

‘Voice needs teeth to have bite’!

Expanding community-led action-learning in rural South Africa

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Overview

1. Background
2. Context, approach
3. Learning, reflection



1/ Background: participation in health systems

- Those affected involved in decisions, actions over health care
- Goals of radical transformation, social and political change / justice
- Long policy support. Renewed interest (coproduction, CEI, CAs)
- Many interpretations. Risks of elite capture. Policy \neq practice

The people have the right and duty to participate individually and collectively in the planning and implementation of their health care **WHO, 1978**

...community participation policies can become regressive, imposing greater risks and responsibilities upon more disadvantaged communities in return for lower levels of power **Rolfe, 2018**



2/ Context, approach

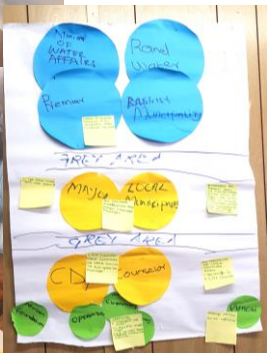
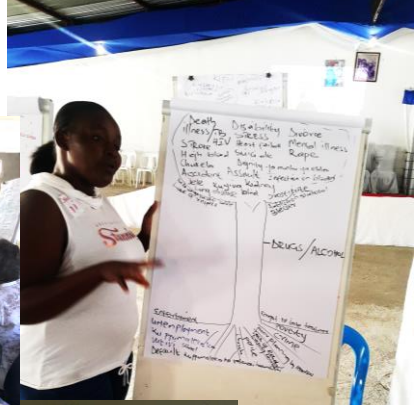
- Complex burden of disease, entrenched inequalities
- District health system revival. Limited community voice
- Established surveillance system. 120,000 popn, 420km²
- HIV/AIDS, maternal and child mortality reductions, external mortality, chronic illness increasing



MAVERICK CITIZEN

Fear and loathing: Patients battle with the hardships of Mpumalanga's health facilities





2 Collectively analysing and problematizing

1 Systematizing experience

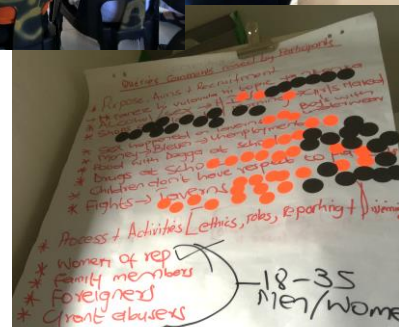
3 Reflecting on and choosing action
Considering alternative courses of action and identifying actions

4 Taking and evaluating action
Acting and reviewing the course and consequences of action and change

5 Systematizing learning
Organizing, validating and sharing new knowledge

1 Systematizing experience
Collectively organizing and validating experience

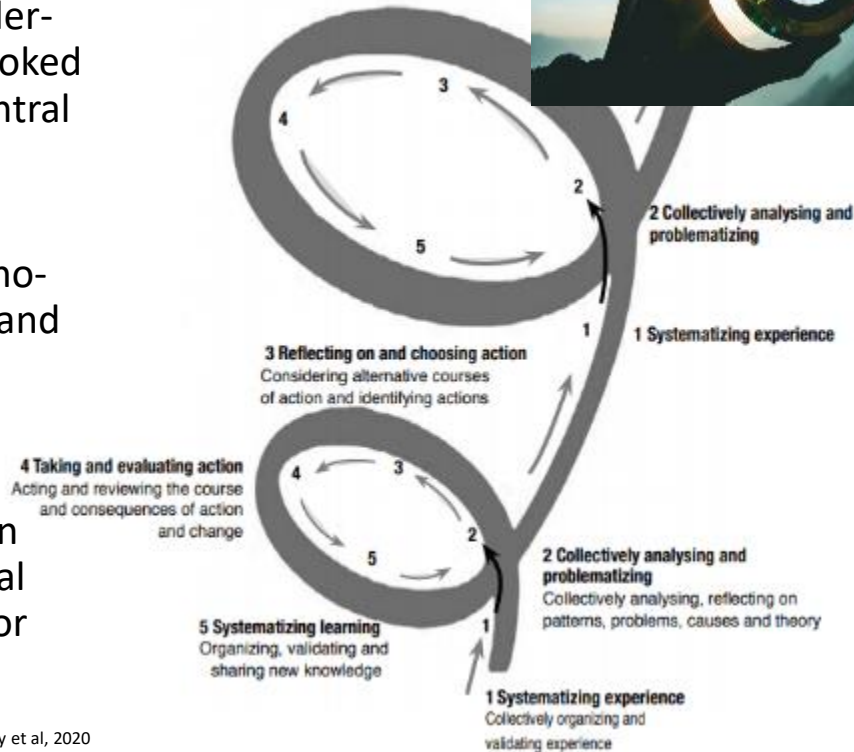
2 Collectively analysing and problematizing
Collectively analysing, reflecting on patterns, problems, causes and theory



Analytical lens: 'voice needs teeth to have bite'

Emancipatory Power (Popay)

- Power vastly under-theorized/overlooked despite being central category
- *Inward gaze*: community psycho-social capacities and proximal neighbourhood conditions vs.
- *Outward gaze*: on political and social transformation for greater equity



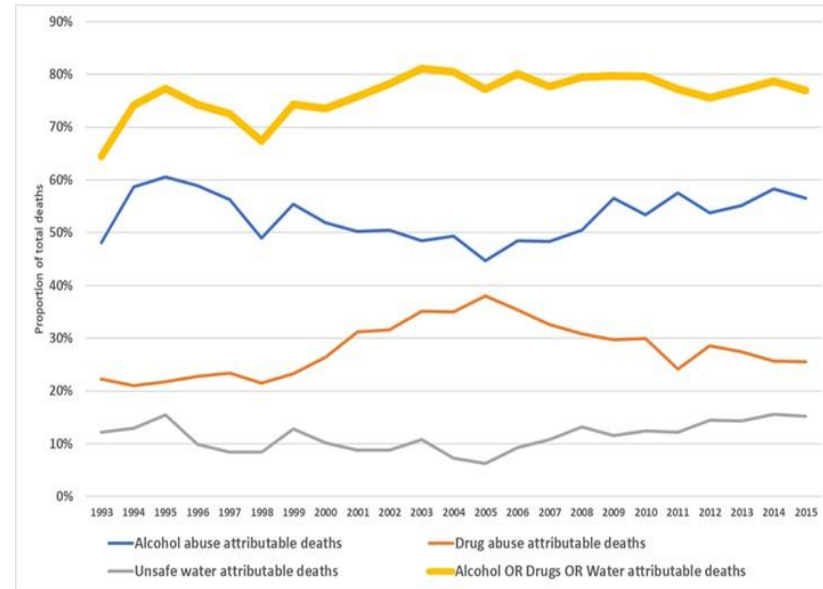
Social Accountability (Fox)

- Evidence on promoting citizen voice for improved public sector performance
- *Tactical*: assumes problems are local and information is power vs.
- *Strategic*: enabling collective action support state capacity to respond

3/ Learning



Shared concerns: connected health to other sectors, revealed major issues, **initiated community voice**



Visual evidence on lack of clean, safe water, and alcohol and drug abuse, Sources: Hove *et al*, 2019; Oladeinde *et al*, 2020

Proportions of total deaths attributable at least in part to alcohol and/or drugs and/or water 1993–2015. Source: Matilla *et al*, 2020

Expanding who participated and sharing control built collective capabilities, **amplified community voice**



Community stakeholder workshop 2015



Community stakeholder workshop 2019

Regular learning spaces built new relationships and trust, gave voice teeth



Multisectoral action planning workshop 2019



“There have been a lot of service delivery protests in communities, but they did not accomplish much – everyone realized that it is time to shift our ways of thinking and initiate dialogue, unite and collaborate and create sustainable partnerships to solve community problems”

Community stakeholder

Embedding in the health system giving voice teeth to have bite



Community mentors and CHWs, November 2020

Mpumalanga Health Policy and
Systems Learning Platform

**Community Health Workers
Community Mobilisation
TRAINING MANUAL**

Verbal Autopsy with Participatory Action Research (VAPAR)



health
MPUMALANGA PROVINCE
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Summary: “Voice needs teeth to have bite”

- **‘Safe spaces’:** credible, actionable evidence, inclusive, informed, adaptive process
- **Enabling togetherness:** raising community voice for action and learning, with authorities
- **Formal recognition:** combining ‘claimed’ and ‘invited’ spaces
- **Long term engagement:** with higher levels: *problems aren’t just local*



Reflection: “Radical potential, with pitfalls”

- **Epistemological challenge:** Researchers navigate conflicting worlds/worldviews
- **Risk of tokenism/ commodification.** Under-theorization of power, risks dislocation from radical politics
- **Relationalities:** mutual respect, dignity and connectedness. Researcher competencies
- **Sustainability,** reconstituting spaces to rework agency in more empowered ways



Completion of CHW community mobilisation training, May 2021

Acknowledgements



www.vapar.org

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