From Our Community to Yours:

Rethinking the Scholarship of Engagement _with_ Rural Communities

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Why Rurality?

Imagine for a moment, a [South Africa] which regarded its rural public schools [and communities] as its elite and as models to be envied and emulated by [wealthy, private and] metropolitan [counterparts]. Imagine a system in which rural institutions were the prime beneficiaries of research, the recipients of a steady stream of the nation's best educators [& researchers], and the bastions of the education world's power prestige, and resources.

(Adapted from Jonathan Sher)

What is it about the rural context that makes [university] educators who have worked in a rural setting so determined to get students out to rural areas, and makes students so animated when they return? What are the visible and hidden assets that rural areas have to offer the educational [& research] process…What is it about the rural context that is so useful educationally [& academically]? (Steve Reid, 2011:3)

Point of Departure

1. **What and who is "the Community"?** What does this have to do with Engaged Scholarship? **The university as a community**: rarely understood or questioned (Soudien, 2008; Cherrington *et al.* 2018),

2. **Engaged scholarship as a social justice project –the endgame as <u>social change:</u> Informed by the principles of participation, engagement, reciprocity, mutual learning**
   - aims to acknowledge complexities related to hierarchies, power dynamics, multiple voices, vested interests (Renwick *et al.* 2020)

3. **informed by Indigenous and feminist principles:**
   - <u>**Starting with Ourselves approach**</u>1) Engaging *<u>with the university community;</u>* **Community members/research participants** <u>as knowers and actors</u> **in/of their own lives and context: Learning from people's lived experience/perspectives; mutual learning –** identifying and working *<u>with</u>* the broader communities

4. **Relies on, & influences high-impact, <u>engaged research</u>,** to understand experiences of inequality in people's lives; and *from* **their perspectives/experiences,**
   - is a**gile, resilient, relevant, people-centredness, collaborative, inter-disciplinary and transdisciplinary research** (Health Systems Trust) **BUT flexible/responsive**

5. Engages and works *<u>with</u>* rather than doing for the broader community, harnesses evidence from the perspectives of those who live in communities

Some Principles of Indigenous & Feminist Engaged Scholarship

Reciprocity & Mutuality: Partnerships, collaborative practices and mutual benefits

Community: Community-based, community-initiated and community-driven

Respect, ethical engagement, collaboration, accountability & relevance

Reflexivity: continuously examining your own beliefs & values & how they might impact the research & engagement process

(See Chilisa, 2019; Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada)

Acknowledging the Continuum and building towards transformative Community Engagement & Engaged Scholarship
Revisiting Bowen, Newenham-Kahindi, & Herremans (2010)

Transactional engagement: Community investment/information

- "Giving back"

Transitional engagement: Community involvement

- "Building bridges"

Transformational engagement: Community integration

- "Changing/transforming society"

- **Our work in communities happens on a continuum: from service, outreach, intervention (usually short-term, addresses immediate need) to engaged scholarship (long-term, reciprocal and transformative)**

A Reminder: Ernest Boyer's (1996) Scholarship of Engagement

- Central to what it means to be a scholar and the priorities of the professoriate (Boyer, 1990):

  - CE as **the exchange or sharing of knowledge between the university and the community or communities**

  - **Integrating** research, teaching, service and community engagement.

WHAT MIGHT ENGAGED *RURAL* SCHOLARSHIP LOOK LIKE?

Gender-based Violence & Femicide as a Case Study

The social context of GBVF & the vulnerability of girls and women

- **A variety of complex global 'wicked problems'--** Socio-cultural problems, difficult or impossible to solve; **complex and interconnected in nature (**De Grace & Hulet Stahl, 1990; Conklin, 2006; **Reddy et al, 2020)**

- **All** girls & women are negatively impacted, BUT **which girls and women are most negatively impacted & why?:**

    - intersecting factors (sexual orientation, poverty, unemployment, race, gender inequality, sexual orientation, place/geography, disability, social class, etc)

    - Recently, pandemics; recently in KZN climate change-linked floods, linked to **long-standing unequal gender norms, etc**

- These **systems of oppression/inequality** intersect to create power imbalances that facilitate GBVF in homes, communities, and institutions/organisations nationally, continentally and globally (Sabik, 2021)?

Wicked Problems

Problems are never completely solved
Every problem is unique
Can take a *long* time to evaluate solutions
There is no clear problem defintion
Solutions are not right/wrong, but better/worse
Are multi-causal multi-scalar & inter-connected
Every solution ramifies throughout the system
Multiple stakeholders with conflict-ing agendas
Every wicked problem is connected to others
Straddle organizational & disciplinary boundaries

A Complex Policy Terrain

International Framework

- Sustainable Development Goals
- Others International Treaties

National Framework

- National Development Plan (NDP)
- National System of Innovation (NSI)
- GBVF National Strategic Plan
- Policy Framework to Address Gender-based Violence in the Post-school Education and Training System
- Other relevant national policies and legislation

Institutional Framework:

- Institutional Strategic Plan for Innovation
- Alignment with other institutional policies?

Implications for GBVF Programming?

"While achieving **SDG 5 [Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls]** would arguably enable and accelerate progress on <u>all</u> SDGs, the evidence suggests that **unless we end violence against women and girls globally, we won't achieve at least 14 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals**" (The Equality Institute, p9).

At the national level, the NSP highlights the significance of local, community-based *understandings* of GBVF, how individuals and groups conceptualise or understand it, **experience it**, how they envision solutions to its elimination, informed by principles that include **inclusivity, participation and intersectionality**

At the institutional and community level, programs that reflect:

Collaboration; inter- & multi-disciplinarity; innovation and entrepreneurship; alignment with international (SDGs) & national DHET frameworks; inclusivity, creativity, continuous learning , improvement and innovation
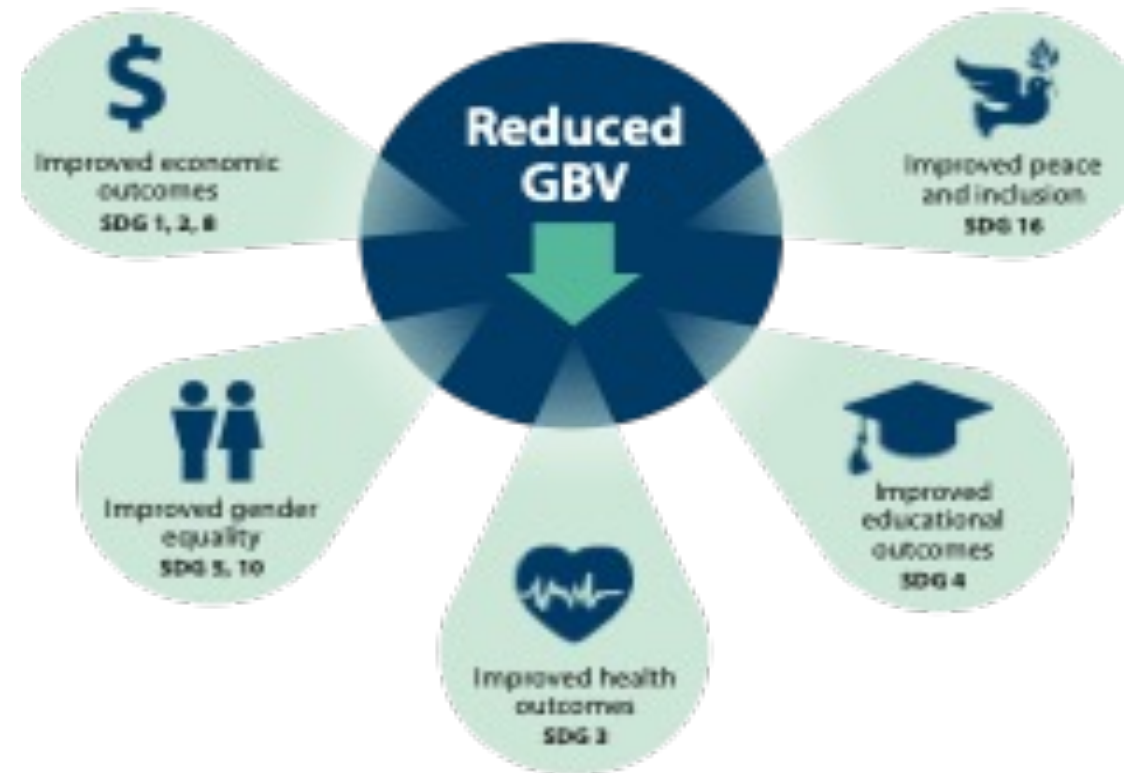
Source: Lang, J., Ghani, F., Stern E., Remme, M. (2019) Briefing Note on Planning and Paying for Local Action Plans to Address Gender-based Violence. UNDP and United Nations University, International Institute for Global Health. p3

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An *Urgent Need* for Engaged, Responsive and Impactful GBVF Research & Programming
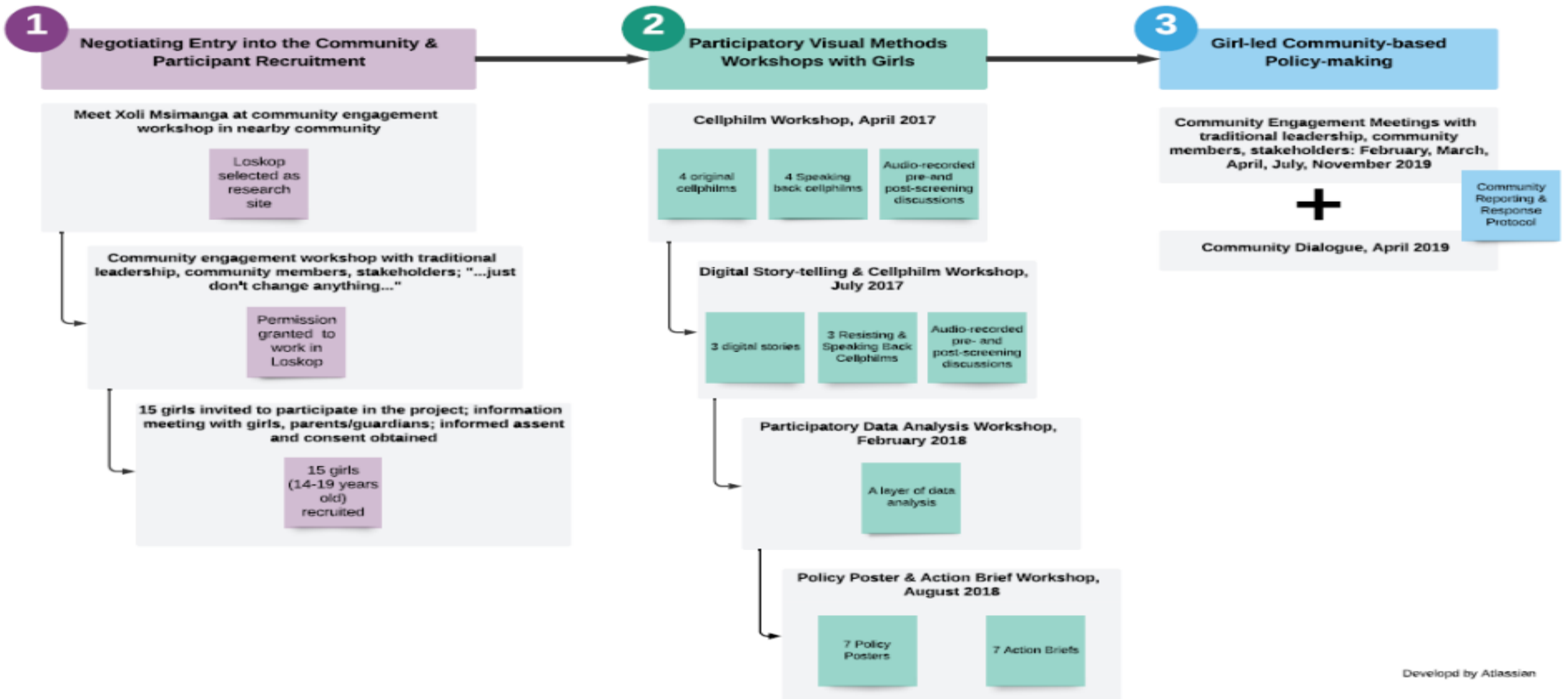
- **GBVF - the most visceral symptom of gender inequality and patriarchy** (a system that values men over women), **an expression of gendered power, and a strategy to exert and reinforce that power**.
- **Multiple & complex forms of GBVF:** Sexual violence, Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), violence against LGBTQIA+ persons, etc.
  - All linked to **the desire to exert masculine power** & to prove the perpetrator's power and masculinity to themselves, the victim and others. *Think, for example, about why sexual violence tends to be used as a tool of war!*

- **Therefore, to prevent GBVF, there is URGENT need to understand, challenge and work towards dismantling unequal gender norms or gender inequality and patriarchy in the institutions, the communities, and our society.**

- ******* This approach to research & programming, will **help make visible/unearth the interlocking systems of power and inequality** that facilitate GBVF in families and communities –

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Networks for Change & Wellbeing with Girls & Young Women in Rural KZN: A Case Study 2016-2023

- **Rural** areas: particularly marginalised
- sites in 4 provinces:
  - **3 in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) (1 university),**
  - 2 in the Eastern Cape (1 university),
  - 1 in the Free State, and
  - 1 in Gauteng

- "You are welcome, just don't change anything!" - Head of the Traditional Authority, KZN)

Three Phases of our Participatory Visual Research Project

1 Negotiating Entry into the Community & Participant Recruitment

2 Participatory Visual Methods Workshops with Girls

3 Girl-led Community-based Policy-making

Phase 1:

Meet Xoli Msimanga at community engagement workshop in nearby community
- Loskop selected as research site

Community engagement workshop with traditional leadership, community members, stakeholders; "...just don't change anything..."
- Permission granted to work in Loskop

15 girls invited to participate in the project; information meeting with girls, parents/guardians; informed assent and consent obtained
- 15 girls (14-19 years old) recruited

Phase 2:

Cellphilm Workshop, April 2017
- 4 original cellphilms
- 4 Speaking back cellphilms
- Audio-recorded pre-and post-screening discussions

Digital Story-telling & Cellphilm Workshop, July 2017
- 3 digital stories
- 3 Resisting & Speaking Back Cellphilms
- Audio-recorded pre- and post-screening discussions

Participatory Data Analysis Workshop, February 2018
- A layer of data analysis

Policy Poster & Action Brief Workshop, August 2018
- 7 Policy Posters
- 7 Action Briefs

Phase 3:

Community Engagement Meetings with traditional leadership, community members, stakeholders: February, March, April, July, November 2019

+

Community Dialogue, April 2019

- Community Reporting & Response Protocol

Developd by Atlassian

# Why Participatory Visual Methodology: Challenging/disrupting Power dynamics?

1) Informed by feminist and indigenous perspectives, regards co-researcher participants **as knowers and actors** in their own lives

2) Challenges/disrupts power dynamics between:

   a. the university research team and co-researcher participants. Whose knowledge?

   b. the university research team and the community leadership

   c. the girls and adults in their community

Power imbalances as barriers to girls' safety

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Overview of Findings

- Poverty; substance abuse; high crime rates;

- unwanted pregnancies & HIV & AIDS; etc

- GBV

- **Early & forced marriages as GBV (school dropout)– BUT**

  - Traditional approaches to justice (mediation, the payment of **"damages"** or retribution) – **'protective' cultural logic**
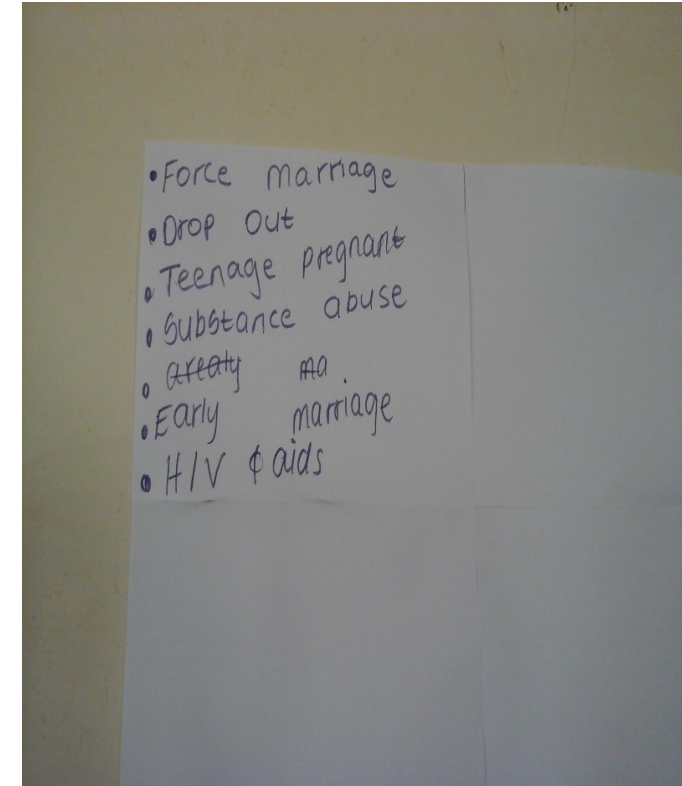
EFM as GBV and a Key challenge to girls' safety & educational outcomes (April, 2017)

Early Marriages Across SA

Working with the Data: Participatory Analysis with Rural Girls

✓ **Working with girls and young women in co-constructing knowledge, communicating emerging issues and taking action,**

- **What can be done to address the situation? Policy Posters**
  - Identifying obvious 'duty bearers': The adults and the formal structures in the community: the police, the ward councillor, parents and community leaders.
  - But what about girls' agency?

- **Identifying possible action points & responsibilities: Action Briefs**
  - Engaging the community and changing unequal gender norms
  - Engaging policy makers and changing institutional norms (e.g., in the schools, in the community???)

Going Public with our Findings: Participatory Dissemination?

- CBPR involves co-creating and co-disseminating knowledge with the research participants: HOWEVER, some ethical/reflexive questions to keep asking:
  - What can we **ethically** expect girls who participate in our research to contribute to dissemination, particularly about violence in their communities?
  - How might participatory researchers balance the need to 'do **least harm and most good**' and to "avoid any possible harmful consequences resulting from [participants'] identification" (Amnesty International, 2008, p.5), with principles of **participatory research** and therefore, **participatory dissemination of findings?**
  - To what extent might girls' involvement in 'going public' and communicating research findings **put them in danger of marginalisation and even violence**?

Ex Policy Poster: 'No More Vows for Cows!'

- Importance of 'culture' in post-colonial, post-apartheid South Africa –
- Some fiercely defended practices –linked to the notion of " our culture" :
- ✓ Ukuthwala
- ✓ Lobolo
- ✓ Inhlawulo/retribution
- EFM accepted, celebrated
- Economic & social rewards
- But girls experience as Violence:

"We feel like nothing!"

Taking Action: Adult–supported/–facilitated Girls Activism

- Workshop on the role of girls and young women in *taking action* against GBV in the community
  - recognizing and negotiating **own agency** in taking action in the context
  - What the SIFs, as *activists in the making*, as individuals and as a group, could do to change the situation
- A *protest march* to raise awareness about GBV in the community
- A **community dialogue** involving members of the community (peers, parents, adult community members and elders, and government officials).

The March: Dissemination, Communication and a Call to Action

- **Researcher-Negotiated and -supported (permit; police escort, etc)**
- **Concern: Would there be backlash and/or violence during the march? Dialogue?**
- 150 participants singing, chanting slogans and carrying posters: *Stop the war on women's bodies, No means no, Break the silence*, and *Rape culture is not our culture* and others;
- Community dialogue (about 200 people, mostly women)
- The march and dialogue (news about them) *possibly* reached about 12 million radio listeners and about 234 000 newspaper readers

Emerging Ethical Dilemmas

- **So, what ethical issues arise when <u>adult researchers</u> facilitate girls' activism and a girl-led march in a context characterized by unequal gender norms and often, age- and gender-based violence against those who transgress the norms of the community?**

- Obviously, this once-off, protected (by the SAPS and municipal & Traditional leaders) and adult-facilitated girl-led march will not change gender norms and eradicate gender-based violence in the community;

- **Our hope:**
  - it enabled the SIFs to actively contribute to disseminating our research findings on EFM in particular, and its impact on girls' lives); BUT… **CAUTION:**
  - "**Intergenerational activism creates relational messiness between adults and girls** … in building activist partnerships in adult-centered and sometimes **politically hostile settings**…" (Bent, 2016, p. 105).

Engaging the Traditional Authority (Amakhosi): Community Dialogue & Advocacy

- After the girls' march in 2017, four of the 16 girls were abducted and forced into marriage; **(1 rescued, with huge community backlash)**

- **In 2019, 8 weeks into the new school year, one school lost 8 girls (13–17 years old) to abductions and forced marriages** (in spite of the country's laws).

- **Our collaborative response:** Meeting with Chief and Traditional Advisors (Feb 20); Community meeting (March 12) – revealed entrenched gender norms; Meeting with parents (April 17)

- **Research Team tasked w/ drafting a Community protocol for the eradication of early and forced marriages and promoting school completion among girls and boys**

Developing the Protocol

- Collaborative process with community partners:
  - Thembalethu Care Centre (local NGO- long-term partner)
  - Traditional leadership
  - 4 School Principals (long-term partners)
  - Parents of learners
  - Community members
  - South African Police Service
  - Legal AID
  - The Department of Co-operative Governance & Traditional Affairs
  - Commission for Gender Equality
  - National Prosecuting Authority
  - Department of Social Development (District)
  - Department of Basic Education (District)

- Final version signed by iNkosi on behalf of the *Amangwe* nation on 13 March 2020
- **Translated into isiZulu** (Literacy)
- **Presented to (& endorsed by):**
  - Provincial Human trafficking, Harmful traditional practices, Prostitution, Pornography, and Brothels (HHPPB) Task Team of the NPA
  - KZN Provincial House of Traditional Leaders
  - Premiere of KwaZulu-Natal's Imbizo , 02 May 2019
  - Extended Provincial Task Team Meeting of Operation Sukuma Sakhe in Pietermaritzburg on 07 June 2019.
  - Standing Committee on Quality of Life and Status of Women, Children, Youth, Senior Citizen and Disabled People

10. REVIEW

This protocol may be reviewed whenever necessary, but must be reviewed by stakeholders at least every two years.

11. APPROVAL OF PROTOCOL

I, the undersigned, as the representative of the eMangweni traditional community, hereby approve the Reporting and Response Protocol on early and forced marriage in eMangweni.

| ████████████ | ████████████ | ~~signature~~ | 11/03/2020 |
| Name | Identity Number | Signature | Date |

Some Concluding Thoughts: Mutual Reciprocity & Social accountability?

- Feminist scientist Ursula Franklin's question, *'what will we know when we know it,* critical to **engaged scholarship**; **disrupting unequal power dynamics** and **achieving social change---social justice**

  - **a multi-faceted phenomenon** –anticipated change occurs incrementally **over the long term**; **sustainability** driven by the **need for grounded evidence: not easily quantitatively measurable**

  - **The development of the Loskop Anti-early & Forced Marriage Protocol: 8-year (2016-2023) project with** Girls in ONE rural KZN community; Used one cellphilm & storyboard & other visual artefacts (exhibitions of photovoice images and narratives, drawings, collage & digital stories) developed throughout the project to facilitate **community dialogue ---** ultimately led to *community-based policy development* –the protocol adopted/signed by the community in 2020.

- **Reciprocity, mutual learning & reflexivity:** holding ourselves & each other accountable in partnerships; **Ethical considerations**

Was it scholarship? Was it Engaged? Going Public with Our Scholarship

- Treffry-Goatley A, Wiebesiek L, de Lange N, Moletsane R. Ethical Considerations of using Participatory Visual Research to Address Sexual Violence with Youth in Rural South Africa. *Girlhood Studies.* 2017; 10: 45-61.

- Mitchell, C. and Moletsane, R. (Eds.). (2018). *Disrupting Shameful Legacies: Girls and Young Women Speak Back Through the Arts to Address Sexual Violence.* Rotterdam: Brill/Sense Publishers.

- Moletsane, R. (2018). 'Stop the War on Women's Bodies': Facilitating a Girl-Led March Against Sexual Violence in a Rural Community in South Africa. *Studies in Social Justice*, 12 (2), 235-250.

- Moletsane, R. and Mitchell, C. (2018). Researching Sexual Violence with Girls in Rural South Africa: Some Methodological Challenges in Using Participatory Visual Methodologies. In Harvey D. Shapiro (Ed). *The Wiley Handbook on Violence in Education: Forms, Factors, and Preventions.* Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell Publishing.

- **Moletsane, R.**, L. Wiebesiek, A. Treffrey-Goately & A. Mandrona (Eds.). (2021). *Ethical Practice in Participatory Visual Research with Girls and Young Women: A Focus on Rurality, Indigeneity and Transnationality.* New York; Oxford: Berghahn Books.

- Mitchell, C.,Giritlin, K and Moletsane, R. (Eds) (2024). ***Where am I in the Picture? Researcher Positionality in Rural Studies****.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

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