talk to the people affected and explain your work situation, and participants found that people actually understand.

When they felt like they weren't being treated well, the best way to cope was through doing their work and delivering what was expected.

Value creation stories

A set of three value creation stories are presented showing the progressing creation of value that Thandi, Siya and Sivile experienced as a result of participating in Tsitsa Project learning interventions. The intention is not to provide a deep analysis of value, but rather to add a complementary element to the data already presented.

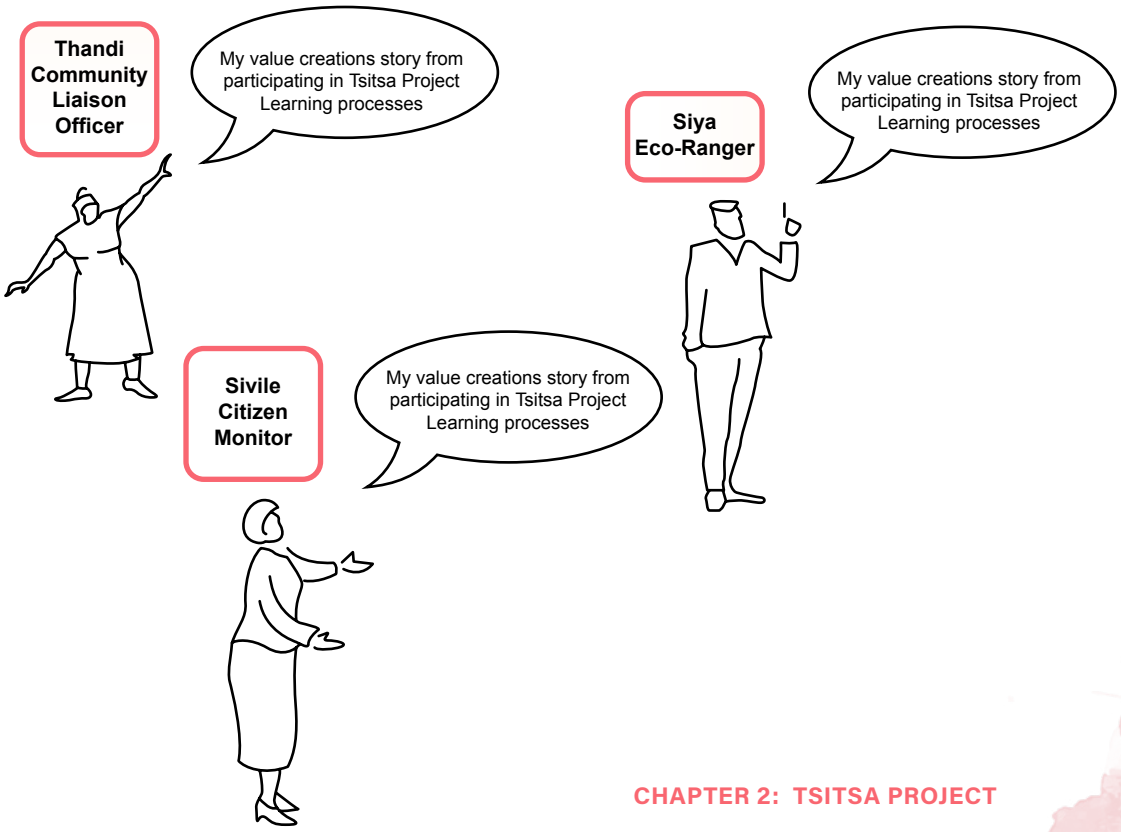


Figure 4:
Thandi's value creation story showcasing the progressive emergence of value catalysed from participation in learning interventions.

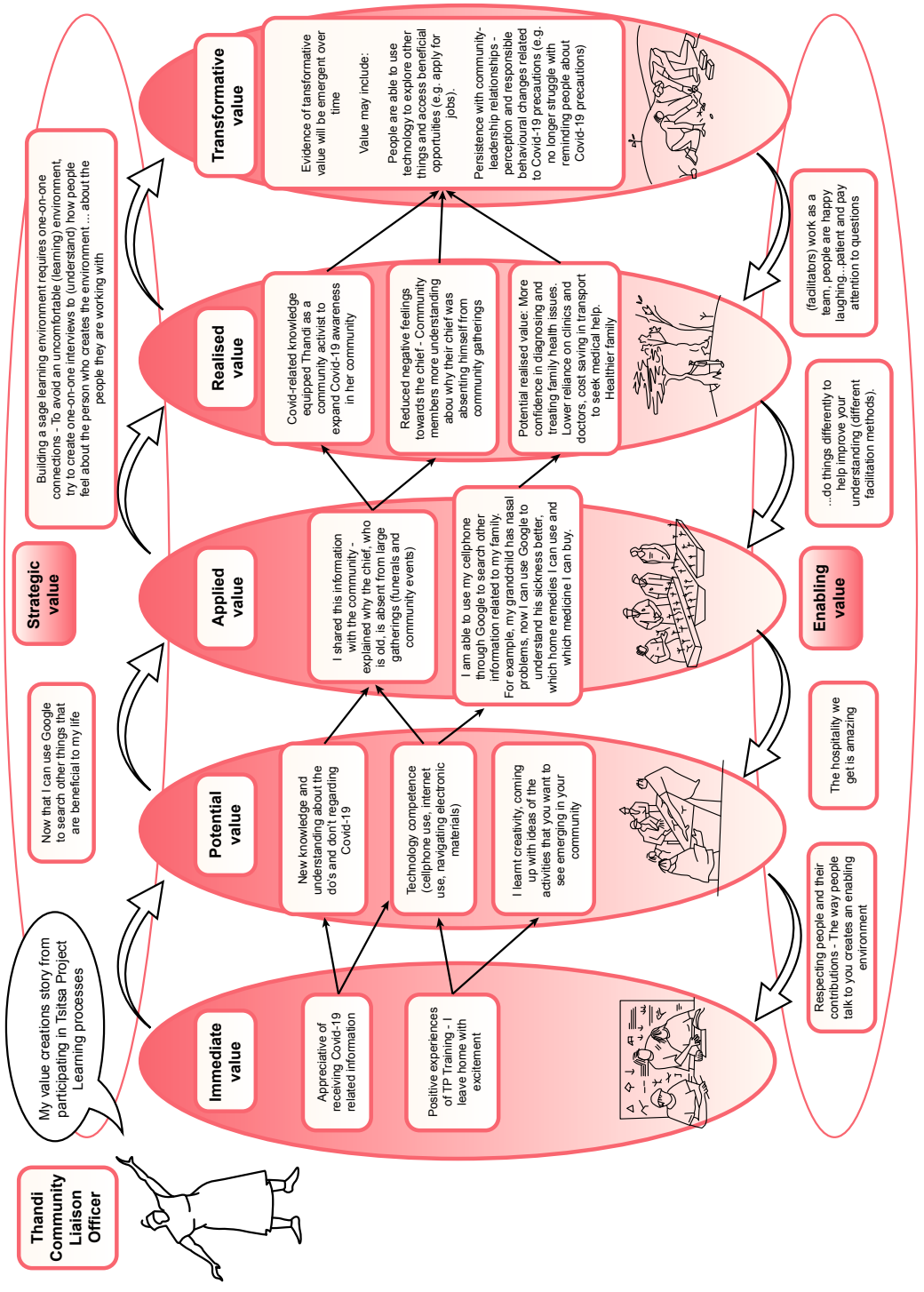


Figure 5:
Siya's value creation story showcasing the progressive emergence of value catalysed from participation in the learning interventions.

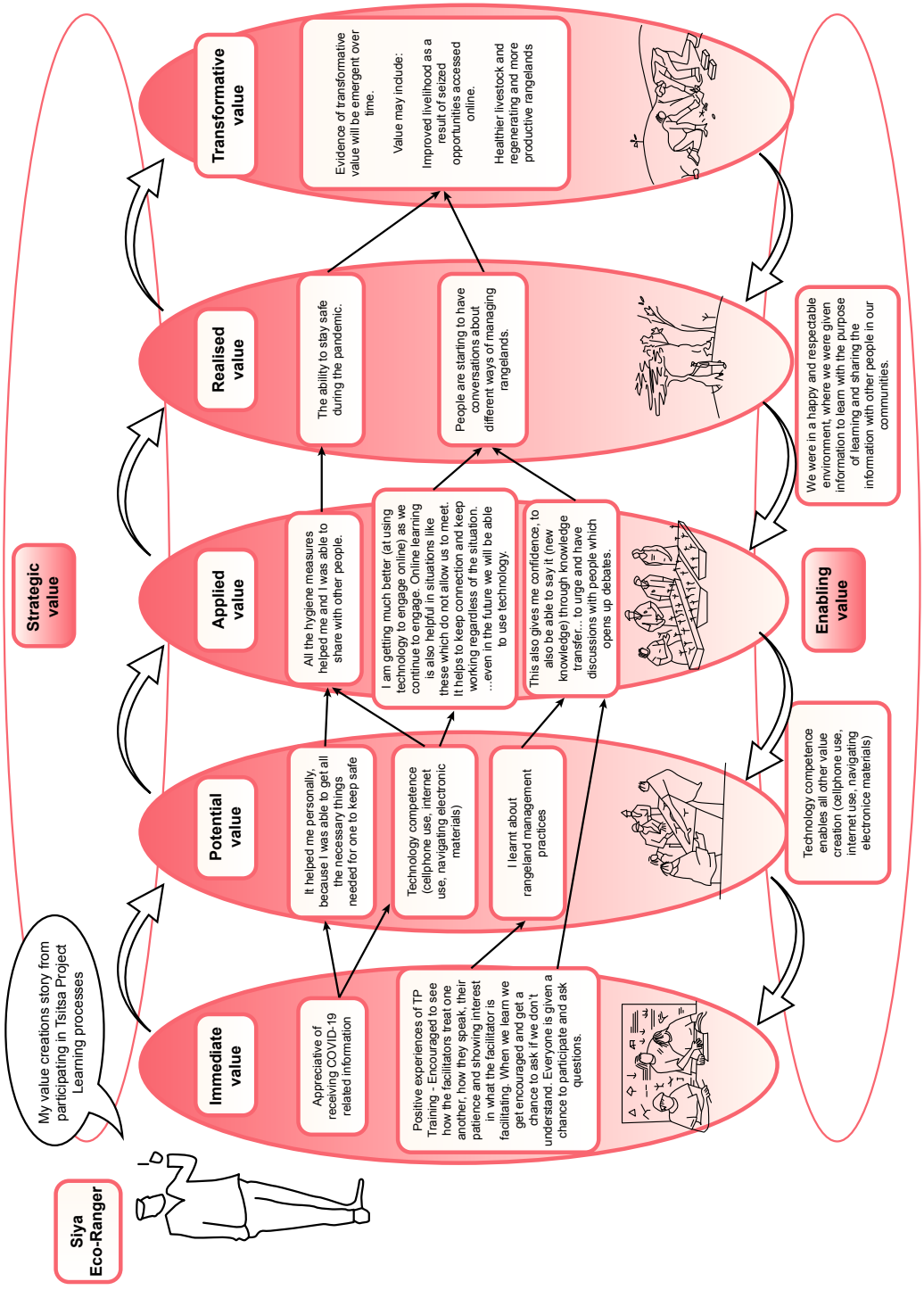
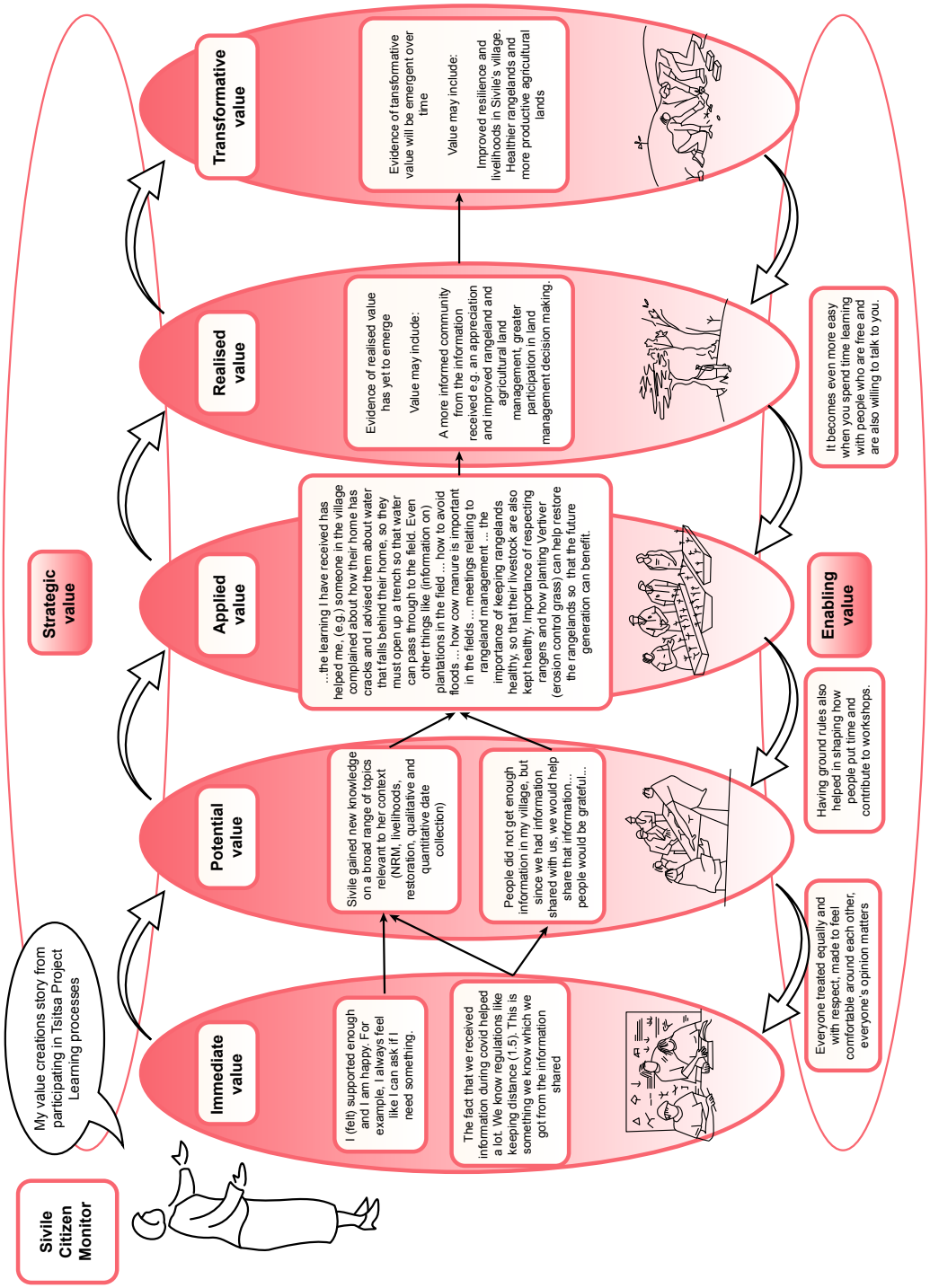


Figure 6:
Sivile's value creation story showcasing the progressive emergence of value catalysed from participation in the learning interventions.



Insights and recommendations for future learning processes

Insights on the environment and design of (online) learning processes

Learning facilitators should innovate to include in-person and/or virtual face-to-face processes to promote learning in rural contexts. Learning is optimised through engaging all the senses, and this is particularly important when designing learning processes in rural contexts where people use body language and facial expressions to communicate, convey meaning and relate to one another.

Seeing people's faces helps learning facilitators and tutors pick up on visual cues (e.g. nods of understanding or frowns of confusion) that may indicate whether their participants are following and engaging or not.

Face-to-face (including virtual) contact promotes relationship and trust building among participants and between participants and learning facilitators, and is critical for participants to feel confident and safe to engage freely and honestly during learning processes.

People's behaviour within a learning environment can have a positive or negative influence on participant learning. For instance, during face-to-face processes, adhering to COVID-19 regulations allows people to feel safe from infection and focus on the learning process.

Facilitated break-out rooms and one-on-one learning opportunities should complement large plenary sessions to promote engagement and learning during online (synchronous) contact sessions.

Online learning material should be complemented with practical exercises.

The design of learning processes should take into account the context (physical and technological constraints) in which learning processes are to take place. For example, where possible, allow the elderly person to do the welcome, and one person to lead the group into prayer to maintain local engagement practices.

Insights on the facilitation of (online) learning processes

Facilitators of learning interventions have an important role to play in enabling learning, especially in terms of how they treat the participants. The explicit way in which the Tsitsa Project team respectfully interacts with the participants has proven to be a successful mechanism to enable learning. Facilitators should get into the habit of reflecting before and after engagements in order to be aware of their positionality, biases and their powerful position in the engagement space, so that they may work on ways to better manage them.

Facilitators should reflect whether the purpose and intended learning outcomes of an intervention align with and is responsive to the needs of participants. Ask, and be transparent about how additional needs can or cannot be met or be planned for in future interventions.

In a diverse learning environment, people's confidence is lowered by their lack of familiarity with the people on the call, as they fear being judged for not being fluent in English (mainly used for bigger and more diverse learning platforms). In less diverse groups, translation is more practical than in bigger groups. Having attentive, proactive and responsive

tutors or mentors, who also speak the local language, is critical to enabling participant learning and supporting them through online learning processes.

When designing learning, it is important to take note of the challenges (e.g. family and community perceptions/misconceptions of what working from home means) related to working from home. Try to provide a note to the participants that they can give to their families to allow them to focus on learning for a certain time. The note could act as evidence for the family or community that the person really has a work commitment.

Insights on technology for learning processes

A positive outcome of the COVID-19 pandemic was also introducing participants to the idea of exploring the use of technology for different purposes in their lives more generally. There is a need for high-level advocacy (e.g. TESF project level) of policy-makers regarding the need to improve services such as network coverage in order to allow people in remote areas to explore the use of technology for the betterment of their lives, taking into consideration the facilitation of learning in a rural context, where there is often a lack of know-how when it comes to accessing cell phones and data compared to an urban context.

The frequent mention of poor network coverage in constraining learning is an indication that for the Tsitsa River Catchment context, the previous injustices from the apartheid era still prevail, where services are not adequately provided in the former homelands. This is an example of transformation constrained by 'lock-ins' in the system.

The use of technology enables one to reach learning in a global context at a cheaper price or rate. When learning is facilitated on a global scale, with diverse language backgrounds, facilitators should try and identify tutors from those areas that can help learners translate learning materials into their local languages (a language that each participating group understands).

Although learning online was a challenge, the technological competence gained provided tools and opened up windows of opportunity for social learning and livelihood development beyond the Tsitsa Project.

When designing an online learning course, provide data-friendly learning materials (consider data-free learning platforms and solutions) and ensure that participants have sufficient data to access and engage with materials and contact sessions.

Way forward and further outputs

- A peer reviewed journal paper;
- Pamphlets documenting key insights and recommendations for future online learning in a rural context;
- Facilitated online or face-to-face feedback workshop sessions with the Tsitsa River Catchment participants; and
- Short videos with visual images and voiceovers, with subtitles translated into isiXhosa or English.

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CHAPTER 3

Ground Truth

Co-researching transformation within training processes in a post COVID-19 world

The case story of the Palmiet Enviro-Champs, indigenous knowledge practices and Action Learning

Written by Ayanda Lepheana, with support from Charlene Russell (Ground Truth) and Dr Jim Taylor (UKZN Research Associate)

Contents

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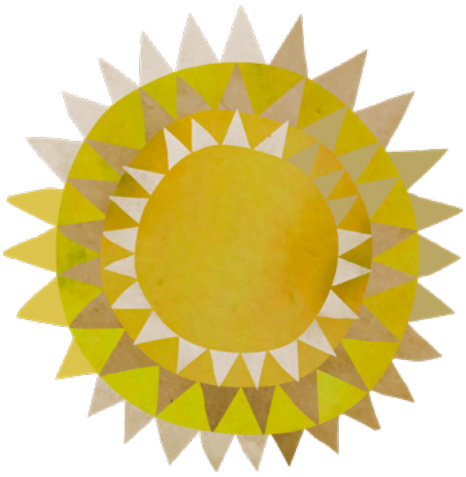

1 Introduction

In the past decade, a modest yet powerful social movement has been gathering momentum. Known by different names across South Africa, the work of the Enviro-Champs was singled out by the Presidential Skills Summit Framework Agreement as an example of best practice in community-based catchment and water management. In January 2021, 300 Enviro-Champs were employed in the Umgeni River Catchment through the Presidential Employment Stimulus package under the Department of Science and Innovation. These acknowledgements come after one of the toughest years we have had to face. The year 2020 will be remembered as possibly the most tumultuous year in recent history. The COVID-19 pandemic has probably affected more lives than any other event since World War II. The effects of COVID-19 interpenetrated every facet of human life and, for us, working with the Palmiet Enviro-Champs movement, the effects were enormous. It is said that knowledge springs from discontinuities; it certainly did in our case. Our training programmes had to be re-shaped from face-to-face learning systems to online learning. This led to the development of some remarkable innovations. We are most grateful to Transforming Education for Sustainable Futures (TESF) for supporting this research and for providing project guidance so that we were able to research and better understand the Palmiet Enviro-Champs project.

This study aims to determine the most effective form of training in a post-COVID period and how this might be applied in support of the Enviro-Champs Job Skills project. It continues to explore how indigenous knowledge practices can best be mobilised as part of adult-based learning and change. With the support of the TESF, we are now embarking on a deeper research process to better understand the project, strengthen the way it is managed, and to see where we can develop learnings or principles of social change at a catchment level that may be applied elsewhere.

Context: Governance failures and deteriorating quality of life

Governance failures are at the origin of many resource management problems. These are further exacerbated by climate change and the concomitant increase of extreme weather events that have exposed the inability of current governance regimes to deal with present and future challenges. Our knowledge about resource governance regimes and how they change is still quite limited (Pahl-Wostl, 2009). A project like this one, that enables the community to play a greater role in how these resources are managed, can add to this body of knowledge and, at the same time, engage with the issues they are facing.

This conceptual framework addresses the dynamics and adaptive capacity of resource governance regimes as multi-level learning processes. The influence of formal and informal institutions, the role of state and non-state actors, the nature of multi-level interactions and the relative importance of bureaucratic hierarchies, markets and networks are identified as major structural characteristics of governance regimes. Within this regime, change is conceptualised as social and societal learning that proceeds in a stepwise (although seldom in

a linear) manner, from single to double to triple loop learning (Pahl-Wostl, 2009). It is this type of learning and change that we are exploring within the Enviro-Champs model.

The Enviro-Champs approach deals with the complexity of resource governance systems in a systematic fashion which includes the institutional, formal and informal dimensions that come into play. The Enviro-Champs approach is situated in an informal institution dimension; in this dimension, socially shared rules and cultural norms are created by the people and the society they live in. These rules are not codified or written down and are usually enforced outside of legally sanctioned channels. These social boundaries are important for a governance. The Enviro-Champs group is an example of this kind of informal group. There are no formal legally enforced rules to govern how the group operates, but social and cultural norms guide their interactions. This promotes inclusion: any person from the community could be an Enviro-Champ and could perform the Enviro-Champs activities within their communities.

The Enviro-Champs project has a strong focus on Education for Sustainable Development and citizen science tools, notably miniSASS, in support of the main project objective, as well as the application of various other monitoring tools. These tools include a clarity tube for measuring water turbidity as well as a velocity plank for measuring velocity and volume.

Background to the Palmiet Enviro-Champs project

The Palmiet Enviro-Champs project aims to mobilise communities to understand and act to address challenges with regards to water quality, quantity and access (equity). The project also addresses challenges of solid waste, sanitation and other pressing township issues such as environmental management and air pollution. Through Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4.7 on Education, the project aims to develop skills and understanding, and then apply these capabilities to the above environmental issues. The project contributes to the implementation of the Department of Environment Affairs' National Environmental Education and Training Strategy and Action Plan (2019–2029) (DEA, 2018).

The selection criteria used for the Enviro-Champs were developed to ensure that the best possible candidates were chosen for this role. The criteria were used to guide the recruitment decisions and to ensure that the best candidates were selected for the job. Participants who were public-spirited, generous to others and committed to community upliftment tended to do well through the recruitment processes, although it proved to be a challenge to acquire CVs for good candidates. The Palmiet Enviro-Champs requirements were carefully devised and advertised to the Counsellors who serve as the elected political leadership in communities. Unfortunately, 40% of the applicants did not meet the selection criteria, particularly Grade 10 as an entry level, which was set as a pre-requisite for accredited National Qualifications Framework (NQF) level 2 training. This limited our selection choices, particularly from certain political wards; as a result, while 15 Enviro-Champs were needed, only ten could be selected.

Training courses were then offered to the selected Enviro-Champ candidates. Action Learning, an open-process framework which offers participants a structured engagement in fieldwork activities, was applied during the Enviro-Champs training. This framework includes the '5Ts Model', which includes Tuning In, Talk, Touch, Think & Take Action (Graham and Taylor, 2018), with 'tuning in' as a key component of the process. Central in the model is the 'Nexus or Matter of Concern' which is the focus or issue which is being addressed (see Figure 1).

The one-day training to cover the 5Ts of Action Learning, with an indigenous knowledge focus, was very productive. At the start of the training a 'tuning in' session enabled each of the Enviro-Champs to engage with how the Action Learning process worked. This commenced with each of them using a 15-minute period to investigate how the 5Ts of Action Learning could be applied to their work. This was done to ensure that their work is strengthened by the learning experiences and to ensure that it develops smoothly and will be effective and sustainable. After exploring their work and how it links to Action Learning, all the participants then reported back into the WhatsApp group. This was done using questioning techniques, with participants responding through voice notes and WhatsApp messages. Discussion amongst participants was encouraged.

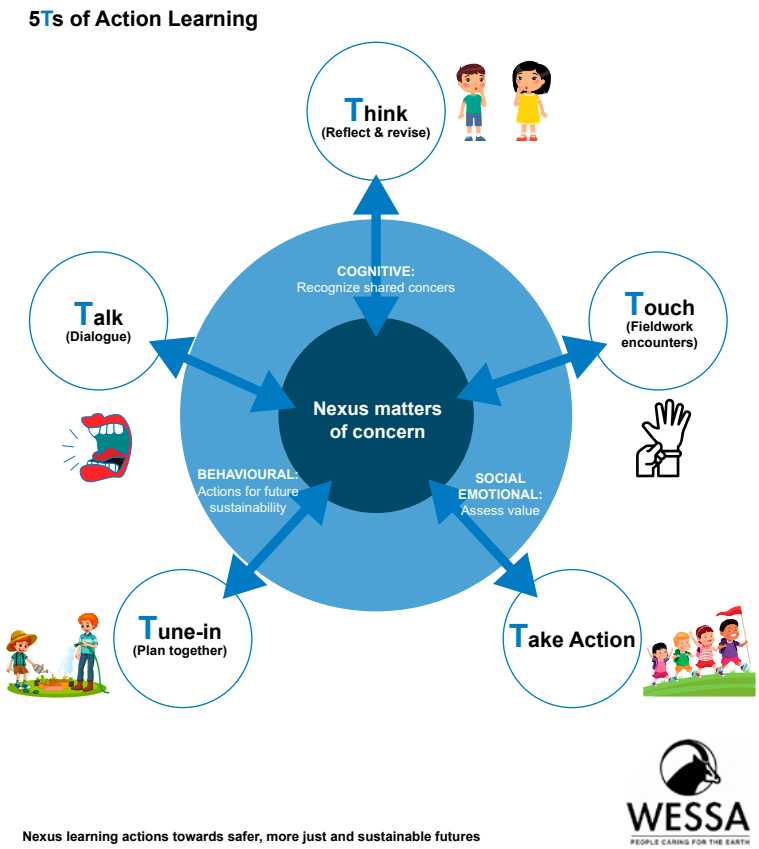

Figure 1: The 5Ts of Action Learning Source: Graham and Taylor (2018)

Major breakthroughs enabling the study

Since face-to-face training was not possible due to the COVID-19 lockdown, other learning methods had to be explored. At first, we thought internet-based programmes like Zoom would be the answer, but none of the participants had laptops and were in any case unfamiliar with Zoom. They did have access to smart phones, however, and these could be used for WhatsApp, a trending tool that is very suited to informal, adult learning. WhatsApp allows for instant messaging and can be used to record voice notes, share photographs and videos as well as enable video calls. This proved to be a significant breakthrough for the community-based learning processes.

In the research processes, we explored how Indigenous or local knowledge practices could enhance the ability of participants to connect with the study topics. This proved a further significant breakthrough in that participants could meaningfully mobilise their prior knowledge and understanding into the learning context.

Indigenous knowledge practices are a body of knowledge, know-how and practices that are maintained and developed by people, usually in rural or semi-rural areas, who have extended histories of interaction with the natural environment. These forms of knowledge practice are handed down orally, from generation to generation. Using indigenous knowledge practices in social learning enables Indigenous people and local communities to actively participate and become meaningfully part of the learning processes. Indigenous knowledge practices are a powerful resource of rural people and therefore can be a key element in the fight against poverty and social exclusion for many rural communities worldwide (Boven, 2002). Unfortunately, modernity and colonising processes are silencing such histories, and this leads to disjointed learning or learning that does not connect well with the participants' reality.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to determine the most effective form of training in a post-COVID period, and this how might best be applied in support of job skills capacity building. We also researched how indigenous knowledge practices could serve to situate the learning and make it more meaningful and contextually connected for participants. Although the research may be described as being located within a social learning framework, action learning processes were also applied to help structure and guide the learning. By joining hands with the Enviro-Champs, who were the training participants in the study, I, as the researcher, was able to participate in a co-learning, and co-researching process that proved to be very meaningful for us all. The conclusions we are discovering together are arriving through the various joint deliberation processes that this research made possible. Through such processes, we are certainly enhancing our ability to better design, scaffold and engage in adult-based learning and transformative change in water management.

The project is managed in a collaborative manner and common goals are addressed with participants. This collaboration includes effective communication through actively listening to others. The importance of respecting the views of other and their diverse backgrounds and understandings is also emphasised.

2 Research methodology

Collecting data

The research methodology may be described as a mixed-method study using an Action Research approach, where the findings of each interaction were critically reflected upon and used to inform and adapt the next engagement. The methods of collecting data included: (i) monitoring and evaluation processes; (ii) learning from monthly reporting; (iii) the gathering of various reports; and (iv) reflection and semi-structured interviews, including data on participant observation and opinions.

Documents from the above four processes were used to collect specific data to track the social learning processes. These datasets may be described as non-technical literature tools, which are useful in qualitative research as they offer systematic, empirical data on the context and assist in providing insights for the researcher through learning with people about water (Bowen, 2009). The datasets used for the research are shown in Table 1.

What each data source yielded

A very large number and variety of outcomes emerged from the various data sources associated with this research. This data is discussed in detail in the following section in ways that highlight the outcomes the data yielded linked to the Palmiet Enviro-Champs project.

Enviro-Champs during recruitment process

Table 1: The data from which the research insights could be drawn

Data-set	Data source	Purpose of data source	Recording method	Analyse/Use
1.	The Interviews for Recruitment and the Physical Test	To provide a just and fair opportunity for people to express themselves, to establish the understanding and meanings the Enviro-Champs made of the training	Interview	Coded according to participants' interests
2.	Code of Conduct	To explore shared values	Written document	Looking for common core values
3.	WhatsApp code of conduct	To find values that are shared	Report on a document	Looking for common core values
4.	Introduction to Aquatic Ecology	To workshop, practical, question-guided learning and indigenous knowledge practices	Course outline and support notes	To determine base for scaffolding knowledge
5.	Fieldwork	To explore action learning within a practical situation	Report with photos	Summarised findings used to guide further practical trainings
6.	Quarterly Report	To share the state of the project	Report with photos	Summarised findings to influence further trainings
7.	Training sessions via online WhatsApp group chat	To broaden the knowledge base of the group and introduce new content	Digital recording	Responses were categorised
8.	New group induction by mentees	To share knowledge and learning, to grow and develop confidence	Notes	Enviro-Champs were observed teaching each other
9.	Evaluation by Dr Jim Taylor	To assess and review the project's progress over a year	Report	Summarised findings to influence further trainings
10.	Sherwood Workshop	To share progress as group of 26	Workshop notes	Interactions were observed
11.	WhatsApp group	To track discussions, agreements, and group dynamics in relation to the themes and 5Ts of Action Learning	WhatsApp Group chat history	Responses were categorised
12.	Semi-structured interviews	To capture participants' learning, experiences, and opinions about the programme in relation to its purpose	Interview transcripts were recorded	Analysed and coded for emerging themes

Dataset 1: The interviews for recruitment and the physical test

The interviews for recruitment and the physical test provided a fair opportunity for people to express themselves and establish the meaning and their understanding of the Enviro-Champs movement. This allowed the candidates to share their stories and experience. More simply put, stories are a way of knowing. Telling stories is essentially a meaning-making process. When people tell stories, they select details of their experience from their stream of consciousness. In order to give the details of their experience a beginning, middle and end, people must reflect on their experience. It is this process of selecting constitutive details of experience, reflecting on them, giving them order and thereby making sense of them that makes telling stories a meaning-making experience. (Seidman, 2006). This enabled the project to select good candidates for the job. Figure 2 shows the Enviro-Champs during the recruitment process.

Dataset 2: The Code of Conduct

The Code of Conduct is a written collection of the rules, principles and values and the Enviro-Champs expectations, behaviours and relationships that the project believes are fundamental to their successful operation. What made this Code of Conduct special was that it was jointly drawn up by, and arrived at through, active participation by the Enviro-Champs. Like the WhatsApp Code of Conduct which follows, it was something all members could continually look back on and draw from when necessary.

Dataset 3: WhatsApp Code of Conduct

The WhatsApp Code of Conduct was co-developed with the Enviro-Champs. Since the Enviro-Champ group is made up of several groups of individuals from various cultures, the WhatsApp Code of Conduct reflects the agreed standards of behaviour for the Enviro-Champs in meetings, trainings and workshops. The Enviro-Champs act according to the standards written down in the WhatsApp Code of Conduct and operate according to these standards for the benefit of all Enviro-Champs. Group leaders of each ward, such as WhatsApp group admin, exercise the right to suspend access to any person who persistently breaks the shared Code of Conduct.

Dataset 4: An introduction to aquatic ecology and its link to indigenous knowledge practices

The Introduction to Aquatic Ecology course consisted of a workshop, practical as well as question-guided learning and the exploration of links to indigenous knowledge practices. The course aimed to be situated in the reality of the lives and work of the Enviro-Champs. This was achieved by organising the course curriculum through key questions posed to the participants. The course included indigenous knowledge processes to ensure that the wisdom of the past was not neglected and can indeed strengthen and complement the wisdom of the present. The participants identified with many of the indigenous knowledge practice ideas that were shared. They also shared examples from their experiences, which strengthened the course curriculum. An Action Learning Framework (Taylor et. al., 2018) was applied to guide the learning process. This enabled all participants to 'tune in' to the content of the training by

mobilising their prior knowledge and understanding. In this way, their life world experiences were very much part of the learning, unlike in an academic course, where information is conveyed to participants in a top-down manner.

Dataset 5: Fieldwork

The project's fieldwork and action learning included discovery, experimentation, learning about and connecting to the natural world, and engaging with the environment.

Dataset 6: The project's regular reporting

The goal of the project reports was to share the state of the project with eThekwini, the project leaders, as well as with the funders, the Development Bank of South Africa. Further training has been conducted since mid-October 2020, covering the following topics:

- Data collection and completion of in-field GeoODK Collect forms
- COVID-19 and toolbox training
- Illegal sand mining (facilitated by the Institute of Natural Resources)
- Invasive alien plants
- Local environmental challenges (sanitation issues, fresh water leaks, illegal dumping)
- Introduction to wetlands

Dataset 7: The training sessions

The Palmiet Enviro-Champs have attended 40 training days. The training included empowering Enviro-Champs with knowledge so that they can share the information during door-to-door activities. This knowledge will be invaluable beyond the finite time period of the project. By running non-accredited training for Palmiet River Catchment local community members, basic competencies where developed that enabled them to address environmental issues in a more informed and confident way. The Enviro-Champs have thus contributed significantly to their own enrichment and training and that of their fellow candidates. This was made possible by the training approach adopted, which included questions-based learning, cultural and indigenous practices as well as intergenerational knowledge sharing. By way of example, GroundTruth ran several citizen science training initiatives. The following subjects were covered:

- Riparian Health Audit tool
- Grassland study
- MinSASS and using all the citizen science tools
- Snake handling
- Conducting water testing in the Palmiet River Catchment
- Learning the names of indigenous trees (in the field)
- Learning to record, edit and make a video on environmental problems in the community

- Learning the names of invasive alien plants
- Laying out sewage pipes and sewage systems (field)
- Using GeoODK Collect, the cell phone data collection app

Dataset 8: Introducing the new group of Enviro-Champs

The new group members were inducted by other Enviro-Champs through an 'each one teach one' intervention, sharing together in order to learn to grow and develop confidence.

Dataset 9: The evaluation research to assess and review the *first year of the project*

Insights from this research process revealed how the Enviro-Champs have contributed significantly to their own enrichment and training and that of their fellow candidates (Taylor, 2021). This was made possible by the training approach adopted, which included question-based learning, cultural and indigenous practices as well as inter-generational knowledge sharing. Of further significance in the training has been the use of photographs, taken by the Enviro-Champs themselves on their mobile phones, to enable sharing and a deeper understanding of the local issues and risks depicted in the photographs. It is encouraging that key learnings from the Enviro-Champs training can be used to inform other, wider catchment management processes in other parts of South Africa.

Dataset 10: The Sherwood Workshop

This workshop offered an excellent example for observing the Enviro-Champs conducting the 'each one, teach one' intervention. The experienced Enviro-Champs were given the opportunity to train, educate and assist the newly recruits. It was interesting to observe the Enviro-Champs growing as a leadership community that freely shares simple ideas and sound and useful solutions. The highlight of the workshop was that it allowed the team to directly engage in discussion through community-based participatory dialogues. Everyone could share their insights and engage in dialogue processes to further clarify what they were trying to share and understand. This dataset proved an excellent example of a co-researching process.

Dataset 11: The WhatsApp group

WhatsApp chat is an inexpensive and popular tool that is being used in informal and formal education. WhatsApp is an instant messaging service that also makes it possible to record and send voice notes and make video calls WhatsApp was used to track discussions, agreements and group dynamics in relation to the themes and the 5Ts of action learning. WhatsApp shows the types of interactions that occur when facilitators are involved in the Enviro-Champs group discussion.

Dataset 12: Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used to elicit participants' learning experiences and opinions about the programme in relation to its purpose. Six Enviro-Champs participated in the

detailed semi-structured interviews. From the interview dialogue transcripts, a number of themes were identified. Table 1.2, below, shows the ranking of the themes as they appeared during the interviews. Each theme is then discussed in relation to social learning. The raw data for the interviews is available, should it be required for further research purposes.

Table 2: Ranking of the themes

Themes	How often mentioned
All could talk and share (rather than just receive input)	**13**
Participants felt they were developing a sense of agency	**8**
Kindness and generosity are appreciated	**7**
Question-guided learning was beneficial	**6**
Connecting to Indigenous Knowledge is very powerful	**5**
Action learning was greatly beneficial (especially the 5Ts)	**4**
Resource material / Learning support material is very important (as are citizen science tools)	**4**
The learning exchange workshop was greatly appreciated (including learning from others with experience)	**4**
Practical hands-on activities were appreciated	**3**
Online learning was a positive experience	**2**
Mobilising prior knowledge, and understanding/ engaging with it, is important	**2**
People felt safe whilst learning	**2**
Knowledge shared was clear	**2**
Fear and anxiety can inhibit learning (but one can learn from mistakes)	**2**

3 Findings and discussion

The findings reveal that the various interactions between the Enviro-Champs and facilitators during the trainings should be valued not only for the relationships of knowledge construction, but also for the social and interdependent relationships that develop. Such learning processes are not usually taken into account and yet can have a major influence on the learning outcomes. The atmosphere of 'learning together' enables the facilitator and the Enviro-Champs to co-create knowledge through active learning and collaboration. Throughout the study period, it was evident how fruitful and beneficial the social interaction among the Enviro-Champs themselves was. The opinions and ideas of all those who were present was valued and often revealed unexpected, yet meaningful insights. In this way, knowledge was constructed together, both through interaction with the facilitator, and through interaction with other participants. The discourse and the creation of new ideas are reflective of a rich social learning process.

The way in which the Enviro-Champs constructed new knowledge together shows that this training course is a good example of how to engage with indigenous knowledge practices because it has successfully included the indigenous knowledge of local people and their communities and shown how this can be used for the purpose of sustainable development to develop examples of 'best practice'.

A 'best practice' is an approach or method that has proven effective for a particular purpose in a particular context, and which could also be effective in other contexts if properly adapted and applied. The 'best practice' is thus held up as a model worth emulating in other parts of South Africa. A 'best practice' related to IKPs might be found in a development project or programme, a method of training, or a specific activity or method that has successfully put the knowledge of local people and communities to good use for purposes of sustainable development. Often 'best practice' is the result of articulating indigenous knowledge with modern techniques, which can prove more valuable in combination.

The interaction between two different systems of knowledge can also create a mechanism of dialogue between local populations and development professionals. This can be meaningful for a project that reflects people's real aspirations and actively involves communities (Boven, 2002).

In this project, the Enviro-Champs were encouraged to explore 'best practices' from within their own context. This allowed them to critically reflect on their modern lifestyles and evaluate them against their traditional values and the needs of the planet. These processes enabled a rich and meaningful dialogue to develop amongst the participants.

Discussed next are the most valuable topics for future consideration that emerged from an analysis of the themes.

All could talk and share

This allowed the Enviro-Champs to experience teaching and learning of their local environmental challenges in ways that grew their knowledge over time. This was facilitated through promoting a co-engagement inquiry. The development of knowledge through inquiry that the enhances the participant's learning about socio environmental issues is very significant (Jaworski, 2010).

As Zandile Ntuli noted:

> The overall learning methods were positive and encouraging because they were allowing every individual to contribute. Everyone could talk and share ideas. I have gained knowledge that I now understand, and I can talk about it and share the ideas with my community.

Another participant, Thabiso Ndzimande, said:

> Everyone gets a chance to share and learn and speak about the sections they understood best, (and) pay attention when others are speaking and conducting activities.

Confidence and developing a sense of agency

The Enviro-Champs have developed confidence in such a way that they believe in themselves, and they can talk and present in front people and conduct door-to-door learning activities. Ntokozo Jili noted:

> Last time I gave the presentation is when I was at high school 7 years ago. I was nervous to stand in front of the group and give presentation. The project made me feel as an important member and I have gained knowledge that understand, and I can talk about and share with my community.

Such an exercise/process is important because it allows participants to deal with their situations and find a sense of relevance. One can define confidence as the feeling of self-assurance that comes from an appreciation of one's own abilities or qualities. By investing time in this endeavour, participants' attitudes and motivation are positively influenced (Bäck et al., 2017).

Kindness and generosity are appreciated

Serving one's community requires special qualities that include a public-spirited outlook and a commitment to the common good. When these qualities are informed by kindness and generosity, they promote powerful transformative characteristics. This is a key finding of our research.

Connecting with indigenous knowledge practices supports the development of situated learning

In a debate on land in South Africa, one of the panellists, a Khoisan chief, spoke about custodianship and stewardship in the following way: when you use the land, you become accountable, and that implies leaving the land in a better state for those who will inherit it (Tladi, 2019). Indigenous knowledge practices, such as these, are critical for sustainable development. This insight was quite meaningful to the Enviro-Champs, who learnt the value of leaving the land, in their case the peri-urban environment, in a better state than when they first encountered it.

The empowerment of local communities is a prerequisite for the integration of indigenous knowledge in the development process. The integration of appropriate indigenous knowledge practices into development programmes and training has already contributed towards their efficiency, effectiveness and impact. Indigenous knowledge, like any other knowledge, needs to be constantly practised and adapted to evolving local contexts. Supporting local and regional networks of traditional practitioner and community exchanges can help disseminate relevant indigenous knowledge and enable communities to participate more actively in the development processes. While innovative mechanisms for the protection of indigenous intellectual property rights need to be developed, many indigenous knowledge practices can, at the same time, be integrated into local, national, regional and global development efforts.

Experience has shown, however, that this cannot be done by one institution alone. Partnerships between community-based organisations, non-governmental organisations, academia, the private sector, researchers, government and donor institutions are needed to enhance the use of indigenous knowledge for sustainable development. The Indigenous Knowledge for Development Program of the World Bank is another example that continues to champion indigenous knowledge and join others in their efforts to harness indigenous knowledge for development. Numerous examples are given of the successful implementation of indigenous knowledge in the areas of healthcare, agriculture, education, and women's issues by communities and governments in Africa, India and South America (Gorjestani, 2001).

In our study are the course process included indigenous knowledge processes to ensure that the wisdom of the past is not neglected and can indeed strengthen and complement the wisdom of the present. The participants identified with many of the indigenous knowledge ideas that they were sharing with each other. They also shared examples from their experiences, which strengthened the course curriculum.

Mobilising indigenous knowledge practices in the Enviro-Champs training processes enabled them, along with local communities, to actively participate in the project social learning processes (Wals, 2007). Nomandla Nqanula said, for example:

> Back at home in rural areas water is clean and they have connection with the streams, rivers and springs because they collect water from these water bodies and it (is) everyone duty to keep them clean. Here in Durban, we have lost that connection and practice of

> keeping water bodies clean because we now thing think water come from the tap and that is one of the reasons we are polluting our rivers.

Indigenous knowledge practices are powerful resources for rural people and are a key element in the fight against poverty and social exclusion for many communities (Boven, 2002). It has been encouraging and interesting to observe the growing interest from the Enviro-Champs in participating in Education for Sustainable Development through the role of indigenous knowledge practices.

Action Learning was greatly beneficial, especially the 5Ts

According to the literature review and based on the learnings and insights which have emerged during this project, Action Learning and the 5T model best encapsulates the key elements describing the successes and barriers to the uptake of the Palmiet Enviro-Champs training technique. These processes engage the Enviro-Champs in decision-making processes rather than assuming that they should simply implement externally derived solutions. Such pedagogical models are therefore potentially powerful ways of enhancing 'agency', which may be described as the ability of people to develop their capacities. This enabled all the Enviro-Champs to 'tune in' to the training by mobilising their prior knowledge and understanding. In this way, their lived world experiences were very much part of the learning, rather having information conveyed in a top-down manner as is the often case in learning contexts.

Thembisa Nomlala noted the following:

> I found 5T very meaningful. I think it should be applied in every project. Also question-guided learning [is] very good because it allowed us to apply our prior knowledge.
>
> When conducting a project we need to engage with people and learn together by sharing ideas. Conducting research through engaging with people is not the same as conducting research through technology. Conducting research by engaging with people using the 5T approach is more meaningful because you connect with the people. Sometimes people share ideas and tell old stories about how things were done in the past and make connections with the present and the future. Working with different people, together, produces more meaningful results than working alone.

Question-guided learning was powerful

Question-guided learning was used to enable the participants to activate their prior knowledge, which is retrieved from long-term memory as a working memory, providing learners with an assimilative context of their existing knowledge. Question-guided learning led to a powerful and positive impact of prior-knowledge activation on learning. Participants were encouraged to mobilise all they knew about rivers, streams and water resources management in their local context. Question-guided learning enabled the Enviro-Champs to bridge the gap between their prior knowledge and the new information.

Zandile Ntuli noted the following:

> Question guided knowledge and indigenous knowledge enable me to apply my prior knowledge and this made me not to forget things.

Practical sessions were appreciated

The practical sessions at the river proved very useful in many ways. People were amazed by what they discovered, and they enjoyed showing each other what they were discovering, linking it back to other streams that they were more familiar with, sometimes from their youth. The rich dialogue about the practical experience was very significant indeed.

Zandile Ntuli noted the following:

> About myself, I realised that I enjoy what it means to be an Enviro-Champ, yet I have never pictured myself as an outdoor person before. However, now I enjoy outdoor activities, as well as working with citizen science tools in the field. I always thought that maybe, I would be a chef.

Thembisa Nomlala noted the following:

> Practicals were so powerful because I could touch the tools and experience the use of the tools because I learn easily in outdoors. These learning methods open my mind in a way that not all the issues in our community require us to strike and complains all the time. I have realised that I need to help my community and understand what other stakeholder are doing, working with other stakeholders and learn about what other stakeholders are doing in our area.

Learning Exchange Workshops

The Learning Exchange Workshops enabled social learning processes between the three different Enviro-Champ nodes. The workshops also enabled us to observe and assess our discussions for evidence of social learning. It also enabled the Palmiet Enviro-Champs to experience the Mpophomeni Enviro-Champs work, first-hand, and gain an understanding of the role that Enviro-Champs play in Mpophomeni, along with the tools they currently use. The workshops generated joint discussion between the groups and identified learning opportunities for the Palmiet Enviro-Champs. It also established how the Enviro-Champs tools/approaches may be adapted for use in the Palmiet river Catchment. Figure 1.3 shows the Enviro-Champs interacting during the Learning Exchange Workshop in Mpohomeni.

Thembisa Nomlala noted the following:

> Thank you to Mpophomeni Enviro-Champs for giving us this learning opportunity. I am 44 years old and not working. I thought my time has passed and now I am waiting for pension grant. But when I saw a 69-year-old (Baba Cele) helping his community, I realise that there so much I can still offer my community, and beyond, through the Palmiet Project. My friend and I always think that it is the role of the municipality keep our environment clean. Through the learning exchange workshop, I have learned how can I be eyes and ears of the municipality. Now I am going to have a chance to teach my friend about the role we can play, together, to assist the municipality.

Enviro-Champs Learning Exchange Workshop in Mpophomeni

Ownership and trust

As part of applying a social learning approach, it was important to co-develop the process and programme to develop a sense of ownership of process, trust and agreement with the Enviro-Champs (see Wals, 2007). As is expected in social learning processes, there are many instances in the programme where it was necessary to accommodate unanticipated gaps in the 'competencies' of individuals in the group. This accommodation of the unexpected was not part of the original design of the programme.

Scaffolding needed to enable participation in Enviro-Champs' activities

Scaffolding as a negotiated, two-way process of learning implies that both participants and facilitators of learning participate to enable the scaffolding process to be a success. Wood, Ross and Bruner (1976) suggest that the participants have to develop an understanding of the end goal, even if it is not reached. The Enviro-Champs have reached a point in their learning where they make constant reminders to each other in the WhatsApp group about what the end goal of their work is, and what is needed to achieve this. In this programme, learning was supported by negotiated scaffolding, as opposed to the structured, rigid form of scaffolding which takes place in formal teaching. This kind of negotiated scaffolding allows participants to situate themselves within their context and make meaning of their learning as it relates

to their own reality. As such, negotiated scaffolding is an appropriate form of learning that is beneficial to the work of the Enviro-Champs. Such activities were meaningful for their learning and, in other words, created a scaffold for learning where abstract knowledge became real.

Prior to commencing training for the Palmiet Enviro-Champs, each Enviro-Champ was sent a few questions about themselves and their anticipated contribution to the project. This information provided the facilitators with a short 'bio' for each Enviro-Champ and further insights into the Enviro-Champ's role in the community. This included their key experiences and expectations for the training as well as for a potential 'change project' idea. A change project is quite simply a story about a change that someone has chosen to undertake, whether at home, at work, or as part of recreation, to resolve an evident socio-ecological risk. The goal being to make a change in perspective and to take action towards more sustainable practices.

On Day 1 of the project, each Enviro-Champ introduced themselves and described their potential change project to get to know each other better. The idea of the change project was introduced to encourage participants to focus on developing a mini project during the training sessions (to address a water-related issue), to enhance their agency and increase the impact of their work in their local communities.

Change projects and participant bios allowed the facilitator to understand the strengths and weaknesses of each Enviro-Champ and adjust the learning accordingly. This was very important because it allowed the facilitator to determine what level of support the individual participants needed. Table 3 illustrates a list of strategies applied to improve the effectiveness of scaffolding. The data sources generated from the teaching activities are listed in Column 1 and their links to scaffolds are listed in Column 2.

Building confidence/agency in ourselves and in the people we work with

To create a sense of belonging and to build confidence, the aspects the participants were familiar with – such as talking to each other about their culture and youth – were emphasised. This enabled each individual to participate, present and contribute significantly to the programme as it evolved.

Community of practice

A 'community of practice' refers to a group of people that has developed a process of collective learning in an area of shared interest. Such groups participate together regularly, working towards a desired, or unintended goal, and such a community is usually governed by a defined culture of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991, cited in Brown, 2013). A community of practice can be anything from a sports club to an organisation of professionals, from an association to simply a group seeking new ways of learning (Wenger-Trayner, 2015). While we learnt and worked together as Enviro-Champs, it became increasingly evident that we were growing together as a community of practice.

Table 3: Effective strategies in scaffolding

Data sources	Scaffolds [To develop and reflect on training progress and make things better]
Six agreements [core values] negotiated on Day 1 of the training: • Mutual respect • Appreciating others • Attentive listening • Adding value to ourselves and others • Join the training 10 minutes early • Co-learning and participation.	• Establish shared understanding about the core values of the Enviro-Champ Project. • Develop interpersonal and communication skills as fundamental to collaboration. • Develop responsibility for behaviour. • Enabling all the Enviro-Champs to share and engage in discussions.
Change project in relation with community activities and social daily activities (conducted on Day 1 of the training): The 'change project' concept serves as a useful way of developing a 'community of practice' in water monitoring and communication management. Each participant briefly explained their change project. Aspects of the change project included the types of monitoring, parameters and frequency, required resources, catchment and stakeholder involvement, reporting and communication.	• Introduced to encourage participants to focus on developing a mini project. • Allowed the facilitators to understand each Enviro-Champ's expectations and interests. • Enabled Enviro-Champs to get to know each other.
Sociograms (on Day 1): • Connect with others • Learn to work collaboratively.	• Identify aspirational friendships. • Promote social cohesion within the Enviro-Champs group. • Promote change projects collaboration.
Daily reflection on previous session (conducted daily for 20 minutes): Enviro-Champs expressed how they felt at the start of each day.	• Linking to the previous lesson/session and filling the gaps in knowledge and understating
Daily training: discussion each day about various local socio-environmental challenges.	• Present ideas in a supportive context • Understand the perspectives of other Enviro-Champs. • Develop skills to engage in collective participative decision making
Other teaching activities and locally relevant themes: • Mobilising prior knowledge by asking a question that evokes a response from the Enviro-Champs. • Action Learning 5Ts activities. • Develop the indigenous knowledge practices more.	• To connect the training and material presented with the Enviro-Champs' daily activities. • To promote Enviro-Champs lived-world experiences as part of the learning.

Table 4: Ways in which Enviro-Champs developed as a community of practice

Techniques	Examples
Problem solving	*'Can we work on the door-to-door community environmental education guide and brainstorm some ideas; I'm stuck.'*
Requests for information	*'What is door-to-door community environmental education?'*
Seeking experience	*'Has anyone engaged with their communities?'*
Re-using assets and ideas	*'I have a door-to-door community environmental education guide for Mpophomeni Enviro-Champs. You can use and it can easily be tweaked for your community.'*
Coordination, strategy and synergy	*'Can we each share our door-to-door challenges and successes so as to overcome our challenges?'*
Building an argument	*'How do people in rural areas practise indigenous knowledge compared to people in urban areas?'*
Growing confidence	*'Before I visit the community, I'll run the ideas past my family members first, to see what they think.'*
Discussing developments	*'What do you think about the community's comments on the project? Does the feedback from the community really help?'*
Documenting projects	*'We have received the feedback from various community members. Now let us write it down once and for all.'*
Visits	*'Can we come and visit other Enviro-Champs nodes? We need to learn from the other, older Enviro-Champ groups.'*
Mapping knowledge and identifying gaps	*'Who knows what? And what are we missing? What other organisations should we connect with?'*

Developing agency

Enviro-Champs have developed their own agency through the processes that they have engaged in during this training.

Ntokozo Jili noted the following in isiZulu:

> *Mina Ntokozo Jili from ward 19 kusukela ngaqala kusebenza ku environment camps impilo yami ishintshile.kuning engikufundile bengakwazi njenga nokuth imvelo iphathwa kanjan. Manje sengyakwaz kuth nam ngifundise abantu emphakathini wangakithi ngokuphathwa kwemvelo ikakhulukazi ngobungozi kwimvelo nakubantu ukulahla udoti noma ikuph akukho kuhle ngoba kungaba nomthelela omumb kugule izingane esancane ezidlala noma ikuph. Sengyaz nokuth mele amanz esiwasebenzisayo ahlale ehlanzekile kuze siphephe ezifeni ezining. Mina bona sengenza kangcono kakhulu ngisho khaya ngeke sawuthola udoti noma kanjan.'*

Which can be Translated as:

> I, Nkozozo Jili, from ward 19. A lot has changed since I joined the Enviro-Champs project. My life has changed, I have learned new things such as having respect for nature. Now I teach my local community members about taking care of the environment especial about environmental impact and health risk of throwing waste in the illegal dumpsites. At home I do things differently now, you won't find waste or rubbish lying around.

Agency refers to an active process of human beings who see themselves as agents that are able to influence their own functioning and actions. This agency is exercised in a number of ways:

- with intentionality (with humans as planners)
- with forethought (as thinkers)
- with a sense of self-regulation, and,
- as self-examiners (Bandura, 2006).

It is evident from the quote above, and in other information that we have reflected on, that the participants have strengthened their sense of agency. Through developing this function of agency, humans can influence their lives in three ways, through individual, proxy and collective agency (Bandura, 2001. Proxy agency occurs when people with resources or expertise are influenced to act on behalf of those who are without resources or expertise. Collective agency plays out when people collaborate with their respective, often unique, resources/attributes to bring about a desired outcome (Bandura, 2000). In the Palmiet River Catchment the Enviro-Champs work with community members, local stakeholders, and various government authorities to improve community resilience in the face of climate change through the

conservation, restoration and rehabilitation of the natural systems linked to river health. This can be seen as developing the agency of individual Enviro-Champs, but also of the collective as they have influence within their communities. The Enviro-Champs can also be seen to be developing their agency as a proxy, as they work on behalf of others, and are the voice of those who are not usually heard.

The Palmiet Enviro-Champs see themselves as agents of change because they have developed confidence in their own abilities. We have found that, by sharing the tools of science and encouraging people to use them, participants develop confidence and understanding from their own perspective, rather than simply listening to experts telling them what they know in a top-down manner. These are exciting issues to research because they are central to the development of agency amongst the participants. We are finding that learning is strengthened when people are involved and co-engaged in the project processes. This helps them develop self-reliance and improves their attitudes towards learning. We describe this as intra-personal competency. The Enviro-Champs programme has been a powerful agent of change as it has equipped individuals with the tools of science and with new knowledge which has been co-created within a base of relevant indigenous practices. This has increased each person's confidence in their own ability and has resulted in the development of their own agency, their agency on the behalf of others, and their collective agency within the community. This degree of agency is what allows positive change to take place.

4 Interim conclusions

We are proud that the Enviro-Champs's project was singled out by the Presidential Skills Summit as an example of best practice in community-based river catchment and water management. Following on from this, 300 Enviro-Champs were employed through the Department of Science and Innovation as art of the Presidential Employment Stimulus. It is encouraging that we were invited to assist in the training processes of the 300 Enviro-Champs, using the training processes we had been researching, with the support of the TESF. This is a significant outcome because it shows how our training processes go beyond simplistic knowledge transfer and aim to support the whole person, including their sense of agency, engagement with issues, their knowledge of citizen science tools, indigenous knowledge practices and how to develop as a community of practice. This learning helps to give a voice to the important principles that are emerging from the research into the learning processes. The TESF has added to this interaction by enabling further research into how this community has been learning and growing together.

The indigenous knowledge practices of the Enviro-Champs were mobilised through storytelling, local languages in social practice, teaching others and using citizen science tools. Having a common language of understanding and communication (e.g. isiZulu and isiXhosa) helped because the discussions were more flowing, which enabled deeper one-on-one engagements in an open and honest manner. This puts knowledge production and sharing at community level in its cultural context by involving the participants as the knowledge holders of the community. Linking the citizen science training with indigenous knowledge practices and applying scaffolding has also helped the Enviro-Champs to develop a sense of agency and confidence in their ability and has enhanced their drive to make a positive change.

This research has outlined one facilitator's attempts to introduce interactive and collaborative learning in informal social learning. The trainings were structured so that it was Enviro-Champs-centred and promoted interaction between the facilitator and Enviro-Champs and also among the Enviro-Champs. The levels of participation were most encouraging and incredible insights about learning and river catchment and stream management were shared. Not only did all participants give feedback, but they also responded to each other's input. This meant that a rich dialogue developed.

Teaching the course has been a real eye-opener for myself as the facilitator. It has made me realise that, although we thought online learning would be second-best, by framing the learning through the Action Learning process and applying the innovations outlined above, the learning has been very effective. The fieldwork session was a further highlight of the course. The hands-on, practical experience complemented the online learning and really enabled us to engage fully with the 'Touch' or 'Real Life Encounters' provided for through the Action Learning framework.

Through this course, we are all certainly part of a remarkable, life-changing, experience. As the facilitator, I have also learnt that we are all learners and educators and, by applying

question-guided methodologies, the best knowledge and ideas from the group as a whole are engaged with. I sincerely wish all adults, and indeed school-going children, could learn in the ways we are developing through the Enviro-Champs WhatsApp training!

The conclusions we are discovering together are the product of various joint deliberation processes that this TESF research is making possible. Mobilising prior knowledge and linking trainings with indigenous knowledge practices had a significant impact on the Enviro-Champs participation during all the training activities. Through such processes, we are certainly enhancing our ability to better design, scaffold and engage in adult-based learning and transformative change. Through the sharing of tools of science and encouraging people to use them, participants develop confidence and understanding from their own perspectives. The TESF support has enabled us to understand that we are all learners and educators

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CHAPTER 4

Bathlabine Foundation

Skills that enable me to catch a fish

Rural women's reflections on the learning needed for sustainable futures during the time of C-19

Written by Mashile Frans Phalane (lead researcher), Innocent Ramuhala (co-researcher) and Mapula Machete (co-researcher), with the participation of Lindi Mushambo, Eunice Maduwa, Mufunwa Ramuhala, Mary Mathole, Leaf Mokwena, Regina Rakgoale and Dolly Kgwahla

Original draft designed by Justin Tromp

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1 Introduction

A lesson learned from interviews conducted as part of this study is that post 1994, the role of non-profit organisations in providing education for livelihoods was abandoned, resulting in an education deficit in rural areas. Many are convinced that COVID-19 offers an opportunity to revisit the role of non-governmental organisations in developing skills that are needed to support basic livelihoods and new forms of work

The main root cause of the problem of poor and slow development is the lack of structured community development for sustainable futures and the lack of accountability in leadership and government. This has resulted in an environment that has inefficient community development to mobilise resources locally and internationally to improve the economic condition of those who live there. In addition to this, self-reliance and self-esteem as part of community development processes need to be enhanced. New ideas about what education might be and do are emerging in response to these challenges. In rural areas, young people in schools, colleges and universities continue to have inadequate access to quality, relevant education. Many leave school without even the most basic skills and find it difficult to access further learning pathways. Despite some laudable efforts in this direction, young people are often left without the capabilities they require to sustain and develop viable economic livelihoods and to participate in peaceful and democratic societies.

The work of this project aimed to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for marginalised activists. During the interviews conducted as part of this study, it emerged that the key issues that should be addressed in each of the three contexts in order to achieve sustainable rural livelihoods in South Africa are: (1) the creation of opportunities for women to participate in project planning and implementation processes of socio-political environment; (2) a well-considered resource accessibility plan, especially with regard to land use and ownership rights (economic environment); and (3) the integration of land and water resources management to protect the viability and caring capacity of agricultural land (the ecological environment).

Several women revealed their need for work-related quality education and skills. Some of these women are mothers with families and yet many are willing to take up opportunities to study should such opportunities arise. Currently, the South African education system has not been reformed to include rural women, most of whom are best taught and trained in their mother tongue, rather than in English as is currently the case. There are few or no centres for adult learning and where they exist, there are no community development practitioners there to support or facilitate the learning process or to fund such processes. In addition to this, many activists showed an interest in improving their technological skills so that they can assist their children with homework.

Social learning, education, training and innovation are not a solution to all problems. However, social learning, education and training are important for good citizenship and an enriching and fulfilling life. Society's ability to solve problems, develop competitively, eliminate poverty and reduce inequality was severely hampered by exposure to COVID-19. The pandemic has highlighted the need for hybrid, inclusive and transformed social actors that understand and preserve biodiversity by all means. In Africa, it is essential to note that sustainable development will be achievable only if poor and marginalised communities are specifically included in the process and if the improvement of the quality of life of these communities is prioritised (Gibbens et al., 2019).

Rural women are an especially vulnerable group suffering from poverty in these areas. Although there are several challenges in implementing sustainable development and sustainable rural livelihoods development in the South African context, there is an emerging set of practices (both proven and exploratory) that provide a solid baseline from which to start (Gibbens et al., 2019)

Community overviews

The devastation caused by COVID-19 is not a product of the imagination. It has caused real havoc to real communities and non-profit organisations. In this study, we will examine how disruptive COVID-19 has been to the Batlhabine and Mudimeli communities.

Batlhabine community

The Batlhabine community, located in Limpopo province, is an area which many reports, including political and economic speeches, have described as among the poorest and the most marginalised in the province. The life of the Tlhabina people has traditionally been based on a very strict system of decision-making, social and political institutions and systems of wealth generation and distribution. Additionally, indigenous culture, whose value has commonly gone unacknowledged (from the times of the homeland ('Bantustan') system during apartheid), is often closely associated with natural resources that have social, economic and spiritual significance.

Many of the differences between indigenous cultures and the wider society in the province, as well as in the broader South African context, are poorly understood. This has serious negative implications for long-term self-sustainability and survival of the Batlhabine community and its surroundings. With a majority of the population not economically active, the Batlhabine community has to remain dependent on grants like other closed mining communities such as Kuruman, Prieska and surrounding communities in the Northern Cape after the closure of asbestos mining and related activities. This dependence is also created because of the fact that the clay mining and brick works industry did not require high levels of education or provide training that equipped people to start their own businesses or employ others with lower skills. There are also few people who can compete with other industries in Tzaneen, Polokwane and Gauteng. Unemployment could have been lower than it stands now had some initiatives been undertaken to make this community self-sustaining and self-reliant.

Mudimeli community

The Mudimeli village began as a government farm for the former Venda government, used for cattle farming. During the period of forced removals in the 1950s and 1960s when different people from different places in the apartheid era were displaced, people from other areas started moving to Mudimeli. After this period, three chiefs from different places also came to stay there. It is not known how Chief Mudimeli was selected to become the ruler of the area or how the village came to be named after him. There was peace during his tenure. Chief Mudimeli passed on and his son (the current chief) came to power and the peace remained until a mining project was being planned to be set up in the area. Then divisions started. Government authorities wanted to subdivide the village. But there was opposition. Some objected to the idea of the mine while others believed that the project should go ahead. Since 2008, there has been no peace in this once beautiful village.

The village has more than 10 000 people. It is dominated by women, who make up about 60% of the population. Less than 20% of those women have reached matric and of those who have, less than 5% have gone to universities or colleges. Most of them depend on temporary jobs in the surrounding farms and others on harvesting seasonal mopani worms. A couple of them work in the nearby towns of Dzanani, Musina and Louis Trichardt as either domestic workers or as vendors who sell fruit, vegetables and sweets.

Their male counterparts are slightly better off when it comes to schooling. Most of them have reached matric and have gone through universities and colleges. While there are some businessmen who are doing well, there is still high unemployment among the men of Mudimeli, most of whom were migrant labourers. However, since the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic, many could not travel to their places of work.

Crime is very low in the village, with only break-ins and illegal hunting the main concerns. Women harvesting trees for firewood is also a main area of concern. A serious challenge facing the area is water scarcity, which mostly affects women as they are the ones who carry out domestic chores.

The Bathlabine Foundation

The Batlhabine foundation is well known for its activism around Limpopo. In 2002, they participated in a Sustainable Development Conference in Johannesburg, where they led a march to Sandton City. They encourage community members to do things for themselves. In 2020, the Batlhabine Foundation led a community march to the offices of the Premier's office in Polokwane to demand clarification on the Musina-Makhado Special Zone Mega Toxic development, in which a proposed coal-fired power station with coal washers was going to be erected.

As partners in the Climate Justice Coalition, the marchers were demanding that the Premier reconsider implementing such a mega toxic development. A landmark court case in which a director of the mine was found liable for environmental damage in the Naphuno Regional Office had been initiated by the Batlhabine Foundation.

The Batlhabine community are custodians of natural resources such as the Thabina Nature Reserve, with its beautiful scenery, and other escarpments around the Wolksberg mountains. Attempts to develop the area – with initiatives such as the Batlhabine Brickyard, Noko Cultural Village and Tented Camp – have failed to flourish.

Impact of COVID-19 in Batlhabine and Mudimeli

The impact of the pandemic is worsening the deep inequalities already facing women and girls, erasing years of progress towards gender equality. Women are more likely to work in sectors hardest hit by the pandemic. Most essential frontline workers are women. Many racial and ethnically marginalised communities like Mudimeli and Batlhabine are at the bottom of the economic ladder. Women are 24% more vulnerable to losing their jobs and suffering steeper reductions in income than their male counterparts (Bryant and Pini, 2010). The gender pay gap, which was already high, has widened, including in the health sector. Chambers (1983) identified five clusters of disadvantage, namely poverty, physical weakness, isolation, vulnerability and powerlessness. The pandemic has shifted more poor people, including women and children, into even deeper poverty.

The United Nations in South Africa has listed the following statistics as of 9 March 2021:

Vaccinated people	107 054
Number of tests conducted for COVID-19	9 269 122
Number of positive cases	1 521 706
Number of recoveries	1 442 045
Number of deaths from COVID-19	50 803
New cases	638

Due to the severity of the COVID-19 pandemic, many people have reported not being paid their allowances and this has increased dramatically owing to the stay-at-home orders and school and childcare closures. Millions of South African may never return to school. Mothers, especially single mothers, have faced acute adversity and anxiety.

The pandemic has also sparked a parallel epidemic of violence against women and children in South Africa. Meanwhile, even though women represent a majority of healthcare workers, a recent study found that only 3.5% of COVID-19 task forces has equal numbers of men and women, and in the global news coverage of the pandemic, just one out of every five expert sources was a woman.

TESF COVID-19 reflective research objectives

Transforming Education for Sustainable Futures (TESF) is a team of local and international researchers with the overall goal of conducting research to understand how education systems can act as drivers of sustainable development. It called for local community organisations to apply for small grants to produce a report of narrative reflections on COVID-19 in South Africa.

The TESF COVID-19 narrative reflection project aims to learn pro-actively from the COVID-19 pandemic with an emphasis on:

- Skills development – developing skills to support basic livelihoods and new forms of work;
- Finding better ways to support children's learning during the COVID-19 pandemic (contextualization, mediation, learning at home, supporting teachers, teacher education);
- Learning lessons from informal learning for a 'just recovery' from COVID-19 to inform climate action and longer-term transformation for sustainable futures.

The project identified the following questions to deepen the research:

- What kinds of skills development and skills ecosystems are needed for a 'just recovery' amongst those most impacted by the C19 pandemic?
- What kinds of support is required for 'learning at home', teachers/teacher education during the C19 pandemic, and what is needed as educational institutions re-open?
- What can be learned from informal learning in community engaged programmes for a 'just recovery' from C19 to inform climate action and longer-term transformations for sustainable future in Mudimeli and Batlhabine?

2 Methodology

The Batlhabine Foundation, a community organisation based outside Tzaneen in Limpopo province, was one of the participants in a South African colloquium on Transforming Education for Sustainable Futures at the University of the Witwatersrand in March 2020. Encouraged by the call for award applications, the Foundation responded with an outline of their proposed methodology for reflecting on the impact of COVID-19 in the communities of Batlhabine and Mudimeli in the far north of South Africa.

Overall, we undertook to follow a reflective action research methodology (and/or a critically reflexive narrative research methodology) based on ongoing work undertaken between March 2020 and March 2021. The first leg of this research project involved reflective focus group interviews that inform the action research that we continue to develop in response to participants' feedback.

The reflective action research methodological approach for this project is based on the premise that the solutions to the wicked challenges that this project proposal seeks to identify and implement are located in the sphere of transdisciplinary work.

Action research methodology bridges the divide between research and practice. It directly addresses the knotty problems of the failures of transforming education, to adapt and migrate to online education or hybrid learning. So, the first main difference between action research and other forms of research is that it is carried out by people directly concerned with the social situation (Bryant and Pini, 2010). It is a pre-condition of action research that the practitioner researchers feel the need to initiate change. Our research took the form of planning, acting, developing and reflecting.

The problems of change in practice are inherent to all practitioners because human action is rooted in routines and develops through experience and fundamental beliefs, which then promotes change in practice for individuals and communities. This – in conjunction with a transdisciplinary team consisting of community members and leaders, as well as academics, environmentalists and social scientists – will ensure positive uptake and buy-in from those who will benefit the most from the project outcomes.

The scope of our action research methodology initiated here has been set up to enable us to locate and identify issues, collect data, interpret research data and design educational research projects that will build on these findings. We have also been involved in online team work. Desktop analysis of several COVID-19 trainings for activists, followed by interviews, data collection and community responses on COVID-19 are reflected in this research. These were the results of a focus meeting held on 24–28 February 2021 at Mosoroni Village and Mudimeli, northern Limpopo.

Research ethics

The successful awarding of the project led to the planning and implementation of the research, with an understanding that, as researchers and participants, care is developed by upholding the ethics required by the TESF and the University of Rhodes teams. The Batlhabine team agreed to adopt the following Code of Ethics:

- Respect and dignity
- Transparency and honesty
- Accountability and responsibility
- Integrity and academic professionalism.

We also developed a participant consent form in compliance with the ethics requirements of Rhodes University. We amended their consent form, and everyone who was interviewed filled the form in. We provided a sample of the form and questionnaire for the researchers to work on as part of the planning stage.

3 Analysis of the data

During COVID-19, several community members who work in Johannesburg returned home as most economic activities were on hold. High levels of poverty, family abuse and alcohol abuse were common in the community at this time. From April to September 2020, the Batlhabine Foundation managed to secure and distribute over a thousand food parcels from the Solidarity Fund and the Centre for Environmental Rights, and this at least minimized hunger and the shortage of food. Other essential necessities like healthcare and medical needs were in short supply at several shopping centres.

Mary Mathole, a 24-year-old woman interested in pursuing her studies in community development, Regina Rakgwale, a 21-year-old who is not studying due to a lack of money, and Dolly Kgwahla, a 26-year-old activist at the Batlhabine Foundation, gave us their reflections on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. They informed us that COVID-19 affected the lives of young people, and women in particular. There were restrictions on movement and thus no job opportunities. In addition to this, their parents were not receiving any salaries, and therefore hunger and poverty took their toll in their communities.

'Our future was lost as we spent a year without schooling,' said Dolly Kgwahla. 'As young women, we received R350 from the government but that is not enough as food is very expensive'. Women were affected more as some of them were pregnant, children were not allowed to gather at shopping centres.

Mary Mathole claims that she needs several skills in order to transition to a just recovery. In Vermeulen (2018), emphasis is placed on managerial skills, resource mobilisation, project management and communication skills for self-reliance. Mary Mathole went on to state that, as women, they need several interventions for a just recovery including job creation, better schooling support from the Department of Forestry on internships, agricultural projects and graduate courses on farming and leadership.

We also reflected on COVID-19 with Leafy Mokwena, a 39-year-old long-time community activist, who had just recovered from the pandemic. He said there is need for community mobilisation through lifelong, social learning processes like the courses they had done at Khanya College from 2001 to 2007. During this programme, activists were empowered by learning their rights and then campaigning for development in their area. The programme also taught them skills in negotiating, developing research and communications.

'During COVID-19, communication and knowledge of technology became critical', said Regina Rakgwale. More emphasis was put on improving access to higher education, although the quality of education is poor overall. It also takes many years to qualify. This impacts on sustainable futures.

Regina Rakgwale said that if it was necessary to study journalism, 'it is better that we do so in our mother tongue'. Access to university is key, but non-governmental organisations like OSISA offer fellowships which are good and relevant to workplaces. Regina Rakgwale

emphasised that what is needed is a curriculum that will make it possible for people to work in real-life working environments rather than having a degree but no work

These views help us understand that what is needed are courses that could encourage people to work including courses on development, project planning and management, public finance, resource management, environmental management, tourism, agriculture and rural development.

Mudimeli case studies

COVID-19 hit most families in Mudimeli very hard, with women seemingly the most affected. The main concerns were families where men became unemployed and the little money they had could not sustain their living standards.

Children were not at schools and providing food became a burden as parents were used to them being fed through school feeding programmes. This became difficult for many parents as they had to feed their children from breakfast to dinner on a daily basis.

The other challenge was joblessness, with only a few people, mostly essential workers, being able to go to work while the majority could not. In this way, the group highlighted how the majority of people in the community were affected since they needed to physically be at work. This is linked to the issue of lack of skills and low education levels as highlighted in the community overviews above. This has hit people hard emotionally, financially and psychologically. Health and well-being have also been affected in terms of, food security and nutrition because children have not been getting enough good quality food at home. Some relief came in when food parcels were delivered, but they were not enough to feed everyone.

Interesting issues also developed around schooling. The introduction of technology for learners created added dynamics. 'COVID-19 has put pressure to change from contact learning to online learning,' said Ms Eunice Maduwa, a mother of four young children. Parents often have little or no knowledge of technology, so helping children with their homework became more challenging as the parents who are supposed to assist them could not. So the contact learning that we were used to has now changed and adapted to this new type of learning, which has become a serious concern. The effect of COVID-19 when it comes to following the regulations forced people to deal with a new reality. Parents had to teach themselves technology in order to assist their children.

Trying to understand technology, transforming from contact learning to online learning and adhering to COVID-19 regulations made life so unbearable for many in Mudimeli. 'Luckily enough, we didn't have any COVID-19-related deaths in our village', said Mufunwa Ramuhala.

Three of the women informants – Mufunwa Ramuhala (33), Eunice Maduwa (27) and Lindi Mushambo (39) – mentioned that the lack of technological skills had been a serious area of concern. So for our communities to adapt together with the changes, we need to assist the women to know and understand technology. Once these women learn, it will be easier for them to move with the changing environment.

We interviewed mostly those who had been included in the government's initiative of introducing learner assistants at schools. The reflections shared were touching as most have absolutely no teaching experience. Technology again became an area of great concern.

As part of the research ethical requirements, we asked each of the ladies several question:

- What can be learned from the COVID-19 crisis for Transforming Education Systems for Sustainable Futures?
- What kinds of skills development and skills ecosystems are needed for a 'just recovery' amongst those most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic?
- What can be learned from informal learning in community engaged programmes for a 'just recovery' from COVID-19 that can inform climate action and longer-term transformations for sustainable futures?

Ms Ramuhala emphasised the need to adapt and move towards gaining technological, business and agricultural skills as part of a just recovery from COVID-19. Vermeulen also emphasised that such skills are necessary in order to improve livelihoods (Vermeulen, 2018).

The skills that were most commonly highlighted were (1) developing their entrepreneur skills to establish real and sustainable businesses using technology; (2) understanding computers and using technology for agricultural products to address the issue of food security and allow them to produce their own food in their homes, as well as to form cooperatives to produce surplus for selling. Ms Ramuhala also highlighted the importance of strengthening smallholder farming as the current yields will not sustain future demand. Ms Maduwa also emphasised technology as the most commonly highlighted issue of great importance.

As an employee at the local Baobab Toll Plaza collecting toll gate payments, Ms Mushambo also highlighted the importance of developing the required technological skills for teachers who are not familiar with technology.

Lastly, when addressing the lessons learned that can inform climate actions for longer-term transformations, most of the respondents said it is of high importance to learn skills that can help them with domestic waste collection. In Mudimeli, many people use horses for their domestic waste collection. Respondents consistently referred to the need for adapting their old ways to match the new 'Kariki' waste method, which involves a mobile wheeled bin that helps with transporting waste. They stated that they needed to learn on how their horses can be adapted to the Kariki system. 'We have to come up with ways to minimise household waste,' said Ms Mushambo. The women interviewed also stated the importance of spreading information about the effect of our actions on the ever-changing climate. Making data for internet access more affordable will make it easier for them to access the internet and get information to help women transform, said Ms Ramuhala

The women interviewed also acknowledge that technology is the future and, once technology is in the hands of the right people, women will play a very important part. Then the future will be in good hands.

4 Recommendations and conclusions

Jan Vermeulen (2018, p. 55) has critically said that 'despite substantially available resources invested into many initiatives since the nineties, they have been mostly unsuccessful, given the current negative macro indicators of inequality, unemployment and poverty'.

As shown in this COVID-19 narrative reflection report, economic activities in the communities were disrupted and poverty levels increased because families relied on household heads to carry the burden, which in most cases were women.

'At the Batlhabine Community such initiatives were visible', said Leaf Mokwena. He graduated with community development training from Khanya College, where he acquired skills in negotiations, community development, research and advocacy whilst others specialised in media development and financial management skills.

COVID-19 has taught us to de-centralise economic and development activities and to mostly focus on 70% of rural populations. If the government can work towards decentralising economic activities by supporting development initiatives in rural areas, it will reduce the impact of poverty there.

Our reflective report shows what community activists could achieve if they were offered skills training in community development, practitioner training, contextual development, rural development, leadership, project management, management of natural resources and public financial management.

According to the interviews, young women in Mudimeli lack the technological skills needed to help pupils with their homework when teaching became virtual. During the COVID-19 pandemic, most pupils became frustrated with learning via Zoom.

Vermeulen (2018) emphasises that that curriculum for teaching and training does not teach learners critical thinking skills and therefore he proposed 'lifelong training' to meet community expectations and livelihoods. He said that an important first step is to identify community assets and protect them.

The problems of change in practice are inherent to all practitioners because human action is rooted in routines and develops through experience and fundamental beliefs. Changes in practice could be assisted in conjunction with a transdisciplinary team consisting of community members and leaders, as well as academics, environmentalists and social scientists. This will ensure true uptake and buy-in from those who will benefit the most from the project outcomes.

The research has created partnerships between the Batlhabine and Mudimeli communities, the Institute for the Advancement of Journalism and the Institute for Rural Development at the University of Venda to collaborate on curriculum development for the Master's programme that will take place from August 2021. The TESF grant has assisted in finding out exactly what the programme needs to entail.

The United Nations Development Programme will support the necessary actions through a small grant. The Fibre-Processing and Manufacturing Sector Education and Training Authority will also contribute sustainable education for the Batlhabine and Mudimeli communities. The COVID-19 narrative reflections have helped these communities to understand their situation and offer to be part of their own skills development for sustainable futures. Participation in the reflections also enabled us to partner and collaborate with other researchers in the field.

Most interviews in Mudimeli and Batlhabine recommended a structured, block release training programme that will enhance their capacity in development practice, leadership, environmental management and legal remedies, campaign mobilisation, agriculture and rural development, public finance and resource management, project planning and management including research, media skills and computer literacy.

This narrative reflection project has generated a programme that will run ten days a month for 12 months and a six-month course in development skills that will help communities recover from COVID-19 and work in their land and environment sustainably. Both communities have natural resources and these could create sustainable job opportunities.

As mentioned before, these reflections covered the main question, 'What can be learned from the COVID-19 crisis for transforming education systems for sustainable futures?' Transforming education is a complex issue, and the South African education system needs a complete overhaul. During the 1990s, Khanya College was established by ANC veteran Mr John Samuel. The college offered a pre-university syllabus in the form of bridging courses to help suitable learners access university. After 1994, the government abandoned such initiatives due to lack of funding. However, the leadership continued to provide what we called 'Education for Liberation' in which activists from several communities, including Batlhabine, benefited from Community Development Training. It is time to revitalise such efforts. Regina Rakgwale emphasises the need for curriculum change in which learning will ensure that participants become thinkers and job creators rather than suffer from 'diploma disease', where people have diplomas but no opportunities to apply their knowledge and skills. In order to transform education for sustainable futures, we need a 'creative curriculum that will empower our people', according to Ms Rakgwale.

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CHAPTER 5

Technological Transformations

Technological transformations

An exploration into inclusive digital responses to an education system in crisis

Written by Luke Metelerkamp and Robin Ferguson

Amidst the frenzy of tech-incubators, overnight start-up billionaires and the World Economic Forum's turbo-charged policy discourse around the Fourth Industrial Revolution, it's not hard to understand why so many people simply roll their eyes when someone suggests yet another 'tech solution' to the world's most pressing challenges.

Anyone responding to emails at 2am knows better than this. And you certainly don't need to be Amartya Sen to understand that no mobile application, no matter how brilliant, is going to rid the world of inequality.

Digital technology is not going to be our saviour.

It's simply a tool.

Like the printing press.

The wheel.

Or fire.

Contents

1 Preamble

The conversations about Vocational Education and Training (VET) between Luke and I began about two years back when we met up around the VET 4.0 project in 2019. The VET 4.0 research project focuses on the formal Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Colleges and the (green) learning pathways and (green) jobs which surround the qualifications offered by these institutions. By definition then, the emphasis of VET 4.0 is on young people and first-time job entrants. Luke and I shared a common frustration because we were working in learning environments which did not fit into this formal TVET model of Big Education which seems to exclude both the necessity and opportunity of unformal and informal VET. We have both continued in this work – Luke is working with subsistence and small-scale farmers, and I am working in the commercial fishing industry as described below.

The reason that my learners do not fit into the formal TVET model is that the officers receive TVET qualifications, regulated by the South African Maritime Safety Association (SAMSA) while the majority of employees receive unformal or informal VET. In an average commercial fishing fleet of ten vessels, this means that the officers, who make up roughly 20% of the complement, receive a number of TVET qualifications as they progress up the ranks, and that 80% of the complement receive unformal or informal training. The formal TVET model is also premised on facilitated, classroom-based training which implies that the learner is available to attend these classes. As a distributed workforce on tight 'turn-around' times in port and legislated shore leave, this makes training logistics extremely difficult. Available training days are dedicated to informal short courses, for example safety and firefighting, which are compulsory under maritime legislation. The majority of staff on the trawlers are factory workers who 'work away the fish' in onboard factories to convert the 'resource' to a product, for example, fish to fillets. In one of the leading international companies, the factory workers, originally called spare-hands, had no formal or informal training for the first 100-years of the company's existence. All they learnt was of an unformal nature, yet the product produced by these men has the reputation in the export market as some of the best in the world.

Most important to note is that *all* the training and development which my company, Future People (Pty) Ltd, conducted over the last 26 years has *not* been accredited or supported by the TVET system in any way. The reason the fishing company was prepared to undertake this 'non-accredited' training over two decades, and continues to do so, is that the skills and knowledge taught are *vital* to the operations on the vessel and contribute directly to the effectiveness of the business. My question then, and now, remains: Can we think of a way of articulating unformal, informal and formal VET to better serve the employees who make up the majority of the workforce in this instance?

For Luke's part, his particular blend of frustrations was a little different from mine. They related more to learning in the informal economy than to informal learning in the formal economy.

To be more precise, the absence within the traditional VET community of offerings that supported livelihoods in the informal economy is staggering. And this absence notwithstanding, the radical sense of exclusion the vast majority of learners face from any kind of formal tertiary qualifications.

We both believed that a transition towards a vibrant and equitable agricultural system, based on the principles of equitable economic opportunity and underpinned by ecologically sustainable approaches, is a knowledge intensive undertaking. However, when it comes to the VET system, existing formal education systems are failing the current generation of young people. Regionally, current formal tertiary education systems cater to 10% of the youth at best, and often the training these institutions deliver caters exclusively towards employment in the corporate sector.

To say nothing of the actual quality of training this 10% receive in many formal institutions, the burning question is really, what happens to the other 90%?

What COVID-19 provided was an opportunity for the middle classes to experience a tiny sliver of what it is like to be excluded from our normal places and communities of learning and forced to learn from home. This prompts us to ask: What can be learnt from supporting home-based or distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic that can support those who will remain excluded from the formal learning system once lockdown restrictions are removed?

2 Background

Future People

Future People (Pty) Ltd is a consulting company which deals with the full employment lifecycle from recruitment to termination. The ethos of the business has always been to 'offer butternut soup but to deliver a three-course meal'. This has been possible by establishing a lean organisational structure and drawing upon longstanding associates to deliver particular projects. In my (Robin) corporate experience in the mining, clothing and food industries in the 1980s, I had my fill of managing wild cat strikes, large-scale retrenchments and dismissals. I began the company in 1995 with the vision of creating a training programme which could *build corporate capacity for conflict so that companies could breathe rather than rupture*. Future People remains faithful to the original mandate but has also developed a specialist interest in providing training and development for the 'cellophane people'. These are employees whose workplaces are geographically distributed, and therefore, invisible to the executive or management team and often work out their years of service without appreciation or recognition.

One of Future People's first clients was a large-scale commercial fishing operation which required training for approximately 1 200 sea-going employees. I was required to go to sea (with a bucket) to understand the training environment. I was offered a three-month contract and have continued to deliver training to the 'cellophane people' at sea and ashore for the last 26 years. Over the years, the 'cellophane people' have become the 'backbone people'. The VET has highlighted that the sea-going employees catch and process the fish and are, thus, the first block in the company's vertically integrated value chain. Groups and individuals have been formally recognised by management over the five years. The training and organisational development projects have been large-scale, spanned a number of years each and have often run concurrently. The teaching challenges are, inter alia, learners arrive in the classroom with different levels of literacy and numeracy, speak different languages (English, Afrikaans, multiple sub-Saharan African languages, French and Portuguese), represent diverse ethnic and cultural groups, they are all men, and they live and work together in confined spaces – all this generates a unique training dynamic.

Figure 1: The author on the stern of a fishing trawler in 1996

The photograph below (Figure 1) was taken in January 1996 of myself on the stern of a fishing trawler. This image has always represented to me my longing and looking to the blue horizon to answer the question: How can I reach the cellophane people better to improve their work, learning and lives ashore? All the training done from 1995 to 2019 was classic, facilitated, shore-based classroom teaching. This was the best we could do, but it was far from ideal because when sailors are ashore, they are either busy on their vessels or wish to be at home. In addition, anything taught must be simulated to approximate

the sea-going environment such as producing fish products at sea. Simulations are helpful; however, training in the real working environment is more effective. As ICT was becoming more accessible, I was convinced that I could reach my dream of providing real-time training to the sailors in their place of work using a methodology which was friendly to the demands of life on a trawler. I explore these efforts later in this document.

Imvotho Bubomi Learning Network

The Imvotho Bubomi Learning Network is an agricultural learning network that focuses on small-scale farming in the Eastern Cape. The network emerged from a small group of farmers, college faculty members and academics who attended a training course about rainwater harvesting in 2015. Over time, its membership has grown to include a wide range of farmers, youth groups, agricultural colleges, extension officers, academics and non-governmental organisations.

The Imvotho Bubomi Learning Network has been continually supported by academics from Rhodes University and Fort Cox Agriculture and Forestry Training Institute as its hub. In addition to regular meetings and sporadic training events, the network has a very active WhatsApp group, which helps to keep members connected and the network alive. This WhatsApp group, which operates within the framework of a wider rural learning network, sparked some of our initial interest into understanding how better to support learners in the informal economy with mobile technology.

Background to mobile technology in the region

In just six years between 2014 and 2020, the number of smartphone users in South Africa has more than doubled, from 9.4 to 23.3 million (O'Dea, 2020). And between 2019 and 2020, South Africans using social media apps grew by a staggering 3.5 million. Among the apps which drew South Africans to social media, WhatsApp is now the most widely used (Kemp, 2020).

The supremacy of WhatsApp is not unique to South Africa and is reflected across all of Southern Africa and much of the globe.

The increasingly widespread adoption of cheap, multi-person chat services like WhatsApp highlights the importance of understanding how these social media platforms can be used in support of a just transition.

Unlike traditional person-to-person text messaging (SMS) systems, the current generation of chat services have opened up the option for large group chats, containing hundreds of people. While society at large seems to have accepted the transition from one-to-one chats to many-to-many chats as a logical and somewhat unremarkable progression in humanity's digital evolution, the implications of this technology are profound. The political implication of these new messaging platforms first came to the fore during the Arab Spring in 2007 and have played a substantial role in many major political processes since. To date their potential from an educational perspective remains relatively unexplored.

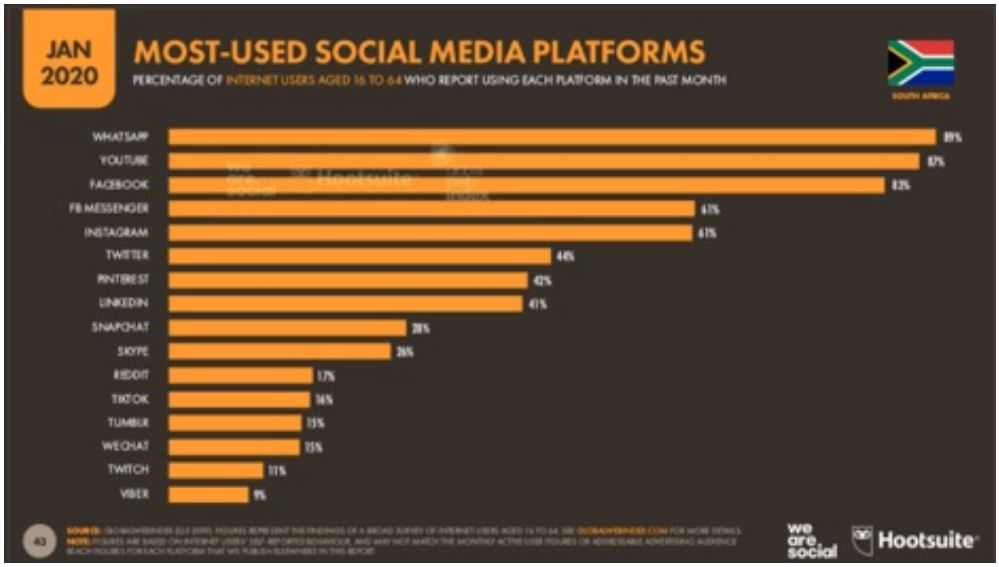

Figure 2: Most-used social media platforms in South Africa in 2020
Source: Kemp (2020)

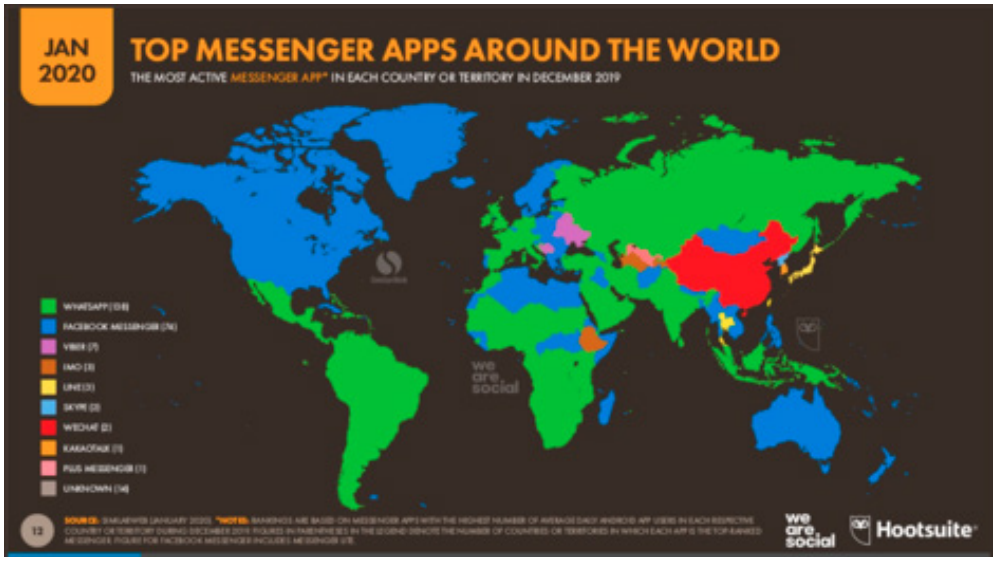

Figure 3: Top messenger apps around the world in 2020
Source: Kemp (2020)

As has been noted in other studies (Bornman, 2015; Muriithi et al., 2016), data costs, smartphone access and digital literacy are the primary barriers to digital engagement. Anecdotal observations from our engagement with the use of smartphone technologies in the rural Eastern Cape support this view and suggest that the major barriers and disincentives which limit the ability to adopt new apps on scale include:

- Old mobile phones which are incompatible with the more recent operating system updates which many apps rely on;
- Low-cost mobile phones with very limited storage space and processing power;
- Data costs associated with downloading and running new apps;
- Data costs associated with operating system upgrades;

- Limited access to online services because data bundles which provide affordable access *exclusively* to key social media apps such as WhatsApp and Facebook are commonly used;
- Difficulties in learning new apps, particularly for older members;
- Lack of interest in learning new apps, particularly for older members; and
- The value of participation in the learning community is often not immediately apparent to everyone.

In order to simply and seamlessly be able to include new members into collaborative learning networks, the technological barriers to first entry need to be as low as possible. Thus the need to work creatively with the simple and widely adopted technologies that are already in operation rather than trying to introduce new tools. If digital technologies are going to be leveraged to bring affordable quality education to rural areas and offshore in Southern Africa, it is unlikely that the current format of disruptive technologies such as computer-based Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) will penetrate into areas that need them unless they move away from their reliance on data-heavy, computer-based approaches which are premised on the higher-level implied assumption of literacy, numeracy and digital skills.

Understanding the platform-based model

Given that the platform model forms the foundation for many of the most powerful ways that we engage with digital life on a daily basis, we felt it our duty as digital sceptics and relative newcomers to the space to spend a bit of time getting our heads around the principle. Uber, YouTube, Wikipedia and the 2.7 billion active Facebook users couldn't be wrong, right?

The premise of platform-based applications is that they provide the platform for users to add their own content and connect with each other. The platform's designer creates very little of their own content. In traditional educational terms, this would be akin to building a campus, setting out some rules on how it can be used, and then opening it up to anyone to teach anything to whoever they wanted.

Platforms enable transactions between the supply and the demand side by providing a repository of information and reducing search and transaction costs.

> Platforms help to sell products or services, to generate content and so on. But the platform owner as such does not manufacture the products that get sold (e.g. Ebay, Alibaba). They do not provide the services that get offered on their platform (e.g. Freelancer, Taskrabbit, Uber, Airbnb). They do not create the content that gets generated each day (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube). (Uenlue, 2017)

Uber, Airbnb, Wikipedia and YouTube are all examples of platform-based models. Platforms need to make the process of transaction cheaper, simpler and more enjoyable for all parties involved. According to Uenlue (2017), at the most basic level, platform models build bridges of exchange between people by offering three types of basic functions that [platforms] can perform:

1. **Reducing search costs:** incurred by the [platform's] multiple constituents before transacting;
2. **Reducing shared costs:** incurred during the transactions themselves; and
3. **Post transaction costs:** relating to problems, refunds, etc.

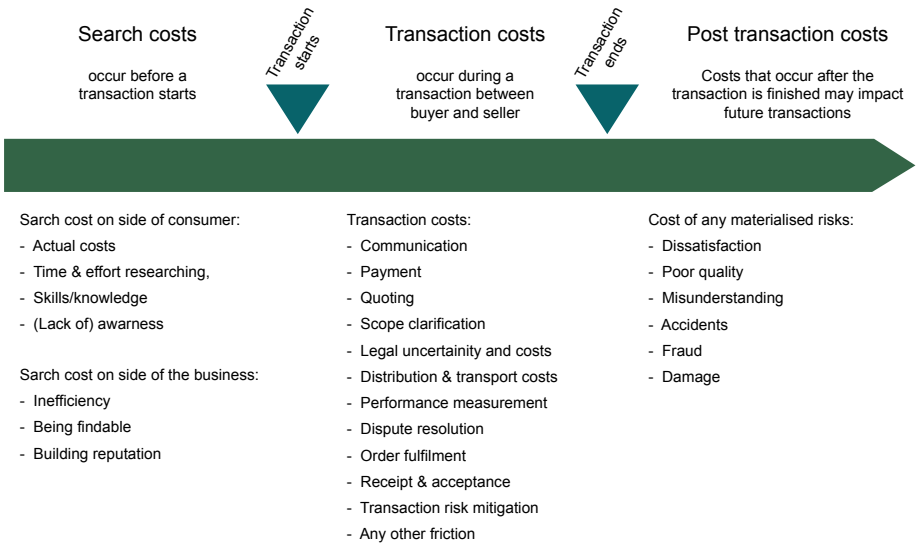

Figure 4: Three basic functions platforms models perform
Source: Uenlue (2017)

While this is clearly an oversimplification, these terms offer a starting point for conceptualising. Uenlue (2017) uses Uber as an example to understand the value to both service providers (the drivers) and the users (riders):

Value proposition to riders (demand side)

- Custom rides on demand: the 'exact ride' that the user needs.
- Affordability: typically lower prices than a comparable taxi ride.
- Ease and convenience: removing friction from all interactions to the extent possible: Fast pick-ups and tracking the driver arriving, cashless transactions and no haggling on price.
- Rating system that allows for feedback.
- Safety: rider sees the driver's name, rating, etc., before entering.

Value proposition to drivers (supply side)

- Income generation and low idle times due to the large number of active riders.
- Flexible and predictable work hours as well as self-determined shifts.
- 24/7 support: ability to contact Uber anytime.
- No boss.
- Driver app helps with navigation, alerts, planning, earnings, etc.
- Ease of joining.
- No upfront investment in joining (pre-existing car or ability to source through a vehicle marketplace for those who want to ride but have no car).
- Ability to get customers (passengers) at no cost to the driver.

While Uenlue's descriptions are somewhat tetchy and Uber's business practices have been criticised, the principle behind this model feels significant for our investigation into vocational learning – in particular, the ability to expand access to learning opportunities beyond the boundaries of formal VET institutions.

The accommodation app Airbnb began when someone hosting a conference realised there was going to be a shortage of hotel beds available at the time they had planned their conference. The solution was to turn to their immediate community and set up a simple platform through which people needing a bed for the night could book an unused room or even an air mattress in someone's lounge for a fraction of the cost of what a hotel room would have cost.

Airbnb's essence is so simple: solving a problem of scarcity by opening up a way for people to connect with each other in ways that were not possible before.

Platforms are of course never neutral, and many valid concerns exist around the subtle ways that power and perception can be shaped using the algorithms behind many of the world's most powerful platforms such as Facebook. There is also a growing concern over the decolonisation of these platforms – whose voices are privileged, where do profits accumulate, and can this runaway train be slowed down to produce a more inclusive and representative internet? However, at a time when so many are excluded because we face a radical and chronic shortage of spaces in learning institutions, we found ourselves gripped by a niggling curiosity as to whether a small part of the solution, at least, may lie in finding new ways of connecting those who want to learn with those who know things they want to learn about, without the need for the big campus and the formal assessments.

3 A review of existing mobile applications

WhatsApp and beyond

One of the major lessons that has emerged from both our own practices over the past two years, as well as the process of engagement within this TESF process, has been the central role which WhatsApp plays. WhatsApp has been able to straddle economic and class divides in an unparalleled manner. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this enabled the rapid formation of communication networks that cut across broad swaths of society. Iqonga LoThungelwano was a community action network which emerged in response to the need to provide local language information about the COVID-19 pandemic to people in rural areas.

Beyond its role in the various community action networks that formed across the country, WhatsApp played a vital role in maintaining energy and a sense of community in the Imvotho Bubomi Learning Network during lockdown. Despite the vastly different, highly industrialised context of a commercial fishing company, a similar shift to WhatsApp took place – albeit for very different reasons. While WhatsApp is clearly vital, it is not without its limitations, and as part of our process over the last two months we have conducted a review of ten existing mobile applications that support learning in fisheries, agriculture and beyond. Three of these are based on a **platform-based** approach. Five offer a more **centralised content development** approach. And the last follows a **blended** approach. This list is not exhaustive, but rather reflects a generative exploration into a set of examples that will help us to carry our work forward in the spaces in which we are working.

Platform-based examples

Coffee Chat

Coffee Chat is an online platform that helps connect personal and business coaches with clients. It is a platform-based model in the purest sense in that it has two groups of users. Those listing their training and coaching services and those searching for training and mentorship services.

Coffee Chat provides no content or facilities beyond a simple-to-use platform that makes searching easy, supports effective engagements and facilitates payment.

The processes and software code behind their platform can (and has been) easily adapted by other training providers such as Injini to provide a tailored offering for their specific needs. In the case of Injini, Coffee Chat set up a separate online app, with Injini's logos and branding, that focused on the educational sector rather than the business sector. Injini then preloaded credit for its students to then spend on coaching of their choice.

From an inclusive learning perspective, what this platform provides is an example of how students can be provided financial credits via a digital platform in order to pursue the knowledge and skills they need when and how they need them. It also makes provision for learners/mentees to review service providers, which in essence democratises the process of peer-review and certification of experts. In contrast to a conventional agricultural extension service in which farmers are stuck with a regional agent appointed by the state, this model offers an alternative, through which the state could provide credit to farmers to hire agricultural experts of their choice as and when they needed them. This same model could apply to other forms training and development.

Other freelancing platforms like Fiverr and Freelancer, although not directly focused on learning, provide further examples of the potential of platform-based models of online skills exchange.

From an inclusivity perspective, the question is how to make these accessible and relevant in low-data, low-literacy contexts in South Africa.

Figure 5: Coffee Chat, a platform connecting personal and business coaches with clients

YouTube

YouTube is one of the most famous examples of a platform-based web service. It can be used via a downloadable mobile app or via the YouTube website.

The role of YouTube in supporting farmer learning in many parts of the world cannot be overstated, with many farming videos having received millions of views worldwide. In a 2019 study into knowledge sources that supported pioneering organic farmers in South Africa, YouTube came up as more important than all of South Africa's agricultural universities combined.

As much of the content uploaded onto YouTube is from other farmers, it presents a working example of a platform web application supporting peer-to-peer learning on a massive scale. Some farmers have over half a million subscribers who follow their video releases. The individual views on some of these videos can range from just a few hundred and into the millions. Tracking which farmers build and retain strong online followings, as well as the kinds of videos which receive the most views, provides a clear indication of what kinds of information other practitioners are looking for as well as who are considered to be reliable information sources.

The volume of agriculturally related content on YouTube is staggering and the main challenge, particularly for users with lower levels of tech literacy, is finding the right content amidst a vast array of options. The wide array of other unsolicited content that YouTube also provides to its users in the form of suggestions and advertisements, further heightens this sense of information overload when using this platform.

This suggests a need to help farmers and other learners in the informal economy make the most of what YouTube has to offer by supporting them to search, filter and select appropriate and helpful content. Two options currently exist for doing this. The first is to provide local-level training and support in digital search techniques that help users in the informal economy get more value out of the free training resources available online. The second is to take a more active role in curating content for specific audiences by creating set video playlists which can be shared. For example, a playlist could be created on irrigation techniques for small farms. Or on food safety.

In both instances, one of the main challenges of working with these kinds of platform-based models in areas with low technological uptake is that almost all content available online is generated in other contexts. This means that while YouTube (and other similar platform-based models) are a very relevant and powerful tool for farmers in the United States and Europe, farmers in the Eastern Cape struggle to find the kind of content that is relevant to them, in languages they are familiar with.

Platforms such as Access Agriculture, which aim to develop high quality, local language video learning materials for farmers in the majority world, offer an example of how this can be overcome.

Experience from within the commercial fishing company suggests that having video content delivered by people and in a style of language that the viewers can relate to matters far more than the technical quality of production.

Unfortunately, with all video-based materials, data remains a major and often insurmountable barrier.

Khula Farmer

This is a South African app targeted specifically at the food trade that helps farmers find markets by letting them register products and find buyers. It seems to be sponsored by the chemical company Nulandis: the app has a very heavy focus on a full range of synthetic poisons and fertilisers. However, Khula Farmer has difficult registration requirements, and the documentation was too much even for me, so it is not really an option for the majority of South African farmers. On one hand, the potential exists for apps like this to further entrench unsustainable modes of production, but on the other, it can open up new pathways and practices to farmers who have the capacity and may wish to do things differently.

Centralised content examples

These next cases provide examples of a centralised content creation model, in which the application's developers have designed all the content up-front. The designers decide what is important and make decisions about how this is communicated. This approach can perhaps be best described as a textbook on your phone. Much like a textbook, when done well they can serve as a fantastic resource, and the digital format has the potential to significantly expand access to the learning material versus a hard copy book. Another benefit of this format is that new information can be easily added or updated, after which it is immediately available to all users.

However, unlike textbooks which tend to go through a longer process of editorial review, the need to ensure quality as the content changes over time requires careful thought and continued effort. The dynamics of a digital user experience and the need for continued upkeep also mean that unlike a textbook, hosting content on an app needs to be understood as an ongoing process that requires time and resources.

ARC Hub

The South African Agricultural Research Council (ARC) is a governmental organisation with substantial expertise across a range of agricultural fields. Dr Naude Malan has substantial experience working with smallholder farmers in WhatsApp groups. He also sits on the board of the ARC. Based on Dr Malan's recommendation, we reviewed the most developed of the ARC's apps, ARC Hub. ARC Hub was designed to be an entry point for accessing the ARC's learning material, training courses and network of in-house experts.

ARC presents a long list of training courses (all available on request, with no contact information available), a list of experts employed by the ARC (most of whose profiles are incomplete) as well as a mixed bag of very short 'Manuals' on a wide range of topics ranging from household spiders to bovine diseases to invasive plants.

The volume and structure of content is debilitating even for a highly tech-literate user who is familiar with the agricultural sector. This is akin to a poorly organised library in which the visitor gets completely overwhelmed when trying to find the simplest piece of information. The user experience is rough, and the content is incomplete. The app is riddled with missing links and old data. It is also only useful when trying to access ARC-specific information. This

makes it very focused and is likely to limit its utility and adoption. Content is only available in English and is not available offline. This is likely to further limit its adoption.

What ARC Hub seems to provide is a warning against a set of potentially common mistakes when providing centralised content through an app.

First, it appears to fall into the trap of content dumping, with insufficient regard for user experience. Second, the need for continued digital upkeep and development seems to have been overlooked. The misconception that apps can be developed, released and then forgotten about came up frequently through this process as a common mistake. Our examples of success within the Imvotho Bubomi Learning Network, Iqonga LoThungelwano and Kurima Maria all planned for and invested in the personnel and personal time to support the 'social scaffolding' around digital systems.

Plant Images

The Plant Images app uses a visual key system with images, diagrams and lists to help farmers identify plant nutrient deficiencies. It is designed to help the farmer visually diagnose plant issues through visual comparison between their phones and the crops in their fields.

It is very light on text and, as such, could be easily translated into local languages. It is currently available in English, Spanish, Mandarin, Russian, Portuguese and French.

The main issue is that a filtering function per crop is missing. This makes the app cumbersome to use in practice as a farmer cannot look at all the images relating to their specific crop in one list. This significantly limits its diagnostic functionality. There are also quite a few missing images and crops, which once again limits its application in South Africa.

In principle, if Plant Image was structured a little differently and updated with more specifically South African images, it could be really good.

AgriSuite Neo

AgriSuite Neo is an app developed for the South African farmer which seems to be very closely aligned to what we have envisaged for a knowledge platform (Figure 6). However, we were unable to download the app and received no response from the company which developed it. According to the Google Play Store, it has only been downloaded around 500 times, suggesting that it is not widely in use.

Farming Solutions

Farming Solutions was developed by the Dutch civil society organisation Solidaridad (Figure 7). It focuses on supporting livelihoods and market access for South American crops and conditions. It is also quite rigid and is more of a content-delivery and progress-tracking system rather than having a platform-based approach.

However, unlike ARC Hub, Farming Solutions has a clear focus and user in mind. So while it is not of much use to a farmer in South Africa, the developers have understood the needs of their target audience and focused specifically on them. This means less content but more impact.

Farming Solutions is an aid to in-person support, not a replacement. Like Kurima Mari (see below), they also appear to have supported their roll-out with in-person support to farmers and field workers.

Figure 6: Plant Images, a centralised content app

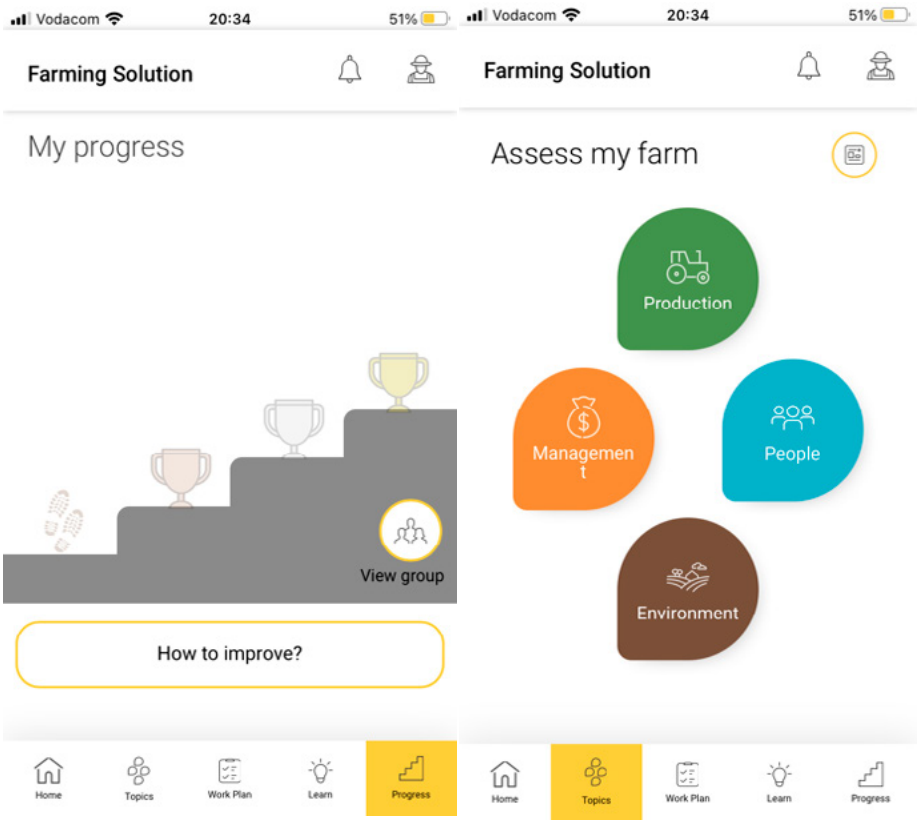

Figure 7: Farming Solutions, a centralised content app

M-Shule

While almost all of the apps reviewed thus far rely on a smartphone, the reality is that many South Africans still do not have access to one. M-Shule has shown that even very low-tech, SMS-based approaches can support teachers, parents and learners at schools in Southern Africa. The system is designed not to replace but rather to supplement and support existing school curricula. Although this is a centralised content model, their approach allows users to select content at their own speed. The system is also set up to track learners' progress through simple assessments.

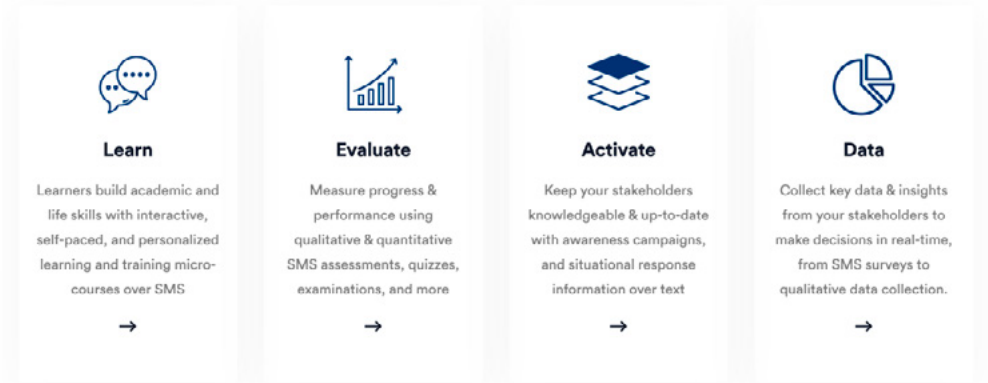

Figure 8: M-Shule, a low-tech, SMS-based system

Blended approach example

This approach combines centralised content with elements of a platform model, which brings the benefits of predetermined content with a space where users can connect, create and share.

Kurima Mari

Kurima Mari was by far the best example of a mobile learning application which holds transformative potential for the VET system in Southern Africa.

Kurima Mari is an app designed for Zimbabwean farmers and extension agents, containing the information and contacts they need to improve and increase production in farming. There is specific information on crops and livestock, direct links to the experts in users' local areas and tips on how to reach the market.

The app was designed by a Zimbabwean team with extensive agricultural experience and has over 100 000 active users. Since only a few farmers in a village may actually own a smartphone, farmers organise in groups to share information. Click here for a short explanatory video.

On entering, the app lets you classify yourself as a farmer or extension worker. It also asks some basic information about you, such as where you are located and what you are farming with. Based on this information, it then filters the available content in order to provide only the most relevant content. The app, as well as all of its content, is available in Zimbabwe's three main languages, namely English, Shona and Ndebele.

Within the app, a wide range of ready-made content is available (ordered by crop). However, it also provides guidelines and support for its users to set up local networks and structures of their own. These include guidelines on how to set up and manage community savings groups as well as farmer learning circles. All content can be downloaded and saved for use offline. Most content can also be downloaded and saved (and shared freely) as PDFs on the user's phone. These features demonstrate:

- The careful thought which has been put into understanding the interrelationship between digital technology and social networks;
- The ways in which the app leverages the digital platform to offer its users content in a way that is much more sensitive to their individual needs, abilities and context than a textbook can be;
- The various ways in which their users' low-data realities have been understood and supported.
- The need for a clear enrolment and onboarding strategy when working with low-data target audiences.

4 Twelve ready-to-use digital inclusivity ideas

WhatsApp has been and remains a fundamental entry point into the digital arena across our own contexts during the COVID-19 pandemic. And smartphones (and their accompanying apps) are likely to remain the only form of digital connectivity for the majority of South African learners. However, a range of processes and systems pertain to each and every mobile application: How much data do users require to download and operate the app and where do they get this data? How is content created and shared? And how do these apps get designed in the first place?

Over the last two months, ten enabling techniques and technologies came up (discussed below) which assist in supporting users to access content via WhatsApp, as well as supporting the design and access to content through various other avenues. Some of these technologies emerged from within our own practices, such as Robin's creative use of Microsoft Office to create effective low-bandwidth 'mobisodes' (mini videos with PowerPoint). Others, such as the use of Sim Controller, emerged from discussions with other projects within this TESF-funded reflective process; while others, such as Turn, emerged from subsequent research across what can perhaps be best described as a low-data e-learning community of practice.

While seen in isolation from the perspective of someone with reliable internet and good digital literacy, some of these solutions may seem unremarkable. However, it is our view that the creative application of various combinations of these have the potential to radically transform access to learning opportunities in low-literacy, low-connectivity, distributed environments.

1. Reverse charge websites

The Amanzi For Food training of trainers programme launched an online offering which the Environmental Learning and Research Centre hosted for the first time on a reverse charge website. This reverse charge system allows the hosting institution to create a duplicate website with a data-free URL.

Normal URL: https://amanziforfood.co.za/
Example of data-free URL: https://amanziforfood.sbox.datafree.co/

The host institution pays the data costs when users access the website via their phones using a reverse charge system. The user pays nothing and does not need to have data credit. Any content hosted on this URL, including videos and downloadable PDFs, are free to access.

This service is currently available across all South African cellular networks and a growing range of mobile networks across Southern Africa. See https://datafr.ee/

2. Bulk data supply and management

In situations where direct data costs are unavoidable and there is a need to support users or field workers with data, the process of managing data allocations to a wide number of beneficiaries across different mobile phone networks can be a major administrative challenge.

The success of models such as Iqonga LoThungelwano rested, in part, on being able to keep a wide network of community champions online. They used Sim Controller to manage data transfers to a wide range of community champions. Sim Controller also simplifies the allocation and record-keeping of large numbers of data vouchers which supports financial reporting.

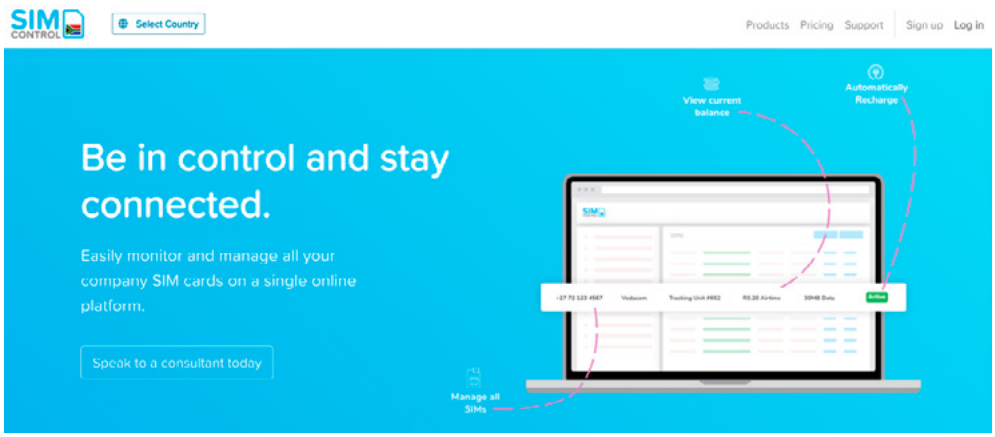

Figure 9: Sim Controller, a supplier of bulk data

3. Low-cost platform-specific bundles

Most people are aware of the existence of application-specific data bundles, which are important for many low-data users. Typical application-specific bundles support Facebook and WhatsApp and are often much cheaper than all-purpose bundles. WhatsApp bundles can work out to as little as R1 ($0.06) per day.

4. WhatsApp-based automated chat platforms

The widespread use of the aforementioned low-cost bundles has driven new forms of digital content delivery on WhatsApp which offer two-way engagement at a very low data cost.

Turn is a WhatsApp-based platform messaging service that enables the development of customised content which users explore in a manner that can best be described as a combination between a website and an Unstructured Supplementary Service Data (USSD) system like M-Shule. But the benefit of Turn is that it can run off of a WhatsApp data bundle while at the same time delivering JPEGs, movies and PDF content.

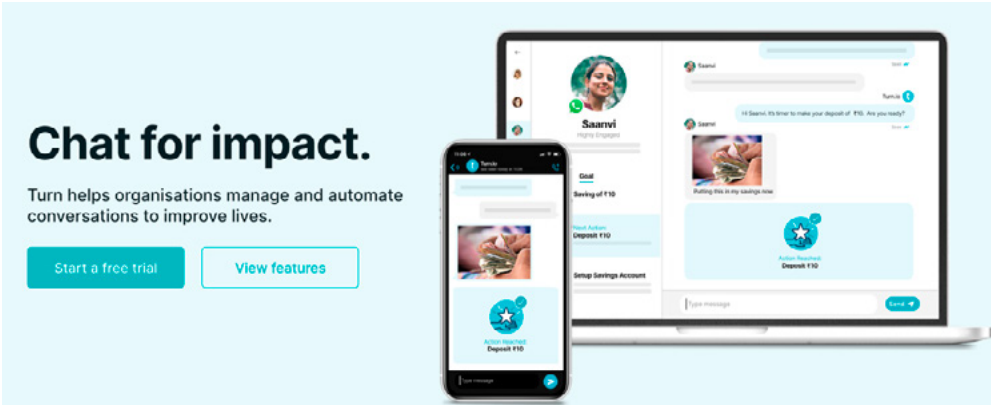

Figure 10: Turn, a WhatsApp-based automated chat platform

Turn also offers close mentorship and support to social justice organisations wishing to use their services.

Their fee system works according to the number of users and starts at $199/month for under 5000 users.

Figure 11: Turn's fee system

Fees

Tier	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
MAU	0-5K	5K-10K	10K-25K	25K-50K	50K-75K	75K-100K	100K-150K	150K-250K	250K-400K	400K-500K	500K+
Turn License	$199 pm for 12 months	$500 pm	$750 pm	$1000 pm	$1250 pm	$1500 pm	$2000 pm	$2500 pm	$4000 pm	$5000 pm	$0.01 per MAU

5. Voice notes

The experiences of Iqonga Lethungelu suggests that using voice notes instead of text also helped support inclusivity in areas where literacy was low. These voice notes could be shared at a lower data cost than videos and were easy to deliver in the local language.

6. Zoom/Microsoft Office/WhatsApp mobisodes

Working with a commercial fishing company, Future People developed a technique which uses six apps that are embedded and combined to produce low data < 15 MB 'mobisodes' (mini videos with PowerPoint) which are transmissible in very low bandwidth conditions to the learner's smart phone or per email to his/her laptop. This technology leapfrogs the current video production house model of online learning by engaging with a technology that allows 'ordinary people' to cheaply and quickly film and produce content using what we have, where we are, right now. This 'applied' WhatsApp solution elegantly cuts out the 'middleman' of expensive video productions, which have lengthy turnaround times. The benefits are that mobisodes:

- Provide *learner driven* TVET to workers at their *site of work*, in *real time*;
- *Decrease costs* – financial, logistical, and personal;
- Allow assessments to be uploaded using WhatsApp video, voice, and text so that the course administrator can collate an e-Portfolio of Evidence for each learner;
- Provide *real-time, two-way communication* augmented by a WhatsApp group of the learners, and a move away from the acquisition method of learning and organisational 'top-down' communication;
- Provide training at the *right level and language* for the learner group, for example the 2–3-minute mobisodes could be produced in more than one language to enable technical learning in the learners' first language rather than their third or fourth language;
- Provide *monthly user stats* on the uptake of mobisodes to enable adequate monitoring and evaluation of training interventions; and
- Build *communication and trust* and lots of excitement because people are being trained in their workplaces for the first time – this is a hard-won 'communication bridge'!

The cost of this applied use of Zoom, Microsoft Office 2019 and WhatsApp is negligible as these applications are ubiquitous and the creation of material is shared between learners and facilitators.

Table 1: Technical affordances using what we already have at sea (Zoom, Microsoft Office 2019, WhatsApp and flash sticks, laptops, smart TVs)

Functionalities	Y/N	Practicalities
Can operate with or without connectivity	Y	No connectivity is required. Master flash stick would be updated by VET professional, replicated by shore personnel and distributed to vessels.
Is simple to use for low-literacy learners	Y/N	If the mobisode is set up for the factory hand it is a simple process. If workers must first find the laptop, locate the right video on the flash and then watch it, this becomes complex. If many learners use the vessel laptops, they are likely to require repair.
Can deliver video-on-demand and podcasts	Y	Videos and podcasts could be screened on the manager's laptop or smart TV if available. This will require time, logistical arrangements and admin from the manager.
Can measure user/ learner uptake	Y/N	A hard copy attendance form is used. No indication of how much of the mobisode was actually watched is possible.
Content production is cheap, agile and has fast turnaround time	Y/N	Content production is cheap. Reloading flash drives, version control, etc. is time consuming. Content can only be updated when the vessel is in port. Mobisodes can be WhatsApp-ed directly to the learner.
Learner-driven	Y/N	Learners are dependent on management to screen material, etc. The mobisodes can be accessed on the learners' smart phones in their own time.

7. MEME-B

MEME-B software was originally designed by Dr Keith and his team at the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) to enable community TV stations. Content is easy to generate and broadcast in a low bandwidth environment. MEME-B uses the smart phone as the decoder and broadcasts using the internet, which means that it is instantly and internationally scalable.

MEME-B was never intended to be used in an organisational training environment; however, when I was introduced to this technology, I could envisage it being 'bent for purpose' and operating as follows in any organisation:

Table 2: Technical affordances of MEME-B at sea

Functionalities	Y/N	Practicalities
Can be operated with or without connectivity	Y	Yes, all mobisodes will be cached and learners is responsible for downloading the mobisodes on sailing day.
Is simple to use for low-literacy learners	Y	Learners must be able to operate a smart phone. Sea-going staff are already in possession of and operate cell phones.
Can deliver video-on-demand and podcasts	Y	Yes, learners can choose to watch the mobisodes whenever it suits them as he is watching on his own device.
Can measure user/learner uptake	Y	Yes, automatic harvesting and reporting of user stats. Trickle-fed to shore during voyage, complete upload on docking.
Content production is cheap, agile and has fast turnaround time	Y	Yes, normally content updated automatically in Port. Important content could be trickle-fed to vessels at sea depending on connectivity.
Learner-driven	Y	Learners are entirely responsible for their learning process.

- Content would be generated using a cell phone or ordinary camera. No expensive video production is required. MEME-B has the capacity to eliminate buffering and to broadcast in three different qualities that the user can choose to suit their device.
- Content would then be produced and broadcast on the MEME platform.
- Once a programme is broadcast it is cached for all time. This data would be housed on a central server at the CSIR or the client.
- Based on user numbers and access controls, learners would download the mobisodes which have been assigned to them.
- Learners would watch these mobisodes on demand on their phone using a customised app (developed for the client) as an interface. They would be required to demonstrate their competence in two ways. First, by an assessment in the workplace, and second, through a written assessment which they submit in fulfilment of their Portfolios of Evidence.
- The user stats would be trickle-fed back to the original server.
- MEME-B carries a licensing cost payable to the CSIR. In 2019, this was a cost of R32 000 for ten channels and unlimited user numbers. This fee also includes the user-stats reporting.

8. Citizen film making

Linking to the discussion on YouTube and video platforms earlier in this report, the role of video in supporting place-based peer-to-peer learning is gaining increasing recognition globally.

A growing number of institutionally supported video learning databases (such as at https://www.accessagriculture.org/) are now available to farmers and many other professions. And, similarly, a growing number of skilled practitioners are moving online through video in order to share their knowledge and practice – informally becoming teachers to an open-source community.

Within the Imvotho Bubomi Learning Network, there is evidence that video (and images) is used as the digital component of the network and form a part of how they learn and share with each other. In an analysis of their WhatsApp group, 996 photographs and 65 videos were shared over a five-year period. As access to video-enabled smartphones and the internet increases, the use of video has been steadily on the rise.

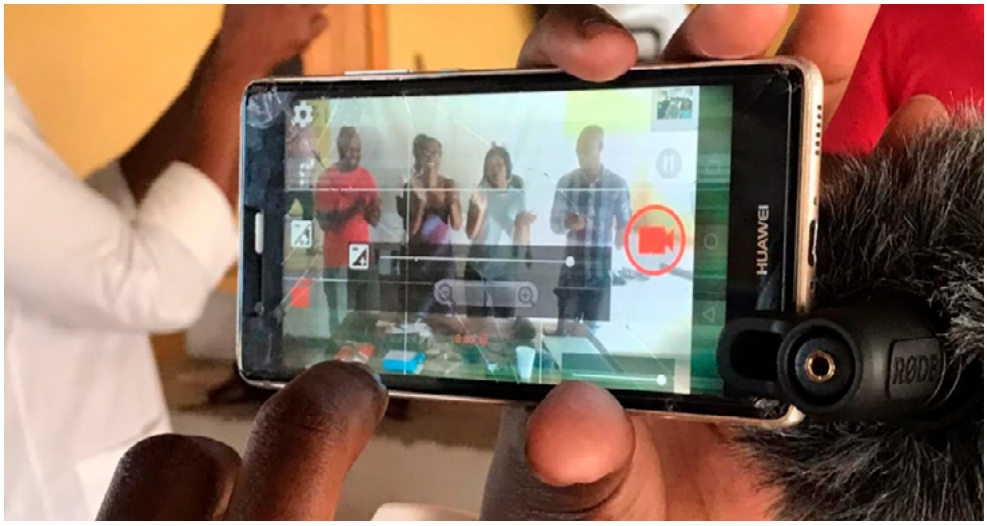

Figure 12: Citizen film making

Simple training in filmmaking can be one way of supporting knowledge holders outside of the formal VET system to share their knowledge with learners of all ages across great distances.

9. Peer-to-peer app transfers

Traditionally, apps needed to be downloaded from the internet via Google's Play Store or another similar platform. However, widely available phone-to-phone file-sharing apps like SHAREit now offer the option to share file and apps from person-to-person without the need to download them. This means that in many instances apps can be shared between friends and colleagues in low-data environments.

As with the sharing of content, this functionality opens up the possibility for individuals to act as technological pollinators for whole networks without access to the internet. Kurima Mari, for example, trained farmers and agricultural extension officers to use SHAREit in order to support the use of their systems.

Designing the social training and support systems to support this no-data download approach during process development may be an important inclusivity consideration.

10. Allowing critical data to be stored out of the app

Linking to the point above regarding the transfer of offline content, apps which allow users to save useful information in places such as in the gallery folder of a phone – which they can which then share with other phones – mean that only one person in a community, family or farming group has to pay data charges as they then can act as a pollinator by sharing the information with others offline.

Enabling files and information to be stored on a user's phone outside of the app itself is an important consideration to make during the software design phase. Apps from our examples here which have this function include WhatsApp and Kurima Mari; Plant Images and the ARC Hub, however, do not.

11. Offline app functionality

Plant Images and Kurima Mari provide examples of apps which allow users to download valuable content when they have access to Wi-Fi for mobile data, and then access this content offline at a later stage. As data bundles which expire on a single day are often much cheaper than the same volume of data over a longer period, apps which allow users to download all the content in one go also helps to improve access.

12. Simple online course generators

For those wishing to create simple content online for something specific, without going through a long process of developing an app from scratch, organisations like Farm.ink (housed on Learn.ink) offer a simple system for digitising training and creating simple app-like online training courses. This site provides an easy starting point for getting content online quickly and at low cost.

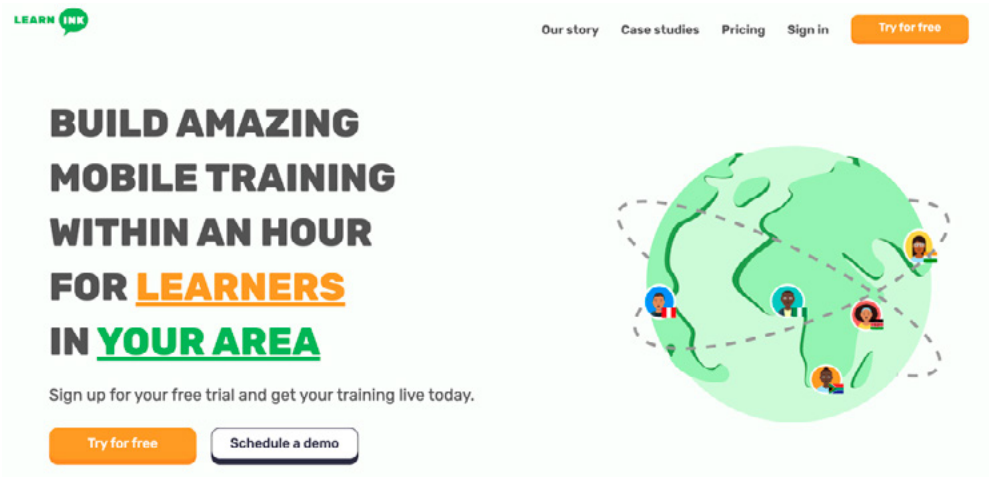

Figure 13: Online course generator, Farm.ink

5 Reflections on mobile apps and enabling ideas

Success is a dance between people and technology

Underestimating the level of continued support, upkeep and development that is required seems to be a common mistake. Discussions with successful examples of inclusive digitally enabled learning, such as Kurima Mari and Iqonga LoThungelwano, revealed that both systems had relied on substantial staff/volunteer contingents to do the interpersonal work on the ground.

In the case of the commercial fishing company, the key to the adoption of the WhatsApp model was the change of mindset of the management team as a result of the pressures of COVID-19 on conventional training. The push to get training to learners in their workplace, with all the cost and learner benefits, came from Future People and not the employer. It remains to be seen whether or not this new, and more equitable, way of teaching and learning will endure once the COVID-19 pandemic passes. Perhaps the organisation will have undergone an unconscious metamorphosis into a digital 'earning and learning' model which they had never imagined, nor requested?

In all the examples we have reviewed, the skills of the learning facilitator are key to the success of the WhatsApp model, and these skills *differ* from classic facilitation skills. This is an area which requires more consideration; however, such skills would include perseverance, the ability to connect one learner at a time to the e-learning system, creativity, attention to detail, ability to build learner confidence, deep interpersonal skills and 'street credibility'.

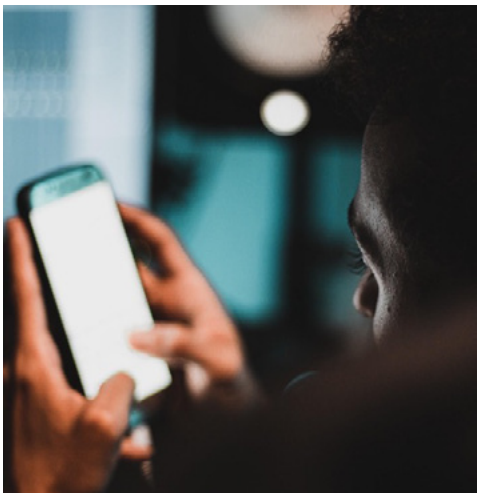

Figure 14: Success is dance between people and technology Source: Mehdi-Lamaaffar/ Unsplash

It's a quilt not the plague

In all the examples we considered to have been successful, the use of WhatsApp and other enabling technologies should be considered as 'tiny education' or an 'education of care' as *every* learner must be carefully linked into each app (e.g. WhatsApp, Zoom, Microsoft Office 2019, Kurima Mari). This runs contrary to the prevailing notion of digital technologies in which the implicit assumption is that if you design an offering correctly, it will 'go viral' on its own.

Instead, the examples we came across during our explorations suggest that the process is far more akin to weaving a fine quilt than spreading a virus. There is nothing quick or 'massive' about this form of education and it is deeply networked, respectful of the individual and

relational. The relationships exist between the learners in the group, between each learner and the facilitator, and between each learning and the technology platform. These relationships are fragile and can be subject to 'shocks' from the outside such as insensitive communication, an insistence on auditing the learning process and conventional forms of assessment.

Kurima Mari invested heavily in running digital literacy clinics, were careful to make extension workers feel like part of the process and focused on providing personalised local content in users' home languages. Experiences from Iqonga LoThungelwano suggest that even the simplest digital platforms that are carefully scaffolded can achieve remarkable results when the right social systems are designed into and around them. In both examples, achieving scale in low-tech rural environments was a result of active human agents working as multipliers for digital technologies.

It's a conversation, not a pipeline

Multi-directional communication is key. Mobile apps cannot be designed as one-way pathways for transmitting knowledge to learners. Experience from the Imvotho Bubomi Learning Network also suggests that integrating users' practical examples into the digital arena is a powerful source of energy. Apps, and the social systems which support them, need to be structured in such a way as to encourage and enable multi-directional communication between the developers and users as well as between users themselves. This can happen in a myriad of ways including:

- Active listening and regular check-ins from network facilitators;
- Platform-based models that allow users to create and share their own content;
- Rating systems that allow users to provide feedback on elements of the system;
- Supporting learners to connect with each other by, for example, forming study groups or working on collective projects;
- Providing lists of contact details of local stakeholders;
- Soliciting and incorporating continuous user feedback; and
- Supporting users to share their practical work and experiences on the platform.

No dumping

Providing content that is not specific enough is not helpful. In the agricultural sector, digital content needs to be able to work at scale, while also responding meaningfully to the specificities of contextual factors such as climatic zone, crop type and farm size. For all users, but particularly for users with lower levels of technological literacy, overloading people with too much information and expecting them to filter out what will be useful can undermine their own common sense, while at the same time failing to provide useful information. The effect of this can be paralysing. Actions that can assist in avoiding this include:

- Having an end-user clearly in mind and taking the time to understand their needs;
- Understanding how your users can be broken down into sub-groups in order to customise content to their specific needs;
- Being clear, specific and intentional with content;
- Involving data taxonomists and user-experience professionals in the design phase;
- Remaining continually sensitive to the ways that users are experiencing the information on your platform;
- Continually updating content based on changing needs;
- Training users in basic online search skills as well as those specific to your offering; and
- Getting facilitators to play the role of 'culture keepers', ensuring the communication remains within the spirit of the group.

Don't reinvent the wheel

Given that WhatsApp is the most widely used application in South Africa and much of the world, its potential as a learning application needs to be engaged with as a matter of serious consideration for those interested in the role of digital technologies in the future of education in South Africa. This is particularly true for agricultural learning in rural areas, where the average learner is older, and the pace of technological penetration is slower, and in the fishing industry, where WhatsApp may be the only avenue open to factory hands and other non-officer staff.

Enable transgression

Part of the excitement of digital network building is in facilitating relationships and forms of knowledge exchange that were either previously impossible or, at best, improbable. Our explorations suggest the need to think about how the boundaries between formal institutions and the informal and unformal sector can be bridged; how a much richer primordial soup of learning and exchange can be cooked up by facilitating spaces and processes in which institutionalised human beings can wriggle, skip and creep into new roles and ways of engaging. Similarly, it means creating ways in which those who have been systematically excluded can begin to find ways of tapping into, and contributing to, not only the limited resources of the ivory tower training institutions, but the astounding potential of the world wide web.

The future may be brighter

While huge barriers exist around internet connectivity, data access and technological know-how, we believe that the ideas presented through this research are representative of a much wider suite of responsive solutions that collectively represent the foundations of a bridge across the digital divide.

6 Generative steps forward

Explore the possibility of re-imaging the relationships and configurations amongst the unformal, informal, and formal VET learning to release the full learning potential: Practically, we see this entailing the continuation of work within the commercial fishing space that will include engagement with SAMSA on sea-going qualifications and a different way of doing things to include informal VET.

- **Push the limits on ubiquitous technologies or 'applied WhatsApp' to deliver learning:** In many instances, this is the *only* option available to many people.
- **Expand and develop:** As well as working to expand our work within the agricultural space, we will specifically solidify our partnership with Welthungerhilfe, who developed Kurima Mari, in order to develop a South African pilot for this approach.
- **Engage with educators:** Conceptually, we plan to continue our exploration into VET through a widening engagement with other academics and practitioners of all formal, informal and unformal VET persuasions.

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Annexure: Additional activities and outcomes

Webinars and partnerships

The TESF grant enabled us to reach out to a range of stakeholders within the educational technology arena. We worked with two of these to host two online webinars.

The first was with Wilma van Standen, who shared her experiences setting up an online 'train the trainers' course using a reverse change web hosting service. The second was held by Tawanda Howe from Welthungerhilfe, who provided an overview of his experiences in the development and roll-out of Kurima Mari.

These webinars not only helped share what we were learning with other TESF grantees, but also helped to lay the foundations for future collaborations and enabled us to reflect on what we were uncovering. Table 3 below outlines four key partnerships which were developed through this grant that we believe will assist us in carrying this work forwards.

Table 3: Key partnerships established through the TESF grant

Organisation	Partnership
Wethungerhilfe, Zimbabwe	In principle, commitment to share existing mobile application code at no cost, as well as provide ongoing technical support on a weekly basis.
Agroecology South Africa network, South Africa	AESA is a prominent but loosely constituted network of highly experienced individuals working in the agricultural sector across South Africa. Conversations with a number of key members contributed in the initial TESF reflective grant process and expressed support for future engagement around the development of an open source knowledge database. Collectively, this network represents organisations and practitioners working with a wide range of farmer networks across South Africa.
C2 Digital, Zimbabwe/ Australia	As the original software developers for the Kurima Mari app, C2 is willing to support the development of a sister application for South Africa
South African Maritime Safety Association (SAMSA)	SAMSA, several of the larger commercial fishing enterprises and myself met on 11 February 2021 to acknowledge that the current TVET model is not working and to begin a dialogue on alternatives. In my academic capacity, I have been invited to continue discussions with the Principal Officer, or her designate, on 'finding better ways to deliver training to meet industry's changing needs'. This seems like an inflection point to change the system which is not to be missed.

Open source learning resources database

We also used the time and resources within this grant to extend the agroecology database which will be a public community asset for the agroecology movement in South Africa. Following a series of dialogues with organisations and networks in the agricultural sector, including Biowatch and the South African Organic Sector Organisation, a plan was formulated to further develop an existing database of learning materials into a wider database of trainers, networks and institutions. Funds from this grant were used to pay a series of small honoraria to various researchers in four provinces to assist in developing this database.

In addition to becoming an open source repository of information, the database could, in time, also become the foundation for future platform-based mobile learning applications in the agricultural sector. This database can be viewed here. In addition to the database, we also set up a simple site online, the African library of agroecology (see below).

Our next steps will be to expand the data on trainers and training organisations in order to then convert this simple database into a fully searchable data-free website.

Figure 15: The home page of the African library of agroecology resources

CHAPTER 6

SpazaHub and Amava Oluntu

Learning to fly during a pandemic

Written by Asavuya Mantongomane Asanda Ndudula, Elona Mteto, Nokubonga Nonkqayi and Nolubablo Bulana, with support from Teresa Boulle, Nadia Sitas, Theresa Wigley and Chas Unwin

Back row, from left: Nolubabalo Bulana, Asavuya Mantongomane, Theresa Wigley, Asanda Ndudula, Elona Mteto

Front row, from left: Nokubonga Nonkqayi, Claire Homewood, Nadia Sitas

Contents

1 Introduction

This is a response to a call for narrative reflections on education, training and public/community education and learning initiatives during the COVID-19 pandemic. The small grant was to allow groups that have been doing substantive education, training and/or social learning work during the COVID-19 pandemic to reflect on, and write up, the work that they have been doing to identify lessons that could be helpful for Transforming Education for Sustainable Futures (TESF) research and praxis over the next few years. Early career researchers and/or community groups were particularly encouraged to apply for this small grant funding. The research is to provide insight into lessons learned from education, training, and/or social learning approaches applied or tried out during the COVID-19 period (between March 2020 and March 2021) in South Africa, with a focus on adaptations or innovations in education, training or social learning.

This report provides a summary of some of our key learnings and the methodologies that we used for the reflection process.

SpazaHub

We imagine a world where youth are inspired and equipped to create social change within their communities. We started as a COVID response with a mapping process within our community of Vrygrond/Capricorn that formed a network with existing kitchens and created new kitchens. We supported the kitchens to run for a year. From this foundation, we have grown and gained enough support to implement our vision of the 'SpazaHub', a place where we can support each other's dreams and visions for a better future. We have evolved and now understand how we can use this COVID response movement to promote long-lasting change.

> We believe that what needs transforming in the world and in our work, is our ability to connect with each other as humans. In the world today, there is so much division that connecting can be very difficult. The one thing that can bring us together though, is food. We came together to make sure that everyone in our community could get food through these difficult times. This did indeed create many amazing connections, across all kinds of divides, but it also created division, and brought up many community dynamics that were very painful and frustrating.
>
> We were a little wary when we heard of this research project because we have seen many researchers come into our communities and take what they want and then we never see them again. They also use jargon that silences and alienates us. When we discussed how we would like to do this research, we agreed that it should be in a way that accommodates everyone.
>
> We are still learning to work together. We have struggles internally and in the greater community, but we continue the difficult journey, and focus on our own growth and transformation, so that we can become better able to connect within our larger communities.
>
> What we bring to the larger TESF circle is our youth and our curiosity, and our desire to learn better ways of doing things than the ones that got us where we are now.

Amava Oluntu

We are a collective working together to create spaces that encourage individuals to reconnect with themselves, each other and the world. South Africa has a huge diversity of everyday realities. We seek to create spaces of learning that honour these differences and recognise the multiple forms of wisdom we all have and can share with each other. We create spaces where, by sharing individual experiences, we equip each other with the skills and knowledge needed to develop practical solutions that create more resilient and inspired individuals and communities.

Transforming Education for Sustainable Futures (TESF)

Our research addresses the role of education in climate action, decent work and sustainable cities. Addressing inequalities relating to poverty, gender and the status of indigenous knowledge are cross-cutting themes in our work, as are concerns for foregrounding marginalised voices and decolonising research. Our aim is to develop new knowledge that can assist education policy-makers, practitioners, non-governmental and community-based organisations to implement policies and practices in education that are transformative and can contribute to ensuring equitable, just and environmentally sustainable development.

2 What does research mean to you?

I think of people who come in white coats and speak in a lot of jargon that we don't understand and this silences and alienates us. This is very triggering. Then they take what they want and leave and we don't see them again or know what they are doing with that information.

– Nolubablo Bulana

Some of these questions, they are too big. You narrow yourself to the space you are in. Speaking globally, it's quite massive. First, the change needs to be in us, and then in our community being free in the space to work together – which is not easy. Talking about the world is not easy. First, we must change where we are at, then we can spread our wings.

Research being done through us – how do we deal with different systems and spaces and language - hard to respond when we can't understand. How can researchers come to a person with clear language so we can share our thoughts, so we can all learn from intentions about community upliftment?

– Asanda Ndudula

I'm longing for open minded and inclusive ways of research into coming out in how the research is structured and who gets access to the research and how it gets given back to the external world.

– Nolubablo Bulana

The tools that are useful for research? Google, cos every question has to be googled to understand it.

– Nolubablo Bulana

I am looking for coming to the ways to connect people and understand their views and opinions about how the world is driving us and how we can find a way to sustain ourselves.

– Nokubonga Nonkqayi

I don't understand the question when you say what codes of knowledge are we using for our research. I mean what codes are there? I'm a first-time researcher, so the codes and all that, I don't understand. Hayi, we didn't get given the codes.
– Nolubablo Bulana

Group reflections on the research

The team found it comforting to hear the shared (but welcomed) discomfort of the broader group, made up of people mostly comfortable in the research space but still sharing uncertainties of charting the shared journey ahead:

"How to embark on something that you have no idea how to do?"

"What can we do with what we have where we are right now?"

" ... invading spaces without invitation ... "

" ... these platforms give us courage to learn ..."

"Activism is being polarised."

"How can community become well?"

"How do you train activists to be protecting of the community?"

"Use the indigenous knowledge practice ... rather than coming with new terms and big words."

"Include formal and non-formal learning."

"We are trying to act ethically, in an incredibly unethical world."

Researching vs reflecting

"What does 'research' now introduce into existing initiatives?"

"What does 'reflection' now introduce into existing initiatives?"

3 How was 2020 for you?

The frustrations

Mostly it was how the element of the pandemic came and the laws from government. You live in a space where there are less resources of looking after yourself. How they implemented the laws of lockdown was quite difficult for our environment, which it makes it hard to work in that space. I remember even the time when we were trying to put up information like posters – people were very confused with those laws and all that stuff. It frustrated me so much.

– Asanda Ndudula

Not being allowed to even visit friends cos you don't know what will happen, you can't see what you are dealing with, you can't even touch what you are dealing with. It's just a sickness that has very minor symptoms. In townships you don't take a fever so seriously. Now you need to go to clinic, and at the same time you are not allowed to go to the clinic. And when you are moving around there are police everywhere, there are soldiers everywhere, it was really a frustrating thing for me.

– Asavuya Mantongomane

Working with people is also a frustration cos everyone has different personalities and different attitudes, so you just have to understand people and where they come from. That is not an easy job. Also trying to convince people to see what you are trying to do, and trying to convince them so they can understand your vision and mission, and that you are not just doing it for your personal benefit, but you are doing it for the benefit of the community.

– Elona Mteto

I can think of many things that frustrated me last year, there were so many, but the main thing that comes to me now is being unemployed, not knowing how I would provide for my kids.

– Nokubonga Nonkqayi

The beauty

The most beautiful thing I have witnessed during lockdown, I witnessed and experienced how it feels to be a father to someone, because that is when I started to spend more time with my daughter. Ya, it's been something that was new to me and I have enjoyed each and every moment of it, being there each and every day, night, waking up next to her, it was just amazing. And to see my capabilities of being a better man that I can be to my daughter.

– Elona Mteto

First of all I was very shy to speak in front of a crowd, I was not brave enough to speak in front of people, but now, baby steps, I can. I used to answer with very short sentences but now I can illustrate what I want to say and I'm even a good listener too. Now I am a problem solver, I can solve problems in the group, I can raise up some topics that we can talk about and share and come up with solutions and I'm a team worker.

– Nokubonga Nonkqayi

The connections that I have made throughout the SpazaHub movement, I have met people that are doing such great and amazing things. I now feel like I can even do more than what I am doing, that nothing can stop me to do what I want to do. I have gained much experience.

– Elona Mteto

Finding something to do after a long time. It was an inspiring thing to do to find something to do in the middle of a pandemic while everyone is just complaining, to find somethingto do that is going to be productive - that was an amazing feeling to meet people that are inspiring.

– Asavuya Mantongomane

I would say that what was beautiful about last year is life itself, cos we are still living. I am still strong. And the first call of the building of CANS, seeing communities building groups, it was quite beautiful to see that kind of movement being established. Creating networks, mapping your own community in terms of how you create easy access for resources and knowledge for how to deal with the pandemic.

– Asanda Ndudula

The hopes

Most of us we've met because we are all passionate about community and us as individuals and the different skill sets we have. We still learning the space, learning to understand each other. It's not easy but we try to find a common sense of working in an environment of respect and also by your heart knowing you are not doing this for individuals, but you are doing this to serve, also to gain knowledge.

– Asanda Ndudula

What I was hoping when I joined the group, at first I thought it was just a COVID Response and I wasn't hoping for much, I just did it out of love, love for helping people, and when I joined the group I was just enjoying it, so excited that finally I fitted somewhere, and doing what I like, as I've been in search of myself so many years, not knowing what I do really like and what I want to do.

– Nokubonga Nonkqayi

Seeing these people, very passionate, who have heart, we are faced by racismsms and many challenges and when you deal with a certain race it can be difficult, but working with people who have a pure heart of unity and wants to make change, it gave me strength to continue, to keep that strength to have that movement for the future.

– Asanda Ndudula

As a young person, I hoped that we could start something new, something fresh in our community. Something that was youth led, an organisation or a movement, that could have different kinds of activities for learning ways of making informal businesses in a formal way.

– Elona Mteto

The first time I joined with the group I was hoping to find an environment that I was just going to enjoy working, and I was so lucky because I found even more than I was hoping to find. I was hoping to find a home away from home, and I found exactly that. An environment where I would just enjoy working without any pressure to meet deadlines, but just enjoying working in a space where we could just be ourselves. So it is true that when you think of something very hard it finally manifests.

– Asavuya Mantongomane

Reflections took place at Silvermine Reserve in the form of questions, followed by solo walking, then group sharing. The team shared how relaxing and safe the environment felt, and how this radically improved their ability to reflect.

River of Life – with Care Creative

After the reflections, Care Creative facilitated a River of Life process where the team plotted their journey of 2020, identifying challenges, fears, dangers, triumphs and learnings they encountered along the way.

River of Life process

4 Doing nothing – with Theresa Wigley

We took a day to go to the beach. Not to think about anything, or process anything, purely to relax and have fun. Why? Because the value of nature spaces, safe spaces, clean spaces, beautiful spaces (spaces that feel safe enough to completely relax in) have proved time and time again to have profound effect on the quality of our interactions and observations. (We also spoke about the difference between those who can afford these luxuries regularly, and those who seldom experience them, and the impact that this has on one's life.)

Day at the beach

5 The Three Horizons Approach – with Nadia Sitas

We started our session with a walk from Muizenberg to St James, where we paused, looking out at the tidal pool and rocky shores. We were all tasked with finding something to bring back with us from this walk: something physical, a visual image, a memory, a metaphor …

Grain of sand: a feeling that sometimes we are so small compared with the enormity of the challenges we face
Photo of water on hands: a feeling of power and connection
Wet skirt: immersing oneself in the water knee deep - carrying the salty weight and the wetness for the morning
Memory of walking over sharp shells: painfulness and tiredness
Dune spinach: nature's gifts are all around us
Octopus: sometimes need to camouflage to cope, to blend in, to transform with the surroundings
Sentimental previous gift: of a shell from one team member to another
View of a mountain: you can see the success and beauty at a distance, but getting there takes time

Walking from Muizenberg to St James

Three Horizons provides a visual framework for thinking about how issues play out over time within short, medium, and long-term time horizons. The three horizons are defined as:

1st Horizon

This horizon emphasises what's known, what's taken for granted, what we (often wrongly) assume 'will always be with us,' and focusses on maintaining stability. This is the current model that is in decline and will be soon outdated.

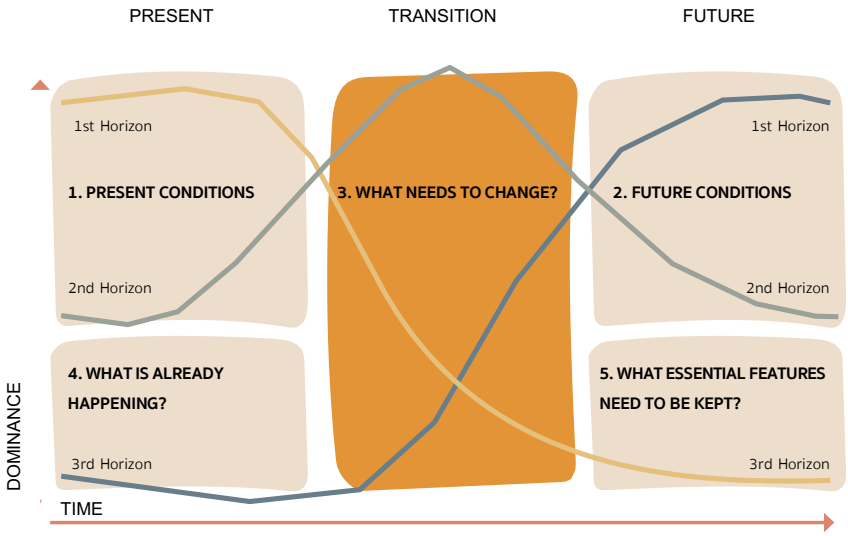
2nd Horizon

This horizon emphasises incremental adaptation, actions resisting change, and practical new innovations to create opportunities from change. It may provide a more approachable alternative to the declining 1st horizon, but it is a transition to the 3rd horizon.

3rd Horizon

This horizon emphasizes the new, the transformative, the visionary, and the break with past traditions and current assumptions. This is a clear sign of the future we can see today, of emerging practices which are not yet quite ready to become mainstream.

Setting up for the Three Horizons process at The Commons Studio: Nadia Sitas, Nolubabalo Bulana, Elona Mteto



PRESENT ⟷ TRANSITION ⟷ FUTURE

SpazaHub is a youth-led incubational space that strives to make change in the community

SpazaHub is a youth-led incubation space that strives to make a difference in our community, we want to have dialogues around social issues and bring awareness

SpazaHub is a youth-led organization that is uplifting the youth of Vrygrond with skills and entrepreneurial learning for them to sustain themselves

1. PRESENT CONDITIONS

- Broader situation in Capricorn
- Can't change people
- Freedom of expression
- Dishonesty
- Jealousy within and outside
- No direction
- Sugar coating
- Finding our space
- Bad vibes, jealousy
- Elephants in the room ($)
- Undermining
- Ageism
- Anger
- Run away
- Movement- we're not saving the community
- Rumors
- Personal issues
- Not coming with solution- end of fight
- Conflict of interest
- Jealousy
- Anxiety
- Obstacles along the way
- Rage
- Switch off
- Belittled
- Low energy & passion
- Sad
- Caring about someone else's feelings
- Vendetta, attitude
- Gossiping
- Frustration
- Movement as change- from being part of community
- Consensus on who we are
- Punctuality & deadlines: I hate it when people are not being reliable- e.g., when you are not delivering on something promised
- External: group conflict, money, attitude/behaviour, community politics, pressure for failure
- Self: Tired, sad, fed up, anxiety, giving up, bottling things up

2. FUTURE CONDITIONS

- No corruption
- Putting Capricorn on the map
- Employment
- Unique and strong youth movement
- Be seen
- Justice
- Music
- Fun
- Spaza Hub - link in accessible community space
- Revive the passion
- Accessible working for good
- Engagement
- Umbrella
- Playful
- Established: operating, registered, legal space
- Excitement
- Coalition of change- SpazaHub at the centre
- Harmony
- Understanding
- Be like kids
- Sparking conversation
- Spirit of Ubuntu
- Love
- Change
- Care
- Conflict resolution
- Friendship: sisterhood/brotherhood
- Feel free & Be free
- Smooth way of working together
- Success
- Responsible
- Money

3. WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE?

- Revive talents
- Bring in more hands
- Find out what community wants
- Fair challenges
- More learning
- Success & Money
- Collaboration
- Focus attention and energy
- Time
- Training next generation of youth
- Rain, rich soil, learning to nurture growth
- Build Skills: communication & confidence,facilitation for holding spaces, mentorships, learning opportunities, mediation, conflict resolution
- Build trust
- Talk around Gender Based Violence(men and women groups)
- Constructive engagement
- Opportunities to raise concerns
- Opportunities to collaborate
- Following up
- Convene spaces for dialogues: women & girls circles (GBV), brotherhood/sisterhood, Imbizos,men's circles
- SpazaHub: equipment (containers) space, move from temporary to permanent, more hands, vibe & energy, be able to move drivenby mission
- Ignore the negative energy, but still focus on community engagement and empowerment
- Knowing when to listen & ignore - stay connected to community

4. WHAT IS ALREADY HAPPENING?

- Supporting community kitchens
- Received funding
- Communication strategy
- Coalition
- Dialogues on GBV
- Looking & visiting existing initiatives

5. WHAT ESSENTIAL FEATURES NEED TO BE KEPT?

- Fire
- Passion
- Spirit of Ubuntu
- Leading by example
- Links

6 How do we want to present our findings, and to whom?

As for me I have many interest in terms of sharing our learnings, when one speaks about theatre, I get excited a lot. However I also have interest in writing a blog about our learnings and that alone I think it can help with our social media and that's where we can easily get the audience even those that are far (The World) can see what we have been doing and learning till this far.

– Elona Mteto

For me, I would share our learnings via songs or musical plays. Music is always a great way of learning and sharing information. To share with the world I would write letters addressed to pen pals and share the plays or songs via video.

– Nolubabalo Bulana

I think we can communicate with people in research by writing on social media as well as correspondence that can be spread locally or hold regular public meetings to share information. The people I think we can share this information with I would say first is 'we' as spaza and then go to the kitchens as well as the community and look at world at large, because we said something has to start within us and we can look on the outside world

And we can even publish it into local community radios and also public transportation, and we can reach people at large, maybe handing out flyers hosting events in our neighbouring communities ...

– Nokubonga Nonkqayi

When one dances there are different ways that one can express themselves, through our research we have share our emotions and our feelings. Through dancing we can depict our learnings effectively and successfully. Through dancing we can share our journey through our dance moves. We can dance with our community watching. It can be another way of engaging with the community. While we are dancing, we can make a video out of us, then we share our video on social media to reach more audiences. The community at large can be the ones seeing us. When we are dancing, we will be enjoying ourselves and it will be fun.

– Asavuya Mantongomane

7 Collective expressions: A SpazaHub Open Space Chapter – with Chas Unwin

Chas Unwin, Asavuya Mantongomane, Nolubabalo Bulana, Nokubonga Nonkqayi, Elona Mteto

I facilitate civic space ritual art events with groups and individuals. The artworks are short (five minutes maximum) and highly concentrated.

> 'Civic space' designates any open public space approached from a civic stance, i.e. a stance relating with non-ideological expressions of the interhuman intrigue. 'Stance' refers to a mode of existence arrived at through focused conceptual and practical training.'
>
> 'Civic' refers to an underlying intent to nourish and support collective understanding and awareness through the work, rather than confront and contend via received social dramas relating to a deadly historical politics.

The only shout is one of joy. This does not mean evading trauma but treating it as a dense mass of materials capable of expressive symbolic transformation in the artwork. A surprising joy seeds change.

A conversation with Theresa Wigley led to being tasked with facilitating a public presentation by the Vrygrond SpazaHub Collective of their experience and research during the COVID-19 pandemic. To prepare whatever it was going to be, we would have two sessions of three hours together. The group had thought to use dance or movement.

The group used the River of Life exercise to explain the journey of the previous year to Chas.

Painting the 'River of Life'

At the workshop

The workshop focus turned to shaping and practising the parts; I selected two gestures to be enacted, one from them, and one from my own research. Theirs was of birds; they would become birds. Mine I call embryonic; the whole body folds in on itself as if under attack or going into incubation. Both these 'gestural postures'; embryo and bird, carry multiple meanings to explore physically. Between the two gestures the performer does transitions; the body goes to neutral standing, grounding and becoming self-present before moving again. The act-transition-act-transition structure in this case repeats two gestures to give us a refrain to play with that can be internally explored and externally interpreted in multiple ways. I then designed a spatial geometry for crossing and covering the performance area. Because walkers are using this crossing-space, covering the space geometrically means being porous.

Visiting Thibault Square

On the chosen Friday we worked in the Muizenberg studio and on the brickwork outside before driving to the central city and Thibault Square. Parked on a nearby street, we visited the site for a recce. Security people directed us to the company which manages the site; at first protesting it was not possible, the manager allowed us to go ahead.

Learnings: Notes on ritual

A key learning for me in this project concerns the relation to ritual of this mode of public space performance. The stance I took during the process led to realising I need to take a more investigative approach around what motivates the work, with ritual as only one of its components. Overall what matters are the effects the work may have on its participants (more than on audience), and in this ritual operates as a useful technology for organising self-affect. However the social face of ritual presents very complex crossflows in southern Africa, and I am rethinking the articulation of ritual in the work.

With the dancing I felt it was a different experience. It was really good to try new things, and also to be out of the comfort zone. I really enjoyed each and every minute of it. When we were practising I felt like I was releasing something because he interpreted very well the river of life that we drew so that he could understand what we were trying to say.

– Asavuya Mantongomane

At first when we started the research there was a lot of like writing – we were looking back to where we came from, the challenges and struggles, we were sort of taking everything out while we were busy writing, it was healing, like deep relief in a way. I never thought the research thing would end up in the form of compiling everything into the moves. It was fun and just to be doing something that I thought I wouldn't do. The dance in the public it was kind of weird before but after doing it I felt like I can do it again, again and again.

– Elona Mteto

At first it was like what to expect I don't know how to do it, how to move, but the way he dances or performs was an expressive art and it was very much expressive for me with our river of life and what we have been experiencing. It was also for me very therapeutic, I kind of just was looking forward to going – to put everything else at the back of mind and just focus on my body and soul. I loved it.

– Nolubablo Bulana

It was amazing, absolutely amazing. I enjoyed every minute. Honestly it was great experience. I thought we were just expressing what we went through and then we forget about it. I never knew we could use our past experience into the healing experience through the dance. It really gave me an attention of how people could be so creative and mind wise.

– Nokubonga Nonkqayi

One thing which didn't sit me well and I didn't like it, was when he started saying it's a ritual and all that and then I was not comfortable with that.

– Elona Mteto

While I was busy performing, I felt connected with the dance and I was quite impressed with how I got warm while I was dancing and then my heart skipped a beat very fast. I felt in love with the dance itself and I felt like I needed it for a long time. Honestly, I felt I was doing something that I knew because I was feeling very warm after I did it. And I just had the feeling after we danced if we could just have another chance to do it again.

– Nokubonga Nonkqayi

8 Art as language – with Care Creative

Art exists to connect and communicate with ourselves, each other and our environments. Speaking in pictures, expressing with movement, painting words into poetry, creating a rhythm. Art gives us ways to express, teach, show, heal, envision and inspire. With paint, charcoal, dance, meditation, process or voice.

On this reflective journey, we painted the 'River of Life': the timeline of events and experience in this last year. We painted it twice. The first time was after time spent in nature writing and reflecting. The canvas was big and buckets of paint could be splashed, pens could write down the important bits. Things could be rubbed out, added on or gone over. The story was recorded. The second time was about drawing the 'River of Life' to explain and step into movement. Was this going to lead to performance? Storytelling? How would the choreography be?

Painting the 'River of Life'

We painted a river of life – we took all the anger, frustrations, sadness at different incidents that happened and emptied ourselves







A last process to express was to paint on a canvas board. Each to create their own. Think about the past, the future and the reality of now. But be free to create as you feel. Free as a bird with paint. Closer to shared intention becoming real.

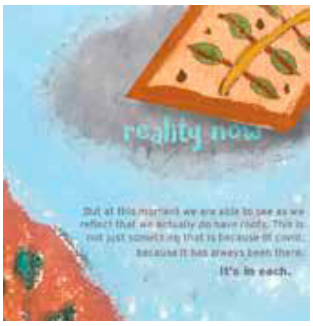
There's a sunflower in there and the sun is shining and there are 3 clouds – with thunder, with rain, and with sun, significant of all the stages we went through, which also makes us grow which helped me to know me and who I am and what are my limits. You can see the roots are longer, cos I feel like we are grounded now and able to see as we reflect that we actually do have roots. Not just because of COVID but it's always been there within us.

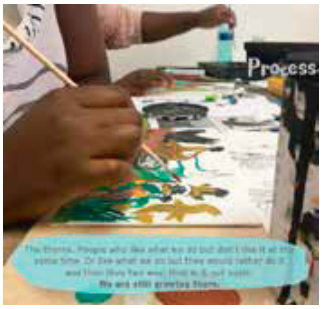
– Nolubablo Bulana

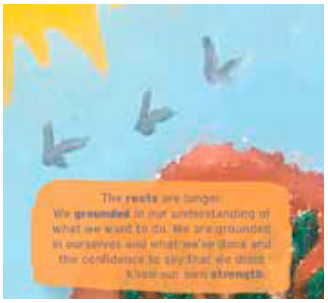
And you can see these two lions in front they represent those that just sit and watch us waiting for us to do a bad move so they can attack us. Above them is an eagle that is very brave and very stronger than before, flying high. That is us. That lady dancing resembles me with that afro there. I just dance my problems away and release every bad spirit I have.

– Asavuya Mantongomane

How can these paintings and this process reach the public? How can we give a window into our experience? What are the important things to communicate?







And so a little booklet developed. With a sprinkle of words, we made a public creative sharing with some useful information.

9 Addendum: Reflections by the space holders

Theresa Wigley: Reflections on the reflection process

It was, and always is, very difficult for me to know when to add my own voice to these processes, and when to be quiet to allow other voices more room. After much deliberation I kept my voice out, and even retracted on the Key Learnings that I thought would be a distillation of the process through my own voice. The thought that made me not do it was that this research would be going forth to other researchers, and they themselves might distil the key learnings from it, essentially making it triple distilled, and I'm not sure if research is like whisky that gets better with every distillation, or if it dilutes? Anyway, upon invitation, I would love to add some of my own thoughts.

Time

Firstly, it felt really good to be offered the space to reflect. 2020 didn't allow a minute for it, and while I'm conscious of my own choice to over commit and over work, it didn't feel fair to expect the same from others, and so on one hand, whilst I wanted to offer as many opportunities to those I was surrounded by as possible, I found myself asking if I was offering too much, thereby getting others into a state of unhealthy busyness, ironically the reflection space itself becoming a demand for time. Luckily, the nature of the sessions was mostly very restorative, and I guess this was my biggest taking there: How do we make our everyday work restorative instead of exhausting? And if I am being exhausted by restorative work, what am I doing wrong?

Trauma

When as a collective we carry generations of trauma, as well as our own very trauma ridden lives on top of that, any work that we do, requires very caring attention. This is the part that exhausts me. Teaching Print Making, Storytelling, Communication Skills, conducting Reflective Research, these things are tiny, in comparison with the level of attention that is required to everyone's emotional well-being and growth. Being able to speak it out loud to each other requires so much trust, bravery, energy and commitment, that the simplest tasks become huge.

Oppression

Then there is another layer on top of that, where I recognize that when your whole life has required all your attention just for your survival, it may have come at the expense of your emotional growth, and you may not yet have built the pathways that lead you to believe you are equal and perfectly entitled to express your true thoughts within the platforms you are

engaging in. Centuries of conditioning doesn't just disappear, it requires huge amounts of work. I feel aware that the fact that I am white and have lived a life of privilege, means that many won't feel comfortable enough in my presence to express completely honest thoughts, and my very presence changes the narrative in the room.

Dancing with discomfort

Some moments of discomfort for me arose around the dance process. Asavuya had found a dance teacher on Instagram that she suggested we use to help choreograph the dance process. This itself is an act of ownership of the process. Then I had a chance encounter with Chas, and when I explained my work and he explained his, it sounded like a perfect fit for the dance reflection, and so I suggested him to the group, and it was agreed we should try him. At this point I wondered if that wasn't a mistake - putting my choice over the groups, undermining the ownership that had been claimed, and the group agreement being as deference to my teacher role?

Second discomfort was around the framing of the dance as a ritual, which has also been reflected on by Chas and Elona. My personal choice is never to frame the work I am doing under any religious or spiritual framework, as I am aware that most groups I work in hold a huge cross section of spiritual beliefs, and so in respect to these views, I keep it human.

Third discomfort was when Chas decided to join the dance. My immediate reaction was that he was putting himself at the centre of someone else's story, but upon reflection with the group, many shared that his presence actually helped to make them feel safe enough to do this public act of bravery.

Whilst observing the dance, through my own lenses, it seemed there was resistance in the movement, it wasn't completely embodied. The feelings expressed by the group immediately after the dance were very unanimous in wanting to do it over, again and again, and I think that that's where it would become more owned and embodied. So some learning there around things not needing to be perfect the first time round (or indeed ever) but an awareness that often we are just creating gateways into future learnings.

Art as therapy

The art processes all seemed to bring about deep relaxation and much release. Words can be very intimidating, and the opportunity to just express yourself without there being a right or a wrong answer felt great. The description of the river of life process "we poured out everything we were feeling" summed that up well.

Safe space

The huge difference in the quality of reflections we had in beautiful, safe, nature spaces was apparent to everyone, and makes me more determined that regular access to these spaces should be a priority to allow enough healing to happen to enable us to actually be able to deal with the root causes of our issues.

Teresa Boulle: Organisational reflections

There is so much that we have learned in the last year as Amava Oluntu. A lot has happened and we are so glad that we all made it through with so much support, trust and with the belief in just futures. The focus of this research project was on the reflections of SpazaHub, I will just list some major points of our own learnings.

Moving at the speed of trust

We did not have any systems in place before lockdown. We believed in moving at the speed of trust, coming up with new plans from day to day, co-creating a new network of carers and volunteers. The fact that we were not a developed organisation actually helped us to get going without thinking of any bureaucratic hurdles or things that could have been in our way. Our very small team and low hierarchical structure enabled us to come up with this COVID response overnight.

It was exhausting to develop new things 24/7, not being able (for all of us) to be out there on the ground and having physical distancing, but we knew how important it is to bridge divides in new ways and that any new systems may be able to last ... it was such an important moment to #buildbackbetter, we could not have been holding back or remained silent. Being part of the Community Action Network helped us all realize that we are in this together and that each neighbourhood can make a huge difference in helping each other to fight the virus and the extreme unequal situations.

Community development

The first 2 months were filled with the ubuntu spirit – we all proved that co-creative, resource-oriented and people-led development is the way to go. Community based help within and beyond our own neighbourhoods was something some of us were longing for and now it was like a moment of opportunity to connect more people and networks, and to build lasting friendships and relationships.

The fact that we were not extremely involved with the Vrygrond Community Trust and the existing 'traditional' structures before allowed us to do what we did. Our COVID-19 response resulted in a joint initiative because some of our participants of a running changemaker project were wondering what they could do to fight the pandemic. We did not think too much before getting active with the youth from Vrygrond, Theresa took all her energy and time to get active together with the youth because it was the right thing to do at that moment. There was no time to think nor to be strategic about things.

I dare to say that if we would have known about the extremely corrupt and complex circumstances in the community before, we might have not done that step.

The fact that we, an external entity, entered the community with donations and funding led to difficult developments which we did not foresee. We learned that especially in this small and diverse community, systemic issues and scars from the past have left people with deep sorrow, trauma, jealousy and anger which are hard to deal with, especially as an external and 'new' stakeholder. The community is suffering from poverty, violence and unemployment and as soon as money is involved, people tend to become greedy or jealous.

Youth empowerment

I second what Theresa said about how much time and efforts it takes to deal with the personal trauma and problems that our youth carry from day to day. We have accompanied the group from day 1 and have extreme respect for what they have come up with and how resilient they have been. There have been a few moments when we sat together and did not know what to do, after harassment by community leaders or threats by community members. Is it worth it to continue if youth are not appreciated and acknowledged? Shall we support them in this struggle or is it a push into the wrong direction of self-destruction?

We do keep on telling them that they have the power to change and that they have done so well thus far. We try to teach them communication and conflict resolution skills that will help them in the future. The time of reflection has helped us to give them the chance to learn more about the significance of reflection and to realize the key learnings which are so powerful. We have been trying to connect the team to specific mentors and trainers, e.g. on leadership trainings as we could not take on everything and there is just so much need for training and mentoring ... we feel that it requires more people getting involved themselves, connecting with youth directly, taking their own initiative. it's a societal responsibility to restore relationships and share our skills and knowledge.

Organisational support

We really appreciated the way you from communicated with us. We felt appreciated and heard. As an organisation with a focus on supporting youth from Vrygrond but not being based there, we keep ourselves in the background and don't want to talk much about the work we actually do. It felt good to get acknowledged by receiving this funding – to get the precious time to sit and reflect on so many things. It was a big gift.

Philanthropy (focusing more on the lockdown)

The pandemic enabled a new way of giving: people started to help in different ways - with time, talents and money in their very local neighbourhood. A lot of people from Muizenberg expressed that they can't be on the ground but they really appreciate our work and that they know that their donation enables us helping our direct neighbours. People started to give with trust without much expectation. This allowed us to use donations more freely without feeling like we have to report back necessarily (which is obviously important, but it requires administration and communication which requires capacity that is not always there). The COVID-19 response strengthened our credibility in and around Muizenberg.

Donations started to fade quickly but we know that if there is a crisis, the whole community of Muizenberg is an incredible support for those in need.

There are many more learnings we take away as an organisation – on the micro, macro and meso level – so many experiences we could share about the COVID-19 response in general. However, I think it is here more about the deep learnings and experiences we take away as individuals and those stories have already been shared.

Claire Homewood, Care Creative: Reflections

Witnessing

Sharing a studio with Amava Oluntu in the lead up and beginning of Lockdown allowed me to witness the group shift their focus from Vukuzezele to kitchens and Level 5 response. I observed, listening mostly into Theresa's experience as it unfolded. My own response felt like it intuitively needed to hang back, observe and allow time for things to sink in before I took any action.

Being inspired

The action I took was directly inspired by what was happening in Vrygrond and the way Amava & Vrygrond United for Change was approaching food security and support. Muizenberg's initial response of packing food boxes (to get people through 21 days) didn't really make sense for me. I waited until what felt like a more purposeful response. I was inspired by the way the group was working together, meeting the challenge and weirdness of what was happening. The idea of mobilising kitchens, bulk buying ingredients and cooking in bulk made sense to me as a more sustainable approach than handing out limited boxes of ingredients. Muizenberg Community Kitchen was born through direct inspiration from Vrygrond.

Engaging

Through our kitchen efforts we criss-crossed with the Vrygrond crew. Supplies were coming through our kitchen base, the unpacking, packing and unpacking of food supplies was all happening at a rate. It required substantial people power. Relationships were being built.

Holding space

I remain in awe and respect of what SpazaHub developed and held. I was very happy to be part of this reflective process. I had some idea of what they had been/were going through but would never attempt to say that I could understand fully. I enjoyed all our sessions together and getting to know the group more. It's hard to hold space for things that feel beyond/above/way-bigger than me. Layers of complexity that need multiple unravels to fully emerge, let alone heal. But the process was good, and I think the diversity of spaces, conversations, and nature connections and activities gave the reflection the much needed time it deserved and what a gift to have had that time.

Creating together

I love creating with others, I love creating opportunity for others to create. I loved the creative process of the reflection. Loved getting messy with paint on the vlei or offering multi-coloured writing implements to get the story down. But my favourite was when the team themselves asked to create. We set up a studio for the morning: art supplies, snacks, tunes and good vibes. I loved the morning and witnessing everyone in their own creative space, happily making sure they had what they needed. I think their paintings were beautiful and they led

directly into the making of the booklet, with a sprinkle of words by Nolu (she missed the painting but drew at home).

Nadia Sitas: Reflections

How this project landed for me – short personal prelude to the process

Over the lockdown period I became increasingly in awe of the Amava Oluntu and SpazaHub team. We had worked collectively through networking around food solidarity and support through my involvement in the Muizenberg Community Action Network, but my efforts paled in comparison to the dedication that emerged as a groundswell from Vrygrond and Capricorn and in support of the Vrygrond kitchens. As the academic and research world which I've been immersed in for over a decade needed to pivot to semi-function within new modes of online, remote working, I was approached more and more by collaborators and funders in the global North to help them document what we were witnessing and living through in the global South. Data still needed to be collected, research still needed to happen and most of it seemed extractive, opportunistic and 'othering'. I distanced myself from most of these requests and felt disconnected from my research world. I work in the field of understanding resilience, transformation, complexity and change, and it was playing out before my eyes: in the big pots that were being sourced, bought and swiftly put into use feeding hundreds, the new solidarity networks sparking, the truckloads of vegetables being sorted through chains of people, the innovation and responsiveness to new realities, but 'researching it' felt wrong. I felt I would be unduly benefitting from the hands and hearts working at the frontline to keep food flowing in my neighbourhood- these were not my stories to tell. When the TESF call was sent through I thought, here is an opportunity to maybe leverage some of my privilege in understanding the research and funding world to provide a space for the team to take a (supported) breath and reflect and (re)imagine how their futures could be shaped by pockets of experiences in the present. It seemed like an intentionally gentle offering to collectively slow down after a year on the go.

I made an offering of running a futuring process with the team, but otherwise I was there to support the process, without a research agenda, and would facilitate whatever needed to surface to find space to emerge.

The uncertainty of 'being researched'

For many this was the first time they had been part of a research project. Questions on what research is surfaced. Is it four white walls, sitting across a metal table, people in suits with clipboards? Apprehensions around the performative nature of being a research subject emerged, as did concerns about extractive research. There was a big collective exhale when this project design and methodology was mentioned – "can we just sit and relax into this?" We arrived at an agreed goal that these shared weeks need to be a process that is useful for those participating – every and all voices count in shaping this process, in suggesting alternatives, putting on the brakes when things are unclear and sharing as openly as they were able to

in that moment. There was an unspoken agreement that this process was SpazaHub's – it needed to be as authentic as possible in terms of voice and representation. This was hard on the broader group TESF calls when there was a feeling sometimes that we should be offering more – especially the non-SpazaHub participants of the research team.

Jargon! – academic words used (un)intentionally to silence and alienate

There were awkward silences in the beginning when words were used flippantly with the expectation that everyone has a shared dictionary. We, as a core team, made a pact to call these words out, to isolate them – to name and shame them, and decided to rather use words that could unlock and surface unspoken thoughts that had been bumping around in our brains, or simmering slowly, to spark discussion and open up spaces for shared sense-making. It was a challenge to leave my comfort blanket of big words and crafted sentences behind that showed my knowledge of literature and theory – my perceived value that I thought I brought to the space – and find new ways of communicating away from my conditioned and engrained ways of engaging in conversations linked to transformation.

Transformative methodologies

The range of methods chosen to unearth and spark reflections, and learning, enabled the sense of flight which surfaced as a metaphor so often when reflecting on this work. There was an intentional design for reflections to be immersive- to be coupled with sights and textures within nature, with colours from paint and pens, with bodies and sounds for dance – opportunities to explore new forms of expression. I was amazed at how these suggestions were welcomed and embraced with every turn, and still the team reflecting seemed unsatisfied and wanted more opportunities to dance and draw and swim again. It was in some of these moments that there were small glimpses of more honest and authentic responses that seemed a little freer from the trappings of responding to research questions and everyday realities of how power plays out in visible, invisible and hidden ways. How can we weave these practices into the everyday? and into this crazy new world we are facing with remote and online engagement- is it possible to do this type of work without being face-to- face? How can we use creative practices for not only surfacing reflections but also creating moments for interrogating the more systemic change many of us long for?

Embracing humble vulnerability

I will hold the bravery that I witnessed in many of the hard reflections and pain that surfaced for people as they spoke about the year that was for many years to come. There was a level of trust shown in me that I was not deserving of. How can we hold that pain and trauma and discomfort – in all its messiness and confusion – and still move forward? How do we know when to voice our discomfort when we feel things unfolding in ways that seem misaligned to us – or when to sit with the discomfort, because voicing it would burden others and shift the gaze to fixing our discomfort? How can we give voice to others to voice their discomfort? I wasn't sure how to report on this work; as a researcher, that is terrifying. Researchers analyse, synthesise, generalise, link to theory, craft an output – our currency and worth is being able to

do this. For this report a decision was made to take ourselves (non-SpazaHub team members) out of the report and let the reflections from the youth of SpazaHub speak in ways that emerged during the weeks of engagement. This felt to be the most authentic way to honour the process, voices and time and not claim this process as ours. As researchers, how can we weave reflections together so they remain intact and true to the lived realities they came from?

CHAPTER 7

Ubuntu Rural Women and Youth Movement

Ubuntu Rural Women and Youth Movement

Transformative Education for Sustainable Futures (TESF) Narrative Reflection Report

Written by Wendy Pekeur, Vainola Makan and Davine Cloete

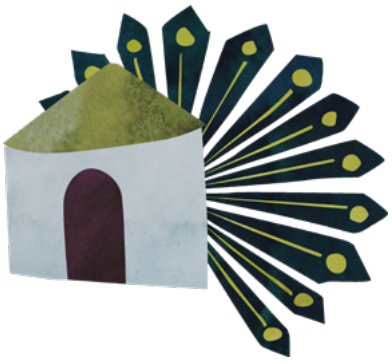
Contents

Acknowledgements

On behalf of Ubuntu Rural Women and Youth Movement, I hereby would like to acknowledge the women from Doornbay, Lutzville, Elsenburg and Klapmuts who participated in the training and the assessment, and without whom this co-created work would not be possible.

On behalf of Ubuntu and the research team, we would like to express our heartfelt thanks Transformation Education for Sustainable Futures (TESF), the staff and research team at Rhodes University and the University of Bristol for administering and sponsoring the research project and selecting Ubuntu as one of the six teams to be part of the South African Hub.

We also would like to say thank you to the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) that is part of the United Kingdom's official development assistance (ODA) and whose aim it is to support cutting-edge research and innovation that addresses the global issues affecting developing countries. Without them agreeing to extend their resources beyond academia to include grassroots community organisations, we would not have had the opportunity to engage in this important and exciting process. We also would like to thank all our fellow members and organisations who were involved in the project and the South African Hub and with whom we connected at our twice-a-month Friday meetings. We learned a lot from you. The research team would like to thank the Board of Ubuntu who believed in them and supported them unconditionally even though the project was implemented during challenging times under COVID-19. We thank our families who were patient when we were busy writing and deliberating over holiday periods that are normally spent enjoying family time.



1 Introduction

This study is an assessment of the work done by the Ubuntu Rural Women and Youth Movement in building relationships among rural women living both in coastal and in-land areas in relation to their access to land and the natural resources they depend on for their livelihood. It explores how their participation can transform social learning processes to make a difference to rural and landless women. This document outlines the background, rationale, objectives, research methodologies and process, the deliverables agreed upon and implementation of the research project. It also reports on the strategy used, possible risks and ethical approaches. It further highlights the key findings and provides an analysis thereof which informs the basis of a set of conclusions.

Partnership agreement

The project is a partnership between Ubuntu Rural Women and Youth Movement (from here on, Ubuntu) and Transforming Education for Sustainable Futures (TESF), based at the Environmental Learning Research Centre (ELRC) Rhodes University in partnership with the University of Bristol in the United Kingdom.

Background and rationale

After submitting a proposal in December 2020, Ubuntu was awarded a grant on 12 January to do research with the aim of transforming education for sustainable futures (TESF). This TESF research is among six projects selected as part of the South African Hub, which in turn forms part of a global project in four countries.

The programme supports collaborative research and addresses the role of education in climate action, decent work and sustainable cities. Cross-cutting themes such as poverty, gender equality, ethics, food security, environmental justice and inclusion issues were explored and provides contextual nuances to the research.

The Ubuntu Board approved the project based on the agreement and acknowledgement that it will be beneficial in three ways:

- It provided the resources that enabled them to release their coordinator to take time out to assess the work done during the first wave of COVID-19, which is ordinarily not possible given the workload and the demands of COVID-19.
- The concept of the project also sparked a long-term interest in research for Ubuntu. They saw the value of building long-term capacity to cultivate a strong community research base in the organisation that is integrated into their mission and functions as a way forward to enable ongoing assessment and research capacity and not be just a once-off research project unrelated to the organisation's overall objective.
- At the Board strategic planning meeting in March, the research project was an important point on the meeting agenda and the Board made the commitment for Ubuntu to train 20 community researchers in 2021 as part of its strategic planning.

Objectives of the research

The project aims to raise awareness about the work that Ubuntu did in the past few months during the COVID-19 lockdown period. It aims to learn pro-actively from the COVID-19 pandemic in order to transform education for sustainable futures, with an emphasis on:

1. Developing skills through paralegal training and Land Rights Workshops, which are needed to support basic livelihoods, food sovereignty and decent work.
2. Learning lessons from informal learning for a 'just recovery from COVID-19' to inform climate action and longer-term transformations for sustainable futures with respect to food security and the land rights of women.

Objectives of Ubuntu's work during 2020/2021

1. To expand the elasticity of rural women and the ability to bounce back in order to mitigate the impact of the both the climate crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic;
2. To build knowledge about land, identity and heritage; and
3. To provide skills training to expand and develop sustainable livelihood options and build self-reliance.

Concept and context

Many women in rural areas – especially the landless, unemployed and those living on farms – are adversely affected by chronic poverty, changing climate conditions and the irresponsible decisions made by policy-makers with lasting adverse impacts on the environment. Even though the circumstances were already dire, the impact of these factors was experienced in much harsher ways during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially with respect to food security, loss of livelihoods, access to education and information, as well as food sovereignty. The COVID-19 pandemic created a crisis where people's struggle for survival became more acute. Women had to engage in learning processes at a faster rate to ensure that their communities are fed and that their lifeline livelihoods are not cut off. COVID-19 amplified the already dire situation of women before the pandemic, and the inequalities became more accentuated. Multiple factors deepened the crisis.

In South Africa, there is a severe drought which threatens access to water, food and energy. Community environmental activists and women's organisations that do communal gardening had to be trained in innovative ways to make climate-related adjustments to better cope with environmental challenges. There was an increase in home gardening, for example, because of the social distancing policies making it difficult for women to travel to a single place and farm as a collective. Those who are seasonal workers had the unenviable task of continuously adjusting to the new weather patterns and build alternative livelihoods. Women also created spaza shops and started to sell things from their homes.

At a global level the plight of women is dire. Most of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals are relevant to this research study. According to the UN's first Sustainable

Development Goal, as human beings, we are already using resources 1.75 times faster than they can regenerate, and unless things change, we will require three Earths to supply our needs by 2050. Drastic interventions are therefore needed to significantly improve the quality of life of women and the rural, landless poor. Other strategies put forward in the sustainable development framework are family planning, women's education and empowerment, which, when approached together, can enable more women to participate in marine resources management and so enhance food security and mitigate the impacts of climate change.

The TESF movement defines education for sustainable development as 'access to a good quality education for all that can facilitate existing and future generations of learners across the lifespan, in formal and informal settings, to realise the rights, freedoms and capabilities they require to live the lives they have reason to value and to protect and co-evolve in a more benign relationship with the natural environment of which human beings are an integral part so that natural and social systems may flourish'. This definition is expansive and makes room for a broader understanding of education beyond the formal, structural and the systemic. TESF believes that at the heart of the change process is transformative and transgressive learning. This means that learning processes, learning systems and learning methodologies must be interrogated, investigated, interrupted and unpacked to ascertain what should be taken forward as useful and what should be discarded as irrelevant in the process of creating 'sustainable futures' (Mitchell et al., 2020).

Ubuntu's philosophy is that education and learning should not only be geared towards achieving career success, but that learning should also enhance the quality of lives of women. Training programmes and learning processes on land rights, environmental, economic and social justice are therefore key to the empowerment of rural women and those living on farms whose needs are often put last, yet in almost all policy documents they are the 'golden' group and cited as the main beneficiaries from government resources aimed at redressing the social and economic imbalances of the past. The training happened also in the context of the Oxfam Training Framework, which is based on the process of domesticating International Land Rights Policies in African countries. In this framework, women's access to land is seen as 'critical to unlocking women's potential to contribute to development' (PLAAS et al., 2020). The Ubuntu Coordinator was one of the participants in the Africa-wide programmes on women and land rights that Oxfam launched a couple of years ago, which developed score cards to measure governments' ability to domesticate international land policies.

Cross-sectoral partnerships that recognise the crucial link between social and environmental issues are important for a better future. COVID-19 has presented unprecedented challenges, reversing decades of development and causing a deep global recession. Never has there been a more critical time for strengthening partnerships and securing the next ten years of collaboration for sustainable development. The international community must foster recognition of the urgent need to end human population growth as soon as is ethically possible and promote greater investment in empowering solutions.

In the absence of prosperity and strong institutions, population growth contributes is related to scarce resources. Empowering women is central to most of the solutions to the most pressing problems in our society, at local and global levels.

Alternative learning systems and processes by women articulate well with 'agroecology', the alternative farming system to industrial agriculture. These alternative systems are geared towards generating expanded and transgressive local knowledge which builds social justice, promotes identity and culture and strengthens the economic viability of rural and urban areas (Kulundu-Bolus and Lotz-Sisitka, 2021).

Peasant agroecology cools the Earth; it requires less energy than industrial agribusiness. The peasant system also helps keep fossil fuels in the ground by using fewer fossil fuel-based chemicals and technologies. In addition, research has found that the wealth of biodiversity within agro-ecological systems makes these systems much more resilient to climate disasters. Agroecology, within the framework of food sovereignty, promotes social justice and equity. In particular, peasant agroecology has strong feminist roots. It acknowledges women as central agents of agro-ecological transformation – on farms and within social movements. Agroecology gives women more autonomy and empowers them within their families and communities. It promotes the preservation of women's material and spiritual relationship to the land' (Declaration by Via Campesina in Mali, 2015).

Women receiving certificates for completing Women and Land Rights training

Elsenburg and Klapmuts focus group

Women from the West Coast sharing their challenges to access land rights during COVID-19

Women from all areas came to hand other land demands to parliament

Our oldest participant Aunty Katrina feels empowered and is reveling in the reconnection to the land of her ancestors

2 Ubuntu at work

Between April and May 2020, paralegal training was conducted with human rights defenders and leaders who play an advisory role in their communities and who are the first point of call in contacting grassroots women dealing with everyday challenges at a local level. The purpose of the training was to improve the women's understanding of the different socio-economic and civil rights available to women and rural people, to deepen their understanding and skills on environmental advocacy, food security and sovereignty, and the protection of labour rights of farm workers during COVID-19.

The trainings helped the 300 women to understand their land rights and how their history of land dispossession has impacted and shaped their identity, their socio-economic situation and status in society. About 291 women from 19 areas attended the Land Rights Workshops. These workshops happened between 29 October and 14 November 2020. Approximately 43 women attended the Rural Advocacy Workshop on 18 November, 38 attended the Urban Advocacy Workshop on 16 November and more than 70 attended the placard demonstration in front of Parliament on 30 November 2020.

The profile of the women involved included those who do not readily have access to information to enable them to access their socio-economic rights, those who are normally seen as 'hard to reach', and whose quality of life is adversely affected by the lack of sufficient pro-poor interventions from decision-makers, which excludes them from the pipeline of economic prosperity.

During the first week of COVID-19 pandemic, Ubuntu developed a humanitarian response together with the women leaders in more than ten communities and created networks and sponsors that have enabled the organisation to feed 2,000 people per day for the past year in several communities that we work in.

Land and environmental justice

One of our rural participants in the training, from the West Coast (outside Cape Town), has been an activist against the thoughtless mining of sand on the shoreline in Doornbay by the Australian mining company for many years. For the past five years, she has been fighting mining bosses and governments to give communities access to meaningful participation in decision-making to protect the environment and to be part of the consultation meetings from which they have been excluded. She is facing a Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation (SLAPP) suit of R14 million. She had also been facing harassment, structural gender-based violence and the risk of displacement for standing against mining the ocean. The Minister of Mineral Resources and Energy and mine owners have in the past refused meaningful engagement and community consultation in spearheading this initiative, amidst allegations of a veil of secrecy and corruption over decisions with a direct impact on communities and of widespread corruption over the past decade in the mineral and energy sectors.

The impact of mining operations on rural communities has brought lots of heartache for communities in mining and coastal towns in South Africa – such as on the West Coast in the Western Cape, Xolobeni in the Eastern Cape and various settlements in the Northern Cape. Concerns had been raised about the manner in which communities are consulted on mining on their land. 'There is often tension between pursuing the economic benefits of mining, and protecting the socioeconomic and cultural rights of people. Some communities rely on the land to sustain themselves through agriculture, and for some their cultural identity is tied to the land' (Meyer, 2021).

South Africa has laws to safeguard the interests of communities in their dealings with mining companies. The Interim Protection of Informal Land Rights Act of 1996 requires that communities provide 'consent' before mining operations can start. The Mineral and Petroleum Resources Development Act of 2002 stipulates that there must be 'meaningful consultation' between mining companies and communities. In February 2021, the high court in Cape Town issued a ruling that strengthens the constitutional right to freedom of expression. The court held that a defamation suit brought by an Australian mining company, Mineral Commodities, and its local subsidiary against three attorneys, two activists and a social worker regarding their statements about its operations, is an abuse of legal process. The defamation trial may still proceed, but activists can now defend themselves by arguing that the court should assess the SLAPP nature of the case. After this ruling it will be harder for corporations to use SA's legal system against citizens and activists to silence and intimidate them when they raise human rights concerns or seek accountability for past abuses (Rall and Mnqondo, 2021).

Profile of the women that we worked with

The women are all from rural, peri-urban and farming communities. They are unemployed activists campaigning for decent work, decent livelihoods, against gender-based violence, access to land, labour and environmental justice. Some of them are social entrepreneurs who make an income from selling their farming produce. They are subsistence farmers who cultivate crops and have livestock. In a context of very high levels of unemployment, they make ends meet by selling crops and clothes, and making jewellery. They are all living under the breadline. At least 50% of the participants are reliant on social grants of some sort, including child support and disability grants.

Many of them are also involved in the food kitchens that were started by the women and supported by Ubuntu when COVID-19 disrupted the ability of hundreds of farm people to feed their families due to job losses and the lockdown regulations.

Research methodology and limitations of the study

The research is an exploration to reveal new insights into the social learning practices and processes that women were engaging in during the Women and Land Rights training and what transformation has happened since the training and what change in the current education and learning systems is needed. Organisations like Ubuntu do not have the time

or the resources to do assessments of this nature, and so the grant enabled Ubuntu to do such an assessment of its work. Despite the pandemic, Ubuntu was still able to focus on its core objectives, such as ensuring women's access to justice, to land as a social justice issue, and to decent work and lives. The grant enabled the organisation to make the linkages between environmental sustainability and the socio-economic well-being of women in communities.

A feminist participatory action research reflexive process was used to gather the information. The research methodology draws on some of the ideas of Schön (1983), who states that reflection is about making sense of issues concerning professional practice and reaffirming or initiating new learning for a positive change to enhance future decisions and actions. He talks about the difference between reflection *in* action and reflection *on* action, and how these reflections can help to foster effective pedagogical practices. Schön (1983) also states that different approaches of reflection are based on previous knowledge which therefore can be used to reframe an issue or topic, along with interventions that lead to outcomes for further analysis. Schön (1983) emphasises the importance of the relationship between theory and practice to improve actions. He purports that there should be a connection between research (knowing) and practice (doing). The Women and Land Rights training was both a reflection in action and a reflection on action. Questions that were explored included:

- What were the building blocks for social learning for the women who were part of the process?
- What can be learned from the COVID-19 crisis for transforming education systems for sustainable futures?

Scope of the research and a sample

The research team decided to do their research for the assessment in Lutzville and Doornbay in the Matzikama Local Municipality on the West Coast, and two settlements in the Cape Winelands District Municipality, namely Elsenburg and Klapmuts.

The Matzikama municipal area comprises 18 towns and villages. Matzikama is characterised by an arid environment, but is served by a life-giving arterial waterway, namely the Olifants River. The river, with its associated canal systems, supports a flourishing agricultural sector that is mainly built on viniculture. In the Matzikama Local Municipality, where the two towns Doornbay and Lutzville are located, the five leading problems are high unemployment, high cost of water and electricity, inadequate housing, crime and gender-based violence, and poor access to electricity.

The two selected areas in the Drakenstein District Municipality, Elsenburg and Klapmuts, are situated in Stellenbosch and Paarl. The residents from Elsenburg, a state farm, have a long history of struggle for housing ownership and are still waiting for the government to give them the title deeds for the houses in which they stay. The women of Flentersklоof Farm, the adjacent farm to Klapmuts, live in the most appalling conditions; some face eviction and none of them has access to clean drinking water or sanitation. The farmer who employs most of them is violating their rights by bringing more people to stay in the housing complex

on the farm even though it is already overcrowded and not fit for decent living. Klapmuts has a high poverty rate and although the community has a garden at the school, access to water was a challenge since the borehole broke. These issues are being looked into. Some women have gardens at their homes. The women confirmed that the site is overcrowded, that access to water is a problem and there is basically no land for anything.

Interviews

Five women in each of the four areas were interviewed. Four additional interviews were held with key community leaders who have played a central role in the training and research process. Due to many women having technological challenges, we decided to do face-to-face interviews in open spaces and outdoors where people could maintain social distancing. The groups were really small, so it was possible to have them in one space and follow the necessary COVID-19 protocols.

Ethical approach

The research process was explained in detail to the participants in a safe space where they could feel free to express themselves. Once they understood the nature of the project, they were requested to fill in a consent form. The consent form included a section where the women were reassured that, should they wish to exit the process, they would be welcome to do so. The report information would be made available and feedback would be provided to participants in an accessible manner, where they would be able to engage with the findings. Permission was be obtained to use information, which would only be shared confidentially, with no direct link to any individual, but rather as part of a collective analysis. No names would be used in the research and the contributions would remain anonymous. The participants in the research would be acknowledged in the report.

Research ethos

The Ubuntu Women and Rural Youth Movement has a strong existing practice of working with communities in a bottom-up way, where the voices of marginalised women are given space to be heard and counted. The learning culture of Ubuntu is that we need to be aware how people learn and make sense of the world, and how they express themselves. It is Important to manage the disconnect between the agendas and the life world of those who do the research and those who are being researched.

The culture of practice and collaboration that shape us is one in which the voices of everyone are important and must be amplified as far as possible. The organisation partners with people who have a similar outlook and can make a difference that will enhance our vision and mission. The integration of diversity is key to the way the organisation works. People with functional disabilities and gender identities participate in equal dialogue, regardless of ethnicity, origin or educational status. Ubuntu embraced the concept of co-creation for the research as it is aligned with its own, existing organisational culture, which is based on the empowering and transformational potential of the product it aims to deliver.

Focus groups

Focus groups were conducted collectively with participants from the Matzikamma Local Municipality in Doornbay and Lutzville on the West Coast and participants from Elsenburg and Klapmuts in the Drakenstein District and Stellenbosch local Municipality.

TESF Hub Networking Sessions

The Ubuntu research team took part in the wider reflective research team meetings (across the projects) via an online platform, with bi-weekly, two-hour meetings for the duration of the project. These sessions were very useful as a model of co-creation and mutual support in the research process. This approach was reflected across the six selected projects and supported the development of the final narrative reports. Each project was expected to deliver a narrative report, supplemented by other creative outputs, that would speak to those who participated in the research as well as to those with whom the projects would like to share their research.

Co-creation of knowledge perspective as a basis for conducting research

Recently, and in the last decade, there has been a move away from traditional academic research that is text based and university centred. For easy grasping – and to include a wider audience, including communities who participate in the research – creative means such as videos, voice notes, singing, theatrical expression representing metaphorical expressions of the topic at hand, and co-productive activities such as, performance, art and video, are increasingly used to better reflect 'the lived experience of those involved'.

'In addition to making the research findings accessible to broader audiences, these participant-produced outputs empower the participants by enabling them to retain greater control over the representation of their experiences' (Beebeejaun et al., 2013, p. 37). The dialogue of our various forms of knowledge is based on respectful listening and on the collective construction of shared decisions. Ubuntu decided to present the findings in both a narrative report as well as in the form of an electronic e-book that will be easily accessible to its members as part of the co-creation process.

The knowledge co-creation process as a learning space

In the research process, an attempt was made to involve the community and participants as much as possible. The process of co-creation made room for including community leaders in the creative expression sessions; when we had discussions and dialogues, everyone's opinion was equally valued. The researchers made a conscious decision to cultivate openness to learning and not be restricted by only receiving information from certain sources, but to be open to the discovery of novel ideas, opinions and relevant information from unexpected sources. Open-mindedness is therefore a key driver in a deep sense – making meaning while ploughing through and interacting with the vast sources of information, wrapped up in the sharing of beliefs, opinions and practices.

According to most co-production and co-creation research theorists, co-production in research must have the following elements:

- Transparent research design and key objectives;
- Active goals (typically to alter the prevalent social conditions or to resolve a conflict);
- A more equal relationship between the researchers, practitioners and communities;
- Participation of communities;
- Mutual learning and interaction to understand issues and create knowledge; and
- Production processes that allow genuine participation at all stages (Pohl et al., 2010; Beebeejaun et al., 2013).

Some researchers hold the view that in this kind of highly co-productive research project, the different stakeholder parties are actively involved in the decision-making processes as equals and, as a result, the boundaries between the researchers and practitioners who participate in research may become blurred (Pohl et al., 2010). Methods can include storytelling, focus groups and keeping diaries; peer interviews are also an aspect that can be explored in the co-creation of knowledge.

Ubuntu decided to include in its bag of methods, the focus groups, interviews with key activists who hold important information as individuals and participant observation, as well as using the information from a preliminary assessment, based on a questionnaire that participants fill in. An e-book with video recordings, audio clips and pictures of the work done in the co-creation process will be included as a community report. There is also a notion that the co-production of knowledge can be used to reach a mutually acceptable outcome. Elliot et al. (2002) makes the conclusion that there are examples in health research in recent years that emphasis in research has shifted from including the service users as 'subjects' of the research to also involving them in the planning, undertaking and evaluating of the research. Even when the overall research design cannot be co-produced, specific co-productive research methods can be included. For example, co-productive research methods such as art, video or performance that do not rely on text can help overcome some of the barriers to active involvement and to incentivise broader segments of the population to participate in the research process (Beebeejaun et al., 2013). While the research attempted to cover all the areas of co-creation, this was only partially possible due to some delays in the project. We achieved some success in directly channelling the voices of the women through the e-book presentation, voice notes and videos, allowing their own cultural expressions to shine through.

Outsider/Insider view

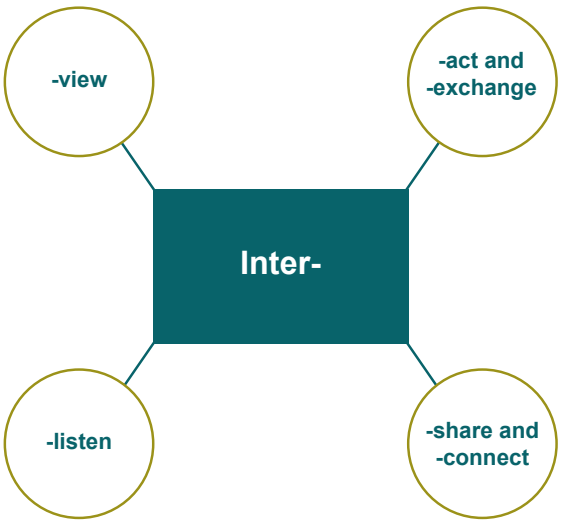
Another popular co-productive practice involves training people with no research background to work as peer interviewers. There is some evidence to suggest that involving service users in health service research as co-researchers (peer-interviewers) can result in 'richer' or more representative data. Positive outcomes have also been recorded from training 'insiders' to carry out peer-interviews with hard-to-reach populations, such as parents who use illegal drugs (Elliott et al., 2002).

Co-creation tools: Methodological tools for community inquiry and engagement

1. Beyond the interview

The diagram below depicts a methodological tool that arose from the co-creation process of assessing the research work on land rights and rural women during COVID-19. It is designed to move beyond the traditional research framework where the 'expert' conducts an interview to extract information – there is very little dialogue and inter-exchange in this traditional approach. In contrast, the 'Beyond the interview' tool, shown in the diagram below, allows the research process to be an equal dialogue, whether it be a focus group with many people or an individual interview. The tool expands the 'inter-view' engagement to include 'inter-listening', 'inter-sharing and inter connecting', and 'inter-acting and inter-exchanging'.

Diagram 1: Beyond the interview



'Inter-view': The interview gives the person listening the opportunity to engage meaningfully to obtain a clear view of what the other person is feeling and thinking, in other words, the particular lens through which the person asks the question. After the conversation, each person is enriched by the 'views', lens and perspective of the other person.

'Inter-act and inter-exchange': This is a method of engagement where people can be busy going about their daily lives in their own environment while they are simultaneously being engaged in a purposeful conversation with the researchers. For example, the Ubuntu research team engaged with the women farmers while they were busy ploughing the land, and at the same time the farmers were sharing information about what they do, how they got the

land, their success with their crops and the ongoing land struggles. One of the researchers engaged with a farmer by helping her rescue chickens that had got stuck behind a fence.

'Inter-listen': This was a mutually beneficial conversation where the women were sharing and listening to each other's stories in groups. This is an extension beyond the one-way listening that normally goes with a traditional interview, where one person asks questions and one person answers. It opens up the possibility for listening for change, mutual learning and sharing; it does not operate within a hierarchical framework where one voice or one ear is more important in the conversation, where they are listening *for* something and not only listening *to* something. This echoes well with the Via Campesina Movement Declaration (2015) that the 'dialogue of our various forms of knowledge is based on respectful listening and on the collective construction of shared decisions'.

'Inter-share and inter-connect': The process of the training on women and land rights conducted by Ubuntu Rural and Youth Movement provided a platform for the women to get together and share their common experiences, hardships and joys regarding their relationship to the land. According to their feedback during their assessment, those inter-connections and inter-sharings comprise the 'glue' that keeps them united in their struggle and enables them to continue and build an even stronger solidarity. It is this glue that aids relationship-building and makes it easier for women to organise and mobilise across regions and provinces, and across their diversities, towards the single goal of women's emancipation. This glue is often ignored as a resource because it is not tangible; but for the women who engaged in the study, it was revealed as one of the most important assets in their struggle for sustainable futures.

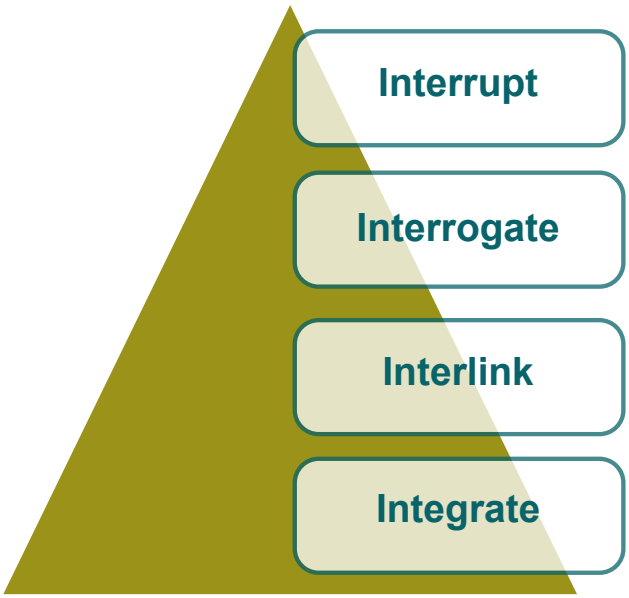
2. Ubuntu Learning Assessment Triangle

This learning assessment triangle (see Diagram 2 below) was designed as a tool of analysis to reflect upon the action and learning, and to provide steps that can lead to deeper insights into (i) how the work can be taken forward, (ii) what the elements were that made the process successful and (iii) what lessons can be learned in shaping the design of future processes to meet particular learning goals and to ensure certain learning outcomes. In the focus groups and scoping meetings, the learning objectives, the result, achievements, relevance and appropriateness of the methods used in the training were interrogated. In the Women and Land Rights Training and assessment processes, there were robust discussions, and in the women and land rights sessions, the 'business as usual' mode of learning without reflection was *interrupted* and *interrogated*. Focused, yet open-ended questions were used in this process. This is different from the traditional survey or interview approach where there is a neat set of questions and a semi-structured conversation. It is in such an environment that interlinkages are made and the social, emotional, political, environmental and spiritual worlds of the women are enmeshed – which is then expressed in some commonly known ritual. With this method, a lot of loud and excited voices are brought to the fore and there is often a reminiscence happening among the women and it becomes a mixture of storytelling, laughter and unstructured sharing that, when something celebratory is shared, could easily erupt into spontaneous singing and dancing, especially the favourite 'Sanibona and 'Mamma Wiwi'

songs. Memories of these conversations later becomes the glue that keeps the women together and promotes solidarity for collective action. And so they live according to the popular slogan – 'An injury to one is an injury to all'.

The community-based researcher provided rich analysis using this tool, drawing *interlinkages* between the social, political, economic and cultural aspects of the research and *integrating* them with the environmental justice and sustainability aspects.

Diagram 2: Ubuntu Learning Assessment Triangle

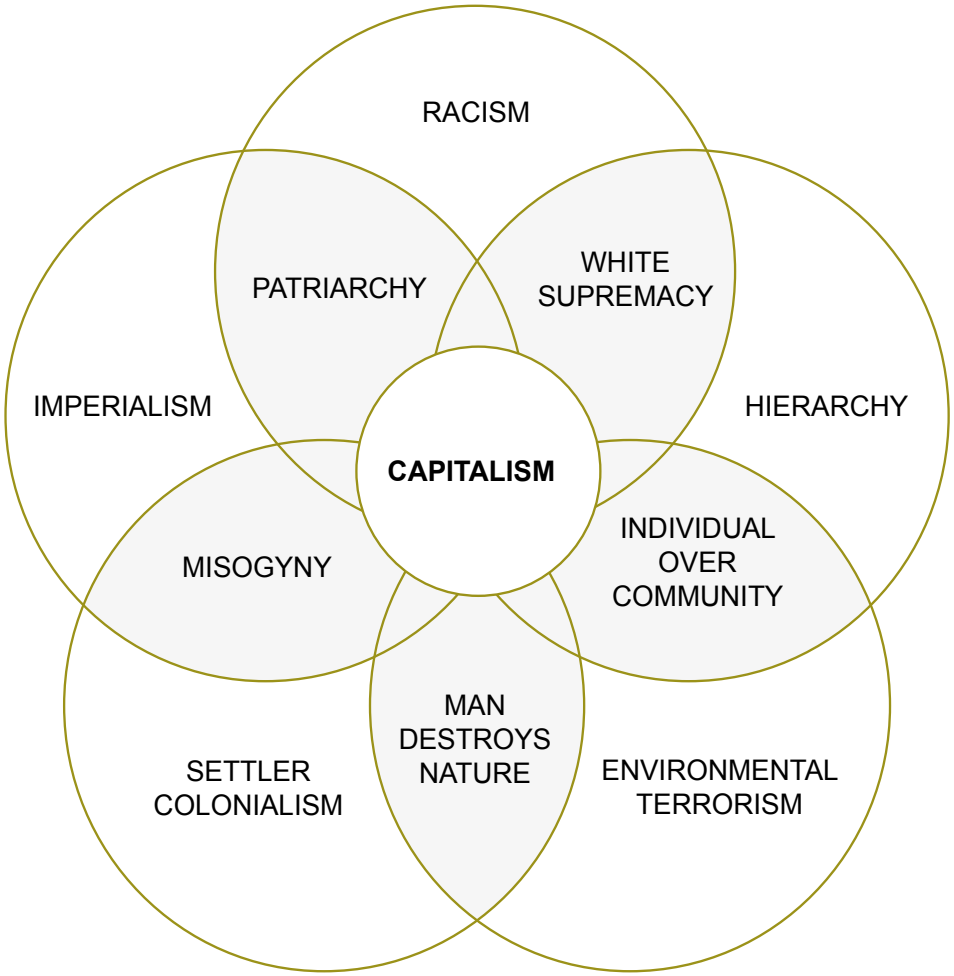


3. 'It's all connected'

The diagram below sums up the interrelationships among different power-interest groupings that create obstacles to the situations that rural women have to face in their daily lives. As black women, the participants shared how their dispossession from their land has created a dependency on white male farmers. Women have to endure many layers of domination through hierarchical relations. While the women are trying to make ends meet through subsistence farming, they also experience white-supremacist domination by Australian mining companies that practise environmental terrorism through their settler/colonial-style occupation of the shoreline without consulting local communities. The patriarchal forces in government are enabling the capitalist mining magnets, and it is alleged that they have a vested interest in the government tenders channelled through local government, making it difficult for communities to appeal to government officials to do the right thing.

Diagram 3: 'It's all connected!'

IT'S ALL CONNECTED



Women have to battle with white and black men in order to acquire and farm on a piece of land because the men are resisting the fact that women can plant and work on the land. The imperialist impulse is visible in the mining company MSR, which is attempting to 'buy' community support with empty promises of jobs for all and by sponsoring most of the small businesses and community projects – thus making it difficult for the community to stand up for environmental justice and challenge the mining operations that threaten the livelihood of future generations. The multiple layers of hierarchy collectively create a situation where rural women's voices are silenced, and this situation can only be changed through education for sustained and collective action for social and environmental justice.

3 Findings and themes emerging from the focus group interviews

Ninety percent of women that participated in the various conversations and focus groups said that they benefited from the training and that it directly impacted on the quality of their lives afterwards. Some women have resumed their gardening projects, others have got involved in food kitchens to ensure that there was no one falling through the cracks and experiencing hunger during COVID-19.

> The training was really good and was and we learned a lot about rights and where we have come from.' – Woman from Lutzville, on the West Coast 'I know now that my parents had a strong sense of heritage', that we belonged somewhere.
>
> – Woman from Elsenburg

Women building solidarity

Women in the focus groups appreciated the process of bringing all the rural women together after individual workshops, which enabled them to share their experiences and hardships together. They revealed that these close connections deepened their relationships at another level as they started to build camaraderie and a strong sense of solidarity given the many things that they have in common. Lasting bonds were built, and some women shared that it was difficult for them to leave after a rural/urban protest gathering at Parliament and some even shed tears when they finally had to return to their home towns. This closeness was described in the interviews as the 'glue' that will enable them to learn, grow and act together.

> The workshop was very special in the sense that we got to share with women in our own communities about our land as well as meeting women from other areas that we have never met. After the getting together in parliament and staying over together and having had time to share each other's struggles and our joy, we left as a family and even cried when we had to part from each other.
>
> – Woman from Klapmuts

A case reported in the focus groups from Doornbay revealed a story about how women have journeyed from living as enslaved workers to becoming women who have restored their co-ownership of the land. The women from Doornbay fought a battle with the municipality and confronted a situation where the councillor was protecting a male family member to be the sole owner of the land. The women insisted that they also have the right to use the land for crops and chickens as it was state land that belonged to the people of Doornbay. Some of the women who were involved in the land rights training have now started to work the land, planted seeds and have conducted the first harvest.

In 2008, through the Integrated Research Management Programme, the government made land available in Doornbay for communal gardening. The land was well equipped with water tanks and nets to protect the crops and mixed-gender group from the community planted crops. Over the years, some of the older people passed away, land the land was left intended for many years. After a while, a woman who was passionate about planting, Aunty Linda, started farming on the communal land again. A male community member, who claimed authority over the land, constantly tried to get her off the land, claiming he was the leader. He later was found on closer scrutiny by the women to be a family member of the Councillor for Local Economic Development. The family also seem to have a share in many of the local businesses, such as abalone farming giving them undue influence in the community and who, in the words of one of the women who participated in the research, was 'able to manipulate: who gets access to what'. After the Women and Land Rights training by the Ubuntu Rural Women and Youth Movement, more women started to challenge the patriarchal system operating around land management. They told researchers that they felt more confident to address the challenge of nepotism and patriarchal land ownership, and they became more assertive and went to the municipality to demand that they be allowed to plant crops. All they really want is to plant so that their families and the community can have crops to harvest and to help them withstand the food insecurity challenges of COVID-19. The battle is ongoing, and the women again faced eviction from the farm in March 2021. They are currently planning a media advocacy strategy to expose the injustice and what appear to be corrupt practices with publicly owned land. According to them, their advocacy and social learning skills has expanded since the training on Women and Land Rights, and they will continue to fight for land justice in the Matzikama region.

Leadership development

Through the process of the training, many of the women in all areas said that they feel that they can now engage with their decision-makers and farmers on their own without the staff of Ubuntu. Those who did the paralegal training are able to refer people and give them advice based on the training. This enabled Ubuntu to extend its work even further through the outreach work that the women are doing. Women have requested advanced paralegal training so that they can deal with more cases, such as gender-based violence, unfair dismissals and poor service delivery, and overcome the barriers to accessing the social relief grants for COVID-19. This shows that there is high interest and that the women had benefited significantly from the first training. One participant told researchers that:

> The paralegal training of Ubuntu meant a lot for me. It expanded my leadership and now I do not have to contact the Ubuntu office for everything but handle most of the cases myself. I recently handled a case where a farmer wanted to bring male labourers and put them in the same overcrowded house as in with a widow who recently lost her husband. I rallied the community together and we embarked upon several strategies.
>
> These included requesting a meeting with the farmer, contacting the media and getting a legal opinion. The issue was covered in the media. The farmer removed the people he put there and promised that they will put them in a safe place.

Reconnecting with heritage and identity

Co-creation also occurred when women reflecting with us on the process revealed that a sense of solidarity had been developed when they realised that they all had very similar problems with and connections to land, history, heritage and identity. As facilitators, we realised that women became passionate about land again when they reconnected to it in the training. The newly trained women became aware of the powerful relationship their ancestors had with the land and how intertwined land is to our identity. It partially explains the vigour with which they took up their land struggles after the training, knowing that they have the moral, social and political support of those that were in the training with them and the idea of now being part of a group of women as well as the Ubuntu organisation, and that they were no longer on their own.

Connecting the seeds to identity

On 24 September 2020 – the annual celebration of Heritage Day in South Africa – Ubuntu held a celebration session with the theme 'Reclaiming the Power of the Seed'. The women brought a range of vegetables grown from the seeds they were given at the last training with Ubuntu, harvesting them a couple food months afterwards. More seeds were given to women attending the various Women and Land Rights Workshops that were held between October and November 2020.

One woman – who is a leader in the community Davine and who also contributed to research – planted out her seeds in small containers and got a hundred seedlings out of it, which she afterwards shared with other men and women to plant in their backyards. In this way, she is not only seeing to her own garden, but empowering and enabling others to do subsistence gardening and at least grown their own vegetables. One woman had to go and look after family members during lockdown and took her seeds with to the Eastern Cape. She has reported that the seedlings are growing well and in two months' time when she goes back to the Eastern Cape, she will then be able to benefit from the crops. The other women shared their seeds with women who already have gardens but do not have plants. One of the women earmarked a piece of land where she will also start her own garden, which is the only way that she can access a piece of land. In Doornbay, only one woman had land available for planting, and she has had a good harvest.

> I am one of the women from a Cape Township in Gugulethu who had attended the workshop on land. That workshop was very powerful and motivated us to create our gardens. I am now eager to plant even though we only have a small backyard, but we can do something.

Women taking initiative in accessing and working the land

> The Women and Land Rights Training was an eye opener and made me realise that I can own land as a woman in my own right. I am now inspired to plant seeds, grow crops, keep livestock and chickens.'
>
> I asked permission from the school to use a piece of land on the school yard for farming and thy agreed. My recent harvest included butternuts and watermelon. I exchanged crops with the neighbouring farmers for animals for diversity.

– Woman living on a farm between Doornbay and Lutzville

One of the Elsenburg women who used their seeds to plant in a communal food garden said that the lockdown was really tough. Going to the garden every morning gave her a sense of belonging. They could use the vegetables grown in their garden in the soup kitchen they run in the community. She got emotional when she said that just to seeing the smiles on children's faces every day kept her going.

How do women learn best?

Women benefitted from the diverse methods of small groups, participatory exercises and exchange visits with women from other areas to learn commonalities. In one of the focus groups, there was a plea for more visual and more practical methods to explain complex information.

> We need to make more visual illustrations and pictures, because it will enable them to understand the factual information better and make known the interconnections to their every-day life.

– Young woman who attended the workshop in the West Coast.

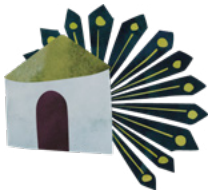
The facilitators realised on reflection that they had attempted to carry out the Women and Land Rights Training in two days whereas the training conducted by Oxfam with feminist land rights activists had gone on for four days. Women do need more time to absorb complex information and to discuss and plan how they will make use of and apply what they learn. In this way, they feel empowered and in control of their own thinking and are not at the mercy of the agendas, interests and plans of others.

What can be learnt from the COVID-19 crisis?

Despite the increase in hardship due to job losses and the upheaval of family life due to school closure and lockdowns, women braced themselves and rose to the occasion as champions and leaders that can step up and alleviate the crisis as best as they could. They took on everything they learnt and displayed extraordinary levels of courage and tenacity, drawing from their own mental and spiritual resources. Despite the fact that there were social distancing polices, women found a way to stay connected in solidarity with each other, and they also grabbed the opportunity of collective learning and mobilisation around land rights to increase their chances at reaching government with their pleas. What is clear is that women are able to learn new things in a crisis situation and they can put that learning to good use. Many of the women who attended the training and who had food gardens applied for the Food Gardens Relief Grant that the Department of Rural Development had advertised in the newspapers, which they all said was as a direct result of the confidence, boldness and strength that they have gained through the land rights training.

Milestones from the Women and Land Rights Training Research Project

- The organisation has achieved our goal by bringing together strong women with great leadership abilities from 19 communities. We carried out all seven land workshops planned.
- Both rural and urban advocacy workshops, with clear outcomes and a way forward, took part in a successful protest at Parliament highlighting our plight.
- A productive webinar took place where the most important demands were consolidated among all the women and a way forward crafted as a collective.
- Several of the women started to take action regarding their land challenges as a result of the training intervention.
- Women from Elsenburg held a protest at the gates of the Western Cape Department of Agriculture on the morning of 30 November to protest against evictions. Women from Klapmuts women held a protest highlighting gender-based violence and the link to the lack of housing.
- There is need to invest in more woman-centred education. The lives of women, their bodies, the environment and their livelihoods are interwoven. It is important that we, as the human species, take care of and protect Mother Earth.



4 Recommendations and conclusions

With the initial exposure to the co-creation process in the research, there is an opportunity for follow-up of more intense training of women activists in land and environmental rights as researchers that can do ongoing fact-finding work, creating evidence-based solutions towards sustainable futures and assessment in the community. This capacity will ensure that women are seen as research community leaders should research training be held with community leaders so that participatory action and co-created assessment of projects becomes standard.

Ubuntu can play an important role in lobbying for well thought through education learning programmes and a three month curriculum with follow-up short courses for rural women to improve their life chances.

There is a need to look deeper into the experiences of rural women who live on coastal towns where mining takes place. The situation and realities have not been sufficiently exposed and revealed, but mining has a severe impact on the communities. A research and educational programme should be embarked upon where women can be trained and can engage in action research to meaningfully participate in exposing their harsh conditions. The possibility of a comparative study between the mining towns on the West Coast and the Northern Cape should be explored.

Ubuntu should consider exploring a partnership with one or more organisations that currently belong to the hub where there are practices and objectives in common.

A curriculum should be developed that includes popular education methods that are specifically targeted at grassroots women to improve their livelihoods and equip them with new empowered relationships with the land that they now choose for themselves after Ubuntu's training intervention. Through focused education interventions, agroecology training is needed with methodologies that speak to the terms and expressions that the women use in their own language.

Conclusions

The research has revealed that no matter how dire the oppression of women is and the extent to which decision-makers and patriarchal and colonial forces will go to prevent them from reclaiming their rightful land, education work on shifting their consciousness as the real owners of the land can be a powerful driver towards tangibly building their confidence, expanding solidarity and changing the material and social conditions of the women in relation to their land rights.

The study shows that women have infinite creative resources if they are given the space to express themselves as thinking beings with the ability to work and create with situated knowledge. Even though the training should ideally have been over a longer period, the benefit of social learning that women received and co-created through sharing created a

spark in them that cannot be reversed. The determination of the Doornbay women who have reclaimed their piece of land, and who demonstrated their ability to grow and harvest in a short space of time, is testimony to that.

In landless rural communities where there are multiple intersecting problems, it is important that education interventions should take a holistic view and include all social, political and environmental dimensions. This is important so that their campaigns and strategies can include environmental aspects from the beginning and not as an add-on afterwards. Women also do not have time for lot of training as their lives are mostly geared towards actions for immediate survival.

The study shows that if the women develop an openness to listening, sharing, interrogating and connecting the dots, their social consciousness will expand, which will translate into them becoming active citizens. The will to learn and create has been ignited and Ubuntu can play a bigger role in bringing a wider group of people together to enable them to secure sustainable futures.

The TESF research process was an empowering process for Ubuntu Rural Women and Youth Movement, enabling the organisation to make an assessment of our work that reveals meaningful insights. For the first time, the organisation embarked on a research project that involved an assessment of its programmes in this comprehensive way. It was also groundbreaking that, at the same time, the organisation implemented a relatively new research methodology and embraced co-creation of knowledge as it core research practice. What made it easy was that the values of the project also dove-tailed with those of Ubuntu. There is a particular appreciation that despite the livelihood challenges, the research illuminated that self-generated knowledge helps us sustain lives with dignity.

The steep hierarchical power relations of the different players that women have to engage with on a daily basis is a barrier to their accessing learning resources to conscientise, organise and mobilise. There is a need for government intervention to provide sustained education and learning programmes in order to expand the capacity of rural women to improve the quality of their lives.

We need to take cognisance of the fact that 'intersectional resonance as space for pedagogic inquiry could mean learning to connect the dots along the harsh lines of a polarised society and to perhaps gain a picture of the whole system at play through the experience of individual struggles' (Kulundu-Bolus, 2018, p. 8)

Women need to be equipped with tools and technology for learning that will support their aspirations in cultivating the land to ensure its survival for future generations. This will capacitate women on their path towards self-reliance and confidence, building towards the goals that they have decided they want to achieve.

A struggle for a 'transgressive decolonial pedagogical praxis' is developing on the continent, among the diaspora and in the common experiences of people from the global South. For Kulundu-Bolus (2020, p. 10), 'what transgressing meant and means as part of a decolonial struggle that moves beyond patriarchal oppression is considered in ways that bring light to the praxis embedded in navigating multiple dimensions of power'.

A multiple strategy of education should be continued in support of the women as they build on the momentum of their outburst in energy for taking on their land struggles. The methods should not only include training but also other empowering methods, such as coaching and mentoring, which will enable the women to further their own personal and social goals whilst pursuing their access to land in the broader political context. Women should be empowered through education interventions to achieve social, economic and environmental justice and flourish as active citizens and be able to break down the barriers in their way. The International Treaties International Conventions that we have signed up to, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), as well as the local laws that protect and promote the land rights of women should be implemented and accelerated. All the rural women that participated in the programme should know these rights and enact them on a daily basis in their lives and ensure that future generations also benefit from the natural and physical resources. The transformative potential of education interventions fosters a culture of self-reliance and innovation during climate emergencies and pandemics for environmental sustainability.

> Our activism on land rights as women should not only include the political and social dimensions but also the gendered and environmental linkages.
>
> – Davine Cloete, a global environmental activist residing in Lutzville on the West Coast.

Women's liberation is integrally connected to their land rights and access to land. Land access can open doors for them that would improve the quality of life in all dimensions. It is all connected, and multifaceted education solutions are the key to a sustainable future.

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Addendum: About the research team

Functions of the research team in the co-creation process

Wendy Pekeur, the coordinator of Ubuntu, coordinated and managed the project and partook in the research process. She also assisted in the analysis of the research information, collated content and material for an e-book, and provided input on the design of the report. Vainola Makan was the lead researcher responsible for the conceptualisation, design, implementation and report writing. She also coordinated the analysis of the research information, collated content and material for an e-book, and provided input on the design of the report. Davine Cloete participated both as a participant observer, point person on the West Coast and research assistant in the co-creation of the research process. She also assisted in the analysis of the research information, collated content and material for e-book, assisted with reporting back to communities on the West Coast, and provided input on the design of the report.

The cover of the original manuscript was designed by Wendy Pekeur. The final report and e-book were written and designed by Vainola Makan. Thanks to Janette Jooste for the technical support with the e-book.

Research team profiles

Wendy Pekeur

Wendy Pekeur, the coordinator of the research project, is an activist with more than 20 years of experience in land activism and labour rights with women on farms. She was the General Secretary of the first women-led trade union in South Africa, Sikhula Sonke. She worked as an organiser for the Women on Farms Project. She is a trainer in labour law and does arbitration and conciliation at the CCMA for unlawful dismissals on farms and evictions of farm dwellers. She served as a Human Rights Monitor during COVID-19 for the South African Human Rights Commission. She is the Founder of Ubuntu Rural Women and Youth Movement and is currently the Coordinator. She has completed accredited courses in Communication, Paralegalism and Management and will be graduating from Cornerstone University in 2021. She has won several awards and recognition for her work, including an Ashoka Social Entrepreneur Fellowship.

Vainola Makan

Vainola Makan, the lead researcher, is a feminist and gender activist who has worked on women and gender issues in the non-profit sector for more than 20 years. She has a BA degree from the University of the Western Cape in Sociology and Psychology. She is interested in the interlinkages of social justice, gender and environmental issues in society, and how groups

of people who are traditionally excluded from knowledge and material resources are impacted. She has done work in several organisations on participatory action research. During COVID-19, she worked on a book project entitled: *Web of Life Disrupted. The Impact of COVID-19 on Women. A Western Cape Case Study*. She worked as Coordinator of the Young Women's Chapter at the New Women's Movement and is active in the Sisterhood Movement. She does leadership development work with young women, such as on their sexual and reproductive rights.

Davine Cloete

Davine Cloete, the community research partner on the project, is an environmental and feminist activist with more than 20 years' experience. She runs an advice office in Lutzville on the West Coast, dealing with food insecurity, gender-based violence, unfair dismissals and other service delivery issues on a daily basis. She is an agroecologist and believes that food security can only be guaranteed if we reverse rapid climate change, mitigate the effects of pollution and aggressive capitalism on the environment, and empower women to plant food in a manner aligned with the principles of sustainable food gardens, where nature is used in the best way, without damaging it as a resource for future generations. She is acknowledged as a respected leader in the Matsikama region as an activist and community-based paralegal adviser. She is a South African representative for the Le Via Campesina feminist environmental justice movement.

CHAPTER 8

Environmental Monitoring Group

Learning during a pandemic

Written by Nick Hamer, Jessica Wilson, Erna Curry
and Mandy Moussouris

Contents

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to the Environmental Learning Research Centre (ELRC) for coordinating the Transformative Education for Sustainable Futures (TESF) process. The TESF funding is greatly appreciated, as it has given the Environmental Monitoring Group (EMG) an invaluable opportunity to reflect on our work and experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. The collaboration and support from UCT colleagues are greatly appreciated and have been vital to the success of this work. The ongoing support from the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SSNC) and Olof Palme Centre (OPC) has also supported the ability of EMG and the Western Cape Water Caucus (WCWC) members to carry out our work in communities in Cape Town and further afield. We acknowledge that none of this would be possible without the continued commitment of activists who, under increasing pressure, are struggling for a better life for all.

1 Introduction

The Environmental Monitoring Group (EMG) is an environmental justice non-governmental organisation (NGO) based in Cape Town, with a focus that spans issues relating to climate change, water and agroecology. A key principle highlighted on the EMG website is:

> EMG believes that a strong civil society is necessary for any social, political or economic change. The strength of civil society is not dependent on its engagement with a particular issue, but on its ability to learn, mobilise, network, analyse power dynamics and embody and practice the very values it advocates.

With the above ethos in mind, in 2018, EMG embarked on a partnership with academic associates from the University of Cape Town (UCT) and civil society activists from the Western Cape Water Caucus (WCWC). Of particular interest to EMG, and this Transforming Education for Sustainable Futures (TESF) project, is how social and environmental justice issues played out during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and what implications there might be in moving towards a 'just transition'.[1]

TESF funding enabled EMG to document a 2019–2020 'learning history', which tracked the shifting issues, participants, organisations and relationships over time. This process surfaced insights into urban resilience, water governance and social-movement building. This learning history drew from reflections, conversations and notes made at the time by EMG, with documentation from that period having been drawn upon and consolidated with follow-up interviews.

This report briefly considers key events and learnings that were highlighted by reflecting on the AXA partnership between 2018–2020.

Planning Action Learning with Swedish partner ABF

1 EMG understands 'the just transition' as the essential movement to an equitable society alongside quickly moving to zero carbon emissions.

2 The EMG WCWC-UCT partnership

AXA and the Action Learning Plan

In 2018, Gina Ziervogel (African Climate Development Initiative) received funding from AXA in recognition of her resilience work to date and to contribute further to research on urban sustainability, with a particular focus on water, cross-scalar governance and resilience. This provided the catalyst for an action learning research partnership between the University of Cape Town (UCT), EMG and the Western Cape Water Caucus (WCWC). The process was designed to benefit all three partners through increased knowledge of urban water governance and factors determining resilience, as well as tangible changes in people's living conditions and networks of engagement.

In January 2019, three EMG team members started an action learning partnership with a UCT team who had a shared interest in how citizens and local communities responded to the 'Day Zero' drought in the Western Cape in 2018. A process to co-design and implement action research with EMG to support the WCWC was then initiated for a two-year period. Initial issues that the process sought to address were:

- **Water management devices:** Relating to the numerous problems which WCWC members reported connected to these devices that restrict the daily allocation of water to households. Issues included unfairness around the processes of installing the meters, as well as faulty meters and a lack of accountability from the City of Cape Town around these failures.
- **The opportunity to influence government and build research capacity:** EMG and the WCWC hoped the collaboration with UCT could strengthen the voice of the WCWC, as well as build research capacity amongst community members.
- **Kuils River Catchment Management Forum (KRCMF):** It was hoped that the process could also re-invigorate the KRCMF, which had recently struggled to meet.
- **Supporting and strengthening the WCWC:** To reflect on and develop the WCWC's own purpose and vision, including the development of research skills, developing outreach capacity as well as building a government engagement strategy.

Implementation of the Action Learning Plan

During 2019–2020, the Action Learning process did not proceed as anticipated. One of the biggest challenges was to maintain continuity of participation by WCWC members. There were questions regarding the degree to which it was 'owned' by the WCWC. Important questions on accountability and commitment were raised. There were also questions on how to design an ongoing 'learning process' for volunteer-individuals when organising at a grassroots

level is challenging and where organisation is relatively weak. The reality of sickness, death and casual income-earning opportunities will always trump 'commitment' to a volunteer process.

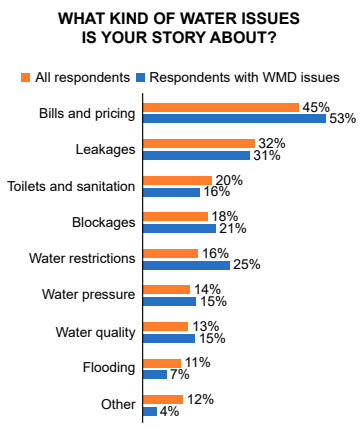
This highlighted the often-fraught realities of NGO–activist partnerships, or in this case, an NGO–university–activist partnership. A particular difficulty was around managing the expectations for something 'tangible' from the Action Learning process. There is often a dynamic where resources are seen as something that a relatively well-resourced NGO or university should be able to provide. The process sometimes struggled to hold this dynamic and one of the biggest sources of tension arose around expectations relating to a stipend provided as part of the 'SenseMaker' process.

SenseMaker: Gathering data, June to December 2019

The SenseMaker group with City of Cape Town officials after presenting

As part of the AXA partnership, the WCWC expressed a wish to learn how to conduct research to collect data to support their work on water-related issues in low-income areas. Discussions led to John van Breda from the Centre for Complex Systems in Transition at the University of Stellenbosch joining the AXA partnership, and research being carried out through the use of the SenseMaker tool. SenseMaker allowed respondents to share their experiences in a narrative form and to indicate the meaning of their stories. SenseMaker uses software to compile and present insights from large numbers of stories, which in this case were collected by WCWC members. Below are some examples of the data generated through the SenseMaker process.

Examples of data generated through the SenseMaker process



Examples of SenseMaker findings

The findings in the above graphs are illustrative of the problems faced by marginalised communities in Cape Town. Respondents reported problems related to numerous water issues, especially in relation to billing (45%) and leakages (32%). The results showed a clear breakdown in getting a response to service delivery issues when they were reported.

These findings set the scene for the context of Cape Town communities before the onset of the pandemic as a baseline to compare with. The results were also a baseline of the expectations for EMG and WCWC members with regards to the Action Learning process going forward in 2020. There were expectations that projects would now have a springboard to focus on Actions to better respond to issues raised and that engagements with the City of Cape Town (CCT) might become more productive. The reports on the SenseMaker results are found here.

Use of the SenseMaker findings

Late in 2019, workshops were held in the communities where the research was undertaken to share the SenseMaker findings with the research participants. One workshop included positive engagements with CCT officials regarding the findings of the research, and it was hoped the process would enable further engagements between the CCT and WCWC members.

WCWC members present the SenseMaker results with a drama

The SenseMaker findings were also made available for use by Action Learning activists, to inform strategy development in the WCWC and EMG, to be shared through academic channels such as papers and seminars and as the basis for a dialogue with the CCT. Despite considerable effort by UCT to catalyse conversations on how SenseMaker could be taken forward, neither EMG nor WCWC were able to respond during 2019. In 2020, it was not clear whether or how they would be able to integrate this research into their work going forward. The alignment with Action Learning did not happen, as the information was not drawn upon to build a response to the issues of concern to the WCWC.

In 2021 renewed discussions have now led to the SenseMaker findings being drawn upon by WCWC, with support from UCT and EMG.

2019: A year of change at EMG

In 2018, the Director of EMG as well as a senior programme manager both left the organisation. Recruiting a new Director ended up being a long and protracted process until Mandy Moussouris took the helm late in 2019. The departure of two senior staff members left a gap in institutional memory and the appointment of new staff led to the blurring of roles, responsibilities and expectations within the organisation. These dynamics compromised the ability of the EMG team to manage the Action Learning process as effectively as had been envisaged. Both Water Caucus members, as well as UCT team members, often felt that EMG was not fully engaged in the process.

It was acknowledged that internal tensions at EMG during 2019 meant they had been unable to hold the process as well as they'd wished to. Several meetings were held in February 2020 between different members of the facilitation team to see how to move the process forward.

Action Learning and COVID-19 in 2020

After the numerous difficulties of 2019, the partnership was once again ready to re-launch a new 'Module 1' of the Action Learning process and was preparing for a training workshop to be held in mid-April.

Planning Action Learning with ABF at Kuils River and Mfuleni

On 23 March 2020, President Ramaphosa announced a State of Emergency in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. South Africa would be in strict Level 5 lockdown from 26 March 2020. And everything was on hold again!

Although access to sufficient clean water is critical to stopping the spread of COVID-19, and people were advised to regularly wash their hands for 20 seconds, for the Action Learning participants, access to water took a back seat to a more immediate and pressing issue: hunger.

> The context of COVID-19 has seen a growing realisation of the importance of local food production to support local food security, with many EMG partners now increasing or expanding their efforts to develop local food production. Although EMG will continue to support community efforts to respond to other environmental challenges, we foresee an increased emphasis in our work in developing greater local food production. (EMG report to funder, December 2020)

At this time, EMG redirected its efforts to helping people get food, alongside supporting the urgent need to access water. They engaged through the C19 People's Coalition partnership and local area Community Action Networks (CANs). The C19 People's Coalition is a broad coalition of civil society organisations that sought to build collective pressure for an improved response to the pandemic from government. CANs were set up by many communities across Cape Town, whereby community members mobilised to support people struggling within their own communities, as well as twinning CANs between suburbs and township areas, as a means of enabling access to additional resources.

This work continued as the lockdown eased to Level 4 in May and to Level 3 in June. WCWC members were phoned regularly and confirmed that their key issue was access to food parcels.

> EMG's community partners have been involved in this emergency work [to provide and distribute food] within their own communities, but have also been impacted by food insecurity in their own homes.
> – EMG report to funder, December 2020

Action Learning visit with WCWC members Makhaza Women Food Growers

During 2020, some of the other initiatives taken and concerns raised during these months by WCWC members included:

- In the Green Park informal settlement, concerns were raised about inadequate sanitation where there were broken un-emptied toilets. An activist engaged the CCT about these challenges and was told: 'You have too many toilets and some will be taken away.'

- WCWC members raised concerns relating to the difficulties in accessing adequate water during the pandemic. EMG worked with the WCWC to produce a Water Access Now flyer/infographic in multiple languages to provide guidance around what to do in relation to emergency access to water.
- Corruption – members noted that food parcels were going to Councillors, their friends and party members, and launched a case with the CCT to try and prevent this.

Left: Mfuleni – broken toilet pipes
Right: Mfuleni – sewage in the street

In early July 2020, EMG once again tried to launch the Action Learning process, though tensions within the WCWC and with EMG still remained after the difficulties of 2019. EMG acknowledged that they had limited capacity to engage strategically with water issues as a result of the very difficult period the organisation had been through in 2019, and that COVID-19 made it hard to work collectively to rebuild their confidence, capacity and purpose. It was also noted that community area structures that would be involved in the proposed Change Projects were weak.

In November 2020, UCT and EMG held a reflection workshop that went some way towards reconnecting the two organisations. We looked at where we have come from (what were our expectations); what we have done (mapping work to date); and what it means (reflection on the three cross-cutting issues of governance, resilience, and organising & organisational relationships).

3 Observations on the process to date

Observation 1: EMG processes

New ways of working

Similar to most people, lockdown led to sudden changes in our working relationships at EMG. We were all used to working together in one office. This environment lends itself to a particular way of engaging with one another, such as popping into a colleague's office, having an impromptu meeting, etc. With lockdown and online working, these sorts of connections were lost, which created new communication challenges around working as a collective. EMG adapted to these challenges by having regular online meetings, which were a space to keep track of our work. Ironically, some of the communication challenges seem to have become more difficult when some of us returned to the office. This meant that the team in the office were able to re-connect with the normal office environment of impromptu meetings. However, this also meant that sometimes discussions and decisions were not adequately communicated to colleagues who were still working from home.

Fulfilling different roles

For EMG, the lockdown created a degree of blurring between the personal, our work responsibilities and personal positions as activists. Given the major disruption to our proposed programmes for 2020, EMG gave staff a lot of space to support local actions as individuals saw fit.

EMG responded to the crisis with a great deal of flexibility, which was valued and extremely useful in the context. We were quite effective at weaving the line of continuing with our work, keeping ourselves safe and sane, and being responsive to community needs in difficult circumstances. EMG discussed and acknowledged this need. We realised that if we had decided to maintain a strict focus on our 'core' activities and only responded to direct water and environmental issues, our reputation would have been damaged and left people isolated. However, there has to be a balance and we are still learning how to manage that.

It is also important to recognise that a lot of the engagement takes place in quite an informal space, where it is easy for boundaries to be blurred between what is a 'project,' what is a new community issue and what is a personal issue – and there is often no neatly defined boundary to separate a 'project' from other community issues.

It does seem fair to say that COVID-19 suddenly saw a major shift in what we and the projects were expecting to do in the process. This certainly didn't help in creating a conducive space for the Action Learning process. A reflection here is that shocks such as COVID-19 do add to uncertainty, so we need to ensure that learning processes are adaptable to such uncertainty, but also ensure that they remain relevant and that expectations are clear and understood.

Observation 2: Movement-building opportunities

It is important to recognise that a disruptive crisis, such as COVID-19, can bring about opportunities for change. CANs emerged as an interesting 'movement building' phenomenon during 2020. As individuals, many of the EMG-WCWC-UCT team became more engaged as in supporting local CAN initiatives in our own communities, as well as seeing the opportunity to build connections across diverse communities.

Reflection and adaptive response: An external shock means more localised responses can be built, and cooperation between communities can increase. Nonetheless, an enormous amount of hard work is required to sustain these activities, which involves actively dealing with the multiple divisions within society, along racial, nationality, sexual identity, class and gender lines.

EMG has built these issues into our strategic planning going forward, where we are seeking to build alliances with partner organisations, as well as building solidarity across communities.

Observation 3: Community skills needs

Use of technology

As mentioned in 'Observation 1' above, lockdown led to changes in working relationships, including the need to work online. WCWC activists were initially isolated by the restrictions on physical meetings but were quick to engage enthusiastically with Zoom meetings. Zoom meetings were a space where participants learned together in how to use the technology, regardless of whether they were WCWC activists, EMG staff or academics. Zoom meetings tended to start as quite a playful space, where we shared tips on how to use the technology.

A team meeting on Zoom

Whilst the ability to adapt to and use such online platforms demonstrated the non-hierarchical nature of such shared learning, the same was not true with regards to having access to data and a stable internet connection. The high cost of data and limited access to reliable 4G connections are ongoing barriers to inclusive community engagement processes.

Other technologies, such as WhatsApp groups, played a critical support role for communicating and organising during the pandemic. EMG adapted our Water Access Now flyer so that it could be distributed on this platform to the WCWC members and to other community and working groups such as within the C19 People's Coalition.

Food growing skills

The lockdown saw a major increase in the need for food growing skills. The Action Learning process saw the issue of access to food and food growing dominate community needs. This example illustrates that new contexts (such as COVID-19) can also open up opportunities for communities to share skills and knowledge and, potentially, to work across communities.

Food growing in Burundi and Makhaza

Reflection and adaptive response: As an organisation, the experiences of the pandemic have led to EMG being far more actively involved in engaging with issues related to food production, which was previously not seen as part of our core focus outside of the Rural Livelihoods programme. EMG now sees agroecology as a core focus, which is in part the result of our experiences during the pandemic.

EMG has continued to use Zoom and other platforms for holding online meetings with WCWC members. Special effort is made to ensure that participants are provided with data to attend the meetings and that minimal bandwidth is used, such as by keeping cameras switched off. These meetings have become a space for maintaining contact and continuity when physical meetings have not been possible. We also continue to rely heavily on WhatsApp for effective communication with members and each other.

Observation 4: EMG role as a knowledge broker

EMG's role as a 'knowledge broker' was clarified in our reflection on the lockdown period. During 2020, EMG logged the numerous queries and requests for support received as the pandemic took hold. EMG then provided useful information and support on an extremely diverse range of issues. Examples include: a request for information on how homeless people could access food and shelter during lockdown; how sex workers could be supported after

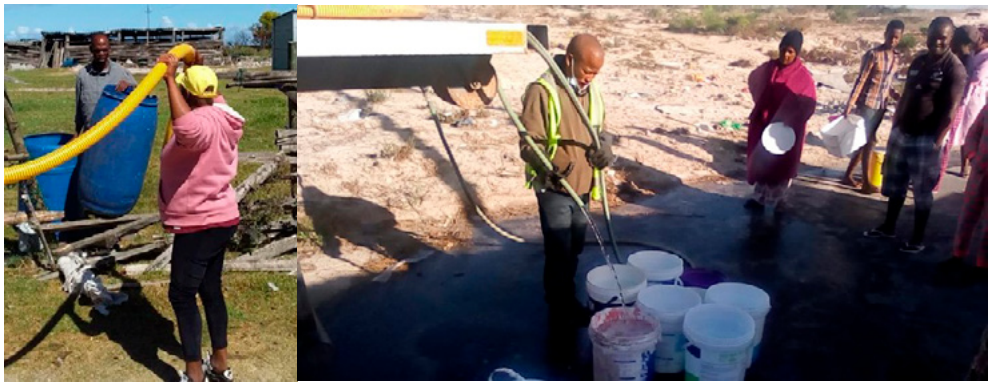
the loss of income during lockdown; and a query on how to report a corrupt Councillor accused of stealing food parcels. EMG was able to respond by assisting community members in finding the information and support to respond to these queries.

Reflection and adaptive response: This observation has been really useful to EMG for reflecting on what our 'value' as an NGO is to others. It is understood that this can be an extremely important function, where community organisations either do not trust official sources of information or struggle to access useful information.

Observation 5: Government processes and skills

Lockdown highlighted positive and negative experiences around government engagement. An extremely negative example was when the Green Park Action Learning project sought assistance regarding their difficulty in accessing well-managed sanitation facilities and approached the City of Cape Town (CCT). Instead of engaging further on the issue or providing guidance or support, the CCT responded that the community had been 'over allocated' toilets and said that the toilets should be removed.

Not all experiences with the CCT were bad. Engaging with CCT officials around the provision of water tanks led to positive results in some informal settlements in Cape Town. In this case, the National State of Disaster emergency meant that certain rules were relaxed and so the CCT was able to legally 'justify' providing some informal settlements with better access to water through the delivery of tanks and water via tankers. The CCT had argued that it was not permitted to deliver water and sanitation services to settlements on private land, but the State of Disaster now enabled this emergency provision of water.



Water delivery in Burundi and Makhaza

Reflection and adaptive response: This points to the need for clear communication and for citizens' rights to be understood during times of crisis. Although this is a governance issue, it speaks to the need for institutions to develop the sort of skills that are adaptable to changing contexts. EMG has a valuable role to play in supporting people to understand their rights in changing contexts, and also to mediate conversations between projects and authorities to resolve arising challenges. In terms of governance, this point also illustrates the shortcomings of weak communication skills and the prevalence of 'technicist' thinking in government.

4 Conclusions

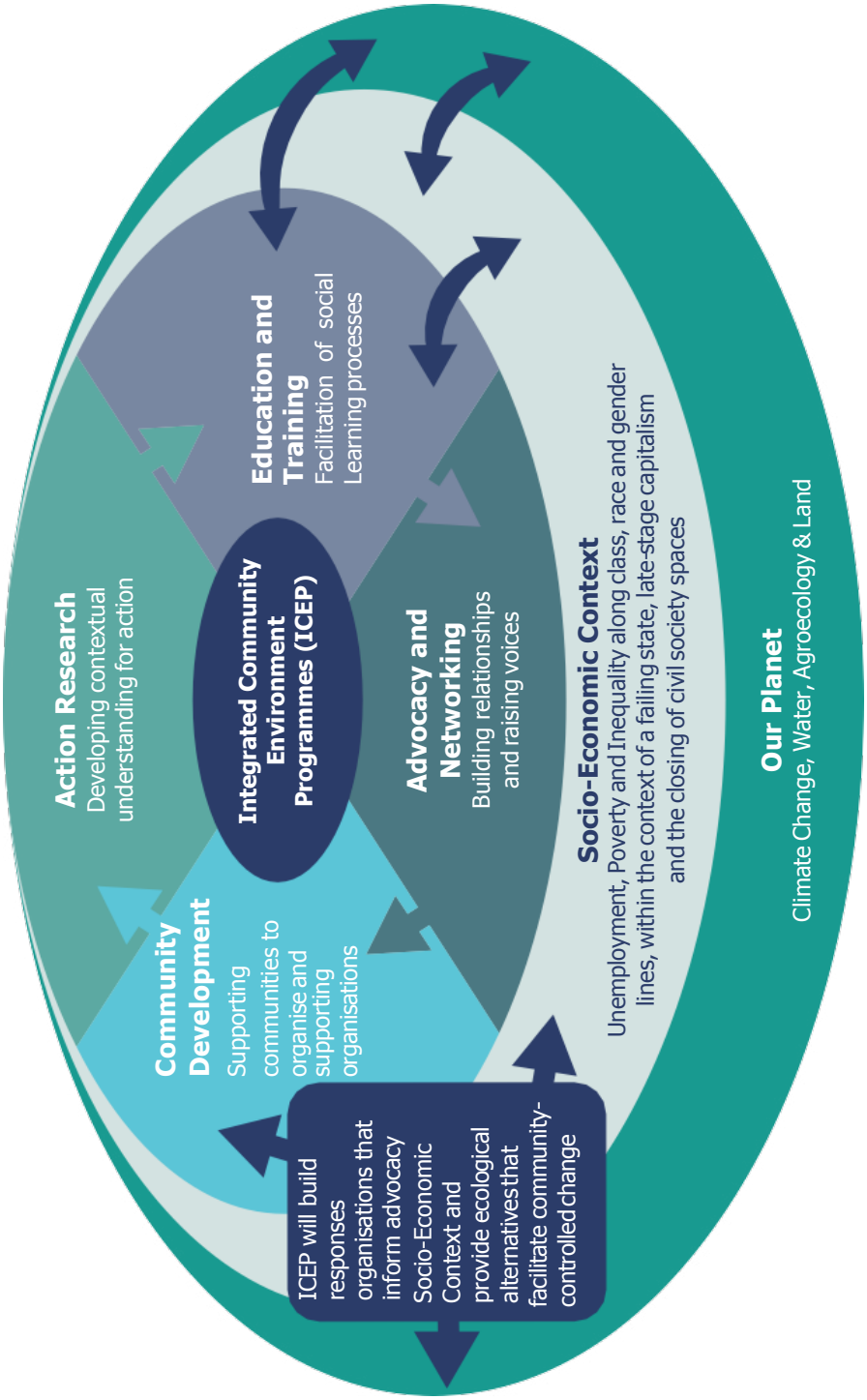
In this process, EMG did a lot of deep learning and reflection. The comprehensive documentation of 2020 during the TESF project was a valuable learning process for us, which has greatly assisted our strategic planning processes and in designing a comprehensive new funding proposal for the next five years. The TESF space has given us a lot of room to honestly reflect on what EMG is as an NGO and how we can action the changes we wish to inspire in our work.

COVID-19 showed that although there can be extremely positive responses to a 'new crisis', it is extremely difficult to sustain the response and build towards a more fundamental transformation of the ongoing crises of poverty and inequality in South Africa. The instinct to go 'back to normal' is strong, so responses to unsustainable situations become temporary and are quickly dropped. For example, many CANs are now shutting down after a year of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Looking back at 2020, EMG can see that the following was important for us:

- Time for reflection is vital. In a crisis we were often overwhelmed and felt out of our depth, so having space to reflect and re-chart our course was essential.
- Our instinct to be a flexible organisation served us well. The crisis really re-enforced our understanding that we can't respond to community needs and issues from a narrow perspective.
- Knowing our limits and limitations was also key. EMG is a small NGO and sometimes we try and spread ourselves too thinly, which leads to exhaustion and less quality work.

We have learned the need to appreciate the fundamental importance of being kind to one another and trying to balance the simultaneous need to keep moving forward with focus, whilst trying to navigate new unknowns. This is the ability to adapt to new circumstances, to be flexible but to also stay focused. A reality for EMG is that we know we need to develop significantly to be better equipped to support transformation for sustainable futures. As a result, we have re-focused our vision, theory of change and re-oriented our approach towards monitoring and evaluation.


Our Planet
Climate Change, Water, Agroecology & Land
Socio-Economic Context
Unemployment, Poverty and Inequality along class, race and gender lines, within the context of a failing state, late-stage capitalism and the closing of civil society spaces
Action Research
Developing contextual understanding for action
Education and Training
Facilitation of social Learning processes
Integrated Community Environment Programmes (ICEP)
Advocacy and Networking
Building relationships and raising voices
Community Development
Supporting communities to organise and supporting organisations
ICEP will build responses organisations that inform advocacy Socio-Economic Context and provide ecological alternatives that facilitate community-controlled change

The eight reflective stories in this edited monograph explore and demonstrate what kinds of collective learning support, skills ecosystems and capacity mobilisation are needed for a 'just recovery' from COVID-19. Such learning within a 'just recovery' must inform basic livelihoods, new forms of work, climate action and long- term transformations for sustainable futures. The stories can strengthen the efforts of social practitioners, activists, educators and researchers navigating the systemic issues that the COVID-19 pandemic has magnified, and inform 'Transforming Education for Sustainable Futures' in South Africa.