
PERCEIVED BENEFITS OF FREIREAN AND GRASSROOTS COMICS WORKSHOPS WITHIN THREE BUSHMEN COMMUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

Participatory research and development methods are purported to improve communication between participants and researchers/extension agencies to allow more appropriate development strategies and empower local communities. Given the impoverished conditions and disempowerment of South Africa's Bushmen communities the application of such methods by researchers and development agencies would seem appropriate. Nevertheless, few research initiatives within these communities have utilised participatory methods and it is difficult to determine the extent to which development agencies make use of these methods as typically these agencies do not critically report on such processes. The study uses participant observation and questionnaires to analyse whether participants perceive participatory workshops, namely Freirean and grassroots comics workshops, as useful, enjoyable, replicable and sustainable.

Keywords: participatory research, development, Bushmen, participant observation, Freirean Workshops, grassroots comics, development communication, collective dialogue

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INTRODUCTION

Since the arrival of Khoe and Bantu-speaking peoples from the north into present day southern Africa, the indigenous Bushmen¹ of the region have been the victims of land dispossession (Crawhall 2004), persecution, prejudice and abuse (Boonzaier *et al.* 1996; Penn 1996). Such treatment intensified under colonial rule (Morris 1996; Penn 1989), and within South Africa, continued under apartheid (Grant 2011). Thus, Bushmen have lived in hardship, experiencing a breakdown in community cohesion, accelerated cultural change and a disintegration of tradition.

Today, this accelerated acculturation into a modern way of life continues, with traditional Bushman values and practices being suppressed by local and national policy and contemporary legal restrictions, resulting in a continued dependence on governments, economically and politically (Dicks 2011; Grant 2011; Robbins 2004). This loss of tradition has resulted in difficulties for Bushmen regarding how they affirm or assert their place in the world, which in the past would have been through their interaction with the natural environment, namely through hunting and gathering, folklore and other traditional practices.

These factors all contribute to the current state in which the Bushmen find themselves: living in abject poverty, and lacking adequate housing, sanitation facilities and livelihood opportunities, to name a few. Despite legislation which enabled the !Xun, Khwe and †Khomani, the subject of this research, to own land, these groups have struggled to benefit from this land, with disempowerment and a lack of capacity and sustained post-settlement support cited as reasons for their inability to develop their settlements and farms (Grant 2011; Robbins 2004).

This project focuses on the !Xun, Khwe and †Khomani communities, introducing an alternative more participatory approach to development than is typically promoted. To date, a number of development agencies have worked with the !Xun, Khwe and †Khomani, including the South African San Institute, FARMAfrica, Open Africa, the Red Cross and Isibindi, in addition to a number of government departments, such as the Department of Land Affairs, the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, and the Department of Health. Some of these agencies have run community workshops pertaining to financial management, arts and craft-making, healthcare advice and computer literacy, etc. (Barnabas 2009; Grant 2011). However, few, apart from Dicks (2011), have sought to introduce more creative development alternatives to the Bushmen, while research addressing their perceptions of the effectiveness of such workshops is rare (although Dockney 2011 and Grant 2011 do offer some insight). To address such concerns and in an attempt to contribute to the facilitation of empowered individuals, this research uses Freirean and grassroots comics workshops to offer creative and participatory methods to community members, to encourage communication, facilitate self-development, future planning and problem-solving while an understanding

of individuals' identity construction is considered. The research also explores whether the participating Bushmen perceive these techniques as useful, enjoyable, replicable and sustainable. Without such research, economic and human resources might be misdirected into inappropriate development strategies that fail to enable the Bushmen to achieve appropriate upliftment.

BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH COMMUNITIES

Bushmen communities are characterised by poverty, disempowerment, dependency, unemployment, alcohol and substance abuse, and neglect from government departments (Grant 2011; Robbins 2004; Tomaselli 2005). Three groups that have experienced such hardships are the !Xun and Khwe who live at Platfontein, 15 kilometres outside of Kimberley in the Northern Cape, and the †Khomani, who live further north, 60 kilometres from the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park (KTP) bordering Namibia and Botswana.

The !Xun originate from Angola and were employed in the Portuguese army, fighting on behalf of the colonists in the Angolan war of independence. When the war ended in 1974, a number of !Xun families fled to Namibia for fear of reprisal. Many of these individuals then joined or were coerced into the South African Defence Force (SADF) - again to fight against an independence movement, this time in Namibia. The Khwe, mainly from Caprivi in Namibia, were also employed by the SADF in this capacity.

Following the independence of Namibia in 1990 and given that these soldiers had actively fought against liberation movements, the Bushmen perceived themselves to be in a precarious situation. Consequently, the SADF and the South African government gave the !Xun and Khwe the opportunity to relocate to South Africa with the promise of housing. Approximately 50 percent of the soldiers and their families accepted this offer. In 1990, they were relocated to Schmidtsdrift, 80 kilometres to the west of Kimberley, in the Northern Cape of South Africa. In 1992, however, it was decided that there would be no housing made available through government funds. More significantly, that same year, the land on which Schmidtsdrift was established was claimed, and subsequently awarded to a Tswana community by South Africa's post-apartheid government. The !Xun and Khwe were able to secure compensation for this displacement, and in 1999 they bought the farm Platfontein. By 2003, 1000 houses had been built on the farm, divided between the !Xun on the one side of the settlement, and the Khwe on the other, with a school and clinic bridging the two communities. Between 2003 and 2004 the Bushmen relocated from Schmidtsdrift to Platfontein where they reside today (Robbins 2004).

The †Khomani are a group whose ancestors originate mainly from the lands that are known today as South Africa and Namibia. In 1865 a Coloured community

under the leadership of Captain Vilander relocated from the Western Cape and occupied lands in South Africa's far Northern Cape that had traditionally been occupied by the ancestors of the †Khomani. In 1931 the Bushmen were further dispossessed of land when the Kalahari Gemsbok Park, now incorporated into the KTP, was proclaimed. From then until the 1970s the Bushmen were systematically expelled from the park while park officials and academics promoted the idea that Bushmen were a dying race (Grant 2011). Successive governments failed to recognise Bushmen in the census and re-classified them as Coloured under the Population Registration Act of 1950.

When apartheid ended it became apparent that a number of Bushmen were living in the rural areas of the Northern and Western Cape. Given that historically their ancestors and indeed some of these Bushmen themselves had been expelled from their ancestral lands in the park and surrounds (Grant 2011) in 1995 some, who adopted the name †Khomani, instituted a land claim under South Africa's land restitution programme (Chennells 2006). In 1999, the †Khomani were awarded ownership of six farms and in 2002 they were given land within the KTP albeit with conditions attached (Bosch & Hirschfeld 2002; Chennells 2006). Despite a lapse of more than ten years little development has taken place on these farms. Today it is estimated that approximately 400 individuals live on the farms, while formal housing is lacking, as are livelihood opportunities (Grant 2011). Currently all three communities, the !Xun, Khwe and †Khomani, live in abject poverty, lacking basic service provision and adequate sanitation facilities to name but a few of the problems (Dicks 2011; Grant 2011; Letsoalo 2010). Despite NGO and limited South African government input (Dyll 2009; Grant 2011; Robbins 2004) community members have struggled to improve their situation.

PARTICIPATORY METHODS

Participation was popularised in the 1990s when it was recognised that proposed development and research outcomes had to be meaningful and favourable to potential beneficiaries in order that initiatives and research attract the support of beneficiaries to enable successful outcomes (Crewe & Harrison 1998). Participatory strategies allow local people a greater input into the conceptions and processes of development and research. The methods transform development and research from a "top down" practice, dominated by external experts, to a "bottom up" process that recognises that local people are in the best position to determine the most appropriate research and development practices and outcomes reflecting their desires, values and concerns (Chambers 1983; Crewe & Harrison 1998). Essentially, participatory methods seek to uncover community, group and individual issues and their causes while enabling the said individuals to address these problems (Servaes 1991).

To be successful participatory methods require increased interaction between facilitators and participant groups, and within participant groups. As effective communication plays an important role in participatory strategies (Fourie & Kloppers 2009; Ingle 2008), a particular body of literature surrounding development communication has emerged (Durden & Govender 2012; Kincaid & Figueroa 2009; Servaes 1996). This field has developed in accordance with the changing nature of development practice, meaning that it is currently concerned with the process of participation and the larger context within which the research or development takes place (Servaes 1996). Valuing both the process and the potential future outcomes, this study utilises participatory workshops and attempts to understand the larger context of the Bushmen's complex situation to enable outcomes that are more representative of participants' concerns. The contextual understandings are facilitated through participatory research coupled with past research retrieved in part from the long-term Rethinking Indigeneity research project of which this is part. The project seeks to understand a number of complex issues, focusing on the indigenous Bushmen of southern Africa. Issues addressed that are pertinent to the present study involve the development and representation of contemporary indigenous Bushmen populations and specifically how these Bushmen peoples negotiate and make sense of their traditional hunter-gatherer identities in a modern and developing world (Tomaselli 2012).

GETTING CREATIVE: FREIREAN AND GRASSROOTS COMICS WORKSHOPS

Fieldwork was conducted with the !Xun and Khwe participants from Platfontein and †Khomani individuals in the Northern Cape during September 2013. Participants were recruited using snowball sampling which involves choosing initial participants based on their relevance to the research problem. These individuals then refer additional participants to the research team or vice versa (Merriam 2009). Given the researchers' established relationships with the participant communities key individuals were identified and contacted. These participants referred the research team to other potential participants and efforts were made to include male and female participants from various age ranges and communities.

One workshop was conducted at the Wildebeest Kuil Rock Art Tourism Centre adjacent to Platfontein. This was completed by 19 individuals: eight females and 11 males between the ages of 15 and 25. Sixteen individuals identified as Khwe, with two people identifying as both !Xun and Khwe, while only one individual was !Xun.

Two workshops were attended by †Khomani individuals, one was held in the school hall at Welkom - a municipal settlement consisting of both †Khomani and Coloured individuals - located approximately 10 kilometres south of the

KTP. Although the study aimed to attract †Khomani individuals, a number of Coloured people from Welkom asked if they could be included. Consequently, the Welkom workshop was attended by 19 individuals, 13 females and six males, 13 individuals identified as †Khomani and six as Coloured. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 48 years.

The Andriesvale workshop, conducted in the local community centre, was the smallest of the workshops, with six participants completing it - three females and three males, ranging in age from 30 to 52 years. All participants identified as †Khomani. Andriesvale is the main settlement of the †Khomani land, located 60 kilometres south of the KTP. It was indicated that the low level of participation in this workshop was a reflection of the fact that community members were suffering from "meeting fatigue" due to the number of events that community members had attended with technical advisors and government officials in the days preceding the workshop.

Two specific methodologies were adapted for use in a combined workshop designed to empower individuals through motivating participants to think about their lives within their local environment, their goals and aspirations for themselves and their communities, and how to achieve these goals. The first method is an adaptation of CCMS's Freirean Workshop, which includes body mapping (Durden *et al.* 2013; Reddy *et al.* 2012), and the second is referred to as grassroots comics (Dicks 2011; Packalen & Sharma 2007). These methods are appropriate to this research as they are participatory in nature, viewing the participants as valuable constituents within the research process (Melkote & Steeves 2001; Servaes 1996).

FREIREAN WORKSHOP

The Freirean Workshop takes its name from Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator and philosopher. He argued against accepted formal education structures, advocating for an alternative method of information dissemination between teachers and learners, suggesting that learners should be actively involved in the learning process instead of being mere recipients of knowledge from an authoritative source. Freire encouraged the "conscientization" of the individual in the learning process, encouraging learners to think critically about their situations, their individual problems and experiences, and the social contexts in which they are embedded (Freire 1970/1996). The adapted workshops, consisting of a *discussion generator* and *body mapping* exercise, as detailed below, are built around these Freirean principles and as such are participatory in nature.

Freirean Workshop: Discussion generator

Workshop facilitators initially used a discussion generator to foster dialogue among the participants. In this instance, a "speed-dating" activity was introduced.

Participants were divided into two groups forming an inner and outer circle. The inner circle was instructed to listen to the individual from the outer circle standing in front of them, who would share their favourite things about living in their community, either Platfontein, Welkom or Andriesvale. The outer circle rotated every 30 seconds so that individuals were able to share their favourites with a new individual every 30 seconds. Once everyone had completed the circle, the groups were switched, with the listeners becoming the talkers and vice versa. This process was then repeated. Instead of individuals sharing their favourites, they were asked to share what problems they experienced while living in their communities. Following this, participants were asked to share these realisations with the group, with facilitators writing it on a flipchart. Participants could then draw from or refer to these realisations during the body mapping and grassroots comics exercises.

Freirean Workshop: Body mapping

The discussion generator was followed by a body mapping exercise, a creative therapeutic tool that uses visual artistic expression. Facilitators used a step-by-step guide to instruct and assist participants to create their own body maps. Body mapping involves having one's body outline drawn onto a large paper surface, with colour, pictures, symbols and words being used to represent experiences lived through the body, thereby encouraging participants to externalise emotional experiences to think about their own bodies, thoughts and feelings. Participants must consider the step-by-step tasks and what they mean to them personally. Through this self-reflection participants explore their identity: what makes them who they are, while identifying and considering their passions, strengths and weaknesses. It is envisioned that this will enable participants' realisation of alternative problem-solving techniques suited to their person and inspire more favourable living in a communal, as well as a general sense. Consequently, participants make meaning through the creative process of symbolisation and to develop a map that connects different aspects of one's being. The body mapping exercise lasted for approximately three hours and at the end of the workshop professional photographer and team member, Thomas Pierce, photographed participants alongside their body maps, printing and supplying copies of the photos to participants immediately. Participants were given the opportunity to keep their body maps.

FIGURE 1: PLATFONTEIN PARTICIPANT ROBERT KABWATA WITH HIS BODY MAP



Grassroots comics

After a short break to relax and discuss their body maps over lunch, the participants engaged in an exercise to create their own grassroots comics. The concept of grassroots comics was introduced by Leif Packalen and Sharad Sharma (2007) who have worked with the method in parts of Asia, Europe and Africa². Grassroots comics are made by people based in the community, rather than by campaign and art professionals. During the workshop participants identified community concerns, as they perceive them, attempting to uncover the cause of these issues, with participants being empowered to voice their concerns,

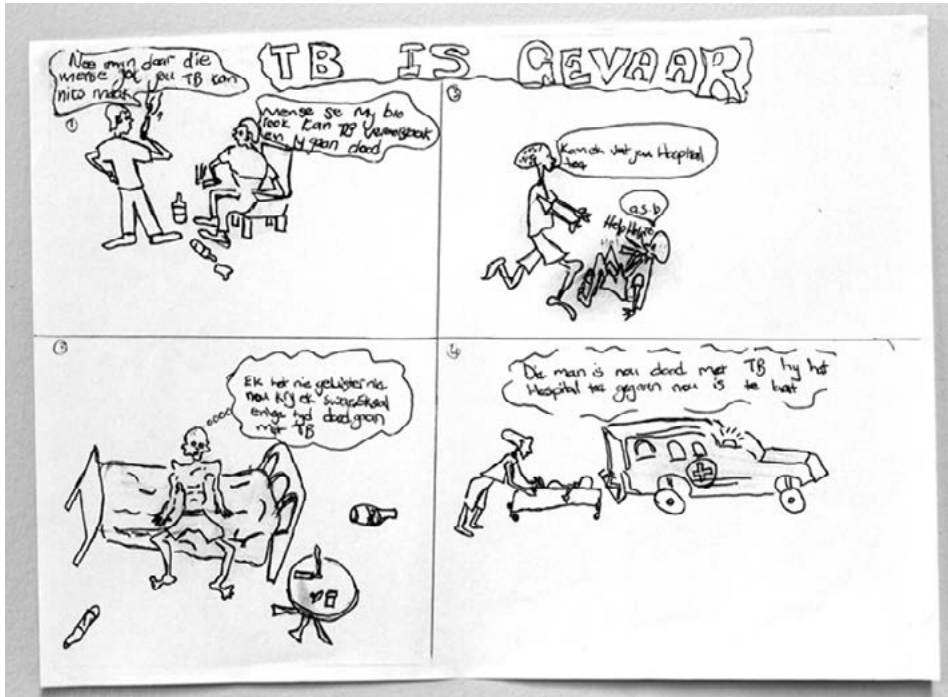
contributing to discussion and debate within the context of their own living space (Packalen & Sharma 2007). Participants then use the format of a comic story to dramatise and communicate specific problems, offering possible solutions to these problems. Essentially, the control and motivation of the comics is in the hands of participants, as the researcher merely facilitates the proceedings. The message and stories of the comics represent the feelings, opinions and fears of the participants and potentially the broader community. Consequently, these workshops utilise community-driven forms of communication, while the completed comics can be placed either in public spaces around the community or in places where the messages of the comics would best reach their intended audience.

Due to time constraints, the research team combined the grassroots comics and Freirean Workshop (two somewhat lengthy exercises) into a one-day workshop³. Thus, the initial template designed as a guide for conducting grassroots comics, a process that usually continues over several days (Packalen & Sharma 2007), was condensed into one half-day session. Instead of participants producing their own individual comics, participants collaborated in groups to produce a collective grassroots comic message and create the comic itself. Initially participants divided into groups of four individuals. They were introduced to some technical aspects of drawing grassroots comics and asked to draw a series of images to depict a problem or issue that they felt affected their community, and a possible solution (if one could be provided). For the purposes of this research, participants were encouraged to use the issues/problems identified during the discussion generator exercise. These issues included unemployment, substance abuse, domestic violence, HIV/Aids and TB, amongst others. Participants were also free to identify alternative issues present within their community.

While it is preferred that participants formulate their own comic story (relating to problems/issues within the community), it is recognised that people may be self-conscious about this and prefer drawing from relatable issues, such as the manner in which representations of the Bushmen might affect how people from outside the community (tourists/visitors, researchers, etc.) interact with them. Although this may be a less empowering scenario, it is nevertheless valuable in that it can help demonstrate the potential for grassroots comics to stimulate problem-solving alternatives for participants.

Figure 2 depicts the dangers of non-treatment of TB. In the comic, a man suffers from TB but continues to consume alcohol and smoke with his friend. Another friend tells the sick man to go to the clinic to receive treatment, but the man continues to drink and smoke until he eventually dies from TB.

FIGURE 2: AN EXAMPLE OF GRASSROOTS COMICS AS PRODUCED BY PARTICIPANTS



AGENCY AND EMPOWERMENT

The combined workshop was intended to encourage participants to “step back” from their everyday lives to reflect and develop a critical understanding of their situation and that of their communities. The aim of the discussion generator was to enable participants to become familiar with other participants and with research facilitators to encourage communication, disclosure and debate. Participants were asked to consider and articulate their short and long-term aspirations and goals regarding their own future and that of their community. They were also encouraged to identify problems within the community and in their personal lives and through the use of participatory techniques, identify actions that work towards addressing these problems. Additionally, participants evaluated the manner in which they represent themselves to the *Other*, (people from outside the community such as tourists/visitors, researchers, development workers, etc.). The research therefore focuses on the agency of the individual and the community, considering factors of self-development and self-representation to facilitate a workshop process that is empowering to the participants. Consequently, the process is as important as the long-term outcomes of the workshops and the study.

The research also aimed to be empowering in the sense that it provides participants with a platform from which they can address the concerns of the individual and community while considering prospective goals for the future. At the same time community members are the driving force behind the research and participants are armed with techniques that can be directly utilised to help enable personal and community goals. This is a departure from much of the research focusing on these communities that typically adheres to strict critical or comparative research methods, considering certain aspects of culture or traditional practices (i.e. hunting, gathering, craft-making, etc.).

Body mapping and grassroots comics were specifically selected for this study given their appeal to past participants (Dicks 2011; Reddy *et al.* 2012). Both are creative forms of expression requiring participants to express themselves on paper through painting and drawing. As the †Khomani have been the subject of much research, most using conventional techniques, namely interviews, concentrating on the extractive gathering of information, it is intended that these participatory research techniques will offer an alternative, more varied form of interaction. Furthermore, given the nature of the methods, it is expected that community members who cannot read or write - a not uncommon situation among the †Khomani (Grant 2011) - will not be restrained or inhibited by body mapping or grassroots comics. An additional advantage of these participatory methods is that the material output produced can be revisited or consulted by the person who created it, or by an alternative reader whenever necessary, meaning that these images or posters can raise awareness relating to specific topics and among different people across time as well as space (Bessette 2004).

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS TECHNIQUES

Following the completion of the workshops, participants were asked to self-complete questionnaires for the purpose of analysis. Due to limited abilities in literacy some participants struggled with this task and were assisted by other participants or researchers. The questionnaires were used to determine if participants perceived that the workshops and the techniques used in the workshops facilitated improved realisation and articulation of participants' short and long-term aspirations and goals regarding their own future and that of their community. They were also used to examine if participants perceived techniques used in the workshops as enabling in so far as they facilitated improved individual abilities to identify concerns within their personal lives and that of the community, allowing these individuals to conceive of ways to address such issues.

The questionnaires allowed for an examination as to the extent to which workshop techniques were perceived as enjoyable, sustainable and useful in addressing personal and community concerns in the future. Analysis was also informed by

field notes and informal interviews and interactions that arose during the course of the fieldwork. Although purposive snowball sampling was employed to attract participants, the small sample size limits the extent to which the findings can be generalised to the greater community/population (Merriam 2009). Nevertheless, the findings do give an indication of the value of using similar workshops as research and empowerment tools in the future and also allows for the improvement of the workshops through participant recommendations. It was unnecessary to analyse the data quantitatively, but rather to refer to the questionnaires and additional data as personalised responses regarding participants' experiences over the course of the workshop and as a resource for any comments/recommendations they might have had regarding certain activities. Thus, the study adopted a qualitative thematic analysis.

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

An analysis of observations and participant questionnaires reveal that during the workshops participants actively engaged with each other, the researchers and the tasks. Findings were relatively consistent regarding the respective communities. This analysis therefore does not explicitly differentiate between communities, apart from where findings differ. The workshops as a whole were favourably received by all participants who completed the tasks, with all 44 participants stating that they enjoyed the workshop. Forty of the individuals commented that the workshop was useful, with only one individual noting that they had not learnt any new skills. Workshops were described in the questionnaires as “relaxing”, “informative”, “educational” and “recreational”. One individual commented, “We learnt a lot about ourselves”, a remark that was not uncommon.

Questionnaires uncovered that participants valued that the workshop had enabled the sharing of information and allowed individuals to be heard, while participants perceived that their communication skills had been improved. One individual stated that she had been empowered, “[t]o ask questions when I don’t understand something”, while another participant noted that she had learned “[h]ow to communicate with the community”. More generally, it was stated that such “workshops could, in future, [enable] better understanding between individuals and the community”. All participants commented that they had enjoyed working with each other and the researchers/facilitators, who had been helpful, approachable and suitably articulate regarding task explanation. This was an important point given that the workshops were conducted in Afrikaans: a second language to facilitators and many of the individuals from the !Xun and Khwe communities.

Of the 26 participants who indicated previous involvement in community workshops, nine stated that they had participated in similar workshops. Although the intention of the question was in regard to workshop techniques, participants

may have applied the question to workshop content (topics that arose during the course of the workshop), as four of the nine participants who stated they had attended similar workshops, listed a number of issues after their answer including “alcohol abuse”, “teenage pregnancy”, “HIV/Aids” and “condom use”. These overarching topics were discussed as part of the workshops and may have been covered in other workshops, hence such reporting.

Questionnaires also indicated that participants would welcome similar participatory workshops in the future and on a more regular basis with increased numbers of participants. While this is encouraging, facilitators noted that participant focus/attention was difficult to manage and maintain as group size increased. Larger group size resulted in greater diversity regarding the time taken to complete task steps, with some individuals engaging in alternative activities to occupy themselves whilst waiting for other participants to catch up. Facilitators therefore recommend a maximum of 16 participants. For a larger sample of participants, rather than increasing participant numbers in workshops, the provision of additional workshops would be advisable.

Participants from all three workshops informally commented to facilitators on the usefulness of the discussion generator exercise as an icebreaker and an information-sharing forum. One individual noted in the questionnaire that “[t]he icebreaker activity... was very enjoyable”, despite the questionnaire focusing on the other dominant components of the workshop. Although all participating groups grasped the discussion generator exercise with ease, the people of Welkom were initially reluctant to share their thoughts. Following some probing, participant interaction increased. In contrast, the Andriesvale and Platfontein participants immediately embraced the exercise and ran with it for longer than the allotted time. Notably, participants of the Andriesvale workshop took charge of the exercise and spent approximately two hours discussing the fractured nature of their community, explaining how past development projects and business ventures had failed and how their community was in a state of perpetual dissolution. Thus, the exercise shifted from being a simple ice breaker to a more in-depth discussion that formed a significant part of that particular workshop. Given that the aim of the research was for workshops to be “needs-driven” as determined by participants, although it was desirable to complete the various aspects of the workshops within the allocated time, it was deemed more important that participants be allowed ample time to be heard.

Overall, by the completion of the exercise, all groups had achieved high levels of interaction and discussion to enable an in-depth understanding of their opinions and frustrations regarding peoples’ living environments. Furthermore, as facilitators recorded the various comments and opinions that emanated from the exercise, the process was deemed valuable insofar as it acted as an ice breaker

while the recorded data was used for reference by participants when creating their body maps and contributed to the themes that were adapted within the grassroots comics.

The dominant workshop activities, body mapping and grassroots comics, were positively received by the participants. While 24 individuals stated that they enjoyed the body mapping exercise the most, ten preferred the grassroots comics activity, with six participants enjoying both equally⁴. Various comments articulated the informative, exploratory and personal nature of the body map exercise. These included, but are not limited to, comments relating to the realisation that body mapping “helps you plan for the future”, “[w]as good and very informative... I got to talk about my own feelings... The body map brings out a lot of emotion”. Another individual stated that “I did not know about my real self, but now I can see who I really am and what my likes and dislikes are”. Similarly it allowed one particular participant to “[e]xplore within myself, my personal roles for my responsibilities”. Body mapping encouraged respondents to be self-aware and self-reflexive, considering their goals in life and the possibilities that are available to them. Some individuals commented informally that they experienced a renewed sense of self-awareness. All participants completed their body maps, stating that they were proud of the final product. In particular, all of the participants from the Andriesvale workshop retained their body maps, whilst some individuals, namely !Xun and Khwe participants, opted not to keep their maps, valuing the process itself rather than the final product. In addition, 38 workshop participants indicated that they would use the body mapping techniques in the future to help solve problems and/or plan for the future. Through the body mapping activity, one individual from Platfontein suggested that he had “learnt and could demonstrate” the process such that other individuals could benefit from it.

The response to the grassroots comics method was also favourable, with 36 participants stating that they would use techniques learned from the activity in the future. The method was deemed “informative”, with it being recognised that the activity “helps you identify problems” and “gives you ideas about how to deal with problems”. One individual noted that the activity provided “a platform to mobilise people to come together, find solutions and make decisions”; such comments were not uncommon. Participants perceived that following the identification of problems, the construction of a narrative/story around the issue aided them in conceiving of a way to address such problems, while the use of comics in this manner was identified as relevant given that the messages could be appreciated by a broad range of people. It was stated that “old and young people can understand what’s going on in every picture”. The potential usefulness of the comics was also recognised, with participants stating, “I think the comics are going to transfer a message to the community”, and that they are “good because they can help

improve the community”. Consequently, through the exercise participants were enabled to communicate an important message via a comic narrative that could be easily understood. Participants realised that through this simple, inexpensive activity, they themselves possessed the power to help their community, rather than rely on external agencies or extension workers. Overall, participants were satisfied with the comics that they produced.

Generally, participants enjoyed the workshop and reported that it had enabled an improved understanding of “the self” as well as a greater understanding of those around them through the group work activities. During the course of the Platfontein and Welkom workshops, participants’ actions indicated that the workshops, which lasted from approximately 10 am until 5 pm, were too long, with some participants being distracted at times and also exiting the workshops for short breaks. Questionnaires echoed this indication. Twenty people from these communities stated that the workshop was too long, but none of the Andriesvale participants indicated such concerns. The Platfontein and Welkom workshops comprised of more participants than the one at Andriesvale, these workshops thus lasted longer, with more individuals taking different lengths of time to complete the steps. These larger workshops required more repetition of workshop instructions to ensure that everyone could hear and understand the steps, whereas the smaller group was more intimate and allowed for more one-on-one interaction. Nevertheless, almost all the participants completed the tasks and workshops, with four individuals leaving the workshops early (one individual had to return to work). Overall, the length of the combined workshop was taxing in terms of the attention required throughout the seven-hour period. Furthermore, some of the self-completed questionnaires lacked accuracy and detail, possibly due to respondents’ desire for the conclusion of the workshop. The separate workshop components, body mapping and grassroots comics, are complementary to one another, but also independently beneficial to participants. Combined workshops could be run over a two-day period, with each day focusing on one particular component with the same or different participants. Alternatively, body mapping or grassroots comics workshops could be run independently. Shorter workshops would allow time for questionnaires to be administered by research assistants and/or interviews or discussions to be introduced at the completion of the workshops for improved understanding and analysis (Greeff 2011).

Thirty-one participants across the three workshops commented that the workshops were over-explained. It is unclear if this response was a result of the question being misunderstood. During the course of the workshops, especially those at Platfontein and Welkom, individuals often asked for the repetition of instructions. Despite this no one reported that explanations were unclear. Such ambiguities in regard to the clarity of the questionnaire could be addressed through shorter workshops,

allowing improved data collection techniques, as already noted. One somewhat disappointing aspect of the workshops was that they proved to be challenging and perhaps disempowering to individuals without adequate writing skills. While all individuals were encouraged to express themselves through drawing, certain tasks resulted in the majority of participants choosing to express themselves through writing. Some less literate individuals subtly declined to complete these aspects of the workshops. Although the step could have been completed through drawing, it seemed that unless these individuals could complete the step in the same manner as everyone else, they chose not to participate in it. Despite such concerns, these individuals remained in the workshop until it concluded, re-joining the activities where they could and generally enjoying the experience. Nonetheless, this indicates that for certain people, more conventional interactive methods, or alternative participatory methods may be more suited.

CONCLUSION

The objective of this research was to assess the extent to which more creative and participatory research methods, namely the Freirean Workshop and grassroots comics, are perceived as useful, enjoyable, replicable and sustainable by participants, determining whether these participant-driven exercises are beneficial to participants with regards to community and self-development, future planning and problem solving. The Freirean Workshop and grassroots comics exercises were chosen for their creative appeal, but specifically as a means to empower participants/community members to discuss their aspirations and frustrations regarding the contexts in which they live. The approach does not attempt to propose a comprehensive solution to the range of issues experienced by any given community. Instead, it serves to offer creative and empowering techniques to community members to promote dialogue and awareness, and to identify concerns, whilst allowing a realisation of strengths to encourage participants to address issues and enable resolution.

On an individual basis the workshops aimed to encourage individual self-efficacy and self-development, empowering participants through demonstrating that they have the capacity to identify issues and conceive of ways in which to address these concerns individually and as a community. Essentially the workshops sought to motivate individuals to take charge of their future and that of their community, promoting community-driven solutions to community problems as perceived by community members, thereby fostering cohesive communities and community self-reliance.

This was the first time that the participatory methods of body mapping and grassroots comics have been combined into one full-day workshop. In this sense, the research constitutes a pilot study. The interactive, multi-method workshop

yielded positive results and demonstrated the potential for collective dialogue and capacity building among community members. Participants indicated that both the Freirean Workshop and the grassroots comics activities were enjoyable, useful and informative. In theory these workshop methods can be replicated by community members without the presence of researchers and outside facilitators. Participants did suggest that they would utilise the workshop techniques in the future, however, the sustainability and replicability of the techniques cannot be fully explored without follow-up interviews to determine if participants have organised similar workshops, or promoted and used the said techniques or materials individually or collectively.

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Endnotes

- ¹ Although the term San is often used when referring to these groups, we have chosen to use *Bushmen*, the term of choice among participants.
- ² Packalen and Sharma have established an online guide to the grassroots comics process including details of grassroots comics initiatives (see www.worldcomics.fi).
- ³ The excursion comprised nine days, thus it was only possible to conduct one full-day workshop in each of the three communities. Consequently, the research team had to adapt the workshop methods.
- ⁴ Although there were 44 workshop participants in total, not all participants answered all of the questions in the questionnaire, hence quoted numbers do not always total 44.

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