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Mismatches between youth aspirations and participatory HIV/AIDS programmes in South Africa

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Although youth participation is a pillar of international HIV/AIDS policy, it is notoriously difficult to facilitate. We explore this challenge through a case study of a community-led HIV/AIDS management project in a South African rural area, in which anticipated youth participation failed to materialise. We take a social psychological view, examining ways in which opportunities offered by the project failed to resonate with the social identities and aspirations of local young people. Interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with 37 young people prior to the programme's establishment and with 21 young people four years later. In response to questions about what they wanted to achieve in life, the young people emphasized: career success through migrating to urban areas to seek education and paid work, non-tokenistic involvement in community affairs, and 'having fun.' We look at how the project unintentionally evolved in ways that undermined these goals. Its strong local focus was inappropriately tailored to young people whose views of the future focused on getting away to urban areas as quickly as possible. The volunteer nature of the work held little appeal for ambitious young people who instead saw paid work as their way out of poverty and were reluctant to take unpaid time out from schoolwork. The project failed to develop new and democratic ways of operating — quickly becoming mired in traditional, adult-dominated social relations, in which young people with initiative and independent views were sometimes belittled by adults as being 'smart' or 'clever.' Finally, the project's focus on sexual abstinence held little interest for young people who took an enthusiastic interest in sex. The article concludes with a discussion of the complexities of implementing youth-friendly projects in communities

steeped in top-down adult-dominated social interactions, and recommends ways in which similar projects might seek to involve youths more effectively.

Keywords: case studies, community management, community participation, interventions, rural communities, youth workers

Introduction

Youth are increasingly called upon to become involved in HIV prevention at the global, national and local levels (UNGASS, 2001; UNICEF, 2002; UNAIDS, 2006; South African Government, 2007). Three reasons for this are apparent. First, and most clearly emphasized, is the fact that youths — especially young women — are particularly at risk of HIV-infection. Internationally, estimates suggest 45% of all new HIV-infections are among young people ages 15 to 24 years and this is skewed significantly towards females, especially in South Africa (Pettifor, Rees, Kleinschmidt, Steffenson, MacPhail, Hlongwa-Madikizela *et al.*, 2007; UNAIDS, 2008). Second, given the high levels of unemployment and under-employment among young people (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2007), they represent a huge pool of untapped talent and labour to involve in such projects. Third, there is increasing recognition that the participation of young people in HIV-prevention programmes is necessary if programmes are to respond to the needs and desires of young people and therefore be effective (Campbell, 2003).

Despite these calls, the meaningful participation of youth in HIV-prevention programmes is incredibly difficult to achieve (Campbell, Foulis, Maimane & Sibiyana, 2005; Whitehead, Kriel & Richter, 2005; Campbell, Gibbs, Maimane, Nair & Sibiyana, 2009). Many approaches to understanding the barriers to youth participation have focused on sociological factors, such as poverty, inter-generational inequality and HIV stigma (Campbell *et al.*, 2005; Ezra & Mchakulu, 2007; Perkins, Borden, Villaruel, Carlton-Hug, Stone & Keith, 2007; Campbell *et al.*, 2009). As Cleaver (1999) highlighted, much less research has focused on people's motivation for involvement or non-involvement in participatory projects.

In this article we move away from a sociological perspective towards a social-psychological approach to understanding youth participation in HIV/AIDS projects by exploring how wider sociological factors shape young people's social identities and motivations (Campbell & Gibbs, 2009). We do so through a discussion of a case study of youth participation in a community-led HIV/AIDS project in South Africa.

Theoretical framework

Socially structured identities are a key influence on people's behavioural choices. An individual's social identity consists of a person's subjective sense of self — both in the present and in terms of future aspirations. This sense of self defines limits and possibilities on people's action and behaviours, as well as the extent to which people are likely to exercise agency in the face of life challenges and social obstacles, or else view them with a sense of fatalism and helplessness (Howarth, 2006). Madhok (2005) argues that people's agency is a socially embedded, constructed and enabled experience. As such, people's agency is shaped by wider social and material structures in society, which are constraining (in terms of limiting individuals' agency) but also productive, opening up certain possibilities for agency and action. However, Fassin (2007) argues that in some situations the inequalities of race, class and gender may undermine the agency of individuals more than we realise. Such limited agency undermines people's health and wellbeing and stops people acting to protect their health (Wallerstein, 1992).

Echoing Fraser's (1992) work on 'counter-public spheres,' Cornish (2006) argues that participatory projects can create 'micro spaces' situated outside the normal relationships of power and inequality which limit people's agency, thereby providing a context in which they can collectively negotiate ways to resist some of the negative effects of marginalisation on their health by developing more empowered social identities and a more confident and positive set of future aspirations for personal health and wellbeing.

The Entabeni Project in KwaZulu-Natal Province, South Africa, sought to provide such micro spaces through facilitating youth participation in a project seeking to strengthen local community responses to HIV/AIDS. The project specifically sought to facilitate effective local community responses rather than 'intervening from the outside,' as is often the case with youth programmes. Its commitment to facilitating youth participation in shaping and implementing HIV/AIDS programmes, rather than imposing externally designed programmes on young people, was based on the assumption that these projects have a greater chance of success if they build on existing resources and work to ensure that project goals and activities resonate with local youths' own perceptions of their needs and interests (Campbell, 2003; Gruber & Caffrey, 2005; Campbell, Nair & Maimane, 2007). The needs and interests of youths vary and manifest differently from one local community to another. This militates against the possible success of one-size-fits-all approaches that are designed and evaluated according to the preconceptions of professionals who usually come from outside the community (and possibly from outside the province or country).

The aim of youth involvement in the Entabeni Project was to provide micro spaces in which young people could develop their skills in group decision-making and project management and leadership, in a context where young people have been traditionally excluded from playing a significant role in community life (Campbell *et al.*, 2009). The assumption was that these experiences would improve the confidence and self-esteem of the young people to act in new and health-enhancing ways, providing spaces for dialogue through which young people could collectively renegotiate their social identities. Ideally they would do so in ways that would allow them to resist some of the negative effects of their marginalisation, to expand their agency, and to begin to take control of their sexual health (Ramella & De la Cruz, 2000; Cornish, 2006). Yet, as will become clear below, the project had limited success in encouraging youths' participation. This article explores some of the reasons for this.

The Entabeni community and project

Entabeni is a rural community of about 28 000 people, located in KwaZulu-Natal Province, where about 35% of pregnant women are HIV-positive and there are high levels of poverty, unemployment and ill health (Barron, Day, Monticelli, Vermaak, Okorafor, Moodley & Doherty, 2007). Many of the residents migrate to urban centres to search for work (Posel, 2003; Hunter, 2007). Local governance of Entabeni is formally shared between the elected government of the local municipality¹ and the traditional chief (*inkosi*), who delegates control of day-to-day matters to his traditional councillors (*izinDuna*; singular: *inDuna*). In reality the municipality plays a minimal role in this particular community and residents are effectively under the control of the *inkosi* and *izinDuna*.

The authors are part of the Centre for HIV/AIDS Networking (HIVAN), a university-based NGO seeking to improve networking among those involved in HIV/AIDS work in KwaZulu-Natal. The Entabeni Project emerged from a two-year study exploring community responses to HIV/AIDS in Entabeni (Campbell *et al.*, 2007), during which time HIVAN were asked by community leaders to facilitate a project strengthening the community's ability to cope with HIV and AIDS.² The project aimed to develop skills and support networks for an already existing cadre of local health volunteers (Maimane, Campbell, Nair & Sibiyi, 2004).

Against this background, HIVAN took on the three-year role of external change agent to facilitate two types of partnership to support the health volunteers (Campbell, Nair, Maimane & Sibiyi, 2008). The first type of partnership the Entabeni Project sought to facilitate was with 'external partners' — representatives of regional public-sector health and welfare bodies outside of Entabeni, as well as with the regional municipality (Nair & Campbell, 2008). The second type was with 'local partners' in the community who had hitherto given the health volunteers' limited support and recognition; these included local leaders, women's and faith-based groups, as well as local youths.

Youths had been identified as a key resource to support local health volunteers in a series of workshops that HIVAN facilitated with community groups. These workshops fed back HIVAN's research results and brainstormed directions for the evolving Entabeni Project. In the workshops, young people were very keen on becoming involved, and the young people and adults agreed that youths were an essential but underutilised and underappreciated resource.

For the purposes of the Entabeni Project and this article, young people were classified as people between ages 14 and 35, and according to whether they currently attended school (learners) or not (out-of-school youths). While recognising the complexity of these broad definitions, they were in line with the Entabeni residents' own classification of young people.

The aim of the 'youth component' of the Entabeni Project was to build a group of between 70 and 100 young people who could provide peer education, counselling, and other HIV/AIDS-related services to community members and also serve as role models of empowered youth leadership. It was envisaged that their involvement would boost youth participation in the Entabeni community and also be a springboard to the wider social development of young people.

Over the course of its three-year existence, the Entabeni Project engaged in three sets of youth-related activities. The first activity was a youth rally conceived by the health volunteers as a way of drawing HIV/AIDS to the attention of youths. While the rally successfully attracted over 800 people, its effectiveness in engaging young people and building their agency was limited. Two adult male community leaders dominated the rally's organising committee and insisted that the event only promote sexual abstinence as an HIV-prevention strategy. HIVAN's representative on the committee cited our finding that many young people were already sexually active and thus argued for a broader HIV-prevention message, including promoting the use of condoms. However, this input was ignored and HIVAN were obliged to accept

the decision given our commitment to a 'community-led and community-owned' project (Campbell *et al.*, 2007).

The second set of activities was a series of training programmes for young people, run by an external NGO. The different training programmes variously targeted out-of-school youths and learners. Out-of-school youths were provided with counselling training — involving skills to provide a range of HIV/AIDS-related and general health-related information to community members, 'traditional' one-on-one counselling skills, and information on how to access regional health and welfare grants and services. The aim was that this group of out-of-school youths would then run and staff an 'outreach centre' in Entabeni. This centre would provide health and welfare counselling services to the community and be supported by the NGO via ongoing training, mentoring and support for the youth counsellors through an NGO outreach worker.

Initial enthusiasm among out-of-school youths was high, and 20 young people volunteered to participate. However, the drop-out rate was high, and only seven young people completed the counselling training. Subsequently this dropped to only four people active at the outreach centre. And while at times these four have been remarkably active, the outreach centre did not expand to provide extensive services to the community, and the four individuals who are still involved have received only limited support from the NGO.

The same NGO provided peer-education training to learners at the local high school. Again, initial enthusiasm for this was high. Yet despite HIVAN's efforts to urge the NGO to facilitate maximum youth participation in the peer-education training, the NGO persisted in their habitual style of didactic training — in this case, giving formal lessons in HIV/AIDS awareness — and failed to provide learners with the skills or support they needed to lead peer-education activities themselves.

The third aspect of support for young people involved the HIVAN project team providing the four out-of-school youths who were active at the outreach centre

with support and additional training in order to build their leadership skills and experience, initially in the Entabeni Project and then in the wider community. This meant providing regular advice and personal counselling to these young people to build their self-esteem and confidence. It also included providing these four, and an additional six Entabeni youths, with opportunities to undertake additional training at the university linked to HIVAN (some distance from Entabeni) to further build their HIV/AIDS-related skills and confidence. While the youths enjoyed these opportunities and participated enthusiastically, this did not translate into the additional six participants becoming more involved in HIV/AIDS work in Entabeni. Furthermore, while the four committed young people became more vocal in the Entabeni Project and are now considered project leaders in the context of the outreach centre, they have constantly struggled to assert their influence with a number of older men who attempt to retain authority in the project (Campbell, Gibbs, Maimane & Nair, 2008; Campbell *et al.*, 2009). Additionally, the leadership roles of the young people have not extended outside the project as originally anticipated.

Overall, the Entabeni Project has not succeeded in its goal of mobilising between 70 and 100 young people to participate in HIV-prevention work and using this as a springboard for wider social development. Apart from the four out-of-school youths currently involved in the outreach centre, young people in Entabeni have generally chosen not to pursue opportunities for involvement or leadership in the project.

Here, we explore the possible reasons for the Entabeni Project's limited success in mobilising local young people, based on the assumption that youths are most likely to engage in activities that resonate with their social identities and life goals (Campbell, 2003). The first part of the findings explores what the young people in our study wanted out of life (their life goals) and the pathways through which they sought to achieve these. The second part reflects on the extent to which the Entabeni Project's aims and activities succeeded or failed to resonate with the social identities and life goals of local youths.

Methods

The data consist of two sets of semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and fieldworker diaries. The first set of data comprises 14 individual interviews and two focus group discussions involving a total of 37 young people (22 females and 15 males), conducted during our initial research in Entabeni in 2004. Sampling ensured that a range of young people's views were elicited; this included young people both in and out of school as well as two young women who were already involved in the home-based care group in 2004 when HIVAN first engaged with the community.

In the second set of data, four interviews and two focus group discussions involving a total of 21 young people (15 females and 6 males) were conducted after the Entabeni Project had finished in 2008. The topic guides covered similar issues: young people's perceptions of the Entabeni community, HIV/AIDS and their hopes for the future. The second round of interviews also explored young people's perceptions of the project and whether or not it resonated with what youths wanted in life. Those sampled in the second round had all been directly involved in the Entabeni Project — but to varying degrees. Some had been extensively involved while others had limited engagement. Young people both in and out of school were included. However, we were unable to contact the small group of young people who had been trained by the project but had subsequently left Entabeni to live or work elsewhere.

Interviews were conducted by the third author in Zulu, and were tape recorded, translated and transcribed. Ethical approval for the baseline research was received from the University of Natal university ethics committee. Approval for the second stage of the research was received from the ethics committee at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (clearance number: HSS/05052A). All interviews were guided by informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality, and the interviewees were able to withdraw from participation at any time. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality we have used

pseudonyms throughout the research, to disguise the identities of community members and our research participants.

The data were analysed through thematic content analysis using a grounded theory approach (see Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2000). The process of analysis explored the data in order to answer two key questions. First, 'What do youth want in life and what pathways do they see to achieving this?' This section of the findings includes data from both sets of interviews (i.e. in 2004 and 2008). And second, 'To what extent did the project succeed or fail to resonate with these life goals?' This section reflects data from only the second set of interviews in 2008. The themes that emerged in response to these questions form the subheadings in the findings section.

Findings and discussion

What did the youth want in life and what pathways did they see to achieving this?

The young people's views of what they wanted in life clustered around three themes: 1) jobs and success, 2) involvement in community affairs, and 3) having fun.

Jobs and success

With high levels of poverty and unemployment in Entabeni, many young people said their primary goals were to find a job (often phrased as 'making money') and to achieve career success. Many said Entabeni offered few opportunities to achieve this. Agricultural work was described as seasonal, piecemeal work providing little money, and was looked down upon by many young people as a 'dead-end' career. In a focus group discussion where the option of cutting sugarcane was mentioned, the in-school youths burst out laughing. When asked why, one male responded: *'I think we are laughing because working in the cane fields is very stressful and tiring. You have to work long hours for a small amount of money.'*

The few better jobs that existed in Entabeni were seen to go to those who had 'connections,' typically to the local traditional leadership. One example the young people gave was of a government-sponsored road-building programme, where *izinDuna* secured all the paying jobs for themselves and their families:

Interviewer: *You told me how it is living in this community. Can you now tell me the worst thing about living in this community?*

Out-of-school youth (female [F]): *Ha! What can I say? The worst thing is that here there are no job opportunities. What I have noticed here, there is a lot of nepotism. I will make an example of the road construction. Traditional leaders were asked to select one person from each family. But in the end, they only told their own family members and friends.*

More generally the young people said they were unlikely to secure jobs in Entabeni as these would usually go to adults:

'Another problem we have in the community is most of the time youth are excluded if there are job opportunities. Adults claim young people cannot tolerate the pressure of work because of their age' (male learner).

Given the limited opportunities for employment that young people faced in Entabeni, almost all emphasized that young people needed to leave Entabeni for urban areas if they wanted to find work:

'This is a quiet community, so young people have a problem of not getting employed anywhere. Young people like to go out of the community where they can get employment and then come back now and then. The problem here is that if you want to get a job you have to move out of the community' (male learner).

The young people identified a number of ways in which they saw themselves securing jobs. For many, education was a primary route through which they could secure employment:

Interviewer: *What do you want to achieve in this community as young people?*

Learner (F): *I think the most important tool is to go to school, get educated and find employment. By doing that we will be in charge of our lives.*

Tertiary education was seen as the surest route to success. When interviewees were asked about people they knew who were successful, the stories they related were primarily about people who had left Entabeni to study at a university, which led to a job:

Interviewer: *Can you tell me of a person here in your community who has been successful in what they have been doing?*

Out-of-school youth (F): *Yes, I know of someone who is a social worker nearby. She finished school when I was doing Standard 5. She lives across the road. When she finished her matric [high school], she studied very hard to be a social worker, and when she finished she didn't find a job. She did not give up. Eventually she found one and is now very successful.*

Many of the young people recognised they lacked basic skills needed for office jobs and suggested that if they received training in these skills they could secure a job:

Learner (F): *There are many young people here who would like to do computer courses and have technical skills.*

Interviewer: *How would it help the youth to have computer skills?*

Learner (F): *They will be taught how to use them and then get certificates that will qualify them to get jobs in nearby towns.*

Many also said they needed 'networking' — links with people outside Entabeni — if they were to get jobs; this would provide them with information about opportunities for further education or skills training:

Learner 1 (male [M]): *What can help us is to be able to network with experienced people who can advise us on skills development.*

Learner 2 (F): *I also think we should network with other people who can tell us how to get bursaries. As we are doing Grade 12 [school-leaving year], we don't know what will happen next year. We need advice from*

those who can tell us which companies to contact for support. Most of us are from poor families who don't have such knowledge.

For these young people success was closely related to having a good job outside of Entabeni. Education, skills training, and networking were all specific ways in which they saw themselves as being able to secure such a job.

Involvement in community affairs

The youths also expressed the desire to become more involved in community affairs. They said they were systematically excluded from meaningful involvement in community affairs and sidelined in discussions that occurred in Entabeni:

Interviewer: *Can you tell me what young people in this community would like to achieve?*

Out-of-school youth (F): *I believe that young people should be active in the community. That makes life interesting. I have heard that there is going to be a bakery somewhere in the community. It would be much better if the youth could be involved in that project. I am telling you they will not take even a single young person.*

Interviewer: *Why do you say that?*

Out-of-school youth (F): *I am saying this from experience. As I am talking to you, you would find that there are people already that have been contacted. Young people do not get any opportunities in this community.*

At times when these young people had taken the initiative to become more involved in the community and shape their lives there, they often felt ignored. Learners at the high school told how they had sent student representatives to talk to the principal, but nothing changed:

Interviewer: *Don't you have an SRC [student representative council]?*

Learner (M): *We don't have an SRC. We only have class representatives. When we send a representative with our complaints, the teacher concerned continues to do what we complained about. We*

have decided not to do anything because even the principal does not do anything. He only says we must 'concentrate on our studies.'

The young people's desire for greater involvement in community affairs was often framed within a rights-based discourse, emerging post-1994 with the formal end of the apartheid regime. This was contrasted with the 'style' of leadership that existed in Entabeni, which continued to deny them any meaningful involvement:

Learner 1 (M): *They are ruling with old fashion.*

Learner 2 (M): *They are still undermining young people. According to them, young people have no rights.*

Yet despite systematic exclusion from community affairs, some felt they could become more involved — if adults, and especially leaders, were encouraged to recognise young people's legitimacy as active members of the community:

Interviewer: *What do you think can help you to achieve all these things you have in mind?*

Out-of-school youth (F): *In this community, nothing is done without the knowledge of the inkosi. I feel he is the first person who should support us. He should be involved in all the things that young people want to do.*

While some young people were positive about the possibilities of greater involvement in community affairs, one set of learners were dismissive, arguing things would not change and the only option was to leave:

Interviewer: *Why do you think young people leave the area once they finish matric [high school]?*

Learner (M): *I think young people are trying to find a place where they can use their knowledge. In Entabeni they won't get a chance to use their knowledge. If they try, people will say they are getting too clever for their own good. That is why young people move out from Entabeni after they complete school, so they can get good jobs or further their education.*

The youths framed their desire for greater involvement in community affairs within a rights-based discourse, contrasting this starkly with the actual role they felt they were accorded. While some were cautiously optimistic about

becoming more involved in community affairs, others were sceptical, suggesting greater involvement in community affairs was not possible and the only solution was to leave for an urban area.

Having fun

Another thing that the young people wanted in life was to 'have fun.' While there were many understandings of what this meant, one theme emphasised by the youths was participation in one of the numerous sports or activity clubs that existed:

Interviewer: *What do young people enjoy doing in this community?*

Learner (F): *This is a rural community. People here enjoy getting together and doing traditional dancing and singing. For them that is fun.*

Another key aspect of fun for young people was their involvement in a thriving sexual sub-culture, conducted with secrecy and great enthusiasm beyond adults' awareness. In our early research in Entabeni (Campbell *et al.*, 2008a; Campbell *et al.*, 2009), many adults (including traditional leaders, parents and the principal of the local high school) told us there was no need to involve youths in an HIV/AIDS project since Entabeni was dominated by traditional conservative mores, where young women guarded their virginity, which was 'checked' annually by older women at traditional reed-dance ceremonies that celebrated the chastity of local virgins. However, a minority of adults emphasized the hypocrisy of adults who refused to acknowledge youths' sexuality, pointing to increasing numbers of teenage pregnancies and AIDS-related deaths among youths. Furthermore, young people spoke openly about their interest and involvement in sex, saying it was a natural and unavoidable biological drive and a source of great pleasure and excitement for them. For example, in a nine-person focus group with out-of-school youths, eight youths said they were sexually active and none had used a condom.

To what extent did the project succeed or fail to resonate with the youths' life goals?

Interviews suggested that the activities the Entabeni Project had organised and facilitated had some resonance with what young people wanted out of life. Three themes emerged in the young peoples' discussions of the

achievements of the project: 1) spaces to speak about HIV/AIDS, 2) involvement in the project and community, and 3) skills training.

Spaces to speak about HIV/AIDS

The young people were very happy with the opportunity to talk about HIV/AIDS which involvement in the project afforded them, but which they were rarely allowed otherwise:

Interviewer: *Can you tell me what you gain from these peer-education classes?*

Learner (M): *I must say that we have learnt a lot from Mr Nzama [NGO worker running the classes]. He has taught us a lot about infectious diseases, especially STIs.*

Learner (F): *We have benefited a lot from these classes. We know now that we cannot risk our lives by having unprotected sex.*

As already stated above, many of these young people were sexually active in a context where opportunities to get information about sexual health were dramatically restricted by adults' denial of youths' sexuality. Opportunities for open and frank dialogue are crucial if young people are to gain the correct information about HIV and AIDS and also integrate it into their lives (Campbell, 2003).

Involvement in the project and community

The project had provided spaces for four young people to become more involved. One very involved out-of-school youth explained how it had provided her with opportunities to get involved in the community in ways that did not exist before:

'What I enjoy most is that now we have many opportunities where we can involve ourselves. When the Entabeni Health Partnership started, many doors were opened for me.'

The opportunities she spoke of included the four out-of-school youths running an HIV/AIDS-training programme at a local primary school, which motivated them to become more involved in the Entabeni Project and wider community:

Interviewer: *Can you tell me what can encourage young people to participate in fighting HIV?*

Out-of-school youth (F): *It was wonderful when we were able to visit the school and contribute to AIDS training. We weren't paid for this work, but I enjoyed it.*

Interviewer: *What motivated you to continue though you were not getting paid?*

Out-of-school youth (F): *You know, just standing in front of a class and teaching kids about HIV and other things was very motivating.*

The Entabeni Project had provided these four out-of-school youths with real opportunities to become involved in community affairs.

Skills training

The project also provided the same four young people with additional skills training, which they saw as a way of securing jobs in the future:

'I have been trained on being a counsellor by the project, and people know about this in this community. I have a training certificate and when I look for a job, I will have proof in my CV that I have achieved this and other project courses, and it will be easy to get employment. I may get a job as a counsellor in a firm or doing first aid on employees that get injured at work' (female out-of-school youth).

The additional training and opportunities for greater involvement in the community and opportunities to speak about HIV/AIDS resonated closely with what young people in Entabeni said they wanted out of life. However, as already stated, the number of young people who actively participated in the project never really numbered more than four very involved out-of-school youths, far short of the 70–100 we had envisaged.

Ways in which the project did not resonate with the young people

Our analysis of the data identified five themes reflecting ways in which the project failed to resonate with what young people wanted: 1) lack of financial incentives, 2) conflicting priorities for in-school youths, 3) adult domination of

the project, 4) lack of recognition for young people as legitimate actors, and 5) limited networking opportunities.

Lack of financial incentives

A key issue that limited the young people's participation in the project was the lack of financial incentives. Given the high level of poverty and young people's desire to secure a job to support themselves and their families, the lack of payment or reward for participation was cited as a major barrier for many:

Interviewer: So what caused people to drop out? They started dropping out soon after the counselling training began and continued to drop out?

Out-of-school youth (F): Though I might not have the right answer, I think people were not really committed to the training. They were not sure what the training was about. Some initially thought they would get fast cash if they participated, but dropped out once they realised this was not to be...some were not really interested in doing voluntary work while their families were hungry.

The project had decided that financial incentives would not be provided for young people, given the lack of sustainability of such funding and the problems this can cause (Bhattacharyya, Winch, LeBan & Tien, 2001). Instead, other incentives were constructed, revolving around building young people's leadership skills through additional training and trips to important meetings outside of Entabeni. These alternative incentives were not clearly set out at the start of the project, but evolved as it developed; but as these opportunities became apparent, they were monopolised by the four out-of-school youths who were particularly involved.

Conflicting priorities for in-school youths

Many of the young people identified education as a main route to securing a job, and many learners felt the time spent with peer-education training conflicted with this. The training was held after school (the time the principal had allocated), limiting the youths' participation as they often had to walk far to get home and had little spare time given their school work:

'I think I can do voluntary work but the problem is that as I am still at school, it is not easy to find time to do that. From school we have to walk long distances and when we reach home we have to study. On weekends we also have to come to school. That is my main problem' (male learner).

The peer-education training offered learners little support for their wider objectives in life: finishing their high school education, going onto university and securing a good job. As such they were highly reluctant to get involved.

Adult domination of the project

The project failed to create what Cornish (2006) would call 'micro spaces' in which young people could become involved in the leadership of the project — and in turn gain confidence, skills, and credibility in the eyes of adults to participate meaningfully in wider community affairs. Despite extensive attempts by project staff to create such spaces, much of the project was dominated by several older men who wielded a great deal of authority in the Entabeni community in general as well as encroached on the Entabeni Project.

The youth rally held in 2004 (discussed above) is a clear example of adult men monopolising a potential micro space created to encourage youth participation, leadership and more general empowerment. The adults' 'abstinence-only' message during the event strongly diluted the potential impact of the rally on young people who were already sexually active and unwilling to abstain, and imposed an adult agenda on a supposedly youth-led and youth-appropriate event (Campbell *et al.*, 2007).

Similarly, some comments made during interviews suggested that the training of out-of-school youths in counselling skills also failed to provide a micro space beyond the gaze of adults. The selection process was supervised by Mr Mzobe, an older man who dominated the management of the Entabeni Project. Subsequently he had attended many training sessions, usually giving long authoritarian speeches complaining about young people's poor

attendance and about their need to be enthusiastic. As one fieldworker's diary reported:

'Mr Mzobe made a long speech about the training, saying the trainees must behave themselves properly through the training. He said that if they did not, this would set a very bad example to other youth, and to the community, and the inkosi would not take it lightly. He stressed that the NGO was brought to the community by HIVAN and that he would not want to hear that the members of the group had done anything to undermine these two groups' presence in the community. He made them aware that this would be taken in a very serious light.'

We speculate that this tone countered the project's attempts to give youths a sense of ownership of the training, and instead served to frame training as a 'top-down' matter in which youths' behaviour would be strictly policed by adults, and where misdemeanours would be reported to the *inkosi*. The tendency by adult men to 'hijack' the spaces for youths which the project sought to create, limited the potential for these to support youth leadership; we also speculate that this contributed to the sense of disaffection underlying the high drop-out rate for the course.

Lack of recognition for young people as legitimate actors in the community

Elsewhere we have written about a prevailing low level of respect for youths and a lack of recognition of their value in a context where young people tend to be regarded as 'mad, bad or deviant' (Campbell *et al.*, 2005). Likewise, the young people involved in the Entabeni Project often had their views sidelined and ignored. This is despite the extensive effort HIVAN placed on working with key adult male leaders to encourage them to recognise young people as legitimate actors and that young people's views were given equal weight in the project. Moreover, there seemed to be no change in the wider community as some of the peer educators told us they still struggled to have their knowledge and expertise recognised as legitimate:

'The main difficulty in talking about HIV/AIDS to members of this community is that, when you talk about it, especially to old people, they don't understand why you are talking about it. Say for instance I talk to the congregation at my church. They will just stare at me as if I am not

there. They dismiss whatever you are, saying — Young people are another problem' (male learner).

Adults' negative views of young people persisted throughout the project, and this thwarted young people from becoming more involved in community affairs.

Limited networking opportunities

Another theme emerging from the data was that young people felt the project did not create strong enough networks with external organisations, otherwise identified by the youths as a key way to progress in life. Elsewhere we have reported on the project's difficulties in developing long-lasting and supportive relationships with external organisations (Nair & Campbell, 2008); the young people spoke of how the networks introduced to support them, failed to do so.

In particular, the youths were particularly disappointed by the performance of the external NGO that had committed to providing ongoing support and training; the youths said this had failed to materialise in any satisfactory way:

Interviewer: The objective of having the outreach centre was to make a place where young people would come and start doing things or where they could access information. Why do you think that didn't happen as planned?

Out-of-school youth (F): I think the main reason for that is that even though some of the counsellors were trained, it took a very long time for the NGO to give them the certificates they had promised. Some of us did not want to volunteer for a long time, which is what happened.... Also the NGO had said counsellors would be trained continuously, which didn't happen. Some of the youth were interested to join the second group the NGO had promised to organise, but that didn't happen. Some even filled in the forms they brought to the community, but nothing happened.

Peer educators also reported that they received little support from the NGO for running peer-education classes at their school. With limited external relationships available for young people, and those which were available not

being particularly strong, this did not match closely with what the young people wanted out of life.

Conclusions

A fundamental goal of the Entabeni Project was to facilitate youth participation. While the project was very successful in engaging, training and supporting four out-of-school youths, it was not successful in its greater aim of involving 70–100 young people.

In this section we use Pawson & Tilley's (1997) formula 'Programme + Context = Outcome' to explain young people's level of participation. The main 'programme' factor of relevance concerned the various levels of support provided to the young people by different project-related agencies. Ongoing support by external agencies is recognised as very important in ensuring successful outcomes for youth-led projects (Campbell, 2003; Maticka-Tyndale & Barnett, 2010). However, the external agencies involved in supporting the Entabeni Project in different ways (e.g. home-nursing training versus peer education versus counselling training) varied enormously in the amount of actual support they were able to give the youth participants.

Two representatives of HIVAN had close contact with the four young women who were actively involved in the home-based care part of the project; the HIVAN representatives provided them with continual mentoring and guidance. They counselled them through a range of personal and project-related challenges, often on the telephone in the evening and on weekends, as well as during their formal community visits. They worked to build the young women's confidence, ensuring that their views were taken seriously in project meetings. Thus, for example, they gave a great deal of counselling support to a young project participant who was heavily ostracised by the other women in the home-based care team when she had an unplanned pregnancy (despite having loudly pledged to use condoms at all times), working with her to constructively manage her 'loss of face' in the group.

For the young people involved in project activities facilitated by other external agencies, however, such a degree of personal support was not available. For example, the external NGO that trained youths in peer education skills did not have the capacity to provide one-on-one support, which could have helped sustain young people's interest and confidence about their contributions. Ongoing support by external agencies appears to be crucial in facilitating successful youth participation.

Taking into consideration the context within which the project sought to mobilise youths, to what extent did the project offer opportunities that resonated with young people's social identities and future aspirations? The findings presented so far highlight ways in which the project unintentionally evolved and which conflicted with young people's social identities and future aspirations, therefore undermining their participation.

A key rationale of the Entabeni Project was to develop strategies and approaches appropriate for its rural setting, rather than to impose imported solutions and methods. However, the project's strong local and rural identity had the unintended effect of alienating many young people whose views of the future focused on moving to urban areas as quickly as possible, and who associated the rural areas with personal stagnation and boredom. Furthermore, the volunteer nature of the work held little appeal for young people who saw paid work as their way out of poverty or for ambitious scholars who were reluctant to take unpaid time out from schoolwork.

In contrast, the four young people who became highly involved in the project did not have these aspirations. They were very much committed to living and working in Entabeni because of family commitments and they had a long history of involvement in the local health volunteers' programme. As such, their wider aspirations in life did not include leaving Entabeni, and for various reasons involvement in the project was more consonant with their life plans and goals.

These contrasting levels of youth participation highlight how youths' identity is not homogenous, even in such a small and clearly demarcated rural area, but is constructed within specific networks and relationships, shaping young people's social identities and aspirations. Our observations draw attention to the danger of the tendency of projects to identify and target an assumedly homogenous group called 'youths.' Either programmes need to identify the multiplicity of youth identities, and accommodate these through different activities and outreach methods, or, as Greig (2009) notes, the projects need to put a great deal of effort into identifying where different youth identities converge and tailor specific programmes to resonate with these. Either way, it is crucial that programme designers understand the complexity of young people's motivations and aspirations and the differences that exist among them and match these with appropriate incentives and approaches to support participation by the variety of youth groups that exist even in relatively grounded local areas.

More widely, another factor at the level of 'context' which may have undermined youth participation and ownership was that the project became mired in traditional, adult-dominated social relations, rather than creating democratic micro spaces for youth participation (cf. Campbell & MacPhail, 2000). The project's narrow focus on abstinence-only approaches to HIV prevention illustrates this point. This held little interest for young people who took an enthusiastic interest in sex. The rigid top-down inter-generational relationships that characterised the Entabeni project and community, as well as adults' strong denial of youths' sexuality, limited the development of any significant social space in which youths and adults could engage in frank dialogue about the realities of their lives and the need for a more open-minded acceptance of well-established youth norms. It is critical to develop a good understanding of how to facilitate equal relationships between young people and adults, ensuring that adult domination does not occur and that young people are seen as legitimate actors (Ramella & De la Cruz, 2000; Percy-Smith, 2007). Vaughan (forthcoming) suggests a need for research that concentrates on what she calls the 'in-between' spaces where young people and adults come together, focusing on how these spaces can be used in ways

that enable greater recognition of the value and potential contributions of youths.

The findings presented here highlight the deep contradictions inherent in programmes that seek to facilitate local community responses to HIV/AIDS. As discussed, the starting assumption of the Entabeni Project was a critique of programmes imposed by outside professionals on passive communities, and the belief that programmes were more likely to succeed if they identified and strengthened existing community responses. In this regard, HIVAN strove to play a non-directive role allowing the project to develop as local people saw appropriate. This however led to a situation where the project became dominated by the very adult- and male-dominated social-relations which many would say are key drivers of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the first place, and which make women and young people particularly vulnerable to infection (Campbell *et al.*, 2005; Campbell *et al.*, 2009).

What strategies exist for creating micro spaces for youth participation (Cornish, 2006)? These will increase the likelihood that projects will resonate with young people's social identities. Researchers increasingly focus on novel participant-led action research methods, such as Photovoice (Moletsane, De Lange, Mitchell, Stuart, Buthelezi & Taylor, 2007; Vaughan, forthcoming). Such approaches provide techniques through which young people can identify their own priorities, and add to individuals' understandings of health and wellbeing, often stepping beyond narrow adult or professional-oriented definitions of health (Percy-Smith, 2007; Vaughan, forthcoming). Ideally such approaches serve as a springboard for social action, tackling issues identified by young people in ways that young people feel are appropriate to their own self-defined needs and interests (Skovdal, forthcoming).

There are no easy solutions to problems rooted in the intricately complex construction of age and gender relations in post-apartheid South Africa. However, we hope that our account of the Entabeni Project's difficulties in supporting young people will contribute to critical debates about contradictions at the heart of so-called 'social development' programmes in highly

marginalised communities, and how these might be best undertaken to open up health-enabling possibilities for youths.

Notes

¹The provincial branches of the Department of Local Government and Traditional Affairs are the sphere of government closest to communities. District municipalities are responsible for development planning in communities, and these are further sub-divided into local municipalities, one of which services Entabeni.

²A community is usually defined as a group of people who share a common social identity or a group who live in a common geographical space. In practice (for reasons relating to place-based resource allocation and convenience) health interventions usually target geographically defined communities. This is particularly the case in geographically remote areas such as the one discussed here. Accordingly, the Entabeni Project used a place-based notion of community to frame its work.

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