Who Knows? An exploration of knowledge democracy in community led development practice in rural Zambia.

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October 2025

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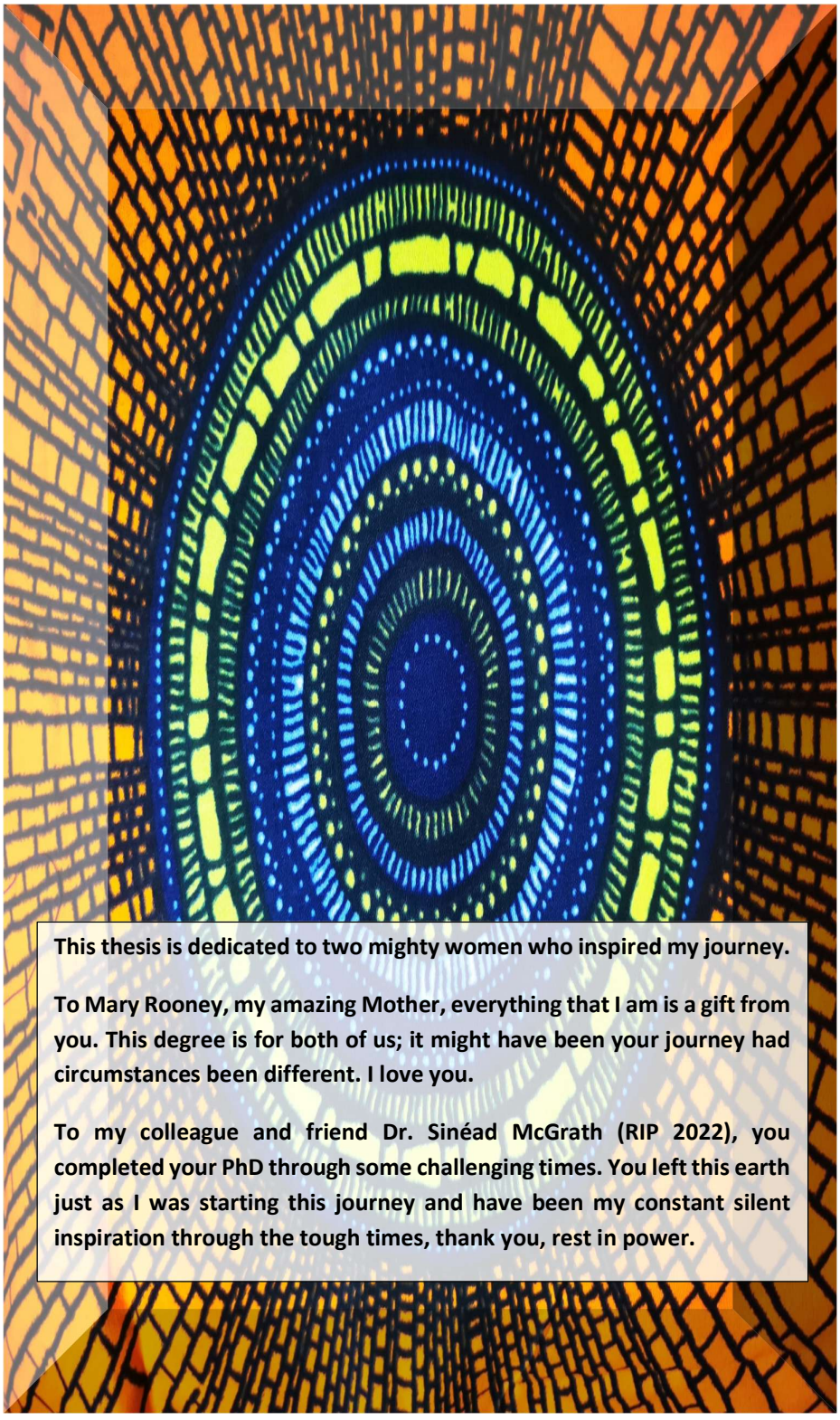


Image 0.1 Chitenge fabric (researcher's own image)

Acknowledgements



A warm welcome

Image 0.2: Welcome to Chisamba District (researcher's own image)

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to the community members of Nyankanga and Kaminembe who welcomed me so warmly, who brought me so much joy, and who shared their knowledge and experiences with me so openly and generously. The knowledge presented in this thesis belongs to these communities, it emerged from and was co-created with community members. This thesis is documented evidence of these communities as experts, see the depth of knowledge within these pages.

Nyanja Translation

Nifuna kuonga zikomo ku bantu bonse bamu munzi wa Nyankanga ndi Kaminembe, bamene banani landira cho kondwelesa ndiponso ndikuleta chisangalalo kwaine. Tina kambilana pa khani zo sianasiana ndiponso munandi pasa nzelu pa ma nkhanlidwe yanu chozi peleka. Nzelu ndiponso ndi ma punzilo yamene yachoka mu bukkhu ili ni yanu bonse bantu baku Nyankanga ndi Kaminembe. Ma phunzilo aya yana fakidwa pamodzi mukugwilizana ndi ine na bantu bamu minzi ibili iyi. Bukkhu ili ndichi sonyezo nau kamboni ya nzelu zamene zichokera ku antu aku Kaminembe ndi Nyakanga. Sopano onani nzelu muma pepala aya.

Tonga Translation

Ndiyanda kupa kulumba ku bantu bamu munzi wa Nyankanga abaku Kaminembe bakandi tambula chaku komana a luyando, a kwabana manoo abukhale bwabo chakulyaba. Twaambo alwiyo lwakabikwa mu bukkhu eli, ndulwenu nobantu baku Nyankanga abaku Kaminembe. Lwaka bikwa antomwe kwinda mukubelekela atomwe andime abantu bakuzhibela zhyobile ezhii. Bukkhu eli ipa bumboni kuluzhibo lwenu lunji. Amulage busongo a luzhibo lwenu muma pepa na mangwalo aya.

This journey certainly has not been mine alone. It was inspired, encouraged, facilitated and supported by many along the way, through different means and in many different relationships, a truly collective endeavour. The 'many' includes those passed on, the younger generation I hope to inspire, the many communities to which I belong, the sea and the sound baths which held, soothed and inspired me, and the spirits I called to for inspiration, in my own 'alternative' world.

I might not have set out on this journey at all but for the consistent encouragement of my colleague and friend Eilish Dillon, who was persistent in her efforts to convince me that it was possible and who supported me in so many ways, go raibh maith agat.

To Mpala, mo anam chara, my 'sista from another mista', who came to the rescue so many times and who kept me going with her insights, kindness and side-splitting wit. Natotela.

To the entire ZGF staff, those who participated in the research and those who welcomed me so warmly into your office space, thank you for trusting me to protect your relations and uphold your values and ethics. I am so impressed by your knowledge, commitment and enthusiasm, you certainly walk the talk. I look forward to continuing our collaboration. Go raibh míle maith agaibh.

To my Zambian research team, I learned so much from you all. It simply wouldn't have been possible without you, Zikomo.

Bernie Grummell, thank you for your gentle, consistent guidance, your deep insight and vision, and most of all, for your constant positivity and encouragement. I couldn't have done it without you, le meas.

To the many mná iontach who I am blessed to call mo chairde... You all provided friendship, comfort, encouragement and refuge as needed, always with love and laughter, go raibh maith agaibh go léir.

To my DHAE colleagues, it was a pleasure to share the journey with you. What an amazing group, I looked forward to every minute I spent with you over the past four years and look forward to relaxed times ahead. Go n-éirí an bóthar libh.

To my colleagues in Maynooth University, thank you for your constant support, I appreciate you all. Thank you to all the dedicated staff of the Department of Adult and Community Education and to Maynooth University for the education support that facilitated my study at this level.

To my extended family. Thank you for your faith in me, for your patience, and for the space to follow and complete my studies. I've missed you all and can't wait to spend some quality time with you again. Hopefully I have inspired some of the younger scholars in the clan… Jayne, you're next!

Finally, Calvin, mo chroí, thanks for your encouragement, for your unique perspective and insider insights on my research. This would have been an impossibly lonely journey without you. Le grá mór.

Abstract

Current debates on development practice call for social justice through decolonisation, localisation and shifting power to the grassroots. This research contributes to these debates, challenging widely held notions of deficiency in development discourse and practice through a critical examination of development practice in two rural communities in Zambia, with a view to exploring their collective experience of knowledge democracy in community led development practice. Informed by reflexive and critical theory philosophies, the research specifically explores processes of knowledge production and consumption, and the nature of collective participation, decision-making and empowerment in community philanthropy and community-led development practice in these communities. This research specifically recognises and explores the critical role of collective learning, education and knowledge in achieving the social justice on which a thriving global community depends.

The participatory approach and critical ethnographic intent reflect a commitment to issues of social justice and equality which are central to knowledge democracy. This qualitative research engaged with residents of two rural communities, Nyankanga and Kaminembe in Zambia, and with ZGF, a local civil society organisation, through group discussion, semi-structured interview, observation and critical reflexive practice. We adopted a co-creative approach which recognises community members as citizen knowers, decision makers and knowledge producers, counter to deficit models of development and extractive research processes.

Findings reveal evidence of a locally initiated and led community philanthropy model of development drawing from diverse local collective knowledge and assets. Decisions and agendas are shaped collectively, with strong participation and ownership, despite some experiences of exclusion at the margins. Consistent attention to power dynamics and the creation of inclusive enabling spaces are essential. Solidarity relations of mutuality, partnership and long-term commitment foster essential community confidence and trust and reinforce a truly community-driven approach.

This empirical evidence further justifies a change from hierarchical and deficit-based models of development research, education and practice to grounded asset-based models and approaches, such as community philanthropy, which recognise and value capability rather than vulnerability. Inclusion and meaningful participation which values and supports local knowledge, capacity and agency in community-led development is key. The importance of solidarity rather than charity relations is amplified, emphasising a need for continuity and long-term commitment which is not tied to funding cycles. Finally, a commitment to transformative rather than technical approaches to localisation in practice is advocated.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the fields of epistemic justice, knowledge democracy, development studies and transformative education, emphasising the value and worth inherent in diverse ontologies and epistemologies, and their imperative to social justice when integrated with inclusive and truly locally led development. This research proposes a manifesto for knowledge democracy for citizens, educators, researchers, policy makers, and development workers to advance just development and social change.

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Acronyms

8NDP	The Zambian 8th National Development Plan
ABCD	Asset Based Community Development
CDF	Constituency Development Fund
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CLD	Community-Led Development
CPA	Community Philanthropy Approach
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DHAE	Doctorate in Higher and Adult Education
EU	European Union
GBV	Gender-based Violence
GFCF	Global Fund for Community Foundations
GPS	Global Positioning System
GRZ	Government of the Republic of Zambia
HQ	Head Quarters
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
LGAZ	Local Government Association of Zambia
MfDR	Management for Development Results
MCLD	Movement for Community-Led Development
MoA	Memorandum of Agreement
MoG	Ministry of Gender
MoLGRD	Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development
MYSA	Ministry of Youth, Sports and Arts
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NNGO	Northern Non-Governmental Organisation
NORAD	The Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
ODA	Overseas Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OSAWA	Own Savings for Asset and Wealth Creation
PAR	Participatory Action Research
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SMAG	Safe Mothers Action Group
SNGO	Southern Non-Governmental Organisation
SSI	Semi-structured interview
TEN	Transformative Engagement Network
TfT	Training for Transformation
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
VDC	Village Development Committee
WDC	Ward Development Committee
WTO	World Trade Organisation
ZGF	The Zambian Governance Foundation (for Civil Society)

Chapter One: In search of knowledge democracy…

"Epistemic justice is inextricably intertwined with the work of liberation, decoloniality, and decolonization", (Dutta et al, 2022:61).

"The struggle for global social justice must be a struggle for global cognitive justice as well", De Sousa Santos (2007a:6).

Introduction

This research aims to add to understandings of knowledge democracy (what is recognised and valued as knowledge; types, sources, forms of knowledge), participation, decision-making and transformative education (education which motivates and empowers learners to explore their world, challenge assumptions and engage in society as informed active citizens). Drawing on my long experience as a development educator, I engage in a critical examination of development practice in communities with complex challenges in rural Zambia, with a view to exploring their experience of knowledge democracy in community led development practice through a lens of power.

This thesis engages critical theory as an approach within the fields of critical education and development studies. The former is briefly discussed later in this chapter, and in more detail in later chapters. The latter, critical theory within development studies, is underpinned by critical post-development (Gudynas, 2017; Ziai, 2015) and decolonial perspectives (Melber et al., 2024; Camfield, 2024). It is concerned with international development practice and the ideas and infrastructure informing and shaping that practice, and with understandings and experiences of justice, equality, participation, empowerment, and solidarity therein. Critical theory is understood in this study as the exploration and challenge of power, assumptions and existing conditions which sustain social injustice.

I take a critical post-development view of Eurocentric development modelled on western knowledge, norms, institutions, systems and structures etc., acknowledging that this model of development dismisses non-western knowledge systems and cultures instead imposing western centric ways and modes of being. I view the neoliberal model and the wider development system as the continued imposition of western scientific knowledge and ideas of 'development', rather than challenging the root cause of poverty, injustice, and inequality. However, rather than promoting an alternative *to* development position (Escobar, 1995), I favour dismantling the flawed model in favour of an alternative development model, one drawing on a pluriverse of knowledge, ideas and contexts.

Decoloniality pushes this further by challenging the root cause of inequality and injustice, naming unequal power relations rooted in the imposed colonial systems and structures which persist in a neocolonial guise. Drawing on Kothari et al. (2019), Mignolo (2012) and others, I explore the opportunities and alternatives viewed through the pluriverse which contests that there is no single universal route to progress and development rather a plurality of ontology, epistemology and cosmologies informing many modes, methods, and context specific solutions and actions emerging from the ground up rather than imposed.

Similar to some in critical development studies, (Gudynas, 2017; Veltmeyer and Bowles, 2017; Ziai, 2015) I strain against the bounds of existing theory, instead at times integrating and opposing theories despite the tensions this provokes from a rigid theoretical perspective.

While theories and debates are further explored in chapter two, the past and present context of development practice and the origins of this space are discussed below.

The International Development Space

This research focuses on practice in the context of the international development space, explored from a critical development studies

perspective. In the interest of locating the research and relevant debates, I present a very brief outline of that space, its modern beginnings, the system in which it functions, and some of the key structures and actors which sustain and operationalise it. While there are many definitions of development, in the international development space it can be broadly viewed in social, economic, political, environmental and technical terms, often development as modernisation through economic prosperity and assessed from a Western-centric power dynamic. A more critical perspective examines the power inherent in 'development', such as that of Esteva (1992) who argues that thus the concept is feeble, fragile and without substance. Munck (2017:87) contests that,

> development acts as a truism and its open-ended significance renders it almost meaningless. Yet, its conceptual inflation has led it to dominate almost all treatments of the non-Western world. Development seems to act as a metaphor for the Western way; a word to represent a world to be built in its own image. Far from benign, a wholesome objective all political tendencies could agree to, development begins to appear as a disciplinary mechanism in the Foucaultian sense.

He further contests that development as modernisation reigns, highlighting, "neoliberalism as uncontested development paradigm… [where] reform in development parlance had now become synonymous with neoliberal, free-market doctrines" (ibid).

Humanitarian and development assistance has long existed in various forms. The existing field of international development and overseas development assistance (ODA), often simply referred to as development or foreign aid, emerged from the debris of the second world war (WWII) and the independence of many former colonised states (Ziai, 2016). Then, the aid system and its related organisations and institutions began to develop in support of post WWII reconstruction in Europe and the development of formerly colonised states. These included extant bodies such as the international financial institutions of the International Monetary Fund (IMF)

and the World Bank, the World Trade Organisation[1] (WTO) and of course the United Nations with its many organs and agencies. The system is further supported by organisations such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) which works "to establish evidence-based international standards and to find solutions to social, economic and environmental challenges" (OECD, n/d) and its Development Assistance Committee (DAC), established in 1960 to promote development co-operation and broader policy in support of sustainable development of developing nations. ODA is contributed by DAC and non-DAC members globally through multilateral and bilateral arrangements at state level, such as through the EU Global Europe financial instrument and Ireland's development cooperation programme, Irish Aid.

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) also feature as part of the aid system, at local, national and international levels. The concept of the NGO is rooted in the UN system, with many established in the latter half of the twentieth century in "three phases of European humanitarianism" (O'Sullivan, 2014:196) following WWII and focused on European reconstruction and refugees; then engaging with newly emerging, formerly colonised states; and finally in a global response to inequality and injustice in the Global South. These efforts re-shaped post-war international relations and all the while cemented Western control over the newly emerging aid system into which NGOs were assimilated (ibid.). NGOs generally operate independently of the state, on a non-profit basis and broadly work towards addressing social, economic and political issues. However, definitions can vary across contexts, with some "known by a number of terms in addition to NGOs, such as civil society organizations (CSOs), community based organizations (CBOs), grassroots organizations, private voluntary organizations, or faith-based organizations (FBOs). They can be international, regional, national, or local" (Brass et. al., 2018:136). Regardless, the concept of the NGO is often contested, with varying

[1] Formerly 'the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade' (GATT), it was replaced by the WTO in 1995 (Green, 2008).

perspectives from the NGO as a route to balance power between private business and the state, or to advance social transformation, justice and equality, or as an arm of the private sector pushing a neoliberal agenda (Lewis, 2014). Most of the major international NGOs (INGOs) originated in and operate from the Global North. Recent decades have seen a rise in NGOs globally but increasingly a rise in the number of (northern) INGOs with established headquarters in the Global South and positioned as Southern NGOs in localisation debates and competition for funding, putting strain on limited resources and on civil society actors (Van Selm et al., 2025). Civil society, the collective of non-governmental organisations, community groups, and associations that operate independently of the state and the market should foster civic engagement, promote social justice, and advocate for public interests. A strong civil society is essential for strengthening democracy and enhancing community resilience.

While the origin and locus of discourse and power (and related practice) has been consistently Northern since the birth of modern 'development', van Norren and Seehawer (2025:np) acknowledge that power and motivation for change in development to a, "large extent depends on attitudes of more affluent countries, nowadays both located in the Global North and South, and global elites, both still deeply engrained into the neo-liberal logic of development and modernism". This research explores elements of these debates through its focus on knowledge democracy and community philanthropy, an emerging alternative to the traditional Western model of development practice, which challenge the dominant locus and modes of power and knowledge.

Development discourse and practice have been widely critiqued through the past six decades and more. Ziai (2016) offers a rich Foucauldian analysis of development discourse through time, from traditional, to global development and post-development approaches and argues that discourse plays a central role in setting the rules of 'development' which has changed through time, particularly since the global debt crisis experienced in the 1980s which led to a focus on participation and ownership, sustainable

development and free markets. These structuralist rules with their universalist assumptions of development were now challenged by neoliberalism and calls for context-specific approaches. These ranged from promoting market solutions to advocating civil society involvement, while others rejected traditional development efforts and called for grassroots alternatives. While divergent in their approach, they continue to operate in the dimension of hidden power, where the powerful Western elite set the rules of the game and to a large extent control who has a seat at the table. They further decide the parameters of concepts such as participation, ownership and sustainability, so constraining the power and agency therein. Ziai argues that these approaches, which appear noble, are contradictory to the original intent and 'rules' of development cooperation and thus lead to serious contradictions. Neoliberal approaches which largely benefit a global elite over developing nations is one such example. Neoliberalism advocates for,

> free-market capitalism with minimal government intervention. It emphasizes the importance of private sector control over the economy, suggesting that government should primarily focus on reducing barriers to market entry rather than actively managing economic or social welfare… promoting deregulation and tax reductions as pathways to economic growth. Despite its wide acceptance, it has faced significant criticism for fostering economic inequality, environmental degradation, and undermining democratic processes (Larson, 2025:np).

Ziai further acknowledges that alternative interpretations and related practice persist regardless within an otherwise Eurocentric, authoritarian and depoliticised space, a critical post-development position which I also hold. Similar critique from other authors is further explored in chapters to follow.

The focus on foreign aid and economic growth as a driver of 'development' has long been contested, favoured by some economists and criticised by others (such as Jeffery Sachs and Willian Easterly respectively). Indeed, for some countries in very different contexts, such as Botswana, Taiwan, South Korea, Spain and Ireland, aid transfers and economic growth have been the catalyst for transformative development (Green, 2008). However,

development is not just about economic growth, as the DAC evaluation discussed below revealed.

Aid Effectiveness

Aid effectiveness is one element of the discourse and approach to improve aid, albeit without changing the existing aid system. The DAC evaluation of aid effectiveness in the latter decades of the 20th century revealed that a significant proportion of development projects had performed poorly with few long-term benefits for communities (ICRC, 2008). One element of the response to these findings was the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness which pledged commitment to principles of ownership, harmonisation, alignment, results and mutual accountability in development policy and practice (see OECD, 2005). The principles make commitments to promoting and supporting developing country ownership, as opposed to the donor-imposed prescriptions prevalent since post WWII (Ziai, 2025). However, while this approach embodied in the Paris Declaration was based on learning and aimed at making the aid system more effective, it did so *within* the existing system. Sjöstedt (2013:154) highlights a mismatch between the principles of ownership and a results-based management approach favoured by donors at the time (and which continues) and reveals that, "there is inevitably a gap between the new rhetoric of ownership and the impact on the overall balance of power between donors and recipients". Naylor (2011) explores the operation of power within international development discourse arising from within a western-centric system more broadly, and its impact on policy and practice. They conclude that while the broad goals of international development are the eradication of poverty and inequality, "as the discourse operates according to unequal structural relations of power, and relies upon and discursively perpetuates the very poverty and inequality that it seeks to eliminate, it will always fall short of this ultimate aim" (2011:193).

Furthermore, Lundsgaarde and Engberg-Pedersen report that there is a sense of fatigue in relation to the aid effectiveness agenda which has persisted from the outset. While acknowledging that the agenda is based on

lessons and learning from decades of practice, they argue that "the current results agenda has shifted towards a more donor-centred perspective, undercutting the basic insight of the effectiveness agenda" (2019:48). In an analysis of the evolution of EU development policy, Furness et al (2020:90) conclude that it "is driven by the tension between its raison d'être as a concrete expression of global solidarity and international cooperation, and its increasing instrumentalisation in the service of European economic and security interests".

Approaches to development practice

Such instrumentalisation has prompted various approaches to the practice of development, such as the management for development results (MfDR) (OECD, 2005) approach in response to the DAC evaluation of aid effectiveness. The MfDR approach attempted to address the evaluations findings, including through enhanced participation, a results focus and performance measurement to achieve development effectiveness.

This approach which persists in the main in practice is an element of the results agenda, critiqued above by Sjöstedt (2013) and Lundsgaarde and Engberg-Pedersen (2019) as being at odds with values and aims embedded in the Paris Declaration. It is also often critiqued as lacking meaningful participation, an important aspect of the ownership principle mentioned earlier, and is attributed as an aspect of the depoliticisation and professionalisation of development, the latter having both positive and negative reported impacts (Kothari, 2005; Maier et al., 2014). The co-optation of terms such as participation and empowerment into these technical and professional approaches favoured by donors has stripped these concepts of their power and agency and in doing so has lost "the radical and transformative agenda implicit in their original formation" argues Wallace (2007:20).

The past two decades has seen 'new' approaches emerge. These hold echoes of the solidarity and grounded grassroots development which was

widespread prior to the donor imposed technocratic expert-led approaches and subsequent aid effectiveness agenda favoured by the predominantly Western architects of the development sector. I use the term 'new' approaches tentatively to emphasise that grassroots development and 'bottom-up' approaches have long existed and persisted in the development space despite top-down approaches. Through the 1970s and 1980s, from theories of dependency to neo-liberalism and post-development to the present day, NGOs have acknowledged the importance of grassroots development (Willis, 2020). However, traditional and grassroots development approaches often clash, and original grassroots development can become co-opted by NGOs or constrained by donors who offer funds and support in return for evidence of results. The 'bottom up' finds itself complying with the 'top-down' rather than challenge business as usual (van Selm et al., 2025; McCloskey, 2023).

However, much grassroots development persists among NGOs and a variety of civil society actors from social movements, faith-based organisations, trade unions, community associations to co-operatives and more. They can favour approaches and strategies such as degrowth, re-commoning, lobbying and advocacy, collective bargaining, or civil disobedience to challenge the structural and systemic roots of inequality and injustice while adopting participatory and critical education approaches as a core of their work, placing value on critical thinking, collaboration, empowerment and community ownership. Grassroots approaches call for a renewed focus on older philosophies and ways, for example,

> For post-development theorists, there has been an increasing engagement with Indigenous and Southern concepts such as 'buen vivir' from the Andes…, 'ubuntu' from Southern Africa and 'swaraj' from India (Ziai 2017). While these concepts have their own particular roots, they share a focus on collective well-being, rather than individual lives and economic wealth (Willis, 2020:231).

Key in a post-development era return to the grassroots is a critical examination of knowledge production, meaningful participation, a focus on the local (as well as the global) and attention to disharmony and unequal power dynamics at the grassroots (Willis, 2020). While these views and

alternative approaches are widespread throughout development discourse and practice, Kothari (2024:68) notes that "they remain scattered and for the most part have been unable to create the critical mass necessary to affect macro-changes. There is, therefore, a need for platforms and processes to bring them together, both as modes of resistance and constructive alternatives". Choudry and Kapoor (2010) advise that failure to document 'alternative' ways and to actively challenge the dominant hegemonic approach risks these worthwhile approaches forever being positioned as just that, marginal alternatives. Some of the more recent 'alternatives' are the focus of this research and are explored in following chapters.

Community Philanthropy

Approaches seeking more radical reform of development practice, such as community philanthropy, supports decolonisation, localisation and engages with movements for community-led development and shifting (returning) power to the grassroots. The community philanthropy approach has gained greater recognition and seen increased growth over the past two decades, according to Hodgson (2020), but they also argue that it needs more credence and support from the broader development sector to bring it from the margins to centre.

The community philanthropy approach is a collective strategy which is, "adopted and takes root as practice within a broader cross-section of southern civil society as a strategy for mobilising alternative forms of finance, strengthening local capacities, building trust, enhancing resilience and increasing local ownership" (Martins, 2021:2). It is a communal, relational process-based approach which identifies, values and draws on collective community resources such as volunteering, skills, knowledge, funds etc. to support development and which plans and designs programmes which meet community needs and priorities through being community led. The aim is to shift the balance of power by raising awareness

of the roots of inequality in policy, strategy, power relationships etc., support community mobilisation to challenge and change the status quo and advocate for localisation (Hodgson, 2022). It is this emphasis on the collective in the community philanthropy approach in community led development which is the focus of this research.

Notions of Deficiency in Development Discourse and Practice

Global inequality, protracted conflicts and other humanitarian emergencies, are increasing with those already suffering most further bearing the brunt. Agenda 2030 acknowledges the critical role of education and knowledge in achieving "a world free of poverty, hunger, disease and want, where all life can thrive... a world free of fear and violence. A world with universal literacy. A world with equitable and universal access to quality education at all levels, to health care and social protection, where physical, mental and social well-being are assured" (UN, 2015:7). Development discourse and practice very often dismiss marginalised communities as deficient, in knowledge, agency, capacity, resources. This has been so for decades as noted by Ziai (2016:200) who describes a persistence "of a diagnosis of a deficit in the object of development discourse, followed by the prescription of a recipe, a strategy which entails the promise of development". Local knowledge is consulted merely as a means for the Northern knowers and decision makers to diagnose the Southern problems which prevent the neo-liberal system from functioning correctly (Girvan, 2007). "Local knowledge cannot be the source of original solutions, since the general answers are universally prescribed" (ibid: 17). This 'empty vessel' approach is contrary to knowledge democracy and, as community philanthropy advocate Hodgson (2020) points out, if we want to achieve real change, then we need to change who we look to for knowledge. In addition to the imperatives of decolonisation, localisation, knowledge democracy[2] and equality, with more recent global political

[2] Concepts which are explored in depth in the literature review chapters.

discord and broad related cuts to aid budgets in the development sector, community philanthropy is challenged to fill the void created.

Furthermore, Western understandings of knowledge which permeate development discourse and practice broadly (Scholte and Söderbaum, 2017) tend to view knowledge and learning from an individualistic perspective. While collective knowledge is discussed in development studies literature at organisational and systems level, this is rarely the case in practice at community level. Collective knowledge is rarely recognised as evidence in a system focused on tangible measurable results in traditional development practice (Eyben et al., 2015), and more broadly in knowledge production viewed through a normative Western lens (Glass and Newman, 2015). This research specifically recognises and explores the critical role of collective learning, education and knowledge in achieving the social justice on which a thriving global community depends.

Research Questions

Given the focus on collective knowledge and learning in a community philanthropy approach to community led development practice, the following research questions are explored in this research:

- How is collective community knowledge in its diversity of form and source recognised and respected in the international development space?
- What is the nature of the collective participation and empowerment processes experienced by these communities in community led development and a community philanthropy approach?
- What makes community led development authentic for these communities? and
- What role does knowledge democracy play in community led development?

The concepts of community led development as a specific approach to development and community philanthropy as an aspect of that approach are discussed in the chapters to follow.

Research Partners and Context

This research engaged with two rural communities in Chisamba District, Central Province, Zambia, and with the Zambian Governance Foundation for Civil Society (ZGF), a local Lusaka-based civil society organisation (CSO). Both the communities and ZGF are research partners in this participatory approach to community-based research. The latter also played a key support and gatekeeper role in the research, which I discuss further in this chapter and in chapter four.

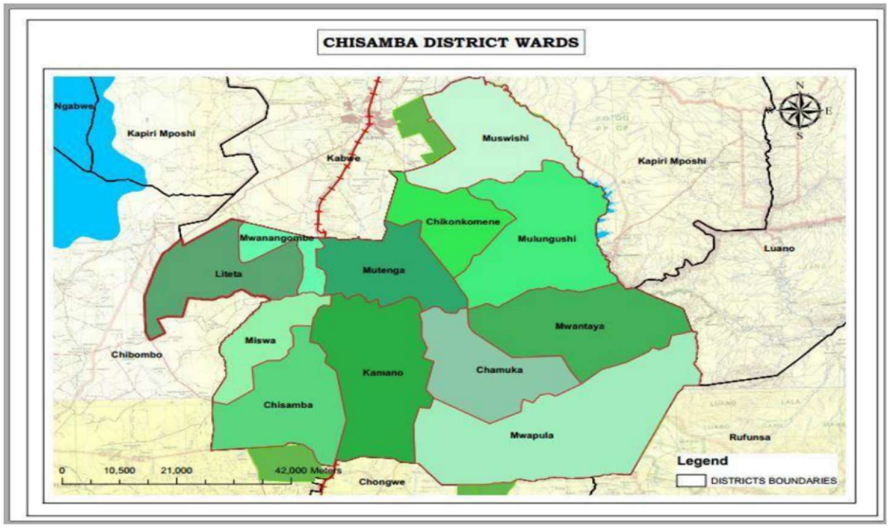


Image 1.0: Chisamba District Wards, adapted from MoLGRD (2024)

Nyankanga and Kaminembe – finding their own voice

The rural communities of Nyankanga and Kaminembe are community research partners in this research. They represent two of the seven zones located in Mwapula Ward, Chisamba District in Central Province, each with villages spread across a wide area of remote bush land. In a 2021 community profile report[3] the population of Nyankanga and Kaminembe were

[3] Internal ZGF community profile documents (ZGF, 2021).

estimated at 1326 and 1550 across 221 and 310 households respectively. Similar to the demographic profile of Chisamba District more broadly[4], the demographics are relatively balanced in terms of gender across both communities. Each has a largely young population with approximately 57% and 55% of the population respectively aged between 25-45 years, which rises to 77% and 73% aged between 25-59 years when those between 45-59 years are added. Most community members are smallholder farmers with livestock and engage in seasonal crop production. However, due to this seasonal nature, many rely on other incomes, such as, skilled trades, charcoal burning, operating hammer mills, or running grocery shops.

Most households in both communities are male headed in line with cultural norms, but it should be noted that this refers to decision making authority rather than as bread winners. While there are slightly more female headed households in Nyankanga community, most are widowed or single mothers. This makes them head of household by circumstance, rather than through challenging traditional gender norms by choice. Conversely, approximately 55% to 60% of households consist of extended families ranging from 5 to more than 10 members with strong family bonds and deeply rooted to the community. In Nyankanga, people from five villages engaged in the research, and from four villages in Kaminembe. These are isolated communities, in a geographical sense but also socio-economically, politically and technically. Mwapula Ward is situated at the eastern side of Chisamba province, close to the border with Lusaka Province. There are no paved or unpaved roads in the communities. The paved road ends/begins at the Great East Road running through Lusaka Province[5], while the unpaved roads end approximately fifteen kms from each community central point (centred around the primary school and near to the headman's[6] home). From that

[4] Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (2024) Chisamba Integrated Development Plan 24 – 34

[5] Over twenty kilometres from Kaminembe primary school, and a similar distance from Nyankanga

[6] The headman is the main traditional authority representative in each community, reporting to the traditional authority chief of that community. There is also a headman in each village in the community.

point on, the transitways are bush tracks. There is no public transport, and the most common forms of local transport are on foot, bicycle or ox cart, a challenge for the approximate 12 per cent of community members with visual or physical impairments.



Image 1.1: Unpaved road in Mwapula Ward (researcher's own)

They are not connected to the electricity grid, and water and sanitation are limited to a few bore holes and pit latrines (aside from at Kaminembe primary school[7]). There are little to no health services, scant access to formal education and no mobile communications network (MoLGRD, 2024)[8]. As one community member shared, if war broke out in Lusaka, they would not know about it, yet Lusaka is a mere one-hundred kilometres away.

Despite these challenges, these are pro-active, united, resilient communities who have self-organised and had successes in their community development initiatives in their own right. Both communities have established their own primary schools, initially as traditional thatch structures with volunteer teachers, progressing to brick school buildings and the necessary teachers houses to secure government accreditation and support. The communities emphasised that this was initially achieved through collective effort in a

[7] Which has toilet blocks, handwashing stations and pipe stands courtesy of two INGOs
[8] See Appendix 1 for detail on Chisamba District Education Facilities and Standards

community philanthropy approach with little or no external support. They went on to build on their achievements, one through external support from INGOs, the other from constituency development funds, and both from a Zambian civil society organisation (CSO). This CSO continues to be a solidarity partner of both communities and is introduced below.

Zambian Governance Foundation - finding their own power

The Zambian Governance Foundation for Civil Society (ZGF) is a Zambian civil society organisation (CSO) that acted as organisational research partner in this research. They[9] acted in gatekeeping and support roles for my research, and seven staff also participated directly in the research as respondents. I was very aware of the potential complications of this dual role and discussed ethical arises arising with ZGF staff from the outset. This culminated in an agreed Memorandum of Understanding and ongoing critical reflections and discussion, further elaborated and discussed in the methodology chapter.

Nöst (2023) shares that ZGF was originally set up as a grant-making organisation in 2009, as a more efficient conduit for several large bilateral donors supporting local civil society. It has worked with EU country donors, including Irish Aid, and has co-operated with the European Commission. As the organisation was set up to facilitate donor funds, their systems, structures and programming were created to meet donors' needs, rather than ZGFs organisational needs or local community needs. Straining against this mould from the outset, they searched for ways to become more independent and within three years of set up they began to diversify their income and managed to buy their rented building. Over the next few years, they set up a social enterprise and generated income from that and from rental and capacity building activities. They describe these as challenging times for them, but they persevered and in 2016 they met 'kindred

[9] I use the term 'they' to refer to ZGF throughout as both an organisation and collective of people.

community spirits' in the #ShiftThePower[10] movement at the Global Summit on Community Philanthropy. It was at that point that they turned their full attention to championing community-led approaches to development and the community philanthropy approach which is rooted in community, and values community assets, capacity and trusted relations as central. ZGF is not alone in this, it is part of a growing movement for community-led development and a global movement amplifying the call to 'shift the power' to local communities in support of localisation and decolonisation. However, as it turned its attention towards community led work, their donors began to turn away resulting in major funding deficits. The financial challenges led to a very uncertain and unsettled period for the organisation, programmes and staff but they worked through it and describe how they found creativity and freedom in the struggle and then began the community philanthropy approach. ZGF eventually started to find new funders who were open to the new community focus, and it connected with networks of community led and community philanthropy focused organisations and funders who were distant from it when previously constrained by their original ties to the traditional aid sector. ZGF recount how they continue to experiment, create, struggle, connect, learn and grow through these changes and challenges, including a change of leadership in 2024[11].

Defining Community

This research is rooted in a notion of community, a core concept which merits attention and definition. Community is commonly tied to place, defined by geographic boundaries, but it can be so much more than that. Mohr Carney et al. (2022:105) argue that community "can be the place where we belong. Where we make meaning. Communities of meaning or those based on shared beliefs, shared experiences, or shared ethnicity also tell the story of the people in the community". Community can be bound

[10] The #ShiftThePower movement is a global movement with headquarters in the South African based Global Fund for Community Organisations (GFCF), see https://shiftthepower.org/

[11] See also Nöst and Jangara (2018) for an account of ZGFs journey and experience.

by “people, social relationships, interaction, common ties, place, shared values, unity, reciprocity, security and experiences of belonging. The features of community combine in different ways and are uniquely interpreted to establish the meaning of community in any instance, hence internal complexity” (Carlon, 2021:326). In a globalised world the community space can cross geographic boundaries locally, nationally and internationally (Gaventa, 2007). Digital technologies can be a great resource and facilitate the formation of powerful global communities. They can also be complex spaces with conflicting interests and agendas, and where power dynamics can be delicate and volatile, often shared unequally (Hodgson et al., 2017). The ShiftThePower movement is one such global community, a movement of like-minded individuals and organisations who “refuse to accept the status quo in philanthropy and development” (ShiftThePower, 2025:np).

In the context of this research, the research partner communities of Nyankanga and Kaminembe are bound by place, identity, shared values and common goals. They are indirectly tied to global community-led and community philanthropy movements through their relations with ZGF. While they share some characteristics, identities and interests, they are not homogenous entities. Within the wider communities are other distinct communities or groupings based on shared aspects, such as tribe, women, elders, youth, the farming community, isolated village communities on the periphery, and more. While exploring community led development and community philanthropy, this research also remains cognisant of broader community knowledge and collective knowledges with the wider communities which are more fluid and unbounded, while also paying attention to the power relations, and economic, social and cultural relations which affect them. Different experiences of this shared community exist within and among these broader collectives, which in turn shape their understandings and perspectives of their world. For many, these understandings and perspectives are influenced by critical education, as a

consequence of deliberate education initiatives, or through the everyday knowledge so vital for social change (Tandon and Srinivasan, 2024).

Critical education - a transformative pedagogy

My understanding and perspective of my world has been influenced by Freire, the old friend who greeted me in a module at the start of my doctoral journey in a year that marked the centenary of his birth. Reading Shor and Freire (1987) was a comfortable and familiar start to that journey. It reinforced my commitment to critical pedagogy, serving as a reminder to me of the importance of situating knowledge for critical education, naming the world, making connections, building the confidence and capacity to engage with issues and ideas that impact life experience in specific contexts.

Within and across societies issues of race, social class and power; scaffolded by ideologies, agendas, policies and practice; sustain hierarchies that drive and support inequalities (Naylor,2011; McCloskey 2023). Critical education in informal, non-formal, and formal spaces is crucial for a future where such hierarchies are deconstructed, and inequalities are challenged and changed (Giroux, 2022). This prompts me to revisit concerns which I may have considered many times before. Does equality start with decolonising knowledge? Does it demand a return to grassroots in its radical and transformative beginnings? Calling for and supporting participation in its truest sense in a change from the norm? Refusing to relinquish control of grassroots organisations to more powerful actors in an effort to regain and retain control and in doing so re-dress the balance of power? The response from community advocates such as Langdon, Larweh and Quarmyne (2020) is an emphatic yes, with an emphasis on reflexivity and a consistent collective unlearning, challenging the power relations, and eurocentrism which sustain colonial inequalities and epistemic injustice.

This research attempts to explore the experience of these research communities through an exploration of knowledge justice, participation, and

empowerment through a careful, critical interpretation of the individual and collective words of the communities themselves. Examples of the phenomena of knowledge injustice related to status (class[12]), power, and knowledge arise consistently throughout the research. The role of participation, critical education and ownership in countering such injustice is also consistent. It is core to the internalisation and external view that ultimately, we are all 'us' (AbdulMagied, 2022), and to a view of these communities not as 'others' but as 'us', 'belonging', a recognised and valued part of the Zambian and global community.

Rationale

This research is informed by twenty years of experience in development programmes and critical learning experiences in the community development, international development, development education and higher education sectors. It is drawn from my engagement with learners, development organisation staff, and marginalised communities grappling with a range of challenges in different settings globally throughout my professional career. I am an educator, constant student and activist. These experiences have informed my worldview and therefore my research approach and design, which is grounded in respect, justice, equality and dignity, and an ethos of 'do no harm'. Keeping a focus on enacting my values and ethos, my intent has been to reflect principles of knowledge democracy and decoloniality with all research partners. Pertinent to this has been action to ensure that all involved, especially the community members, understood the purpose and value of the research, chose to participate of their own free will, free to engage in the research in a spirit of collaboration and co-creation which is integral to my approach. I discuss this approach in more depth in the methodology chapter.

[12] In this rural Zambian context, concepts of status (related to wealth, education, social connections, etc.) are more relevant than Western understandings of the concept of class.

Professional experience of epistemic injustice

This focus was driven by previous experiences and attitudes expressed by development workers throughout my practice which had a profound impact on me - 'They are poor, rural, backward and uneducated - they don't know what they need!' This statement, voiced by a white European development worker in an organisational capacity-building workshop in South Africa describing the people in the community that they support, shocked me. It returns to me often and came to mind again as I engaged with the field of knowledge democracy and epistemic (knowledge) justice (Hall et al., 2020; Fricker, 2007). Who knows? Clearly no-one in that community as far as that participant was concerned. It is a clear example of Fricker's (2007) concept of pre-emptive testimonial injustice. This means that the development worker does not look to the community for insights; they never intend to seek their knowledge or input as they do not regard them as credible knowers. The indignity and the patronising, dehumanising, infantilising nature of that comment still haunts me, and when I hear the term 'white saviour' I think of that moment. Attitudes and assumptions like these erode people's humanity, dignity, capacity, and agency; and they disempower and further marginalise them. Those who hold them assume people's life situation is their fault, rather than scrutinising the systems and structures, which can cause and sustain inequalities and marginalisation, such as those within powerful institutions. These attitudes also exemplify the persistent diagnosis of Global South communities as deficient, as described by Ziai (2016), an understanding which has permeated development practice for decades. Further, Pérez (2019:83) highlights the attitude towards the 'they' in this example as being at the root of epistemic injustice and violence, the 'them' being "implicitly excluded and inferior". I have experienced and witnessed this phenomenon of pre-emptive testimonial injustice consistently (as the norm rather than the exception), through my lived personal and professional experience of development work, and these experiences shape my perspectives and worldview.

Contrary to the patronising perspective shared above, the research partner communities are far from "deficient". They have limited experience with NGOs[13] in the past and have exercised agency and determination in community led development processes with successful outcomes prior to their engagement with ZGF. This fact merits recognition and has enhanced their engagement as research partners.

Collective ways of knowing

As noted earlier, understandings of knowledge in development discourse and practice tend to view knowledge and learning from an individualistic perspective, rarely recognising collective knowledge in process and practice at community level. Nor is it considered when gathering the prized evidence for results in traditional development practice (Scholte and Söderbaum, 2017; Eyben et al., 2015), with knowledge production viewed broadly through a normative Western lens (Glass and Newman, 2015). Furthermore, development practice tends to engage with knowledge as something to be delivered, managed and measured. It is usually focused on 'beneficiary data', measured at an individual level, and with specific pre-determined results and measures focused on efficiency and effectiveness. These are set by and relevant to funders and INGOs (Kimambo and Shallwani, 2025), rather than offering a focus on wider learning such as process learning and critical education, and rarely at the collective community level.

In the education and development studies field, the concept of collective knowledge is more widely discussed in relation to 'communities of practice' in the context of organisational or sectoral learning in the international development sector. Similarly, collective knowledge is more often explored in the community development field and educational research literature, through a lens of epistemic justice, such as that of Glass and Newman (2015)

[13] Other than ZGF and the WDC, some villages in Nyankanga have knowledge of and benefitted from a health clinic in a neighbouring community but reported that they had not engaged directly with an NGO at the time of this research. Kaminembe has some limited NGO experience, with PLAN Zambia and a Japanese NGO on WASH facilities at Kaminembe school.

in their examination of ethical and epistemic dilemmas in knowledge production in collaborative, community-based research.

Collective ways of knowing and being are fundamental to worldviews such as Ubuntu, Buen Vivir, Buddhist Happiness, Sami Arbediehtu, Sentipensar and others (van Norren and Seehawer, 2025; de Sousa Santos, 2014; Kothari et al., 2019). In a comparative analysis of the former four worldviews mentioned here, van Norren and Seehawer (2025:np) present that they all share a biocentric and interdependent view of all life, which value mutuality and epistemic diversity and which accentuates "collective flourishing and dignity rather than individual rights; a holistic view on education, health and gender values (including the emotional, spiritual and practical); restorative justice rather than punitive justice; and the importance of reciprocity, interculturality and interdependence". An important aspect is that collective knowledge is located, related to place. Nadarajah and Grydehøj explain that "*knowing takes place*… Knowing and knowledge systems are developed collectively through relations between peoples and places" (2024:1). This view of learning as situated and collective connects with the Freirean concepts of collective consciousness and situated knowledge as core aspects of education for social change (Freire, 1972).

While collective knowledges are a central facet of epistemologies of the South, these epistemologies are widely considered as subaltern knowledges by the Western academe with its focus on the rational and knowable (Mignolo, 2012). This skewed power dimension impacts what is considered 'legitimate' knowledge and how we seek that knowledge in development practice (Carlsson and Wohlgemuth, 2000:16).

My understanding of collective knowledge is further shaped by many authors, including writers on knowledge justice and democracy. These include Escrigas et al (2014), Mama (2011), Gaventa (1995), Hall and Tandon (2017), and Fricker (2007) in their many works cited in this chapter and throughout the thesis; and by theorists on Pan-African and Southern epistemologies including Dzisah and Kpessa-Whyte (2023), Appiah (2005),

Mkandawire (2000), Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018, 2020), de Sousa Santos (2007, 2007a, 2016) among others. My research draws on authors and worldviews mentioned here in this regard but with a particular focus on the African philosophy of Ubuntu. Research findings are in the main drawn from, and presented as, collective community knowledge rather than individual knowledge and perspectives, and recognise many collectives within the community rather than a homogenous community knowledge. Through constant critical reflexive practice, I attempt to remain vigilant of the fact that my perspective is shaped by my located European education and its propensity to seek out rationality at the expense of relationality and mutuality. In so doing I aim to acknowledge, recognise and respect diverse ways of knowing, in contrast to the Eurocentric norm, and to respond to the research questions through a situated epistemological lens as best I can, despite my positionality and conditioning. This thesis is not about the technicalities of how collective knowledge is formed, rather it emphasises its existence and value, contrary to its paucity of recognition in Western episteme and in the development space.

Contribution

Current approaches to development practice call for social justice through decolonisation, localisation and shifting power (back) to the grassroots. These calls reach beyond the development sector and are prevalent through the social sciences. Theory and ideology hold and shape visible, hidden and invisible power which is exercised across a variety of spaces and levels in practice. Gebremariam (2025) argues that the development studies (DS) space from where much theory and practice emerge needs attention and serious commitment to decolonise that space. They argue that it needs a "focus on the knowledge, the knower and the power-mediated relations of knowledge production equally in "decolonising DS" ... decolonising efforts would bear more fruit if we focus on redressing epistemic injustices within DS that perpetuate interpretative marginalisation and credibility deficit…" (ibid:451).

In their critique of the concept of localisation in practice, van Selm et al. (2025:9) argue that it is currently performative and retains power firmly with Northern rather than Southern NGOs, they;

> propose reorienting localisation towards the investigation and facilitation of locally-led competition for authority by SNGOs – and other civil actors. In systematically recognising and reinforcing their agency, development sector actors can facilitate SNGOs to further accumulate their legitimacy and authority and enable an environment wherein SNGOs compete on a more equitable footing with Northern NGOs… To enable SNGO agency in practice, localisation must shift not just who participates, but who defines what counts as legitimate.

Further, they call for research which supports and explores locally led initiatives in terms of their power and authority considering localisation critiques, and which investigates how local organisations "can legitimise and leverage alternative forms of capital that align with their contexts, rather than relying on capital legitimised by NNGOs" (ibid).

This research can respond to both through its exploration of processes of collective knowledge consumption and production, participation, decision-making and empowerment to reach a critical understanding of the reality of these processes for communities engaged in a community philanthropy approach (CPA) to community-led development (CLD) practice.

Therefore, this research acknowledges the critical role of knowledge democracy and transformative education in development discourse and practice and focuses on collective knowledge to explore processes, opportunities and limitations of the community philanthropy approach to community led development practice. As a result, it adds to the field of knowledge justice and knowledge democracy, to transformative education and to community philanthropy in development practice. It also has the potential to prompt a rethink of dominant development practice, supporting critical reflection on collective knowledge, knowledge justice, meaningful participation and empowerment processes and informing future development approaches based on empirical evidence from this research. As outlined earlier, the community philanthropy approach to community led

development is practiced globally but is not the norm and needs increased credence and support with the sector (Hodgson, 2018), which is the case for all 'alternative' approaches to the modernist neoliberal model as noted by Kothari (2024). This research contributes to a body of evidence critically exploring locally led development practice supported by these participatory approaches.

It is important to highlight that while the organisation which is the focus of this research, ZGF is now committed to locally led development and a CPA, it is important to acknowledge its European roots as a conduit for EU donors and its current position as a southern CSO still funded by European (and other) institutions. Further, they are part of a movement calling for decolonisation, localisation and shifting power, concepts which some argue originate in the same locus of power as the very injustice and inequality that it attempts to change. This complexity arose in personal conversations with staff and is further explored in a review of the literature.

Supporting Theorists

While influenced by many of the theorists cited so far in this chapter, John Gaventa's work has proved particularly important for my exploration of the exercise of power, particularly in relation to knowledge and participation. Therefore, Gaventa is a central theorist in this research whose work on social power analysis and the related concept of participation is widely recognised in the social sciences, particularly in sociology, education and the international development fields in relation to development practice and social change. He has been affiliated to the Institute of Development Studies[14] for many years. This focus on power and participation is of specific relevance to this research.

I find Gaventa's articulation of power and its intersection with knowledge and participation resonates deeply with my experience in practice and his grounding of theory in practical examples which are familiar to me most

[14] See https://www.ids.ac.uk/

helpful in unpacking concepts, ideas and understandings. Gaventa's work on theories of power is deeply influenced by Stephen Lukes (1974, 2005, 2007, 2021), renowned for his radical views on power, among others.

My views on knowledge democracy are shaped by many other influential writers on the various concepts of and in knowledge democracy and epistemic justice, including Hall and Tandon (2017, 2020), DeSousa Santos (2007), Fricker (2007), and others. I have found the work of Hall and Tandon in relation to participatory community research and engagement most helpful. In my opinion, it is congruent with my practice, of relevance to my research focus and complements Gaventa's work well. I see knowledge (epistemic) justice as a fundamental aspect of knowledge democracy and use the term knowledge justice for the most part throughout in an effort to use language that includes rather than excludes. These concepts and ideas are explored in depth in chapters two and three.

Research Approach

The theorists mentioned above explore power, social justice and equality in their work, which reflects and complements my research approach. I approach this research as a feminist, informed by reflexive and critical theory philosophies, introduced here and further explored in chapter four. My understanding and interpretation of the world is through feminist eyes. For me, feminism is about naming and challenging oppression, marginalisation, injustice and inequality, seeking out and exploring power and agency, for and with everyone, from a gendered perspective. My views are reflected by Dillon's (2021:30) that feminism is concerned with, "power relations, identities, the economy, politics and the social constructions of gender identities, roles and relationships". Similarly, a critical theory approach is about challenging social injustice through an exploration of assumptions and existing conditions which support social injustice. Critical theory applied in this research "involves the development of ways of knowing that transcend the dominant constructed ways of knowing,

including the recognition that knowledge may reflect empirical reality but is also socially constructed" (McAreavey and Das, 2013:124).

I acknowledge my power and positionality through reflexive practice which interrogates assumptions of knowledge and power, and investment in relationship building and considered planning, appreciating the effects of power dynamics on meaning making, perspectives, and relationships. This is pertinent to this research in that I am a white, European female academic engaging with marginalised rural communities in an African context where being white and European is associated with power and control, being highly educated brings added perceptions of power and relative wealth, and where my gender further challenges in a patriarchal society. My approach comes with an awareness that the search for empirical knowledge is entangled with my own lived experience, power and influence, which makes a constant reflexivity on my worldview and power and the potential for influencing the research process and outcome a necessity. Drawing on participatory theory, I apply a participatory approach and a critical ethnographic intent, the latter which similar to Madison (2020), I understand as the practice of critical theory. This reflects my commitment to issues of social justice and equality and sees the research process as a legitimate space where such issues can be tackled.

This research acknowledges the importance of knowledge democracy, to individual and collective dignity and recognition. This includes respecting diverse ways of knowing and sources of knowledge, and collective ways of being, learning and knowing in community development and action for social change. It acknowledges the diversity of local systems and practices, which use this knowledge as relevant in context, to take action for change that can support sustainable development. Participation and empowerment are crucial elements of knowledge democracy (Hall and Tandon, 2017). Therefore, central to this research is an exploration of processes of empowerment and participation to reach a critical understanding of the reality of these processes for communities. In my experience, social power relations play a major role in sustaining inequality and poverty and in

shaping what is valued as 'knowledge', as such, an analysis of power in the context of development practice in communities in rural Zambia is crucial to this research. These experiences have repeatedly created and re-created my worldview.

The work of Freire (1972, 1981) and his concepts of conscientisation and critical pedagogy had the most profound influence on my understandings of knowledge, education, learning, and power; and of *my* world and situated critical education when I first encountered this work and continues to do so. I entered my teenage years in the late 1980s, an era of devout Catholicism where the relations between Irish State and Catholic Church were in decline but the conservative influence remained, especially in relation to education and moral behaviour. Like many others of my generation, my understanding of 'development' was based on notions and ideas of charity, pity, poverty, race, the Third World and were heavily influenced by my Catholic education, the nuns and returning missionaries. I encountered Freire's discussions on the distinction between charity and social justice as a young woman, which challenged my uncritical perspective and sparked an interest in exploring my world. This in turn led to a discovery of critical education, conscientisation, and power as concepts where I learned that more than one perspective on reality and truth exists, where I learned to question the banking model of education, the role of the church, state and media in informing and shaping my views, and more. Although I found his writings quite challenging, I continued to engage with Freire's work, later followed by the writings of hooks (1994) and Giroux (2022). While I have engaged with literature from writers across various disciplines in relation to knowledge, power and participation, I predominantly lean on those in education and international development, again, finding resonance and familiarity in knowledge situated in my field.

Summary of Research Findings

This research generated a wealth of diverse knowledge. The scale and richness of response, while unexpected, was valued and appreciated. This is reflected in the depth of findings presented, which honour the collective community voice, and which results in a larger than usual findings chapter (and thesis overall).

This research has documented a wealth of collective community knowledge, experience and perspectives, highlighting a flaw with approaches and models based on notions of deficiency. It further presents a broad snapshot of development practice drawing on the knowledge, perspectives and experiences of ZGF staff. As will be presented later, findings reveal evidence of a community philanthropy approach to community development which is community initiated and led. Decisions are made and agendas are set by community collectives, with strong community participation and ownership, despite experiences of exclusion by some, usually those on the periphery. Power relations demand consistent attention and enabling spaces of learning and inclusive participation emerged as vital for sustaining, enhancing and transforming life experience and local realities. Relationships rooted in solidarity rather than charity, based on mutuality and partnership, and where commitment and continuity are key, emerge as crucial for community confidence and trust, and reinforce a truly community-driven approach.

This data and analysis underpinning this summary is elaborated in findings and discussion chapters, while an elaboration of the research conclusions and recommendations are presented in chapter seven.

Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the research topic and objectives, bringing a focus to the development sector context and to collective ways of knowing as core in this research. It has briefly introduced the methodological approach, the rationale and contribution and most importantly has

introduced the research partners, the communities of Nyankanga and Kaminembe, and their solidarity partner, ZGF.

Chapters two and three respectively delve further into the ever-important context of development practice, the concept of localisation and community-led and community philanthropy approaches to community development and explore knowledge and power in an examination of existing literature through a critical post-development and decolonisation lens. The methodological approach in theory and practice is presented in chapter four. This is followed by the wealth of knowledge documented in this research presented in four parts in chapter five under subject headings of knowledge, participation, empowerment, and inclusion, exclusion and the spirit of Ubuntu. This is followed in chapter six by a discussion of the findings in relation to the literature presented, leading to recommendations and conclusions in chapter seven.

Chapter Two: Context is Everything

"Context is everything and is wildly variable…"

(Djohossou et al., 2023b:117).

Introduction

A review of key literature relevant to this research, in the context of the international and community development sphere, is presented in this chapter and the next chapter. This first literature review chapter posits that 'context is everything' and as such, we need to start with a focus on the context of this research. While I briefly focus on community development at local government level in Zambia, I view an understanding of the different approaches to community development which have been practiced in Zambia (and globally) over the past 50 years or more as the most important context to focus on. Through a lens of critical post-development and decoloniality, this part of the literature review explores the current local and global contexts of development in theory, policy and practice relative to this research context. This includes a focus on traditional approaches to development practice, and newer participatory approaches which prioritise localisation in locally led development including community led-development (CLD) and the community philanthropy approach (CPA). Within this the concepts of localisation and decolonisation are briefly explored (with a continuation of this exploration throughout chapter three in a discussion of power, knowledge and participation). This is followed by an overview of community foundations and participatory grant-making which are elements of the CPA. Last but by no means least, a brief discussion on the pluriverse of context specific worldviews which challenge the universal Western knowledge system that underpins much of development practice and thinking is outlined, and alternative ways of knowing are explored. Crucial to this research are different perspectives on ways of knowing, being and doing, and an interrogation of the knowledge bases upon which different practices of community development rest. Of

particular relevance to this research context is the African philosophy of Ubuntu, which is explored here and throughout chapter three.

Messy complex contexts

My understanding of development practice and social change as messy and complex is shaped by almost two decades of working with community development organisations and groups in various country contexts, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. These views are presented here in relation to the views and experiences of relevant others.

Development is not generic, meaning and understanding, ways of knowing, being and doing differ across society and culture which merit contextualised responses to issues of social justice. 'Context is everything' is a mantra repeated on a loop in my practice and one that arises consistently throughout the literature (see for example Escobar, 1995; Kothari, 2005, 2024; Brunt and McCourt, 2012; Hodgson and Knight, 2016). Despite this emphasis in literature, context is given limited attention in practice in my experience, with projects and programmes planned based on the assumed knowledge of outsider experts. Further, context is often either dismissed or taken for granted by local staff who do not have the time to devote to context analysis and relationship building due limited resources and the heavy administrative demands of donors. Besides this, they are seldom asked to contribute their knowledge or analysis in programme design, instead relegated to objects of information for consultation purposes only. My experience is consistently reflected in the views and experiences of others, such as Carlsson and Wohlgemuth (2000), and the many contributors to this research in their reflections on learning in development co-operation. I have worked with third sector staff who are so conditioned to working on specific issues, in specific ways that they do not consider alternative ways of thinking or working. Instead, they often operate in silos, a practice cited by Hodgson et al. (2017), Djohossou et al. (2023a) Carlsson and Wohlgemuth (2000) and others. This results in them being frequently detached from local

government and missing real opportunities to leverage support, often blindly duplicating the efforts of others in their locality or missing opportunities to collaborate and free up scarce resources, blissfully unaware of policy or sectoral changes and initiatives that could enhance their work. Most of all, while many in NGOs and civil society are deeply connected and committed to the communities they serve, the service they offer is often based in charity discourses, a welfare-based model of development that sustains dependency (Peace Direct, 2021; Ziai, 2016). This model is one that fails to recognise the depth of knowledge and the potential for transformation that exists within communities and fails to see communities as having power in their own right, and as individuals and collectives with capacity, experience, dignity and agency.

In the Zambian context, there exists a local model and structure which recognises the knowledge, capacity and potential that exists within communities, and which aims to foster and support community led development. This local government structure, the Ward Development Committee (WDC), is discussed here given its primacy in supporting community development in the Zambian context.

The Ward Development Committee (WDC)

Community development in Zambian Government strategy aims to "reduce poverty and vulnerability as well as economic inequalities through the provision of livelihood and empowerment interventions to individuals, families and communities, to realise the aspirations of the Vision 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)…" (MCDSS, 2021:np). It is the responsibility of the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services which also administers basic social protection services. All initiatives of this Ministry intend to enhance human development, improve socio-economic development of community households and in turn, accelerate national development. The approach intends to be people centred and community driven.

The WDCs are established at ward level to facilitate and support such community driven development. Under the jurisdiction of the local authority, they are “key to facilitating structured community participation as espoused in the Republican Constitution and key policy documents such as the National Decentralisation Policy. Community participation is at the core of actualising decentralisation” (LGAZ, 2023:3). These committees aim to harness opportunities to address local development challenges and promote inclusive growth “by fostering robust engagement of local communities in decision-making, development, and administration, while concurrently preserving substantial connections between the central government and peripheral entities” (Chilufya, 2023:4).

The WDCs aim for diverse composition to ensure that they reflect and represent the various sectors and interests within the community, enabling inclusive and effective local governance (LGAZ, 2023). Typically, the WDC is comprised of part-time members appointed by the Town Clerk or Council Secretary and includes an elected zonal representative from each zone, various extension officers from government departments responsible for livelihoods and economic sectors, education, health and community development. Members also include a representative of the Chief, community representatives such as from a CSO or NGO, marginalised groups, a ward councillor, a local authority trustee, and several focal point persons (including for example, gender, youth, sports and recreation, persons with disabilities).

The key functions of WDCs (GRZ, 2019) as directed by the Local Government Act are ward development planning and submission of project proposals to the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) committee; to collect revenue on behalf of the local authority as required; to monitor and evaluate ward development projects; to promote community involvement in ward development planning; to support research into sustainable local economic development; to promote and participate in natural resource management; and to identify areas for capacity building within the ward and promote

training initiatives. The WDC also has additional administrative and reporting functions.

While the WDCs are intended to act as a bridge between local authorities and communities, ensuring effective community participation, development and governance at the ward level, they have faced continuous challenges and have been the subject of criticism. LGAZ (2023) values the critical role of community participation in the effectiveness of WDCs in fostering accountability and transparency, enhancing ownership of development projects, and empowering communities especially through decision-making functions. This intends to ensure that local knowledge and needs are incorporated into development plans, thereby improving communication and coordination between local authorities and communities, ensuring that community concerns and priorities are addressed effectively. However, several studies find that in practice community participation does not meet these aspirations and WDCs are limited or ineffective in their functioning.

A five-year study of the effectiveness of WDCs in Chibombo District, Zambia by Siachisa et al. (2023) found that in many cases, the WDC was not established according to the guidelines, for example, often marginalised groups were not represented. They also found instances of patronage where councillors selected family members for key positions. The study found that while some communities were involved to some degree in local governance, the level of community participation, "leaves much to be desired… local people were mere recipients of services" (2023:41). Community members felt largely excluded from decision making and involvement in the identification of projects, participation was found to reflect mere tokenism. Further, the study found that the level of community participation is influenced by the limited functionality of the WDC. Key factors affecting their functionality were members' lack of understanding of the role of the WDC and of their role and responsibilities. Participation was also hampered by a lack of allowances, resources and workplans, by skewed composition of WDC membership, and by the disrespect shown by community members for the WDC. Poor communication between councils, WDCs, traditional leaders

and communities were also cited as detrimental to functionality and effectiveness. In the limited instances where the study found the WDCs to be functional and effective, they occurred in wards with high economic activities and wide revenue base, and where strong leadership was shown by councillors.

Many of these findings are supported by LGAZ (2023) who found that WDC members work on a voluntary basis without monetary benefits. This makes it difficult to host or attend meetings and leads to a sense of apathy among members. They further found that poor communication hampers coordination and engagement, that WDC are sites of political interference. Relations between WDCs and Councillors are also weak and limit development efforts, and importantly, they highlight that many WDC members are only familiar with their Constituency Development Fund (CDF) functions and lack understanding and capacity to perform other roles and functions.

Chilufya (2023) reached similar findings in his study on the resourcing of WDCs such as the voluntary nature and lack of financial allowances for members, political interference, and poor coordination with local councils. Their study found further challenges limiting the effectiveness of WDCs, including lack of an office base for members, the limited capacity of members due to low educational attainment, and inadequate administrative support. The literature reviewed suggests that without meaningful participation, attention to power dynamics and robust leadership, adequate resourcing and clear communication, and investment in strong trusting relations, even local context specific structures and mechanisms which value community driven development are likely to fail.

Traditional Approaches to Development

In contrast to the WDC, as the literature and experience in the introduction to this section demonstrate, Western imposed systematic approaches to development tend to be rather generic regardless of context. Traditional

top-down projects replicating the status quo are not producing change. International development in 2025 is reeling from recent USAID aid budget cuts and broader global aid budgets contracting, leaving development initiatives around the world who are dependent on these funding streams in dire straits (Chase Lubitz, 2025). This has exposed the sharp edge of dependency and power dynamics in international development. “Links between colonialism, neo-colonialism, capitalism, and the structures and power dynamics of modern international development” (Djohossou et al. 2023a:87) as the root cause of aid dependency are being called out consistently in decolonial discourse. In colonialism, in order to achieve wealth and dominance, colonisers need to exercise power to control knowledge from above, repressing local knowledge systems to achieve ideological and economic domination (Nadarajah and Grydehøj 2024). In the neocolonial context, local skills, knowledge, structures and systems are a threat to the colonial order and must be contained. In that context, grassroots development is the least likely to be valued, encouraged and supported in any meaningful way. The colonial order continues according to Carlsson and Wohlgemuth who posit that, “aid is, and has always been, based on the idea of transferring knowledge from the developed to the developing countries” (2000:12). Colonialism and imperialism are responsible for the wilful destruction of diverse knowledge systems which had sustained communities the world over. Cummings et al., (2018; in Djohossou et al., 2023a:89) present, “evidence that this devaluation is continued by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which ignore local knowledge” and in doing so local power is suppressed. Gibson Nangle et al. (2025) argue that such power disparities create gatekeepers with the power to direct resources. When that happens, donors have power over funding partners, and all partners, especially international partners, have power over local staff and over communities. Power dynamics exist at all levels, in all spaces, and in multiple forms.

Development aid systems, and the traditional approaches to development practice that they promote, are modelled on unjust and deeply flawed colonial systems. Djohossou et al. elaborate that;

> the siloed nature of development undermines lateral connections that reflect the holistic lives we all live, and renders nearly invisible the age-old power of community connections. Continued reliance on top-down, single-solution, expert-driven projects undermines needed post-colonial repair of repressed civil societies (2023a:99).

Research by Hodgson et al. highlights barriers in traditional donor development practice which create challenges for participation and community led development. These include operating with, "superior donor mindsets, unreasonable demands and expectations of local partners, silo (vertical) thinking, empowerment/deficit-based framework which assumes communities are lacking, funding the 'usual suspects' while overlooking small organisations, and risk [averse] – funders do what is safe and 'acceptable'" (2017:7).

Further, these barriers are not helped by traditional development approaches using results-based models that are insisted on by donors and imposed by western experts who decide how change *should* happen, not necessarily how *it does* happen. It must be measurable, manageable, and follow a linear path, (Liddy and Gallwey, 2020; Murphy et al., 2019) as if perfect theories of change happen in a parallel development universe invisible to the majority of the development community. Of course, some change can follow a linear causal pathway, and it is undeniable that there have been notable achievements in health (Ndizera and Muzee, 2018). Good adequate nutrition can lead to healthier populations but not if there is no clean water, or no healthcare, or if the nutritious food, water or healthcare is so expensive only the well-off can access it, or if there are no roads to access it. Life does not happen in straight lines or metrics.

Participatory approaches

Many funders and third sector organisations lay claims to participatory practice or to the promotion and support of community led initiatives. In

practice the reality quite often reflects the use of external expert-led imposed traditional approaches which consult rather than collaborate with, working for rather than with, and leading rather than being led by communities (see for example Carlsson and Wohlgemuth, 2000; Cooke and Kothari, 2001). Participation and community-led development are concepts which are often linked and an assumption made that one leads to the other. They are described as 'buzzwords', originally by Cornwall (2007), followed by many including Veda (2023), Gibson (2017) and Romain Murphy (2025) who argue that many donors and practitioners claim to support it but most often the practice lacks integrity or any semblance of meaningful participation. These 'buzzwords' are interrogated further in the following pages and chapter. Localisation and decolonisation debates focus attention on development from the ground up, detangling development from its colonial past and shifting the decision-making power from external elites to local experts, with development initiatives locally owned and led a priority.

Decolonisation and Localisation

The concepts of decolonisation and localisation are inextricably linked to knowledge justice and knowledge democracy, and by extension, to development at local, national and international levels. While global inequality has many root causes, one of the deepest roots can be traced to colonisation and the creation of empire through imperialism which saw immense injustice delivered to much of the majority world by minority world imperial powers (Peace Direct, 2021). While most former colonies have gained their independence[15], the legacy of their colonial past lives on through continuous exploitation. For as long as this colonial legacy persists, global power dynamics remain unequal, knowledge democracy remains an aspiration, and development initiatives largely remain imposed with skewed power dynamics. This position is echoed by Ranawana who argues;

[15] There are 17 territories which are not yet self-governed, this does not include the OPT (UN, 2024).

> it is crucial to recognise that although what constitutes development is a contested set of ideas and practices, there is an increasing consensus that aid and development perpetuate colonial power structures and uphold Eurocentric logics. This means that the realities of the global majority are determined by a handful of powerful institutions and a global elite. Consequently, we can argue that 'development' imposed its own understanding of poverty, wealth, justice, and injustice, thus categorizing certain subjectivities and knowledge systems as inferior (2023:3).

Movements and commitments in the humanitarian and development sectors towards localisation have grown and accelerated in recent years, with Grand Bargain[16] commitments and calls for a participation revolution which no longer "treat[s] local and national actors as subordinate" (Van Brabant and Patel, 2018:16). However, it is important to note the longer historical focus on locally led development and localisation, particularly as they were framed from the early 1990's, which Mohan & Stokke (2000, 2007) contest facilitated processes of neo-liberalisation and the depoliticization of development process and practice. For them, "examining the politics of localization means to investigate the ways in which diverse political forces construct and use local political spaces to pursue their instrumental and general interests in development and democracy" (Mohan & Stokke, 2007:26).

While a simple explanation of localisation could be the recognition and support of local communities (and nations) to determine and lead their own development efforts, there are many contested definitions and a general lack of consensus of what 'local' is and what localisation looks like in practice (Johnson and Marnicio, 2024, van Selm et al., 2025). There are two broad and competing perspectives of what it is that localisation is trying to address. One interprets localisation as decentralisation, essentially a technical and operational approach which attempts to shift power in strategic, operational and financial decision-making closer to the local issue largely focusing on the "distribution of 'power' between 'HQ' and the regional/country offices" (Van

[16] Global commitments to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian aid by localising the means for action. See: https://gblocalisation.ifrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Section-2.pdf

Brabant and Patel, 2017:4). The risk inherent here is that it instigates the further creation of INGO national country offices which simply transfer rather than shift power and which also increases competition for funds in the national funding pot. The second is the transformative perspective which is rooted in "a broader historical and systemic view" (ibid.) and which interprets localisation as the transfer of power, leadership and decision-making entirely to local state and non-state actors (Van Brabant and Patel, 2017).

Another issue highlighted by van Selm et al. (2025) is that NGOs use terms such as locally led development and decolonisation interchangeably, making assumptions about their meaning and hiding nuances in policy and practice. They further the argument that localisation does not mean locally led and suggest that the concept and practice of localisation is 'NNGO-centric' with Northern NGOs 'owning' the concept, directing what localisation processes are and how they should happen. Khoury and Scott (2024) in van Selm et al. (2025:3) argue that "rather than the restoration of lost practices, localisation can be a further subjugation and exploitation of the local by external actors through subcontracting". They conclude that their, "analysis helps highlight how current Northern-led localisation processes perpetuate an epistemic injustice where what counts as localisation is under the authority of NNGOs while continuing to misrecognise the capital and authority of SNGOs" (van Selm, 2025:9).

Regardless of definitions and commitments, "attempts to 'shift the power' towards local actors have been inconsistent, failing to address the deep-rooted, systemic issues that exist. Beyond broad commitments to locally led approaches, the development, humanitarian aid and peacebuilding sectors have struggled to implement any significant structural change" (Peace Direct, 2021:8). Proponents of locally led development have been trying to shift the power for decades, with some success and much learning documented by global networks. These include the Movement for Community-led Development (MCLD) and the ShiftThePower movement. Their focus is on approaches such as community-led and community

philanthropy, but, as Djohossou et al. (2023b) warns, it is a long road to transformative change so we must prepare for the long haul.

Community-led development (CLD)

Essentially, in community led development, "local communities should take centre stage in envisioning, planning, actively implementing, evaluating, and learning from development activities" (Veda, 2023:1) where power, decision making and ownership truly emanates from within. While a community-led approach offers a way forward, or perhaps a way back, to find the value in local knowledge systems, strategies and structures currently suffocated by hegemonic colonial knowledge and expertise, there are many barriers along the way. Many proponents of decolonisation argue (and many have been doing so for decades) that decolonisation and knowledge justice must go hand in hand. Dutt (2025:473), for example, suggests that for decolonisation to truly happen the "Eurocentric edifice [of development needs to] be dismantled". Others, (Telleria, 2024; van Selm et al., 2025) more explicitly call for a recognition and resurgence of Southern epistemologies and imaginaries in a challenge to the hegemonic Northern ontological and epistemological frameworks shaping our global context.

This global development context is in a state of upheaval and change with recent widespread and devastating cuts in aid and political support for ODA globally diminishing. These changes have far-reaching implications more broadly within the sector, especially for local organisations dependent on Northern agencies for funding. Such organisations may be further restricted from challenging unequal power relations, values and practices of locally led development, still reluctant to bite the hand that feeds (Edgren, 2000; van Selm et al. 2025), instead bending to traditional top-down demands.

Djohossou et al. (2023b:117) reiterate that "context is everything and is wildly variable, which means there is no recipe for CLD". As stated, development efforts are also in crisis and in response there is growing momentum in the sector for decolonising and shifting power (Veda, 2023)

and pressure to ‘co-create new ways forward’ in a challenge to the status quo (Djohossou et al. 2023a). From a decolonisation perspective we need to ask questions about where ‘legitimate’ knowledge originates, whose knowledge counts, how knowledge is created, and how to amplify the voice, agency and dignity of diverse knowledge in a co-creation approach (ibid).

Gibson Nangle et al. (2025) are eager to advise that adopting alternative approaches does not mean rejecting the existing knowledge of and relations with powerful development actors. A view shared by others including Acosta (2019) and Djohossou et al. (2023a). This advice correlates with the Mi’kmaw nation concept of ‘two-eyed seeing’. This advocates for bringing Indigenous and western scientific knowledge together, one eye from each perspective. However, van Norren and Seehawer (2025) advocate multiple eyed seeing, bringing many cosmologies together in dialogue with each other, including western scientific models, and so moving beyond coexistence towards knowledge complementing enriching and challenging each other.

Much of the literature reviewed asserts that if we want authentic, meaningful change then we need to truly commit to community-led development “and the values of solidarity, equity, inclusion, justice, mutual aid and collective action that it promotes [as] the antidote to this toxic culture. These are not empty words but values that, if we have the courage to embrace them, hold the power to guide us to our salvation” (Romain Murphy, 2025:np). Much discourse similarly suggests that we need an approach which draws Southern imaginaries (see for example Matthews and Castellsagué, 2025) of collective knowledge and other collective assets, valuing and legitimising these ‘subaltern’ ways of knowing, understanding, interacting, and being; and having the courage to embrace them. Perhaps to move forward in an authentic and meaningful way, we need to first look back.

Community led development is not new. Throughout history communities of people have created and transformed local structures and systems of

their own accord. CLD is designed to be the opposite of the traditional top-down approach and counter to imperialism. The legacy of colonialism and continued neocolonialism must be named and deconstructed and CLD can be a powerful part of this process (Djohossou et al. 2023a). For Veda et al. (2021:10) and the global Movement for Community-Led Development (MCLD) represented in their writing, they define CLD as "a development approach in which local community members work together to identify goals that are important to them, develop and implement plans to achieve those goals, and create collaborative relationships internally and with external actors—all while building on community strengths and local leadership". The movement began to mobilise in 2010 and was launched in 2015. It emerged in response to a sense of isolation and disappointment among organisations who had been working from a bottom-up approach for decades, to the lack of change in a sector still focused on 'single-sector, top-down projects'. Today, it is a growing global movement whose mission is "to ShiftThePower so that low-income communities successfully achieve their own visions and goals" (MCLD, 2025:np).

Romain Murphy (2025) speaks truth to power in their writing which is refreshing in its unapologetic honesty and bravery in calling out a deeply flawed and often toxic system, arguing that authentic CLD is messy, challenging and requires "trust, inclusion, transparency, humility and a genuine appreciation of community stakeholders' equal humanity, valuable knowledge base and strong leadership capacity" (2025:np). They advise that relations of trust and continuity are vital, that a lack of consistent engagement can break trust, damage credibility and community confidence. The author has experienced instances where donors were unsettled by challenges in CLD projects and wanted to take control to fix things or to avoid the risk presented, and while the author had spoken out against this, they are one of the few. Most submit to donors' demands rather than bite the hand that funds, as noted earlier.

Romain Murphy (2025) continues that committed funding for CLD is a constant challenge, a point reiterated by others including Veda (2023) and

Hodgson et al. (2017). Most donors are risk averse. Few are prepared to fund community-led development, consistently finding issues with local capacity and preferring to maintain the status quo rather than relinquish power and control over to local organisations and communities (Gilbert, 2018). In fact, Romain Murphy (among others such as Peace Direct, 2021) opines that many northern donors are biased and racist towards the Global South, stating that "all these factors are mixed with a dose of (should we say it?) racism. Aid is dominated and controlled by a majority of White and Global North institutions that are both reluctant to give out control, and unable to dismiss their bias towards Global South leaders and organisations" (2025:5). The rigidity of donor funding policy and criteria makes it difficult to find support for anything outside of the matrix and that surrenders control to local partners. The lack of trust in these experiences is evident and reflects the distrust I have often witnessed from Global North donors and NGO financial controllers towards their Global South counterparts where issues of decision-making and financing is concerned.

While mindful that the term has been co-opted to describe approaches which do not reflect practice where power lies in the hands of the community, there is value and powerful potential for social change in community-led development. Communities have so much to offer through their collective action, vision and ownership if they are valued and properly resourced. There are global examples of powerful change through CLD in collaborative endeavours with communities rather than for them, and, as Romain Murphy claims, "co-creation is a magic wand" (2025:np). That said, it is crucial to recognise and respect that communities are complex and layered and that CLD is nuanced. A one size fits all approach will not work. Even at local level, communities have their own power structures, dynamics and inequalities, contexts differ and those differences matter. Communities can and will analyse their own challenges and identify their own pathways to change. We must support an approach that leverages "communities' power as opposed to only exercising our own" (ibid.).

Hodgson et al. advocate for a systems theory lens to the community-led approach which values networks and "that puts relationships at the heart of development" (2017:5). They further advocate for an asset-based approach which enhances community power, the use of more creative and flexible tools for gathering 'evidence' in CLD, alternative funding opportunities and mechanisms for CLD. This is also where funders rebalance power by investing in communities. This can be done by adding value through non-financial capital such as knowledge and reputation, by setting out to actively learn, collaborate and cooperate with peers and partners, and perhaps through communities of practice (Hodgson et al., 2017). Supporting communities to adopt such an approach to community-led development, which changes the narrative to one where power, decision making and ownership, and which truly emanates from within demands new strategies of solidarity and commitment.

Community Philanthropy

This new narrative of community led development emerging from the MCLD brings a focus to community philanthropy in changing what is perceived as the existing flawed system of international development. It emphasises the need to change unequal power dynamics by harnessing community assets, capacity, trust and agency and regaining local ownership and control of resources. This may or may not be supported by external donors, depending on context, needs and other factors. This new narrative differs from previous discourse which saw community participation and change happening through rights-based development aid processes that rely on the state to uphold rights and citizens' ability to claim them (Hodgson et al., 2017). Community philanthropy offers a framework for this new community led narrative where it is "both a form of, and a force for, locally driven development that strengthens community capacity and voice, builds trust, and most importantly, taps into and builds on local resources" (Hodgson and Pond, 2018: 5). Keidan states that "the essence of community philanthropy is that development should be owned by local people not imposed from the

outside, and that power should be shifted closer to the ground to give people control over their own destiny" (2016:3). Rooted in ancient traditional practices of self-reliance and mutual aid (Doan, 2019), the community philanthropy approach has been growing and gathering momentum for almost three decades. The journey has been messy, disorganised, organic and contextually nuanced and has been happening alongside a focus on localisation in development discourse (Hodgson and Knight, 2016), in theory if not in practice.

Almost ten years ago Hodgson and Knight proposed;

> a new paradigm called 'durable development'… The growing field of community philanthropy has much to contribute towards such a paradigm shift because it marks a distinct break with many of the conventions – and resulting distortions – of mainstream development. The 'three-legged stool' of community philanthropy combines asset development, capacity building and the strengthening of trust between multiple local and external stakeholders. Durable development follows John Ruskin's maxim – 'when we build, let us think we build forever'… It's all about power, Power is the key to durable development. Power matters because efforts to solve a problem only last while people with the problem take responsibility for it (2016:33-35).

Community philanthropy is preoccupied with existing power within communities, building relationships within and with communities, finding new ways of working such as participatory grant making and community asset mobilisation (elaborated in the following section), and creating and connecting with new institutions. These new institutions are varied and include community foundations which are a feature in the research partner communities. Donors do not fit into the stereotypical institutional mould that comes to mind, instead they are a "more expanded and nuanced characterisation of the word, which emphasises the intentional blending of resources from three different kinds of 'donors'. These are the external donor, the community philanthropy organisation, and people in the community" (Hodgson and Pond, 2018:8). These new institutions, ways of working and forms of donors represent a change to the status quo and an

optimistic new paradigm, perhaps durable development is indeed a possibility.

Gibson Nangle et al. (2025) discuss how philanthropic efforts tries to avoid gatekeeping and perpetuating existing power imbalances. Their findings suggest that it is imperative to be aware of our own organisational power, to recognise that everyone has knowledge and expertise to contribute, that dialogue is the key to deeper understanding, and that collective knowledge sharing and action is required to truly shift power. They agree that progressive philanthropy calls for 'shifting power' to funding recipients and find that this requires flexible funding mechanisms, localisation of funding, and participatory grant making processes where local experts make funding decisions. Djohossou et al., (2023b:117) suggest that "we need to shift how we perceive 'expertise'. Communities… are experts of their own lives". Reminding us of the colonial and neo-colonial systematic imposition of determinants of knowledge and expertise, they implore that an awakening to shift these imposed definitions is essential and that "key to this awakening is recognising that engaging deeply in context is essential… contextuality must drive CLD" (ibid). Such deeply contextual approaches must surely recognise and create space for local ways of knowing, understanding, interacting, and being.

Deficit based models of development see and engage with marginalised communities in terms of their vulnerabilities rather than their capabilities, dismissing their intellectual, social, relational and financial and other assets as irrelevant or without value (Ziai, 2016). Communities have been directed to follow suit and dismiss their traditional ways in favour of Western rational ways. Now is the time to reject such deficit-based models and to seek out and recognise capability rather than vulnerability. This call for a shift in mindset from one of dependency and vulnerability, to a growth mindset which recognises individual and collective knowledge and expertise, assets, capacity and agency and "which believes in the power of community" (Djohossou et al., 2023b:113) is voiced consistently by the CLD and CPA

communities. It echoes the sentiments of pan-African writer Mungwini (2017:170) who asserts that,

> the very identity of being African evokes particular historical emotions, unfulfilled grievances and aspirations in the minds of many. There is no doubt that what Africa needs today in its quest for authentic liberation is a drive that brings together memory, imagination and praxis - these are elements which Pan-Africanism embodies. A fundamental reorientation of the African mindset is necessary in order to drive the change.

Such principles elaborated above, if enacted, can work to rebalance power inequalities but reflexivity is important to ensure that power inequalities are not perpetuated or replicated in our practice. We need to be critically aware of power within local systems and structures, recognise that urban locations tend to be favoured over rural, and that local experts tend to include those with status or privilege rather the marginalised expert (ibid). There are power dynamics in philanthropy, just as in the traditional aid system, so there is as much scope for misuse or power over in this arena as others. Therefore, reflexivity and critical practice is important in the analysis and exercise of power, and more generally. Reflexivity and critical practice can support localised social power analysis and attention to power dynamics, which eventually and cumulatively may challenge the larger power inequalities of the aid system. When shifting power, it is important to use the power responsibly and be open about to whom and for what we are accountable. Taking account of the debates and guidance presented here, it is useful to add that community philanthropy is a practice and a process rather than an organisational form (Doan, 2019). Bearing this in mind, this practice and process operate with supporting structures and strategies, two of which are elaborated below.

Community Foundations and Participatory Grant making

Participatory grant making and community foundations respectively are a way of working and formal structures that play a central role in the research communities' experience of CLD and community philanthropy. While

community foundations are not essential elements, they could be instrumental as a mechanism for aid to be directed to grassroots communities rather than being diverted by elites. With or without these structures and process, there is no quick fix, and, as Kimambo and Shallwani (2025) advise, shifting power is a complex, messy process which has its challenges and takes time and perseverance. Hodgson and Knight (2010) suggest that they can foster imperatives of local ownership, leadership, and accountability, and place an emphasis on the importance of relationships in the community development process, fostering and building the trust which is often lacking but which is crucial. While community development is about more than just money, community foundations accumulate funds by encouraging the contribution and pooling of even small local financial contributions. This demonstrates the value and power of local giving as a response to local issues. In addition, with close relationships with grassroots groups, the community foundations can offer small grants locally helping to amplify the voices of local people, empowering them to influence decisions that affect their lives (Hodgson and Knight, 2010). While community foundations can be diverse in terms of origins, set-up and structure, "what characterises their importance is that local people are both taking the lead and contributing their own money" (Knight, 2012).

The community foundation and its structures and processes are more evident in community voice in this research but the participatory grant making process is a core aspect of knowledge democracy in action. It involves community peer review panels and community experts reaching funding decisions and conditions rather than or with outsiders (Nöst and Jangara, 2018). The community foundation in this research is a structure set up in the community with community members governing and operating the structure and processes. There is much learning and capacity building through process learning in establishing the community foundations, with active citizenship education, and capacity strengthening in governance and financial management. ZGF explain that they support the process as facilitator and mediator rather than director or decision maker, promoting

gender equality in structures and positions. In the research context, they are established with a clear mandate for community led and owned practice. While this is the intended practice generally, Doan (2019) warns that there is always a danger of community foundations losing their original values and mission in deference to funders criteria and demands, a point raised consistently others in CLD discourse. Of course, values and mission are elements of a long list lost to Western demands if we bring indigenous epistemologies into view.

Ontologies and Epistemologies of the South

The glaring reality regarding context is the fact that Western ways have long been imposed on the global South with scant (at best) regard for ontologies and epistemologies of the South. These impositions have eventually become internalised, normalised and accepted, albeit with continued resistance in many contexts. Some similar concepts describing other ways of seeing and knowing the world include 'cosmologies' and 'imaginaries'. The concept of abyssal thinking, offered by de Souza Santos (2016:119), suggests that the hegemonic Western worldview and related knowledge create a dividing line which renders anything on the opposite side to the hegemony invisible,

> the invisibility of forms of knowledge that cannot be fitted into any of these ways of knowing. I mean popular, lay, plebeian, peasant, or indigenous knowledges on the other side of the line. They vanish as relevant or commensurable knowledges because they are beyond truth and falsehood. It is unimaginable to apply to them not only the scientific true/false distinction but also the scientifically unascertainable truths of philosophy and theology that constitute all the acceptable knowledge on this side of the line. On the other side of the line, there is no real knowledge; there are beliefs, opinions, intuitions, and subjective understandings, which, at the most, may become objects or raw materials for scientific inquiry.

The term 'epistemologies of the South' aptly describe this 'abyssal thinking'. Coined by de Souza Santos, he defines the former term as "a set of inquiries into the construction and validation of knowledge born in struggle, of ways of knowing developed by social groups as part of their resistance against the

systematic injustices and oppressions caused by capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy" (2016:x).

The contextualised ways of "doing, being and becoming" (Le Grange, 2012:1) embedded in such alternative ways of engaging with and understanding the world are rendered invisible, if not lost. Similarly, in a discussion on multiple ways of knowing, Sloane Perry and Couchois Duncan (2017:np) highlight a bias in dominant culture and,

> one that shows up in the nonprofit sector as well, to value only one way of knowing, the one grounded in data, analysis, logic, and theory—a rationalist's approach to truth. But there are many different ways to understand and engage with the world. These other ways of knowing are equally meaningful, and are critical to our efforts to understand complexity and create the possibility for transformational social change.

Widenhorn (2014:378) describes such bias as an expression of social injustice grounded in epistemic injustice, "that is, the presentation as invalid of forms of knowledge that differ from dominant rationality. Epistemic inequality is manifest, among others, in the common assumption that modern science is objective and universal, while indigenous forms of knowing are not credible".

Despite the persistence of such bias, as outlined in chapter one, some contextualised grounded 'alternative' approaches are visible in modern societies engaging 'alternative' epistemologies. Ziai (2017:2548) shares that, "alternative concepts of what a good society looks like and alternative practices of organising it exist in almost every society", giving examples such as Buen Vivir, Ubuntu, Swaraj, Gharbzadegi, and Décroissance. However, while such 'alternative' worldviews have captured attention in recent decades, some authors (Widenhorn, 2014; Melber et al., 2024) advise caution to guard against their political co-optation and abuse in order to maintain the credence of dominant approaches and knowledge frameworks, and therefore the status quo. Likewise, Matthews and Castellsagué (2025) highlight the contradictions and complexities that can emerge when

alternatives to classical models of development transition from theory to practice.

The work of van Norren and Seehawer (2025) offers an example which could be described as paying lip-service to 'alternative' worldviews rather than any serious credibility. While their article explores missing dimensions of the SDGs from the perspective of global South and Nordic world views, these discussions are easily transferable to the general global development context broadly aligned to the SDGs. They argue that the universality and inclusivity of the SDG process and resulting goals are questionable given the "marginalisation of indigenous perspectives and southern cosmologies and marginalisation of knowledge in general" (ibid:3), furthermore, "relational worldviews do not think in terms of goals, but in terms of processes" (2025:12). Despite the recognition that local community knowledge and participation is vital, "community orientation and general negligence of nature as a central part of community life" (2025:3) is ignored. Participation in the sense of inclusive development focused on humans only and Western notions of inclusion exclude diverse knowledges which share a biocentric and interdependent view of all life. Additionally, they value mutuality and epistemic diversity and prioritise, "collective flourishing and dignity rather than individual rights; a holistic view on education, health and gender values (including the emotional, spiritual and practical); restorative justice rather than punitive justice; and the importance of reciprocity, interculturality and interdependence" (2025:16). Seehawer and Bredlid (2021) in Van Norren and Seehawer (2025) suggest that sense making in these systems of knowledge needs to be contextualised and the relevant elements and approach applied in development practice based on that contextual analysis.

Kothari et al., (2019) acknowledge the diversity across these worldviews but argue that shared ethics and values are central and consistent. These include holism and interconnectedness, mutuality, harmony, unity and solidarity with each other and nature, and a respect for past, present and emerging generations. Kothari (2024:67) suggests that "the uniqueness of each of

these worldviews, and their differences, are worthy of respect through recognition by engagement. In this sense we have a pluriverse of ways of living, being, knowing, acting, and dreaming". Similarly, Van Selm et al. (2025) contest that Southern imaginaries, such as the African philosophy of Ubuntu, need to be recognised as legitimate to prevent the reproduction of power inequities in theory and practice.

A brief history of Ubuntu

Ubuntu as a philosophy, ethic and practice is an ancient concept. Gade (2011) traces its historical and conceptual development noting its first appearance in texts can be found in 1846 and in at least thirty texts prior to 1950. Throughout this period, ubuntu was defined almost exclusively as a human quality — variously translated as humanity, kindness, generosity, and similar terms.

From the late 1970s, new frames start to emerge with some authors referring to Ubuntu as 'African humanism' and framing it as an indigenous political philosophy. However, it is the period of South African transition from apartheid to democracy in the 1990's that is pivotal. This was a time where the term ubuntu resurfaced with vigour, with Mandela (and other post-colonial leaders) and post-apartheid South Africa heavily promoting the values, ethic and philosophy of Ubuntu as a philosophy of peace, a reconciling force rooted in the search for social transformation, dignity, harmony, culture and identity in postcolonial Africa. Gade (2011:304) refers to this as the "narratives of return" and suggests that around this time, Ubuntu was linked to the Nguni proverb 'umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu' ('a person is a person through other persons'). This connection then spread throughout the literature. Post the 1990's, Ubuntu definitions diversify further, with definitions of Ubuntu as a philosophy, an ethic, African humanism, or a worldview — but nearly all anchoring their definition in the interconnectedness proverb. Gade (2011) frames this trajectory as part of a broader pattern of African "narratives of return" with attempts during periods of political transition to root a new national identity in reclaimed pre-colonial values.

Ubuntu – a relevant context specific philosophy

Interdependence of all that exists is intrinsic to the African philosophy of Ubuntu and is articulated in the concept of 'vital force',

> present in all that exists, both humans, animals and plants as well as mountains, earth, sky and all other so-called 'objects' in Western thought. The vital force is equally present in the spirits: Those who have come before us, or the living-dead, as well as those who will come after us, the yet-to-born. In this way, all are connected and influence one-another. The forces interact and thereby impact on the other forces, i.e., the lives of other humans, other living entities and beings (van Norren and Seehawer, 2025:6).

This interdependence encompasses compassion and humaneness, a focus on the collective, 'we', (with 'we' understood as all the exists), mutuality and relatedness are central, meaning that "decolonization in Africa therefore means ***restoring the place of the 'sharing community'*** in life (Mbembe's 2021), not only for the wellbeing of people but also for
the wellbeing of the community of life, replacing the idea of sustainable development with planetary survival" (van Norren and Seehawer, 2025:7).

The centrality of the communal and collective 'we' is a vital aspect that shapes understanding, learning and knowledge. This connectedness extends to place, and as Nadarajah and Grydehøj assert, "*knowing takes place*… Knowing and knowledge systems are developed collectively through relations between peoples and places" (2024:1). Camfield (2024:429) asserts that "knowledge itself is something that cannot be individually owned—the notion of expertise is redundant. Instead, it is something that is negotiated, communal and contextual". They conclude that, "knowledge is holistic, cyclic, relational; knowledge is not just mental, but physical, emotional and spiritual; reality is relational; and knowledge and values are one and the same" (Tynan, 2020) in Camfield (2024:430).

Ubuntu is reflected in the community-led development and community philanthropy approaches where the collective takes centre stage, a contrast to traditional top-down approaches which are generally reductionist in their approach (Armytage, 2011). Mutuality is promoted by (Djohossou et

al.,2023a) as a condition of CLD, along with growth mindset, power dynamics, and relationships. They describe mutuality as interconnectedness, and as having the same meaning as Ubuntu, 'humanity to others', arguing that mutuality "is poorly understood in the West, especially in ultra-capitalist settings, where the idea of doing good things with no thought of return is often considered irrational, suspect, or unbelievable" (Djohossou et al.,2023a:98). The philosophy of Ubuntu reminds me of the Irish practice of Meitheal, the coming together of communities as collectives to achieve a task, most often in rural farming communities at planting or harvest time (O'Dowd, 1981). Doan (2019:5) also highlights various global traditional practices including Meitheal as similar to Ubuntu in their "shared values and norms, such as: reciprocity, solidarity, social cohesion, self-reliance, and interdependence". LeGrange in a discussion of "human capability theory, which posits that the combined capabilities of a nation's citizens might be a better indication of its quality of life than the crude measure of economic growth" (2012:1), they describe Ubuntu as a capability that permeates all others, an "architectonic capability – that… pervades all capabilities and conveys the idea that our doing, being and becoming are dependent on others (humans and non-humans)" (ibid.). The values and meaning ascribed by Doan and Le Grange in their relations to Ubuntu certainly marry with the core of CLD and CPA, with communities as the leaders of their own development, locally and globally, in a reciprocal, just, interdependent and continuous relationship of solidarity.

However, it is important not to over-romanticise Ubuntu in theory nor assume its universal and consistent application in practice. While often overlapping and similar, Topidi (2022) argues there is no singular accepted universal definition of Ubuntu, for example, while Mbigi (1997) outlines values of solidarity, compassion, survival, dignity and respect as forming the basis of Ubuntu, others foreground mutuality, reciprocity and communalism. Despite the variety in interpretations of Ubuntu, one is consistent, "and that is the notion of humanness linked to a strong emphasis

on consultation, consensus building and participatory decision making" (Van den Heuvel 2008; in Mutwarasibo & Iken, 2019:21).

Mutwarasibo & Iken (2019) contest that while these values are seen as rooted in people's community life, how they are understood or practiced are not mandatory. They further cite Karsten and Illa (2005) to emphasise this point, noting that, "African communities are social entities which are changing, just like any other community meaning that the way in which the values are lived and translated into social action is continuously contested and negotiated… It is through dialogue and conversation among the members of the collective that the practices associated with Ubuntu are defined, implemented and routinized" Mutwarasibo & Iken (2019:21). Mangaliso (2001) posit that culture is not fixed so there is no fixed absolute causal relationship between behaviour and culture. Neither is culture homogenous, factors such as age, location, whether urban or rural, and interactions with and exposure to outside communities and cultures impact on the lived values and practice of Ubuntu values, or not. Mwipikeni (2018: 327) highlights human agency and stresses that, "the contradiction between ubuntu and behaviours that are inconsistent with ubuntu does not indicate that ubuntu is bankrupt in terms of its justification as a normative ethical principle. The behavioural practices that contradict with ubuntu are an indictment against individuals who choose not to be guided by ubuntu".

Topidi (2022) elaborates his argument that Ubuntu lacks an agreed definition by highlighting that it is a difficult concept to translate into Western epistemology. The critique of Ubuntu here (ibid) lies in its vagueness, the collectivist dimension, limited exportability and its perceived anachronistic essence. Meanwhile, Enslin and Horsthemke (2004) contest that the substance and content of Ubuntu have been weakened by sexism, corruption, autocratic rule and the environmental degradation present in African society. They further suggest that it is a patriarchal and conservative concept which fails to uphold equality; failing women, children, and LGBTQ communities and may be viewed as old-fashioned and out of place in modern society, especially by youth.

Discussing opposing schools of thought on the relevance and compatibility of Ubuntu in modern society, Mwipikeni (2018: 326) argues that;

> the incompatibility school of thought focuses on the incongruence between ubuntu, which values the interests of the community, on the one hand, and on the other hand, neoliberal economic system and the merely deracialised postcolonial state, which tend to promote the interests of business and Western interests. However, such incongruence indicates the relevance and urgency of construing ubuntu as a normative theory to show how it can be interpreted and appropriated as an alternative to a neoliberal economic system and politico-juridical order that favour and promote individualism accompanied by maladies of economic marginalisation and poverty for the majority.

Others such as Oyowe (2013) and Bhengu (2006) highlight a tension between the communal focus of Ubuntu and individual (human) rights, leading Topidi (2022) to conclude that individual freedom and an Ubuntu ethic are incompatible. In contrast, Moyo (2021) in their conceptualisation of Ubuntu as part of a decolonising discourse, disputes this tension arguing that through attention to the interconnectedness of individuality to community and mutual responsibility to each other, human rights are extended thus are not incompatible. A further counter argument proposes that the concept of Ubuntu enacted in society is neither necessarily binary nor individualistic and instead sees Ubuntu in terms of power which is "co-created and mutually empowering" (Tavernaro-Haidarian, 2018; in Topidi, 2022:55) one that is debated, evolving and so sometimes abused politically and interpreted in multiple ways.

In her discussion of Ubuhlalism as a universal pedagogical praxis, Harley (2025:155) draws from the philosophy-praxis of Abahlali baseMjondolo, a social movement of shack-dwellers in South Africa, arguing that, "having emerged from within a specific, concrete, contemporary struggle, *ubuhlalism* goes beyond Abahlali, creating universal axiomatic truths that can be taken up by anyone from singular experience". Here Ubuhlalism emerges from continuous, active collective thinking grounded in lived politics and daily experience, shifting and changing in response to contextual shifts, learning and solidarity with and from others, and drawing from local

indigenous epistemologies. It links to, “indigenous concepts and culture; but also, to socialism, to Biko and Fanon, to Freire and Marx… [and] is both the alternative to what is, and how you achieve it” (Harley, 2025:161). For Harley, Ubuhlalism is grounded in and depends on some basic truths rooted in equality, participation, agency, voice and inclusion. Her analysis emphasis that everyone matters, equally without discrimination; human dignity is central; all people think but critical thinking is crucial; all people should be included and active in making decisions about their own lives in a living politic which “is owned by the people… a space where people represent themselves and take decisions for themselves” (ibid:162).

Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the importance of context in development theory and practice, accentuating the need to move beyond traditional, top-down models toward more inclusive and just approaches that are locally led, reflect meaningful participation, and are grounded in diverse epistemologies. The continuing repercussion of colonialism and extant related neo-colonial structures continue to mould global development and are expressed as epistemic injustice leaving local knowledge and agency on the margins. However, there is a broad global call for and trend towards grounded approaches such as those reflected in community-led development, community philanthropy, which embrace subaltern worldviews such as Ubuntu. In global social movements such as the Movement for Community-led Development and ShiftThePower, the momentum is gathering to reclaim power, agency, and ownership at local level. These approaches challenge dominant paradigms and offer alternative routes to more just, inclusive, and transformative development. As the sector is confronted by systemic change, in the struggle to adapt it must commit to reflexivity, solidarity, the recognition of a pluriverse and learn to engage with those multiple diverse ways of knowing. At the same time, we need to guard against the assumption that alternative approaches represent a seamless panacea to traditional, top-down models and instead adopt a

multiple eyed lens and remain cognisant of learning and advice drawn from critiques of Ubuntu in theory and practice. As this review has consistently affirmed, context is indeed everything so in this changing environment we need context specific frameworks which recognise contextualised ways of 'doing, being and becoming', embedded in every facet of development, discourse, policy and practice.

The following chapter further elaborates ways of knowing and explores the relationship between knowledge and power, and related concepts of participation and empowerment which are central to this research.

Chapter Three: Knowledge and Power

"There is nothing wrong with power if power is used correctly… the concepts of love and power have usually been contrasted as… polar opposites …power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is love correcting everything that stands against love" (King, 1967; 38)

Introduction

In this chapter my primary focus is an exploration of theories and concepts of power and knowledge democracy, and their intersections. I recognise knowledge as a form of power, as something which is innate to every human being and as such every person should be recognised as a knower. Democracy depends on people and their power, and knowledge is an important form or aspect of that power. Therefore, I see knowledge justice as a fundamental aspect of knowledge democracy, and I draw on discussions of knowledge justice and related concepts. A selection of the diversity of understandings of knowledge and learning is presented, with a focus on collective ways of knowing which are central to this thesis. Participation, inclusion, education and learning as central aspects of a knowledge democracy are examined, along with expressions of empowerment as an important aspect of knowledge democracy. Indeed power, participation and knowledge are intertwined, so much so that it is quite difficult to examine each independently of the other. However, while acknowledging this, I attempt to explore each in distinct sections which follow.

Views on Power and Knowledge Democracy

At its core, this thesis is about power relations and the exercise of power in development practice and social change, grounded in the collective knowledge and experiences of community development practice in

Nyankanga and Kaminembe communities. To explore power, we need to investigate it where it operates, which is not an easy task since it pervades every facet of life, from the personal and familial, to the community, public and private, and at local, national and global levels. Power is a dynamic process and like any dynamic process, it can have positive and negative imperatives and implications, a perspective shared by many others including Foucault (1998), Haugaard (2020), and Lukes (2005). My perspective is formed through experience, both personal and professional, and that perspective has been challenged and changed through reflexive practice on theories of power, and in particular, the work of those whose writing is 'situated' in my field, such as Gaventa (1980), Cornwall (2008), and Eyben (2006) among many others. My view is reflected by Miller et al. in their publication on concepts for revisioning power, stating that, "in reality, power is dynamic, relational and multidimensional, changing according to context, circumstance and interest. Its' expressions and forms can range from domination and resistance to collaboration and transformation" (2006:4).

In critical education, knowledge isn't seen as neutral or purely objective. Instead, it's understood as something shaped by social forces like power, politics, and culture. In this view, knowledge is not solely gained through rote learning, or what Freire (1972) termed the 'banking model', where people are treated as passive subjects, empty vessels to be filled. Rather learners are encouraged to question and interpret knowledge within its context, drawing on their own experience, understanding, awareness and information to produce new knowledge and understandings and using it actively to challenge and address social inequalities. Knowledge in the critical pedagogy space is crucial to challenge accepted ideologies, positions and power, crucial for a future where hierarchies that drive and support inequalities are deconstructed, challenged and changed (Giroux, 2022).

In this study knowledge is understood as socially constructed, constituted from individual and collective experience, understanding, awareness and information, situated in their specific context. The search for this situated

knowledge is rooted in justice and is generated through the communities naming the world from their understandings, experience, and awareness, making connections between power, politics and the official line on paper and in promises, and their lived reality in practice, reflecting of the ideas of Shor and Freire (1987). This knowledge is deepened by their praxis, supporting the confidence and collective capacity to engage with issues and ideas that impact their life experience in this complex context. As I discuss in the methodology chapter, critical questioning of the understandings, experience, awareness and knowledge presented allows us to interrogate its authenticity, challenging underlying assumptions and cross-checking experience and understandings with others in the same situated context through data analysis to ensure reliability of findings and rigour in the research process.

As stated in chapter one, Freire's ideas on power and knowledge have shaped mine. I understand conscientisation from the Freirean perspective as a political process of critical awareness and engagement, through teaching and learning in spaces of education, be they informal, formal or non-formal. I see active participation in learning and knowledge creation along with reflection and action (praxis) as key. Critical thinking for me is the praxis of engaged pedagogy and is essential to transformative change. The words of hooks (1994:47) in relation to Freire's concept of conscientisation and decolonisation reflect my views and are relevant to this research;

> …Freire's work, in its global understanding of liberation struggles, always emphasizes that this is the important initial stage of transformation— that historical moment when one begins to think critically about the self and identity in relation to one's political circumstance.

Beyond these initial stages of conscientisation and transformation, is a deeper state of critical consciousness or criticality. Freire's (1972, 1981) ideas on critical transitivity see consciousness as constantly in transition and affected by external factors such as social and political norms, and culture, moving from initial stages to criticality, not always in a continuous linear trajectory.

As noted in chapter one and above, I find theories with an empirical basis in development practice most useful and as such, I predominantly engage with literature written by those in this field to explore and analyse power relations and operation. In particular, I find Gaventa's articulation of power and its' intersection with knowledge and participation resonates deeply with my experience in practice. His grounding of theory in practical examples which are familiar to me are most helpful in unpacking concepts, ideas and understandings. At the same time, much of Gaventa's work draws from other seminal theorists on power such as Lukes (1974), Bachrach and Baratz (1962, 1970), Dahl (1957) and others, or is written with or by practitioner researchers with whom he has collaborated.

My views on knowledge democracy are also shaped by writing on concepts of and in knowledge democracy and epistemic justice, including Hall and Tandon (2017, 2020), DeSousa Santos (2007), Fricker (2007), and others. As outlined above, I see knowledge justice as a fundamental aspect of knowledge democracy and use the term 'knowledge justice' for the most part throughout in an effort to use language that includes rather than excludes. This comes from reflection on conversations about the term 'epistemic justice' with people from many walks of life, both inside and outside of my research context and in response to the question that many of those people asked, "why not just say knowledge justice?" As one educated professional noted, "I had to google the term 'epistemic justice', the irony that the term itself made me feel uneducated and ignorant". I use the term 'epistemic' when drawing on specific concepts in the work of others.

While I have engaged with literature from writers across various disciplines in this regard, I predominantly lean on those in education and international development, again, finding resonance and familiarity in knowledge situated in my field. However, I do not intend to imply that the ideas and concepts in other fields have not been useful to my study, on the contrary, they have deepened my understanding and critical thought on the philosophy of knowledge justice and otherwise. Some of these concepts are central to my

research and I draw on them in tandem with the ideas and understandings of others. I elaborate further as I broach power and knowledge later in this chapter.

A Definition of Power

I see power as the agency of an individual or group to influence and control the attitudes, understandings, beliefs, behaviours and actions of themself and others, and through this, to exert power on the life experience. This power can be exercised through many means, systems, structures and in many contexts. These include the sharing of information, ideas and controls, through knowledge, ideologies, discourse, and debate; in education, in law, in media, in public campaigns and actions, in private conversations and practices, establishing rules and norms of behaviour in social contexts and more. The exercise of power can be negative or positive, harmful or just, oppressive or liberating, disempowering or empowering, individual or collective, zero-sum or shared, in an endless realm of configurations and possibilities where it can be expressed and experienced in different forms across different contexts and spaces. As Foucault infamously claimed, "power is everywhere" (1998:63).

Offering a perspective of power from an African ethic, Le Grange (2019:325) relates Ubuntu as,

> the manifestation of the power within all beings that serves to enhance life, and not thwart it. This is a power that is productive, that connects, and engenders care and compassion – it is the power of the multitude that gives impetus to social movements. This form of power is in contrast to power that imposes, that divides, that colonizes – the power of the sovereign wielded by supranational organizations, governments, the military, and the corporate world. The latter form of power results in the erosion of *ubuntu*.

These views spotlight the various ways in which power is exercised, a pivotal aspect of power which is discussed below.

The Exercise of Power

Gaventa studied under Steven Lukes at Oxford University and his understanding of power was influenced by both Lukes and Bachrach. Gaventa applied Lukes' concepts of three-dimensional power in his early research, later building on this to focus not only on dimensions of power but also levels and spaces in consideration of globalisation and expanding decision making arenas, arguing that the relational and multidimensional nature of power must be considered. He began to refer to the dimensions of power as forms of power and highlights how the levels, spaces and forms interact with each other (Gaventa, 2007). The power cube was developed as a framework for analysing the levels, spaces and forms of power, and their interrelationship. It helps to explore and visualise power and to "begin to assess the possibilities of transformative participatory action in various political spaces" (Gaventa, 2007:208). Others have collaborated with Gaventa on developing the power cube further in specific contexts, with specific focus and aims which I consider below.

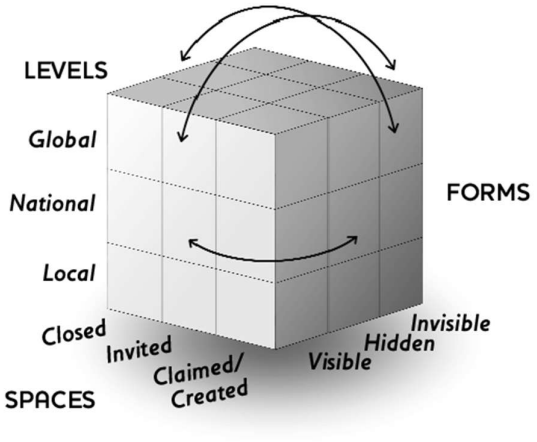


Image 3.0: The 'power cube': the levels, spaces and forms of power (Gaventa, 2009).

Expressions of Power

I find it useful to consider some expressions of power used to analyse the exercise of power and do so briefly here, while also considering some alternative or additional terms used by others working on power and social change. First, let me continue with the power cube, and consider the terms used to express aspects and dimensions of power and their significance. This

section discusses dimensions of power as outlined in the power cube as developed by Gaventa over time in his many publications.

The power cube focuses on three intersecting and interacting continuums of power across form, space and level (or power, space and place). The spaces and levels are open to dispute on the limits and restrictions for participation. This is impacted by who created the space and how it was created, where the space exists and at what level engagement is possible, and the extent to which power is apparent (Gaventa, 2003b).

…in Forms

Forms is used to represent the faces or dimensions of power – the hidden, visible and the invisible.

In the form of hidden power (or one-dimensional power) the bargaining for power is assumed to happen in a relatively open space where anyone with a grievance can enter, air their views and be heard, and potentially have their grievance addressed. This assumes that everyone has a mandated, legitimate representative who can speak on their behalf in this space, or that the people have the capacity and agency to access this open space and act on their own volition to have their grievance raised.

In the form of visible power (the second dimension), power is manipulated by those with influence, the rules of the game are orchestrated to promote or protect vested interest by preventing issues from being raised and reaching the agenda. This mobilisation of bias not only has a hand in setting the agenda and rules of the game, but also in deciding who gets to play. Actors are often marginalised and excluded through the use of force, symbols or labels (such as ignorant, troublemaker). Another feature in the visible form is non-decisions, where inaction in response to a grievance raised or the sum effects of incremental decisions are seen as non-decisions, nothing changes. This can lead to people not voicing their demands at all or limiting their demands to meet their reduced expectations. Where people fail to voice their grievance on an issue or decision, it appears not to exist,

so the decision makers can assume that there is consensus. However, this does not take account of the possibility of false or manipulated consensus, which is something that I believe I have experienced over and again in practice, for example, throughout the many years spent supporting third sector staff with participatory planning and management of development projects.

Very often, I saw the same minimally successful project plans presented repeatedly with the same flaws, the same unequal results widening inequality. When probed staff regularly displayed a mix of apathy, exhaustion and frustration and shared that there was no point in complaining, they had no input in project design other than consultation for information gathering. They complained that decisions were made by higher level staff at planning meetings far removed from the communities and project staff on the ground. Despite this, the project staff went through the motions of implementation continuously, feigning consensus rather than risk losing the funding, or losing their livelihood, after all, some people did benefit, perhaps not the most marginalised, but at least it satisfied management and donors when they could prove 'results' in some form. My experiences are reflected in those of Cheng (2000:140) who offer an example of such false consensus in highlighting the lack of learning and power inequalities in development practice, sharing that,

> They often repeat the same mistakes that were committed by other organisations which arrived in the same country some 15 or 20 years earlier. Such mistakes are clearly observed by the local partners. The problem is that such activities usually bring money with them. The local partners may be reluctant to go against the enthusiasm of the "donor agency", if that might mean a hampering of the mutual relations, even if the project is doomed to fail. Most often, the eventual failure of the project, which could mean a complete waste of money, is not seen as failure in understanding the local culture, but rather, a mistake in the local culture. In other words, the consultants are not wrong, but the local people are. In such cases, the organisation will never learn.

In 1980, Gaventa described invisible power (the third dimension) as the least developed and understood. While this form has been explored in depth across many disciplines in the prevailing 40 years, I would argue that it remains the most difficult to understand and analyse.

Miller et al. suggest that;

> processes of socialisation, culture and ideology perpetuate exclusion and inequality by defining what is normal, 'true' and acceptable. These processes also operate in ways to make injustices like poverty, racism, sexism and corruption invisible to the society at large, and make those who experience systemic discrimination the object of blame including, blaming themselves (2006:10).

This view connects sharply with the attitude of the white European development worker shared in chapter one, the dismissal and objectification of a community and laying blame firmly at their door without question, assured of their own position and truth. It is the least visible form, most often invisible, and which Lukes (2007) referred to as an insidious form of power which battles for hearts and minds. "Invisible power involves the internalised, often unconscious acceptance of dominant norms, institutions, languages and behaviours as natural and normal, often desirable, even if they appear to be against the interests of the actors involved… [and] helps to perpetuate an unjust status quo" (Scott-Villiers and Oosterom, 2016:2). We experience this in the everyday in simple often unnoticed ways; through media headlines which use disingenuous labels, language and narratives to shape our understanding and attitude towards a prevailing issue leading to discrimination, injustice and worse, as exemplified by the inhumane ongoing genocide in Palestine and media complicity in 'justifying' the erasure of a population (see Matar, 2025); or through the algorithms that shape our social media feeds serving incessant doses of 'truth' which often in reality are manipulated by AI, projects of the wealthy big tech companies (Salaj, 2025) or created by the self-declared 'expert' online, in invited or created spaces where everyone can participate . It is worth noting that there are converse positive examples to the aforementioned, such as citizen journalism in contexts where free media is repressed, and the access to a

world of knowledge, information, communication and digital services where available through mobile technologies is a game-changer for many. Regardless, the spaces where invisible power resides is ever widening, reaching into the everyday through multiple spaces and levels in a globalised world.

…in Spaces

Spaces reflected in the power cube are closed, invited, claimed or created. It is worth highlighting again that all these spaces can be sites of dispute, none are neutral, they are all imbued with power in some form, all shaped by those that created them and the boundaries that limit them (Cornwall, 2002; Gaventa; 2003b). There are many types of spaces, such as political, educational, policy, community, social, economic, etc. and while in this research my main focus is on power, participation and knowledge in the community development space, other spaces feature intermittently, ever connected and overlapping.

Closed spaces

Closed spaces are spaces which admit entry to a particular set of actors who make decisions on issues for others, without any attempt to include the voice of wider society or those affected by the issue, some often quoted examples at global level are the World Bank and the World Trade Organisation. In recent years there have been attempts to enhance transparency and accountability and to foster greater inclusion in decision making for social change. At state level this can be through decentralising processes and devolvement of powers to regional and local levels.

Invited Spaces

Previously excluded actors may be invited into a decision-making space, often as a result of external pressure with the aim of increasing legitimacy (or perceived legitimacy) of the space and decision made there. One such attempt to transform previously closed spaces has been at local government

level through the Ward Development Committees in Zambia, established as "the sub district structures which serve as legal platforms for people's participation in local development at ward level" (LGAZ, 2023:4). This is a clear example of an invited space, created by those with power and influence with the purpose of fostering greater community participation in local development, with community representatives invited through mechanisms with specific criteria for the selection and nomination of representatives at community level.

Miller et al. (2006:5) warn that, "while invited spaces can offer possibilities for influence and networking, they rarely produce long-term results on vital justice issues. The more pressing danger, however, is that they can serve to legitimize the status quo and divert civil society energies and resources".

The boundaries of and power within the space is a key consideration. Hayward (in Gaventa, 2007:214) offers an understanding of power as;

> 'the network of social boundaries that delimit fields of possible action.' Freedom, on the other hand, 'is the capacity to participate effectively in shaping the social limits that define what is possible' (Hayward 1998: 9, 21). In this sense, participation as freedom is not only the right to participate effectively in a given space but also the right to define and to shape that space, i.e., 'to act upon the boundaries that constrain and enable social action' (Hayward 1998: 12).

With this in mind, we move to claimed space where the freedom to participate, define and shape the space is assumed.

Claimed/Created spaces

Claimed and created spaces tend to be created by civil society or other stakeholders in response to an issue, to mobilise and act on a grievance or shared concern, or to challenge the dominant hegemonic narrative and the systems shaped by those narratives. Miller et al. (2006) also consider that claimed spaces can be found where civil society exerts pressure to gain access to closed spaces where they can try to influence or negotiate their own agenda. They describe created spaces as autonomous spaces, providing

a space to "develop agendas, knowledge and solidarity" (2006:6) without external 'power over' or influence. Cornwall (2002) suggests that these spaces can emerge organically in response to issues or the coming together of like-minded people to simply gather in commonality. The key point here is that the space is created by the participants themselves, setting their own limits and agendas, rather than created and bound for them. These claimed spaces can embody participation as freedom as suggested by Hayward, however, I suggest that we must always be mindful not to assume that a vision for a space which embodies these values is free of power dynamics, as nuanced power dynamics exist everywhere. Care must be taken to avoid replication of the grievances or hegemonic narratives and systems which the claimed space hoped to escape. Gaventa (2007:215) warns that;

> who creates the space is critical – those who create it are more likely to have power within it, and those who have power in one space may not have so much in another. In some settings, the 'claimed or created' spaces may indeed have more influence and control over decisions that affect peoples' lives than the closed or invited state spaces, especially in settings of weak or illegitimate states.

The learning and experience gained in created space may generate agency to enter another claimed or invited space demonstrating the transformative potential where there is freedom for participation. However, this must be considered in relation to other spaces, as Gaventa advises above, having power in one space does not guarantee power in every space. This is often the case for women, especially working-class women, who are expected to 'know their place'. Moving into an influential position in a voluntary or professional capacity can lead to the experience of power and influence in one space, yet at home or in their community, they may be seen as 'too big for their boots' and may suffer in return. This example suggests that the zero-sum argument is not quite accurate, gaining power in one space and losing it in another may be considered same-same rather than zero-sum, a shame when with critical thought and mindset shift, the empowerment of one could be celebrated and harnessed to advance change for many, a win-win situation. However, taking Chambers (2006:99) definition of mindset as,

"the ensemble of a person's ideas, attitudes, values, beliefs, mental categories and predispositions" into account and reflecting on Chambers (2006:100) words which caution us to consider how mindset can shape meaning and can alter the ending. In this case, my mindset shapes my understanding of empowerment as predominantly a good thing, therefore leading to the conclusion that in the example above, the empowerment of this working-class woman could be beneficial for her family, community etc. and so could be win-win if those affected encouraged her to fill her boots and wear them proudly. Of course, her empowerment may not be used for positive ends, in which case, the end result could indeed be zero sum, with others left barefoot.

…in Levels

The places or levels where power resides and is exercised are many and varied, however, the power cube focuses our attention on the local, national and global levels. The national and state level has always been a locus of power and the one that immediately comes to mind when considering power. It is now difficult to address power at local level without taking global power dynamics into account. The global has become even more pertinent with the expansion of globalisation and the many sites of global power which now exist. Global South activists and CSOs have been fighting for decades to hold the Global North to account for inequalities and injustice which remain from colonisation and its remnant policies, ideologies and strategies of extraction and oppression.

However, the local is important too, increasingly more so with the connections between the local and the global, with some advocating that, "participatory practice must begin locally, as it is in the arenas of everyday life in which people are able to resist power and to construct their own voice" (Gaventa, 2007:209). Indeed, the power dynamic behind the 'situated' knowledge of the SDGs is critiqued by Uleanya and Yassim who suggest that the SDGs need to be Africanised in order to meet the goals. They advocate that this requires 'glocalisation' through connecting

specialised knowledge with local knowledge, "that synergy between global and local knowledge is one way …the SDGs can be Africanised rather than continuous and absolute dependence of Eurocentric knowledge for driving sustainability in African countries" (2024:6). Similarly, Freire discussing power at local and global levels argues that "globalization is killing the locality. We need to restore and to invent local power again. Restoring and reinventing local power means to create different possibilities that make possible the experience of solidarity" (2014:44).

The definition of local becomes even more nuanced from a feminist perspective. Focusing on women's empowerment, Miller et al. (2006) view levels in terms of three interacting realms – the public, private and intimate. The public refers to people at work or in the community, the private includes familial, platonic, romantic and sexual relationships etc, and the intimate refers to the relationship with self in the physical, emotional and psychological sense. Similarly, Kabeer (1994) highlights the importance of focusing beyond the public sphere to intimate and household levels if power is to be challenged and changed in ways that impact and empower women.

They posit that individual people can feel powerful or powerless for different reasons such as identity, and in relation to different contexts or levels – such as the example of the working-class woman offered above. Therefore, it is important to focus on the intersections and flows between all levels of experience and acknowledge that positive shifts in one level does not necessarily carry through all levels and in fact can increase the experience of negative power in others.

Feminist expressions and visions of power

Miller et al. (2006) offer a key examination of power, its complexities, and opportunities and challenges for transforming social power. They outline a nuanced analysis of power that is attuned to representations of sources, spaces and levels of power, some of which have been presented in previous sections, including economic, political, social and cultural sources. This sees

power as both positive and negative and, drawing on Lukes' three faces of power, expressing it in analytical terms of; power with, to, within, and power over. They suggest these types of analytical forms allow people to better explore their own lives in terms of inequality and subordination, which provides a useful framework for the analysis of community and staff knowledge in this study (see later discussion chapter).

Power over is the most often recognised form of power, manifesting as abuse, violence, oppression, discrimination, corruption, coercion, control, etc. Miller et al. (2006) say that at the most basic level it privileges some at the expense of marginalised others. Those with power can make decisions that affect those without, controlling resources, decisions and agendas. Power over is often mimicked by people in all spaces so without critical conversations on the concepts of power and change, people often replicate existing inequality and injustice, themselves re-enacting oppressive values and behaviours.

It is important to consider the possibility of challenging dominating 'power over' and regaining 'power over' in a positive sense, for example, where the antagonist is met with resistance from those considered 'under' their power, and the locus of power begins to move or change to a more positive dynamic and result. The successful resistance movements for reproductive justice and marriage equality in the Irish context come to mind, where citizens over time harnessed 'power within' and 'power with' in exercising 'power to' successfully challenge the entrenched institutional power of church and state, with citizens gaining 'power over' the issue and 'power to' choose through civic action and public debate, changing hearts and minds and ultimately securing and winning in constitutional referenda. Gaventa (2021) agrees, arguing that in this sense, 'power over' and 'power to' are intertwined in a constant agitating relationship which in his experience has seen even the most marginalised communities adopt strategies to push back and reclaim some power over their situation and context. He further advises that a strategy that works on all the 'prepositions' of power is necessary for

transformative change. This view reflects that of Bradley (2020) in their expression of 'power for', discussed in the section to follow.

Vital or Transformative Power

Miller et al. (2006) present a generative view of power as life affirming or vital offered by feminists seeking alternatives for the expression and exercise of power. They share three visions of this vitality incorporating power with, to and within, which are useful for this current research.

Power with can build collective strength by searching for commonality among interests and values, and combining individual and group resources, recognising and acknowledging conflict and working to resolve the issue for the greater good. This can create a cohesive connected community, bringing people and efforts together for social change in a supported process that recognises diversity and the existence of conflict. However, Batliwala (2019) reminds us that while this is the most potent expression of vital power, it can also be a strategy of the powerful to silence people in order to protect their own interests, such as collective 'power with' private companies and politicians for their mutual benefit, rather than for justice and equality aims. Powerful alliances between western powers are an example of 'power with' often used to silence and protect political and corporate interests from macro to micro levels. While at the micro level, Lukes (2021) draws attention to the tendency to focus on operational definitions of power, such as community power, without due attention to individual power at the personal and intimate level. However, in the context of this research, the focus is mainly on aspects of collective power, especially from the perspective of 'we' inherent in Ubuntu, which when applied to power to and power within, reflects the 'we' in the individual, as opposed to the individual viewed from a rational Western perspective.

Power to recognises the unique individual potential of citizens to make difference in their lives. This potential can be enhanced with knowledge and learning and the confidence this brings. When individual potential is

recognised and supported this also supports the possibility of power with. This is important given that top-down decision-making in development practice have often stifled power to or one's sense of agency and has caused a sense of apathy and withdrawal.

Power within is concerned with a person's sense of self, their recognition of personal value, knowledge and capabilities. It is the ability to imagine, to hope, to critically reflect on power and assumptions and is connected to dignity, recognition and respect. Creative approaches can affirm power within needed to create actions which are nourishing, and which are fundamental to agency and "the creative human capacity to act and change the world" (2006:6). Effective strategies draw on such sources of power leading to empowered action that keeps people engaged and motivated rather than the usual lobbying or technical approaches which do not consider the aspects of oppression which "leave people feeling inferior, isolated, cynical and often angry" (ibid.).

Critical education can be a catalyst for the generation of power within and power to, I know this to be true from personal experience, indeed proponents of critical education such as Freire (1972, 1981) were part of my personal awakening as shared in chapter one. Giroux sees education as a "site of struggle over agency, identities and values… and [critical] pedagogy as an empowering practice that gets people to think about their own sense of agency in relation to knowledge and their ability to engage in critical and collective struggle" (2022:198). This view supports the notion that working on one expression of power can effect change in others (power with).

Miller et al. (2006) offer a note on discrimination, highlighting that it is something which is firmly rooted in society in multiple ways ensuring the uneven distribution of resources and benefits based on aspects of identity and which is dependent on access and control of resources. They highlight self-confidence and credibility as a political resource, in addition to representation, information, education, experience and leadership. Economic and productive resources include land, livelihoods and money.

They explicitly highlight time as a key resource, one which is "particularly scarce and critical for women" (2006:7), something which emerged as a stark reality for women in the research communities and to which I return in the discussion chapter.

Power For - In their reflection on developments in power analysis for social change since the original Miller et al. (2006) publication, Bradley adds a new term to the above expressions - power for, which "provides a logic to transformative power - motivating the sustained movement-building efforts that generates power to, with and within as building blocks for change" (2020:108) maintaining that all of the above expressions of power need to change in order to achieve transformational change.

Power and knowledge – a formidable partnership

To understand the impact of power in relation to knowledge and learning and the role of knowledge in exercising and sustaining power, we need to consider several issues. These include how and where knowledge is created, and by whom; the type of knowledge that is considered legitimate and why; the forms and spaces of learning that are valued; and the use of knowledge as a resource in the exercise of power. These are big broad questions which have been broached initially in the previous chapter in the discussion of Southern epistemologies. In the interest of relevance to this research project, I continue to explore this through the lens of knowledge democracy, bearing in mind the views of Go (2016) in Dzisah and Kpessa-Whyte that "knowledge is intrinsically tied to power, especially imperial and colonial power" (2023:14).

Knowledge Democracy – an emerging framework

Through the research process and engagement with literature, I have come to an understanding of knowledge democracy as a broad concept which encompasses multiple phenomena, in agreement with the views of key thinkers such as Hall, Heck and Godrie (2020). Drawing from both, I present

an emerging conceptual framework of knowledge democracy which is explicit and nuanced in its focus and consideration on participation, ownership and power.

An overarching pre-requisite for knowledge democracy is the recognition of all people as global citizens, with inherent dignity and with equal and inalienable human rights as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). I highlight this while regrettably accepting that these rights are not recognised, upheld and/or enforced for many of the world's global citizens. Furthermore, rights as viewed through 'alternative' worldviews do not necessarily align with those enshrined in the UDHR (van Norren and Seehawer, 2025), a point I return to later.

Through my engagement with both the literature and the research partners, I have come to an understanding of knowledge democracy (which includes knowledge justice) as having three core components. These are equitable knowledge production and consumption, social inclusion and learning, and meaningful participatory processes as standard practice, as elaborated below.

The equitable production and consumption of knowledge and information is central. This demands knowledge justice; the acceptance of multiple types, forms and sources of knowledge as legitimate knowledge, including collective ways of knowing as legitimate, and the recognition of all people as citizen knowers, without discrimination, capable of holding, creating and sharing knowledge and information in multiple representations and forms.

Knowledge democracy emphasises social inclusion and learning where citizens have consistent access to information and knowledge; through equal access to multiple spaces, forms and processes of learning; through effective representation and feedback mechanisms in the public sphere; and equal access to technologies, and a free and independent media in all its forms.

Participatory processes which can empower and transform, that recognise existing knowledge, assets, rights, capacity, and agency, and can support the achievement of social justice are crucial for knowledge democracy. Citizens are viewed as key stakeholders and partners in political processes with public policy setting shaped by multiple knowledge perspectives. Citizens are viewed similarly in development actions and processes with the right to participate asserted and locally led, where decision making and agenda setting rests with affected communities.

I discuss this conceptual framework further in the discussion chapter, here I return to a discussion of existing literature with a focus on knowledge democracy and knowledge justice, including concepts of social inclusion and participation.

Knowledge Democracy – existing understanding and debates

There are many views on the concept of knowledge democracy, most of which share similar themes (Hall, Heck and Godrie, 2020; Gaventa,1995; Tandon, Sing, Clover and Hall, 2016; Babalola, 2024). In particular, they share a common view that knowledge justice and knowledge democracy are interrelated, inseparable, and together are concerned with equality in the recognition, production and consumption of knowledge, with some emphasising participation and inclusion more explicitly.

Two of the most renowned writers on knowledge democracy, Budd Hall and Rajesh Tandon, present their perspective of knowledge democracy as an;

> interrelationship of phenomena… [which first] acknowledges the importance of the existence of multiple epistemologies, or ways of knowing such as organic, spiritual and land-based systems, frameworks arising from our social movements, and the knowledge of the marginalized or excluded everywhere, or what is sometimes referred to as subaltern knowledge. Second, it affirms that knowledge is both created and represented in multiple forms, including text, image, numbers, story, music, drama, poetry, ceremony and meditation. Third, and fundamental to our thinking about knowledge democracy, is understanding that knowledge is a powerful tool for taking action in social movements and elsewhere to deepen

> democracy and to struggle for a fairer and healthier world. And, finally, knowledge democracy is about open access for the sharing of knowledge, so that everyone who needs knowledge will have access to it. Knowledge democracy is about intentionally linking values of justice, fairness and action to the process of using knowledge (2017:13).

The need to recognise multiple knowledges arises from our global history of dispossession of knowledge, land, identity, belief systems, freedom and so on, and the accumulation of capitals, which is the foundation of our current dominant economic system (Harvey, 2004; In Hall and Tandon, 2017). With knowledge hoarded and repressed, the path was cleared for the spread of a hegemonic knowledge, accepted as legitimate in the Western world, and foisted on the majority world. A hegemony that comes with accusations of it as historically founded on white, male, western, imperialist and colonial 'truths' which dismiss and disregard alternative forms and sources of knowledge (Hall and Tandon, 2017; Letherby, 2003), as discussed in the previous chapter. The historical and persistent dominance of a masculine knowledge system and lens is problematic in that women make up half of the worlds' population, how they experience that world is nuanced and the knowledge that they consume and produce is likewise nuanced, and valid, yet it has been historically dismissed. Similarly, the way in which indigenous, ethnic, colonised and marginalised populations experience the world and shapes their related nuanced knowledge, and experience has been dismissed and disregarded, as articulated in the previous chapter. The research partners are among those excluded, with the added dimension of formerly colonised, and including the identities of women and rural which further discriminates. This exclusion and denial have facilitated and sustained this hegemonic knowledge.

The 'knowledge' which socially constructs 'our world' and shapes such things as accepted ideologies, norms, meanings and crucially, the school curriculum, in the majority world contexts is Eurocentric, constructed and enclosed by a privileged elite (Hall and Tandon, 2017), sustained and protected by others of a similar status. The curriculum teaches us to see the past and present world through a colonial lens. This lens often also

influences spaces of informal and non-formal learning and education. What we know has been carefully selected, pruned, culled, and managed strategically to uphold certain ways of thinking and being in the world, promoting a privileged perspective as the norm while in reality that 'norm' only mirrors the existence and truth of a few. Nadarajah and Grydehøj (2024) assert that, "theory can seek to tame 'knowing' into 'knowledge', thereby restricting localised, Indigenous, marginalised, or inconvenient agencies within a scope that can be encompassed and managed by globalised academia" (2024:14). Alternative forms and ways of knowing and being in the world are rejected and silenced in favour of the privileged knowledge disseminated continually on a global scale through (neo) colonisation and imperialism (ibid.).

As discussed in previous chapters, calls for decolonisation of knowledge, for knowledge justice and equality, for localisation and shifting power from the 'powerful' to the 'powerless' are not new, but have found renewed focus and fervour in recent years through the work of those advocating for knowledge democracy (and others). This is a useful framing for this research as it brings into view the deep inequalities in the consumption and production of knowledge locally and globally. Epistemic inequalities in access to knowledge and learning and recognition of people as knowers, with multiple ways of knowing is highlighted by both Godrie and Heck (in Hall, Heck, Godrie, 2020) as impediments to a knowledge democracy, a reflection of knowledge injustice undermining the achievement of knowledge democracy for all. Heck (2020) notes that theories and concepts of epistemic injustice help us to explore these inequalities.

Babalola (2024) sees inclusion as a precondition of epistemic justice, so deep is the connection between the two. The diverse voice and contribution of individuals and collectives as citizen knowers must be recognised, valued and amplified through participatory processes in inclusive spaces. Each supports the other in achieving the aims of social inclusion and knowledge justice, and "together, epistemic justice and inclusion can contribute to more equitable, diverse, and inclusive societies" (2024:7). Ziadah and

Hanieh (2010) emphasise the situated and collective nature of knowledge production, particularly in social movements and collective struggles, "the production of knowledge is a collective process developed through a common political practice… Only through practice can we truly understand the world and our place in it" (2010:94). The term 'citizen knowers' intentionally positions all people as global citizens with inherent knowledge and with equal and inalienable human rights, without discrimination, as an overarching pre-requisite for knowledge democracy. Box (2000:106) draws attention to the lack of recognition as citizen knowers in the development sectors, noting that, "among poor cultivators of poor crops in poor countries, a wealth of knowledge exists. The negative corollary of this is that among great scientists in countries concerned with these crops, limited knowledge exists".

Drawing from their experiences in the Transformative Engagement Network (TEN) research project, Ryan and Murphy (2018) contend that adult and community education can be a force for exploring knowledge injustice, where deeply held assumptions and taken for granted knowledge can be disrupted and connections made between knowledge and global inequalities. They further argue that a focus on every day and experiential knowledge and learning, and on relationships and relational learning from practice in a transformative learning approach is necessary to disrupt the status quo, achieve knowledge justice, and global equality.

Recognising that participation and inclusion are facets of knowledge justice, which in turn is central to a knowledge democracy, necessitates further discussion of both concepts in their relation to knowledge and power. Knowledge justice itself is a broad concept with many related concepts which assist in understanding and exploration of the field and as such merit acknowledgement. While I briefly explore some of these concepts, I limit them to those that I have found useful within the scope of this research. I return to participation, inclusion and knowledge justice later but first it may be helpful to consider some conceptions of knowledge and learning.

Understandings of knowledge and learning

What do we understand as knowledge? I have sometimes heard people distinguish 'knowledge from books' from 'knowledge from experience', the former almost always implied to be the most valid or legitimate. This in itself provides a glimpse of the power behind understandings and perceptions of knowledge, those who are knowers, and those who are not.

My own perspective on knowledge is reflected in a definition offered by Escrigas et al (2014; in Tandon et al., 2016:np),

> the facts, feelings or experiences of a person or a group of people, a state of knowing or awareness, and/or the consciousness or the familiarity gained by experience or learning. Knowledge is created through research, through the experience of the wise, through the act of surviving in the world, and is represented in text, poetry, music, political discourse, social media, speeches, drama and storytelling. Knowledge is linked to practical skills, to our working lives and to universal and abstract thought. Knowledge is created every day by each one of us and is central to who we are as human beings.

More importantly, I find this definition encompassing and fitting a sense of knowing from a Southern epistemological perspective.

Hall and Tandon (2017:10) link knowledge to change, describing it as, "dynamic, active, engaged and linked to social, political, cultural or sustainable changes". Whereas in defining knowledge UNESCO (2015:16) states that it is;

> central to any discussion of learning and may be understood as the way in which individuals and societies apply meaning to experience. It can therefore be seen broadly as the information, understanding, skills, values and attitudes acquired through learning. As such, knowledge is linked inextricably to the cultural, social, environmental and institutional contexts in which it is created and reproduced.

While all valid and with some overlap, the former two are imbued with life, invoking an image of knowledge (and learning) as a living entity, bound to life experience and change.

As presented in the previous chapter, there exists an epistemological divide on either side of an invisible line, with hegemonic Western rationality and

knowledge on one side, and epistemologies of the South on the other (de Sousa Santos, 2016). As presented by de Sousa Santos (2016:192) "throughout the world, there are not only very diverse forms of knowledge of matter, society, life, and spirit but also many and very diverse concepts of what counts as knowledge and the criteria that may be used to validate it". While this thesis is not concerned with exploring criteria for the validation of such knowledge, it does seek to recognise and investigate the existence of diverse forms of knowledge, its manifestation in collective forms and what that means for locally led development.

Collective ways of knowing are limited in Western understandings of knowledge which permeate development discourse and practice broadly (Scholte and Söderbaum, 2017). Instead, the Western perspective tends to view knowledge and learning from an essentialist ontological and related epistemological framework where the individual is central (Telleria, 2024). Conversely, the collective and interdependent nature of knowledge and learning is central in the collective "we" of Ubuntu and other cosmologies which define 'we' as humans, nature, and spirits in a world where everything in creation is interdependent and interconnected (van Norren and Seehawer, 2025). This recognition of 'we' is accentuated in a knowledge democracy which values cultural and knowledge diversity, where,

> knowledge including its generation, use and transmission, is in the public domain or commons; innovation is democratically generated and there are no ivory towers of 'expertise'; learning takes place as part of life and living rather than only in specialized institutions; and, individual or collective pathways of ethical and spiritual well-being and of happiness are available to all (Kothari, 2019a:291).

Accepting that knowledge is acquired through learning, I understand every waking moment as a potential learning opportunity, whether interacting with the self, others or nature, whether through dialogue, listening, reading, watching, observing or otherwise. Therefore, learning for me is embodied, lifelong and constant whether intentional and organised or organic and messy.

Counter to unorganised and organic informal learning, UNESCO (2015) describe formal and non-formal education as, “deliberate, intentional, purposeful and organized… [and] suppose a certain degree of institutionalization… with clear objectives, assessment of same and certification”. While I agree with this descriptor for the most part, in my experience, non-formal education is not always assessed or certified, with this being very much dependent on the subject matter, purpose, context and provider, for example, community education initiatives focused on reading and writing literacy skills, livelihoods skills, or financial management which may or may not be assessed and certified. Non-formal education often takes place outside of the formal education system, is usually people-centred with learner participation and experience highly valued, an emphasis on both process and outcome learning, and usually does not follow a hierarchical framework for entry. While it can be organised with intentional learning outcomes, it can also be organic and fluid, taking the lead from learners and leading to unplanned learning through process and practice.

Informal learning is the process through which we gather understandings, attitudes, information, skills and knowledge daily throughout our lifetime. The learning is context specific and multilayered, influenced by family, community, and our wider sociocultural environment (and beyond in our globally connected world), the resulting knowledge is ‘situated’, influenced by and influencing our ‘habitus’ through our lifetime. Despite the fact that it is usually unorganised, often unintentional and always unaccredited, it forms the vast majority of the learning in an individual’s lifetime (Coombs and Ahmed, 1974; in Johnson and Majewska, 2022), and as such is vital, informing social, personal, emotional and cultural literacy and more. Indeed, Tandon and Srinivasan (2024) insist that everyday knowledge is vital for social change and empowerment. In their research on informal intergenerational knowledge and everyday literacy practices Shukla (2025) found that the rural research community initially did not consider themselves as knowledgeable because they are not literate in the functional sense, from a formal school education. Informal learning is often the least

recognised and valued form of learning, not seen as a source of legitimate knowledge, unlike 'knowledge from books' which is most often associated with formal education.

Knowledge Justice

Informal knowledge and learning are not alone in the perception by many as not recognised or illegitimate, epistemic injustice renders much knowledge and learning as unofficial and unrecognised. As noted earlier, what is accepted as legitimate knowledge in the majority world is Eurocentric, constructed and enclosed by a privileged elite (Hall and Tandon, 2017; Djohossou et al., 2023b), sustained and protected in an epistemic hegemony. Alternative forms and ways of knowing and being in the world which exist outside of the enclosure are often rejected and silenced in favour of the privileged knowledge disseminated through (neo) colonisation and imperialism (ibid.). This denial of other forms, sources and expressions of knowledge and related knowers represents a knowledge injustice which extends to indigenous knowledge, subaltern knowledge, spiritual knowledge and wisdom, informal intergenerational knowledge, marginalised languages and representations of knowledge in all its diversity and origin. The scale of knowledge injustice globally is inexhaustive.

Gaventa and Bivens (2014) discuss knowledge justice in terms of cognitive justice in a more grounded and practical sense drawing on a background theoretical landscape that is informed by the thinking of the philosophers presented next. Gaventa and Bivens reflect that the idea of cognitive justice is not new, nor are challenges to the assumption that a knowledge society leads to a democratic society and vice versa, noting that key thinkers including Freire, Fals Borda, Rahman, Tandon, Hall, Chambers, Visvanathan and De Sousa Santos have been doing just that for decades. The idea of cognitive justice encompasses elements of both knowledge justice (as presented below) and knowledge democracy more broadly, including questions of what and who is deemed credible knowledge and credible knowers. It highlights the ostracising of diverse forms and sources of

knowledge, and promotes the ethos that knowledge is of and for everyone, everyday learning is valid and important, and everybody is both learner and expert.

Fricker (2006, 2007, 2017) has been one of the most influential thinkers on epistemic injustice, defining the concept fundamentally as "a wrong done to somebody in their capacity as a knower" (2007:1). In practice, in interpersonal communication the marginalised and oppressed are not heard or understood, and at a systemic level they are prevented from shaping social meaning and understanding through a sharing of their knowledge and perspectives (ibid). These practices are exclusionary and harmful. Fricker proposes many phenomena under the theme of epistemic injustice. These include two key concepts: testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice. In testimonial injustice a speakers' knowledge is considered less credible due to an identity prejudice held by the hearer in relation to the speaker. The speaker is the subject of an epistemic wrong due to their knowledge not being shared; and a wrong in that they are not seen and heard as a knower, they are not valued, their knowledge discredited and as such they suffer an ethical harm. Hermeneutical injustice occurs where marginalised individuals and groups cannot express their experience and knowledge, or where the hearer cannot understand them because the knowledge or language is unfamiliar to them or fails to accept their expression of their knowledge as legitimate (Fricker, 2007).

The struggle for epistemic justice globally is fundamental to African epistemic freedom. Ndlovu-Gatsheni asserts, "the urgent need for epistemic freedom, which restores to African people a central position within human history as independent actors. This epistemological concern is fundamentally decolonial… Africans always had their own valid, legitimate and useful knowledge systems and education systems" (2018:2). He acknowledges the 'colour line' as the big issue of the last century and proposes the concept of the 'epistemic line' as the major issue of this century. He states that the 'epistemic line' continues from the 'colour line' since the;

> denial of humanity automatically disqualified one from epistemic virtue. The epistemic line is sustained by what Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2007) termed 'abyssal thinking' – an imperial reason that reduced some human beings to a subhuman category with no knowledge. This means that the epistemic line is simultaneously the ontological line… Epistemic freedom is fundamentally about the right to think, theorize, interpret the world, develop own methodologies and write from where one is located and unencumbered by Eurocentrism (2018:3).

The denial of valid, legitimate and useful African knowledge and education systems is a contrived act of epistemic violence, encompassing multiple aspects of epistemic injustice as defined by Fricker (2007), including that of Fricker's concept of pre-emptive testimonial injustice. This "occurs when prejudice… leads to a tendency for some groups simply not to be asked for information in the first place" (2007:130), so those who consider themselves credible knowers do not even consider seeking input from marginalised or oppressed groups as they are regarded as having a credibility deficit, so in effect they are silenced. Another similar concept is epistemic objectification where someone is seen merely as a source of information with no credible knowledge to offer, seen as an object of knowledge only, rather than a subject of knowledge and as such," is wrongfully excluded from the community of trusted informants" (2007:132). Qualitative research which fails to include respondents, treating them as objects of knowledge, rather than subjects with credible knowledge, is a clear example of epistemic objectification, an injustice which the principles and processes of participatory research aim to remedy.

There are many other theorists in the field of philosophy and others which offer helpful concepts, definitions and understandings used in this research, such as Dotson's (2011) concepts of epistemic oppression, testimonial quieting and smothering, Silva Filho et al.'s (2022) understanding of epistemic silencing, and the concept of epistemic isolation offered by Kidd and Carel (2017). I also found the work of Pérez (2019) on epistemic violence both helpful and insightful. Fricker's work and that of other theorists mentioned above have been useful to me in exploring and understanding knowledge inequality and injustice in this research. I further explore their

value in understanding and analysis of the manifestation of these phenomena in practice, particularly in the practice of community development, education and learning in my analysis, returning to those that do support analysis in the discussion chapter. The experience of knowledge injustice is intrinsically linked to the phenomenon of social inclusion as explored in the following section.

Inclusion, access and knowledge

Social inclusion is often defined as "the process of improving the terms of participation in society, particularly for people who are disadvantaged, through enhancing opportunities, access to resources, voice and respect for rights" (UN, 2016:17). In the Zambian context, the latest UNDP (2024) country report highlights social inequalities as a significant continuing challenge. The Zambian 8th National Development Plan (8NDP) notes poverty as much more extreme in rural areas at, "76.6 percent compared to 23.4 percent in urban areas" (Ministry of Finance and National Planning, 2022:14), with extreme poverty in rural areas reaching 60.8 per cent coupled with disparities in access to education and health care suggesting that rural communities face greater exclusion compared to their urban counterparts.

Discussing participatory citizenship in relation to inclusion, exclusion and identity Mohanty and Tandon argue that "participatory citizenship is both a discourse and a set of practice about the inclusion of the excluded groups. It is about their agency, articulation and mobilisation in their attempt to change existing relationship and turn their overwhelming exclusionary citizenship experience into an inclusive one" (2006:10). Further, VeneKlasen and Miller suggest that citizens learn about citizenship through processes of socialisation, education, being active in civil society and through everyday experiences, adding that active citizenship is difficult to encourage and promote among people, "who have been marginalized from politics… Citizenship does not just happen naturally in response to increased public space or political opportunity… In all contexts, the changing views of

citizenship are marked by battles that determine whose concerns get incorporated as legitimate and whose get excluded" (2002:30).

For citizens to claim recognition and rights, they first must be aware that those rights and entitlements exist and apply universally. They must also have the awareness and capacity to understand and assess how those rights are implemented through social policy, and in the process develop a consciousness of whether those rights are upheld or denied in their contextual reality. However, it is important to acknowledge that from the perspective of many Southern epistemes, "human rights are individualist and therefore cannot fully encompass collective worldview such as most of the original cosmovision's of the Global South" (van Norren and Seehawer, 2025:6). From the perspective of Buen Vivir for example, one must accept that, "the community of life comes first then the individual. Therefore, collective rights, rights to cultural heritage and rights of nature are closely intertwined" (2025:11). More broadly, Southern epistemes, "emphasize collective flourishing and dignity rather than individual rights" (2025:16).

Active citizenship fostered through popular education can bring individual and intersecting identities together to form solidarity partnerships and mobilise for change (Giroux, 2020). However, as alluded to above, even if a new public space is created for or by new citizen solidarity partnerships, it is important to remember that these spaces are never neutral and can result in further exclusion without attention to power dynamics and appropriate support and action.

Access to information and knowledge through formal, non-formal and informal learning systems, through ICT, access to resources and services, and more are vital to an informed citizenry. Forms of popular education and global citizenship education have a key role to play in developing critical consciousness (Liddy, 2021). In a globalised and connected world, ICT can be hugely influential - in positive and negative terms - in developing an informed citizenry and introducing people to social networks and movements for change. However, access to information, knowledge and

spaces of learning is not universal and equal, whether in terms of formal and non-formal learning, or through access to ICT and digital literacy, not everyone has equity of opportunity. For example, in the Zambian context equity of educational opportunity and quality education remains a challenge, along with access to ICTs generally, and particularly in rural areas (UNESCO, 2016). In relation to access to knowledge and information through ICTs globally, UNESCO acknowledge that, "a critical challenge is to promote an enabling environment for harnessing the potential of information and communication technologies (ICTs) – from radio to mobile media and the Internet – for the benefit of each and every individual, including the marginalized and most vulnerable" (2010:8). This lack of access to information, knowledge and spaces of learning impedes even the most basic form of participation.

Participation

The concept of participation is heavily contested in theory and practice and has often been relegated to a depoliticised 'buzzword' by many (Cornwall and Brock, 2005; Cornwall, 2007) so it is necessary to define it clearly. Of course, the need for an emphasis on participation primarily stems from exclusion of marginalised groups from full participation in processes of decision making on issues that affect them. Related to the enclosure of knowledge as discussed earlier (Hall and Tandon, 2017) and the development of hegemonic knowledge, ideologies and systems that shape our world, the powerful elect and elite having been making decisions for citizen others for centuries (Ziai, 2017; Esteva, 2019). The term participation is often incongruent in discourse and in practice. As elaborated in discussions of participatory approaches in the previous chapter, what is described as participatory practice in theory may in practice resemble consultation, basic information gathering or manipulation, rather than meaningful participation (Chakma et al., 2024; Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Cornwall, 2007, 2008).

Debates on meaningful participation in the practice of development initiatives and more broadly have been ongoing for decades since it became mainstreamed in development discourse in the 1970s, albeit without agreement on what defines meaningful participation (Cornwall, 2008). From Freire's' (1972) advocacy for participation in education in support of conscientisation and social justice, to Chambers' (1997) calls to put communities first in a people-centred approach which values their reality over those who dominate the arena and decisions, participation has been a constant in social change discourse. The demand for meaningful local participation has been amplified in recent years with a renewed call for decolonisation and localisation (Chakma et al., 2024; Djohossou, 2023a, 2023b), key concepts which I have discussed in previous chapters.

In an effort to 'unpack' participation, Cornwall (2008) considers some different typologies of participation including those of Arnstein (1969), Pretty (1995) and White (1996) which range from notions of non-participation to citizen control and power, manipulative and passive to self-mobilisation, and nominal to transformative, respectively. Cornwall highlights that they all suggest a normative progression along a spectrum from bad to good, from control of citizens to control by citizens yet the outcomes offered in each typology are not the same. They suggest that when empowerment means that citizens are left to their own devices and must take responsibility for their own needs rather than the state, this can reflect bad to worse rather than bad to good. They further argue that "citizen control goes much further than self-mobilization… What Pretty's typology helps make clear is that the motivations of those who adopt and practise participatory approaches is an important factor... And what Arnstein's reminds us is that participation is ultimately about power and control" (2008:273).

Although all such typologies offer a helpful frame for an exploration of forms of participation in practice, I mainly draw on Pretty's (1995) typology presented below in my analysis and discussion as for me it more accurately describes the types of participation that I have experienced in practice. In

all analyses, it is important to consider the specific context, who is participating, in what, why, how, what level of freedom and safety exists in the context of the participation, and where does the power lie. How much power do participants have, individually and collectively, they are rarely a homogenous group with equal power and influence. These considerations have been made explicit in their importance by Cornwall throughout her writings, by the authors of these typologies and many others. They have been a core concern for me in my practice, including in this research process and as such are paid due attention in later discussion of findings.

Type	**Characteristics of each type**
Manipulative participation	Participation is simply a pretence, with 'people's' representatives on official boards, but who are un-elected and have no power.
Passive participation	People participate by being told what has been decided or has already happened. It involves unilateral announcements by an administration or project management without listening to people's responses. The information being shared belongs only to external professionals.
Participation by consultation	People participate by being consulted or by answering questions. External agents define problems and information-gathering processes and so control analysis. Such a consultative process does not concede any share in decision-making, and professionals are under no obligation to take on board people's views.
Participation for material incentives	People participate by contributing resources, for example, labour, in return for food, cash or other material incentives. Farmers may provide the fields and labour but are involved in neither experimentation nor the process of learning. It is very common to see this 'called' participation, yet people have no stake in prolonging technologies or practices when the incentives end.
Functional participation	Participation seen by external agencies as a means to achieve project goals, especially reduced costs. People may participate by forming groups to meet predetermined objectives related to the project. Such involvement may be interactive and involve shared decision-making but tends to arise only after major decisions have already been made by external agents. At worst, local people may still only be co-opted to serve external goals.

Interactive participation	People participate in joint analysis, development of action plans and formation or strengthening of local institutions. Participation is seen as a right, not just the means to achieve project goals. The process involves interdisciplinary methodologies that seek multiple perspectives and make use of systemic and structured learning processes. As groups take control over local decisions and determine how available resources are used, so they have a stake in maintaining structures or practices.
Self-mobilisation	People participate by taking initiatives independently of external institutions to change systems. They develop contacts with external institutions for resources and technical advice they need but retain control over how resources are used. Self-mobilisation can spread if government and NGOs provide an enabling framework of support. Such self-initiated mobilisation may or may not challenge existing distributions of wealth and power.

Table 3.0: Typology of Participation (Adapted from Pretty, 1995).

Power, participation, knowledge and inclusion – in action

Gaventa and Bivens (2014) share that from the perspective of many policymakers and theorists, knowledge resources in society are crucial for democracy and vice versa. Processes of developing both,

> are assumed to go together… The promises of both the democratic and the knowledge society are mediated by power relationships that affect both who participates and whose knowledge counts. Those who write about democracy often see knowledge as a way to inform the citizenry, who remain passive consumers of knowledge, not active participants in its very production (2014:69).

My experience in development practice concurs with Gaventa and Bivens, most often communities are relegated to passive consumers rather than citizen knowers and active producers of knowledge. In practice, locally and globally, issues of who is included and excluded, who truly participates, in what, are central. Community members are often invited to participate in community development initiatives at implementation stage, after decisions have been made on needs, priorities, solutions, and actions. In this reflection of visible power, expert producers of knowledge take centre stage, expertise usually consists of "action for" others, speaking on behalf of others and creating knowledge for others without any significant input from the

voices at the core of the issue or any consideration of the influence of power on the how the issue is understood, packaged and presented through expert knowledge (Cornwall and Gaventa, 2001). In each case, this reflects passive participation, or functional participation at best, communities are mere passengers in the process, and as noted by Gaventa and Bivens (2014), mere consumers of knowledge. This a situation that many scholars (Freire, 1971; Fricker, 2006, 2007) raise issues with, highlighting the disparate positioning of communities as objects and subjects in the locus and creation of knowledge.

The attitude, policy and practice of development and social change initiatives need to shift from such object-subject relations to recognition of communities as "reservoirs of knowledge" (Gaventa and Bivens, 2014:73). This object-subject relation is often heightened by identity prejudice towards marginalised communities, such as rural communities, who "tend to be under-represented in decision-making processes. As a result, their capacity to contribute their knowledge is severely curtailed" (TEN Team, 2020:2). Such object-subject knowledge relations exist in engagement between academia, state, civil society organisations, non-governmental organisations, religious and other powerful institutions and communities, where the powerful often view the grassroots as "lacking the knowledge or sophistication necessary for effective…action" (Gaventa 1995:29). This prejudice extends through a tendency to focus on the individual rather than the collective, as highlighted by authors such as Scholte and Söderbaum (2017), Eyben et al. (2015) and Kimambo and Shallwani (2025). The latter regret that the focus of donors in learning from evidence for results is on individual rather than collective 'beneficiaries'. They highlight a problem with both the individual focus and the language used, arguing that the "concept of "beneficiaries" implies passivity and overlooks the agency and active engagement of community members" (Kimambo and Shallwani, 2025:2). Sharing changes to their own organisational practice they relay a "shift to community-driven systems change, we have placed additional focus on recognising the agency of community members – not just treating them

as passive “beneficiaries” receiving a service provided by external organisations, but as active collaborators and co-creators of the change process” (ibid.). Drawing on the work of Hodgson and Pond (2018), they further argue that in the community philanthropy approach, community members should be framed as ‘co-investors’, in recognition of the assets that the community collectively contribute to their own development. I concur with this view and that of Peace Direct (2021) who share the decolonial view that in every community development context, the contributions, agency and participation of community members should be recognised and related language used should be dignified and respectful rather than passive and patronising.

In contrast to the relegation of communities to objects and subjects in the locus and creation of knowledge, Escrigas et al. invite us to imagine a different world with more balanced power relations and knowledge creation processes where, “the creation and dissemination of knowledge could contribute to transforming the paradigms and beliefs established in social, economic and political systems, and to moving forward to creative and innovative ways of thinking and imagining new realities” (2014; in Tandon et al., 2016:np).

Challenging the status quo requires a shift in mindset similar to the Pan-African idea advocated by Mungwini (2017) in the previous chapter, coupled with a change in practice. Scholarship on knowledge democracy in community-university engagement advises that co-created knowledge which recognises, values and respects communities affected by issues, builds relationships of solidarity, and which are grounded in universal values of equity, justice, inclusion, peace and sustainability are essential for quality engagement on the road to these new realities (Tandon et al. 2016). Similarly focusing particularly on adult learning and development in research contexts in relation with universities, Wood and McAteer (2017) advocate for a levelling of the playing fields in participatory research with a focus on power, privilege and participation. Mahlomaholo (2013; in Wood and McAteer, 2017:252) advise that in this process, grounded approaches to

guard against dependency are recommended, cognisant that "transmitting knowledge in a top-down way leads to dependency and does not encourage the mind shifts needed for transformation on a deeper and more sustainable level". Relations and solidarity as an essential support for mindset shift and an element of participatory research and practice are discussed below.

Relationality and Solidarity

The relational aspect of development practice is something that is valued by many communities, CSOs, NGOs and donors, in theory at least. However, for some - often donors, in practice the relational aspect is undervalued and often overlooked (Eyben, 2006, 2010). As outlined in discussions of community led and community philanthropy approaches in chapter two, relationships are at the core of social change and a central concept in such approaches. Knowledge is relational, as Nadarajah and Grydehøj remind us, sharing that, "knowing and knowledge systems are developed collectively through relations between peoples and places" (2024:1).

A concept which appears consistently in discourse, practice, mobilisation and action for social change and justice (including knowledge justice) is solidarity. It is a central concept in Southern epistemologies, including the Ubuntu philosophy, and in community philanthropy (Doan, 2019; Dutta et al., 2022; Kothari et al., 2019). The collective 'we' is embodied in the concept of solidarity from this epistemological perspective, highlighted by Freire (2014:47) in his assertion that "individualism is the antithesis of solidarity. Under the individualistic perspective each one thinks of his or her own personal interests and the tendency is for us to close ourselves in ourselves". This solidarity relationship is stated explicitly by de Sousa Santos (2016:156) in describing his view of 'knowledge-as-emancipation' as "the point of knowing is solidarity, the recognition of the other as an equal and as an equal producer of knowledge".

Nonetheless, it may be useful to discuss understandings of solidarity and dimensions of the term. Often solidarity is proffered as the opposite of

charity, although they often may have similar goals, the approach to reach the goal is quite different. The former suggests relations of equality in a horizontal direction where choice and agency are shared in a 'power with' relationship, while the latter may be viewed as unequal, benevolent, and vertical in a 'power to' or 'power over' relationship. Dirik (2016:np) insists that,

> solidarity is not a charity undertaking, but a horizontal, multidimensional, educational and multidirectional process that contributes to the emancipation of everyone involved. Solidarity means to be on an eye-to-eye level with one another, to stand shoulder to shoulder. It means to share skills, experience, knowledge and ideas without perpetuating relations based on power.

Cameron et al. (2018:22) add that solidarity relations need to be examined with a critical lens to ensure that they do stand up to scrutiny against Dirik's definition offered above. They argue that decolonisation must be given consideration in actions, spaces and relations of solidarity, particularly decolonising pedagogies, and that solidarity is temporal given that it "is based on relationships and situations that change over time." Similarly, Djohossou et al. (2023b:119) state that building and sustaining solidarity relations requires long term commitment, advocating that development actors need to "plan for decades, act in the present… [and] need to partner with people who are there before, during and after any given project term to ensure sustainability as well as effectiveness". Heeding their advice can guard against a slide into charity mode, which Dirik (ibid.) argues often happens if we act without checking our privilege.

Theories of Power - From domination to empowerment

Haugaard (2020) in his review of theories on power argues that a view of power as normatively negative is problematic. They note that Parsons (1963) was the first to interpret power as empowerment and highlight Arendt (1970, 1998) and Morriss (2002) as writers who tend to look at power in normatively positive forms, exploring what virtuous forms of power might be. As demonstrated in preceding text, feminist work such as that of

VeneKlasen and Miller (2002), Miller et al. (2006), and Bradley (2020) add to discussions of power as virtuous and indeed, vital. Morriss (2009; in Haugaard, 2020) discussing a view of freedom as the opposite of power over, speaks of freedom as a joint capacity for action, as social energy, as not just the right to act but the capacity to act. From this perspective, empowerment is seen as the opposite of dominating power or power over and as such offers opportunities to visualise and create spaces for the emergence of positive power. However, as Miller et al. (2006) advise that there is a false dichotomy between the concept of power in research and for action, arguing that the concept of power needs a deliberate, collaborative conversation which "is in itself an organising and empowerment strategy" (2006:4).

There are many definitions of empowerment offered by different scholars including Kabeer, Batliwala, Anderson et al., and Cornwall and Gaventa as elaborated in the following text. These definitions began as a quite rounded view of empowerment which focused an analysis of power aiming to move from negative to positive expressions and experiences of power. However, Kabeer (2017) argues that neoliberal ideology and a focus on the market as the solution to all ills created a dichotomy between broader empowerment and economic empowerment, particularly in relation to women's empowerment. Whereas in original grassroots and feminist analysis, emphasis was placed on material, ideological and structural power and inequalities, but with economic empowerment, the focus is on women's empowerment related to markets and growth, which appealed to development agencies looking to economic growth as the path to development. Kabeer regrets that the question of whether economic "growth contributes to gender equality is less frequently posed" (2017:np) and argues that achieving gendered economic empowerment demands a focus on the non-economic realm and related dimensions of change too. The assumption that empowerment in one arena translates to empowerment in all is untrue. Even if someone experiences economic empowerment as an individual or collective, they may not have the agency or safety to replicate that empowerment in intimate spaces or vice versa. Anderson et al. (2022)

agree highlighting that participation in actions can lead to personal level empowerment but may not necessarily go beyond that, at least not immediately, critical consciousness and solidarity are therefore important here. They emphasise that, "women's political agency is limited in many ways by gendered social norms and male gatekeepers" (ibid:7) so women tend not to be seen as claim makers in some spaces.

As is often the case, when helpful concepts become mainstreamed, they can lose their original meaning and value, becoming weakened or meaningless buzzwords (Cornwall and Brock, 2005; Cornwall, 2007). This point is raised by Batliwala in relation to empowerment, which in their opinion has become one of "the most widely used and abused" (2007:557) concepts and has led to the depoliticisation and co-optation of the term by government and other powerful actors and results in communities being 'empowered' to look after themselves. Speaking of the importance of building networks and alliances, Gaynor (2022) warns that some relationships with NGOs and donors can pose a danger to democracy in the long term. They argue that when they are,

> focused on 'empowering' individuals within associations… can subdue and dissipate such political agency. As members are encouraged to be 'resilient' – to adapt, innovate and 'empower' themselves – their 'capacity' is built to survive within the extant political order rather than to seek to engender and transform it, (2022:155).

Both examples of meaningful participation and empowerment at the level of self-mobilisation achieved but in a way that reflects Cornwall's (2008) fears of bad to worse.

In their discussion on negotiating empowerment, Cornwall and Edwards (2010) argue that empowerment is not necessarily achieved with the typical solutions offered by NGOs and projects. Empowerment is personal, subjective and context specific. Simple choices can be empowering for women. In their research context, choices related to things like leisure time proved empowering for women, in this case women in an informal settlement watching afternoon TV, which for them is empowering. Individual perspectives of empowerment may not always align with the

experts' view, it is important to acknowledge autonomy and agency, what is empowering for an individual from their perspective is so, regardless of whether it meets the expert definition or criteria. Empowerment may also be (and often is) dependent on others, through power with, in group spaces and collectives. However, as cautioned by Gaventa (2007) and Anderson et al. (2020), individual or collective empowerment in one space does not guarantee the same experience in other or all spaces.

VeneKlasen (2006) describes empowerment as a non-linear process, a position supported by Cornwall and Edwards who note that while it is often depicted as a liner pathway, "outcomes are not always the direct result of choices" (2010:3). It involves power with and within, through dialogue, conscientisation, the building of awareness and confidence, combined with action to challenge systems in an attempt to change or eliminate systemic and structural barriers. Whether women or men, individual or collective, empowerment begins with questioning the world around us, making meaning of it and our place and role in it.

The process of empowerment requires meaningful participation in actions to challenge and change power across levels, spaces and forms. Chakma, Booth, and Johnson present an argument for why we should care about participation with examples through history of the power of participation in "social movements to challenge and dismantle entrenched systems of oppression… [which] demonstrate participation's potential to catalyse systemic change rooted in solidarity" (2024:15). They state that involving usually excluded communities can be transformative when people draw on their experience, make their own decisions, set their own agendas, influence policy and decide on the use of resources. As history has shown, such transformative action can dismantle systemic oppression.

Empowering spaces

However, Anderson et al. (2022) point out that in the past it was assumed that with information and awareness people can and will mobilise, this is not

so, it also requires enabling spaces together with strategic approaches that include building alliances and political capacity for people to be empowered to mobilise. This relates to and affirms the point by Kabeer and Huq (2010), that simply creating a space for participation and being part of a group in that space does not necessarily bring about changes associated with empowerment. They discuss the power of relationships for social change and empowerment, emphasising the importance of love, solidarity, unity, strength, value, recognition, and dignity in these relationships for empowerment and transformation. They find a significant link between social relationships and processes of empowerment, arguing that strong continuous relationships of trust, support, loyalty, love, learning and solidarity can foster leadership within the community. Similarly, Djohossou et al. contend that trust, relationships, love and a constant eye on power dynamics is at the centre of community development, which they describe as a "profoundly emotional undertaking" (2023b:110), drawing attention to the emotion that rises with empowerment and social change. Kabeer and Huq (2010) argue that it is the strategies and approach of the partner in the relationship that makes a difference; and in their research context, the strength and continuity of the relationships developed, love and solidarity, and promoted equality, value and recognition among the women in the community. The social relationships of love and solidarity were a clear motivating factor. They highlight that one of the strategies of the partner organisation in their research is education and networking, linking communities to key stakeholders in their communities, supporting the building of external relationships in their context.

Once again - Context is everything

For Cornwall and Edwards context is "crucial in making sense of empowerment" (2010:2). They stress an exploration of context in terms of place and time, noting change that happens through generations in context, and of place in terms of what's normal, so for example where war or persistent struggle is normalised. For Anderson et al. (2022) context needs

to be grounded in understanding and analysis of local context and lived experience, from a 'citizen-eye' view, both individual and collective. Cornwall and Edwards (2010) further emphasise that the issues that matter in negotiating empowerment include choice, narratives, relationships and voice, as summarised below.

As mentioned earlier, change is not always a consequence of choices. Often choices are limited in each social context and failure to analyse and strategise for a particular socio-cultural context can result in limited empowerment. In practice it is common that women's exercise of agency is reduced to strategies for individual empowerment rather than collective struggles for transformation. Individual context and circumstances need exploration and consideration; one size does not fit all.

Cornwall and Edwards contend that narratives matter. They argue that how women are represented in media, literature, religion and other narratives can determine their choices or how they feel about their choices - the idea of a good girl or good woman is socially constructed, it can constrain a woman's freedoms. Narratives promoted through digital media can be both dangerous and empowering depending on how it shapes narratives and whether it imposes power over or ignites positive power, such as empowering in terms of access to knowledge and information for those with digital access and literacy.

For Cornwall and Edwards, relationships also matter, a position also held and promoted over and again by Eyben (2006) throughout her writings and highlighted consistently in this text. They argue that solidarity, alliances, unity, and rights, which are all fundamental to empowerment and social change, are relational. Women's (and men's) lived experiences are relational - social and intimate relations can shape power relations and enhance or limit empowerment, failing to acknowledge relations will lead to limited change or even disempowerment. Kabeer (1998; in Cornwall and Edwards, 2010:5) cautions "against extracting women from the relational webs that constitute their social and economic lives". They advise that funders need to

recognise the significance of raising consciousness, of the power of relations and of power with, women together dismantling structural barriers, only by funding the conditions for an enabling environment is sustainable change possible. Empowerment is not about assets, more important are relations, consciousness, confidence, capability, collective action, power with, and enabling environments.

Voice is placed as central to both collective and individual empowerment by Cornwall and Edwards. Anderson et al. (2020) advise caution, noting that raising voice in one arena does not mean women are listened to in other arenas, and a safe enabling space to raise the collective voice is crucial. They contend that the opportunity to participate does not necessarily lead to the power to be heard, or lead to empowerment, a common example being women filling quotas in government positions, but their individual and collective voices barely register, and often women are co-opted to other agendas as a result of feelings of disempowerment. Cheng (2000) argues that the participation of women and hearing them voice their needs is key, to ensure that projects are based on what women actually want and need, rather than what organisations and funders think they want and need. For Cheng, this is essential for social change and empowerment. A focus on voice, relationships and challenging power relations is also a key feature of Gaynor's (2022) work on engendering democracy in Africa.

In negotiating empowerment, we must understand that it is not clear cut, it is dynamic, it often involves trade-offs or requires conforming to norms or pretending to in order to acquire freedoms elsewhere. Anderson et al (2022) agree adding that power dynamics are hard to shift and are often fleeting and difficult to maintain, gains made often fall back to the default position. Empowerment is subtle and incremental rather than reached through linear processes with tangible predetermined results.

While the work of Anderson et al. (2022) focused on the contributions of citizen-led social and political action to empowerment and accountability in challenging contexts, they reached similar conclusions to Cornwall and

Edwards (2010). They emphasise the need for spaces, alliances, networks, rights-based work and protections. Their work offers key ideas relevant to this research in relation to meaningful participation, inclusion and knowledge justice where citizens identify their own priorities, agendas and strategies, some of which may contradict those assumed by development agencies. This meaningful participation extends further to key ideas of collective power and agency in organising, decision-making, agenda setting and mobilising for recognition and protection of rights. Their ideas advocate for building collective power, fostering empowered communities who are organised, with a focus on political agency. Relations and networks for support are central in this regard, as are enabling spaces for collective action, strengthened by enabling conditions. They caution that it takes time for these ideas to manifest to democratic and accountable governance in practice, small steps are important. Howard et al. (2014:19) state that enabling environments for civil society participation and social change should support the right to conduct development work without fear of reprisals, freedom of expression and the right to make complaints, freedom of peaceful assembly, and the right to develop and discuss new development ideas. However, they guard that this may look quite different at community level. This is sound advice, even more pertinent in contexts where local ways of 'doing, being and becoming' do not fit with the Western focus and priority given to individual rights over the collective (van Norren and Seehawer, 2025). An often first small step is learning and knowledge, developing the critical consciousness for empowerment as advocated by many throughout this chapter.

Knowledge and empowerment

In resistance to universally accepted Northern knowledge, de Sousa Santos (2007:6) declares that "the struggle for global social justice must be a struggle for global cognitive justice as well". Adding to this call to resist, Girvan (2007:40) advocates for "the knowledge empowerment of the South", free of the current obligatory external supports and suggests that a

“first step is the jettisoning of the mind-set of mediocracy and dependency… knowledge empowerment begins at home” (ibid.). Shifting mind set from without knowledge to legitimate knower, from a limited view of knowledge through a lens skewed by injustice to a broad just view of knowledge through a knowledge democracy lens, and from top-down experts to grounded local knowledge informing policy and practice is a virtuous aim. Inclusive participatory community education in the development practice space is a valid place to direct efforts to bring about positive mind set change. Critical education is one powerful and effective catalyst for raising critical collective consciousness, disrupting internalised oppression to create the space shifting mindset, and empowerment (Freire, 1972, 1981; Freire et al., 2014).

Tandon and Srinivasan (2024:2) agree and advocate that everyday knowledge is vital for social change and empowerment. They argue that “communities who choose to participate in development need to see value in the process… the purpose of participation is to facilitate learning and collectivisation to change a situation… Individual experiences and popular knowledge matter in this process of learning for change”. It is through participatory learning processes that individual and collective consciousness is raised. Here people learn to question the status quo, which in turn builds empowerment and supports communities to hold accountable those in authority and duty bound to citizens. For marginalised citizens, calling for social change carries risk, the safest route can be through collective learning and action (Tandon and Srinivasan, 2024; Anderson et al., 2020). Tandon and Srinivasan see participatory research with communities and higher education as an opportunity for change where, “learning from life – from our own experiences and those of communities – allows us to envision a culture of collaboration and cooperation, and a future where knowledge can help repair the injustices of the past and present, and contribute to just and sustainable futures for all” (2024:262). These views are supported by Langdon, Larweh and Quarmyne (2020) who emphasise reflexivity and consistent collective unlearning, challenging the power relations and

Eurocentrism inherent in traditional development practice, and which sustains a Western epistemic hegemony and therefore, knowledge injustice.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented the intricate and interwoven relationships between knowledge and power, exploring how both concepts are embedded in the existing structures and practices of development. Drawing on Gaventa's' theories of power and using the power cube as a framework, I explored the exercise of power across forms, spaces, and levels, and introduced feminist perspectives to interrogate both negative and positive expressions of power.

Theories on knowledge democracy which present the concept as one grounded in equity, participation, and justice were reviewed together with related discussions of epistemic injustice, inclusion, and participation. The origins of dominant forms and sources of knowledge, rooted in a history of colonialism and imperialism were explored, with an acknowledgement that this dominant knowledge permeates development discourse and practice.

The chapter emphasised the significance of collective and informal ways of knowing, particularly within 'alternative' worldviews and ways of knowing, and the role of critical education in facilitating critical consciousness and as a catalyst for change. Such debates must transition from mere theoretical ideals to practical imperatives for social change.

Overall, the literature suggests that meaningful social change demands a conscious shift in power and practice and a growth mindset—one that prioritises knowledge justice, challenges accepted normalised narratives, and champions meaningful participation, ownership, solidarity, dignity, and agency in a more inclusive community-led development process.

The following chapter explores the methodological considerations and approach, reflecting on both theory and the research process in practice.

Chapter Four: Methodology - Considered plans, messy reality, interpreting voice

"Choice has a companion: responsibility. We have a responsibility to make choices that serve the good of everyone involved in our situation" (Wade, 2018, para. 9).

Introduction

This chapter is presented in three sections representing key elements in the three phases of the research.

Phase One- Considered Plans	Phase Two – The Messy Reality	Phase Three - Interpreting Voice
Research design The "ologies" - theoretical approach 'Me' in the research Research Partners and Team Ethical Considerations	Building relations Methods and process	Research assistants and translation Data Analysis – striving for accuracy and authenticity Limitations

Table 4.0: Methodology phases

The first, Considered Plans (re-)introduces my research partners and team, and presents my methodology in the planning phase including my research approach and ethical considerations. The second, the Messy Reality, presents the methodology in practice, including sampling strategy, community engagement, working through translators, and being responsive and reflexive through the process, highlighting that research processes seldom follow linear, predictable pathways. The final phase Interpreting Voice presents the analysis phase which includes (re-)interpreting community and staff voice, the challenges and process of managing and analysing large amounts of data, and limitations of the study. Like most aspects of this research, there is often overlap and inter-relation between phases which makes presenting them as three distinct phases difficult at times. Ultimately this chapter communicates the research journey in theory

and practice, a rich and complex learning experience which transpired to be both similar and different to what I had imagined or planned. While I adopt a critical ethnographic intent and as such draw from related literature, I also draw on literature related to decolonising research methods and participatory action research (PAR). Similar to Eisenhart (2019), I regard PAR as compatible with the intent of critical ethnography albeit with an *action by* rather than an *advocacy for* focus.

Phase one - Considered Plans

Phase One - Considered Plans		
• Research design • The "ologies" - theoretical approach • 'Me' in the research • Research Partners and Team • Ethical Considerations	*Positionality* *Reflexivity* *Power and co-creation* *Practitioner experience* *Research assistants* *Relations and Gatekeepers* *Free and Informed Consent*	*Boundaries and Independence* *Payment* *Do No Harm* *Confidentiality* *Scheduling*

Table 4.1: Phase One – Considered Plans

As presented in chapter one, this research contributes to understandings of knowledge democracy, participation, decision-making and transformative education through a critical examination of development practice in communities in rural Zambia, with a view to exploring their experience of knowledge democracy in community led development practice through a lens of power. This research specifically recognises and explores the critical role of collective learning, education and knowledge in achieving the social justice on which a thriving global community depends. Given the focus on collective knowledge and learning in a community philanthropy approach to community led development practice, the following research questions are explored in this research:

- How is collective community knowledge in its diversity of form and source recognised and respected in the international development space?
- What is the nature of the collective participation and empowerment processes experienced by these communities in community led development and a community philanthropy approach?
- What makes community led development authentic for these communities; and
- What role does knowledge democracy play in community led development?

Research design

This research acknowledges the importance of knowledge democracy and respecting diverse ways of knowing and sources of knowledge as advocated by many theorists, including de Sousa Santos (2016), Hall and Tandon (2017), Tandon et al. (2016), Sloane Perry and Couchois Duncan (2017), Dzisah and Kpessa-Whyte (2023) and others. It acknowledges the diversity of local systems and practices, which use this knowledge as relevant in context, to take action for change that can support sustainable development. Participation and empowerment are crucial elements of knowledge democracy, as discussed extensively in chapters two and three. Therefore, central to this research is an exploration of processes of empowerment and participation to reach a critical understanding of the reality of these processes for communities. This position, informed by critical theory, is based in a perspective of community development, transformative change and social justice that sees adult and community education as a legitimate space to explore our world (Ryan and Murphy, 2018) and to challenge meanings, understandings and assumptions of our socially constructed world. I take a Freirean view that critical pedagogies situated in the local context are crucial. Processes of participation and empowerment can and should be processes of learning and knowledge creation, reflecting the view of Tandon and Srinivasan (2024) that everyday knowledge and participation

is vital for empowerment and social change. Therefore, if local modes, systems and sources of knowledge are recognised and valued, and communities are empowered to participate in their own development, there is potential for community led development to bring about real, lasting, positive change in the lives of communities with complex challenges. My research design overall commits to reflexivity, places emphasis on participation and respect, and puts the safety and welfare of the communities involved at the heart of process and practice.

This research draws on many years of professional experience as an educator and development worker working directly with communities with a range of challenges in low- to middle-income country contexts. In my experience, social power relations play a major role in sustaining inequality and poverty and in shaping what is valued as 'knowledge', as such, an analysis of power in the context of development practice in communities in rural Zambia is crucial to this research. As noted in earlier chapters, I find theories with an empirical basis in development practice most useful for exploring and analysing social power dynamics. My understandings and analysis of power, participation and knowledge are influenced by many, but particularly through the work of Gaventa (1980, 2003a, 2007, 2005, 2009), a key theorist in this research.

My approach is informed by feminist, reflexive and critical theory philosophies and applies a participatory approach informed by participatory theory coupled with a critical ethnographic intent. While my intention was to adopt 'pure' participatory methodologies throughout the research process, I found that I needed to adapt and negotiate aspects as the research progressed due to issues and challenges encountered. These challenges prevented me from religiously applying all aspects of participatory methodology throughout the process, largely due to the isolation and exclusion of these communities, and the reliance on gatekeepers for access and communication. My intent and approach were informed by participatory theory and a Freirean co-creative approach, it was central to the research from the outset, especially given participation being a core

concept and research focus. I went to great lengths to ensure and maintain a participatory approach throughout, from initial insistence that communities were invited to participate and made their own decision in that regard based on informed community consent, to community taking decision making roles in the process and focus of research, through to iterative and collective data analysis which included member checking during the research process while still with community members, and all the way through to a collective sense of agreement on what should be done with the research[17]. However, the more formal and structured member checking with research communities such as discussed by Fine (2016), Koelsch (2013) and Weis & Fine (2004) at desk-based and data analysis stages could not be done due to the geographical distance and absence of a direct means of communication. Subsequently, unlike most other actions, this aspect was not based in PAR and required an adapted version of a participatory approach where data analysis at this stage was researcher led through qualitative thematic analysis. These adaptations reflect the challenges to participatory methodologies experienced in doctoral research where the bounds and limitations of time and academic criteria are an ongoing factor.

The qualitative research design intended to be adaptive and responsive in a process of knowledge co-creation with communities in a collaborative research process, aiming for, "new collaborative space(s) of learning and research… [with] participants as active co-creators of knowledge… sparking and encouraging collective and critical knowledge production with people" (Grummell and Finnegan, 2020:3). I planned on qualitative data collection tools but left the final decisions related to tools and logistics to be determined by the community collectives as knowledge co-creators, trusting

[17] This was discussed with communities at the outset with the agreement to acknowledge the community's role in knowledge production in all research outputs and to work together to package the research findings in a format that the communities can use to showcase their achievements and lobby for support. This commitment is being fulfilled, together with a post-viva opportunity for member-checking, in a return trip to work with the communities in this regard in July 2026.

them to select the most appropriate tool relevant to their community context. I elaborate on this process in phase two.

The research design also features collaboration with some ZGF staff focusing on their experiences of development practice in these communities, and others over time, and exploring their perspectives on knowledge, participation, empowerment, decision-making, power and transformation. I used purposive snowball sampling to identify relevant staff members for semi-structured interview, beginning with two key staff members who recommended other staff who had experience with the research partner communities and the community philanthropy approach and who also had broader experience in the development sector.

Contact was established with communities through ZGF in advance of engaging in the research process in Zambia and I was available to respond to questions and concerns from all research partners as necessary. My intention was to build and maintain the relationship with communities through the research process and beyond. This includes continued collaboration with the communities to find a format to present the research findings to the wider communities involved more broadly and share with community research partners the knowledge that they have created with me. We have provisionally agreed that I will seek support to return to the communities in 2026 to continue our collaboration and to find ways to make this co-created knowledge work for them in support of their community development initiatives.

I approached data analysis as a reflexive process, checking interpretations with research partners in an iterative process parallel to data collection as far as possible to ensure that voices are accurately represented, valued and respected throughout the research process. This approach is influenced by Langdon's et al. (2020) participatory approach and values the importance of co-creating and documenting "the what" and "the how" of knowledge production. However, as noted earlier, member checking with communities in the thematic data analysis process was not possible and as such an

adapted approach was necessary, one which demanded hyper-reflexivity. Further influenced by calls for consistent unlearning and hyper-reflexivity by Langdon (2013), I aimed to challenge my own Eurocentrism in the process, particularly in relation to knowledge and power, and so guard against sustaining the inequalities that maintain colonial relations. Ultimately, the communities drove the decision-making in process, directing the research process their way, putting my adaptability and responsiveness to the test. While often challenging at the time, I feel the methods and process had the active participation, engagement and leadership of the communities involved, with clear learning and experience gained from the challenges presented, as discussed throughout this chapter.

The "ologies" - theoretical approach

I approach this research as a feminist, informed by reflexive and critical theory philosophies, recognising that meaning in the social world is shaped by individual and collective lived experience, and by the immediate and wider socio-cultural, political, economic and environmental context (Fraser, 2013; Freire, 1972; Hall and Tandon, 2017). Horkheimer (1972; in Kemmis et al., 2015:453) described, "critical theory as a form of theorizing motivated by a deep concern to overcome social injustice and to establish more just social conditions for all people". This definition of critical theory is also reflective of my feminist position and perspective, for me both seek to find, interrogate, disrupt and change patterns of social injustice and both are reflected in Ackerly and True's (2010:1) assertion that a, "critical feminist perspective is expressed through a feminist research ethic that guides our research and research decisions and helps us to reflect on and attend to dynamics of power, knowledge, relationships, and context throughout the research process".

I acknowledge my power and positionality, appreciating the effects of power dynamics on meaning making, perspectives, and relationships. My approach comes with an awareness that the search for empirical knowledge is

entangled with my own lived experience, power and influence (Moser, 2008). I apply a critical ethnographic approach that, “takes us beneath surface appearances, disrupts the status quo, and unsettles both neutrality and taken-for-granted assumptions by bringing to light underlying and obscure operations of power and control” (Madison, 2005:5).

Through my practice and life experience, across many contexts, I have witnessed societies, and their systems and structures, which sustain inequalities, injustices, unfair and harmful ideologies and power imbalances without interrogation or critique. Particularly in contexts of disadvantage, rather than engage and empower marginalised communities, quite often socio-economic initiatives are external, prescriptive, and done for rather than with those impacted. Furthermore, often existing individual and collective knowledge is disregarded in favour of imperial ‘truths’. These experiences which have been shared and documented by many including Kimambo and Shallwani (2025), Kothari (2024), Carlsson and Wohlgemuth (2000), and buoyed by my personal ethos and values prompt critical examination of issues of knowledge justice, participation, empowerment and transformative change. Indeed Dutt (2025) contests that there will be no development without decolonisation and that a new epistemic approach to theory and methods in development research and practice is needed which moves beyond the Western scientific model.

The ethos and values which drive me are grounded in social justice. These ethics and values are coupled with a commitment to deep reflexive practice in a conscious effort to ‘walk the talk’ of critical theory in my practice. My commitment to social justice and challenging ‘business as usual’ leans on reflexive and critical theory philosophies where, “social life is represented and analysed for the political purpose of overcoming social oppression” (Habermas, 1971; in Madison, 2020:6). Social oppression is understood and experienced in different ways for different collectives in the communities, often most acute for those on the periphery as exemplified in the following findings chapters. My research with these communities focuses on their collective holistic reality; the inequalities, injustice and power therein, and

supports the interrogation of these realities from their collective worldview. Together with community groups, we tried to understand their roots and sustenance, to explore collective community praxis, to document knowledge, perspectives, challenges and opportunities encountered so that others can learn from this context and experience. In turn, community groups can learn from their own situated knowledge, developing critical consciousness through the process and the communities can draw on research findings to support them in their local actions for social change. This approach seeks to disrupt the normalised colonial hierarchy of knowledge systems, the normalised extractive research approach and the normalised deficit model of development practice and research in a contribution to efforts to decolonise international research collaborations and, "bring the business-as-usual lifestyle to a grinding stop" as promoted by Gebremariam (2024:np).

My application of a participatory approach, while drawing on a critical ethnographic approach and intent, reflects my commitment to issues of social justice and equality and sees the research process as a legitimate space where such issues can be tackled. I see participatory research as a necessary approach to challenging power. Madison (2020:5) describes critical ethnography as critical theory in action, or the method of critical theory, a description that resonates with me. It blends the personal (me in the research), the collaborative collective (participation/human connection) and the critical.

My research and practice are a personal experience, "my intuition, senses, and emotions… are powerfully woven into and inseparable from the process" (Madison, 2020:9). I believe much of our deepest and most powerful learning happens in our relations and interactions with others, learning together in formal, non-formal and informal spaces, from and with each other - and the most insightful learning often happens in dialogue with others. The personal and relational aspect of my research with my research partners and team is so important to the research, and to me. It is a profound

privilege to be invited and welcomed by the partners and team into their context, to exchange life stories and lessons, perspectives, experiences and challenges, hopes and dreams.

The spirit of the Ubuntu philosophy resonates; I am who I am because of others. Similarly, Segrest (2002) suggests that we are all born to belong, so being and belonging are intertwined. I have been conditioned by people, places, relations, and contexts through time and have been affected physically, psychologically and spiritually in the process. These affections of being and belonging are spatial and temporal, shape shifting from one interaction to the next. Rowe (2005:18) suggests that "these sites of belonging are political as they operate in relation to power: with and through, as well as against, in resistance to, and even in directions that redefine and redistribute". The merging of human experience and connection allows for deep engagement; critical ethnography demands it and calls for grounded process and dialogue which is deep and enduring (Madison:2020). The site of belonging in this research process facilitated the sharing and devolving of decision making to research partners, disrupting and challenging expected power relations in the design and process, and encouraging communities to act as agents of change in their own right, which Palmer and Caldas (2015) insist is a key tenet of critical ethnography, the research paradigm in which this research is positioned.

I was and am deeply conscious of my responsibility towards research partners and the potential implications of my decisions and actions. I relied on consistent planning and debrief with the research team and partners throughout the research process to safeguard the integrity of my practice, guard against unintended consequences of and in the research, and to strive to do no harm in the process. This happened through constant dialogue and reflection in the planning and implementation stages, essential to the integrity of this process and like a constant entangled flow of exchange between all involved in the research directly and indirectly. Conquergood's (1982) dialogical performance is reflected here, dialogue framed as a

performance to emphasise the personal, collective, located, shared human experience. This awareness prompts another constant performance, that of "turning back" on myself (Davis, 1999; in Madison, 2020) in a mindful practice of constant self-reflexivity, an integral element of a critical ethnographic approach (Madison, 2005) and which I further elaborate in phase two.

A core aim of this research is to explore the concept and experience of knowledge democracy with research partners. This aim was further embedded by grounding the research process with a design that intentionally seeks to challenge knowledge injustice and address issues of participation, inclusion and empowerment, key aspects of knowledge democracy, through collective, collaborative and co-creative approaches and methods. Palmer and Caldas (2015:1) note the strong connection between knowledge democracy and critical ethnography highlighting the value of "indigenous ways of knowing and producing knowledge" and the duty of the researcher to interrogate hegemony and support decolonisation of knowledge and knowledge production. They further refer to Smith's (2012:198) assertion of indigenous research as one that "documents social injustice, that recovers subjugated knowledges, that helps create spaces for the voices of the silenced to be expressed and 'listened to,' and that challenge racism, colonialism and oppression. . .". I attended to this through an attempted reversal of roles in the research process, where I assumed the role of student and asked community groups to be my teachers for the duration, a necessary contestation to single knowledge positions and a celebration of diversity in qualitative research in a knowledge democracy according to Openjuru et al. (2015). I invited the community to help me to understand knowledge and participation from their worldview, in their situated context, to share their collective knowledge in all its diversity and forms, without Western bounds, in an effort towards epistemic humility as advocated by Gebremariam (2024). I encouraged them to state their challenges, to voice their opinions and perspectives, to make decisions and set the bounds of what they felt was relevant to the research in sharing their

knowledge. Together we created a safe space where they could speak freely with the assurance of confidentiality, where their voice was given priority consistently and where I tried to listen and attune to their voices and stories carefully. Together, we tried to dismantle invisible barriers created by position, status and ontology by meeting on a human level, in the spirit of Ubuntu, sharing stories and insights into our life experience and situation in a reciprocal horizontal relationship. These aspects of the participatory approach align with the advice of Wood and McAteer (2017) who promote the importance of building relations and trust, of supporting community voice to bring their knowledge to the fore, of balancing respect for culture and context with 'equal participation' and accepting that this is not easy and is the imposition of a Western concept. I explore the process further in phase two. Regardless of best intentions, I accept that it is not entirely possible to level the playing field and that,

> as researchers we have to constantly reflect on the question of how our ascribed positions of power and (white) privilege affect the involvement of people who do not usually self-identify as knowledge producers. We may not be able to eradicate the effects of years of racial and social divisions but… we can use our positions of privilege to help community members find their own voices to bring their knowledge to the table to ensure that the outcomes of any learning are more likely to be sustainable relevant and useful for the wider community (Wood and McAteer, 2017:252).

I remained consistently conscious of my position of power and privilege and their impact on my worldview and on my relations and engagement with communities through continued reflexive practice. My personal influence and impact on the research are elaborated below.

'Me' in the research

This research is informed by twenty years of experience in development programmes and critical learning experiences with marginalised communities grappling with a range of challenges in different settings globally throughout my professional career. My years of experience in development programmes and critical learning experiences in the

community development, international development, development education and higher education sectors has been an education and a privilege. The knowledge and experience gained is drawn from my engagement with learners, development organisation staff, and marginalised communities. I am an educator, constant student and activist. These experiences have informed my worldview and therefore have informed my research approach and design, which is grounded in humanity, respect, justice, equality and dignity and an ethos of 'do no harm'. I see dignity and respect as closely related, with dignity related to a sense of worth and value, inherent to all human beings, and respect as the act of acknowledging that worth, value and rights, justice follows when rights are upheld with dignity and respect. Equality for me in my Western context is closely related to rights, fairness and opportunity whereas from an African perspective, the philosophy of Ubuntu emerges once again, consistent in its collective, mutual, interdependent nature and focus, where equality is a condition of our common humanity (Molefe, 2019).

While I was familiar with the ethical and socio-cultural norms in the Zambian context from previous experience, I sought guidance and advice from research partners and the research team throughout the planning process and during the research process in Zambia on national, cultural and traditional, ethical and regulatory issues. I wanted to be confident that my research process met the intended standards set in my research approach and design. It was integral to my research that the community members understood the purpose and value of my research, that they gave informed consent to my presence among them and that they chose to participate in the research of their own free will rather than out of any sense of obligation or otherwise, and which is elaborated in the ethics section. My values, my ethos, and subsequent choices and responsibilities shape my methodological approach, something that became increasingly evident in practice as I engaged in the research. The individuals and communities who welcomed me are the heart of this research. I strive to safeguard, protect and respect them and their interests throughout this research process. We

are all relational beings. I value social relationships in my personal and professional life, in my research and practice. I elaborate on the importance on social relations in the following sections.

Research Partners and Team

This research was carried out with 294 residents of nine villages[18] spread across the two rural communities of Nyankanga and Kaminembe in Chisamba District (Central Province), Zambia with the support of the Zambian Governance Foundation for Civil Society (ZGF), a local civil society organisation (CSO). The research partner communities were selected through purposive sampling with the support of ZGF, with a preference for those that were engaged in community-led development with a community philanthropy approach. The fact that the two communities invited to participate had limited or no exposure to traditional development practice with NGOs added to their suitability.

A total of seven ZGF staff members also participated directly in the research through key informant interviews, while many others supported the research process indirectly through administrative, logistical and communicative support. This brings the total number of respondents to 301, comprising 165 women and 136 men, far more than I had anticipated and planned. However, I am grateful to each collective and individual for sharing their knowledge, experience and perspective and for the time they gave so generously in doing so. The table below illustrates the collective community research partners in terms of number of villages, gender disaggregation and total number of community members engaged in the research. This is further elaborated in phase two.

[18] The scale and richness of response is reflected in the depth of findings presented, which honour the community voice and results in a larger than usual findings chapter (and thesis overall).

NV – Nyankanga village			**KV – Kaminembe village**			
Village/ Gender	NV1&2 -W	NV3 -W	NV4&5 -W	NV1&2 -M	NV3 -M	NV4&5 -M
No. of participants	58	40	31	40	22	19
Village/Gender	KV1 -W	KV2&3 -W	KV4 -W	KV1 -M	KV2&3 -M	KV4 -M
No. of participants	7	12	13	8	22	22
Total participants: 294 (161 women, 133 men) divided across 18 groups from 9 villages[19]						
Nyankanga: total participants: 210 → 129 women 81 men Kaminembe: total participants: 84 → 32 women, 52 men						

Table 4.2: Community Research Partners

While not 'official' research partners, there were others who I consider as part of the research team and trusted partners who were pivotal to this research journey. Fiánta*[20], my friend, colleague and confidante introduced me to ZGF and who offered constant advice, contacts, support, encouragement and constructive criticism throughout. I was initially connected with ZGF by our mutual colleague Fiánta, with whom I have worked closely for over a decade. Fiánta and I share a similar work ethic and values, and they have a similar familiarity with the reciprocal values and ethos of ZGF through their professional collaboration. Fiánta shared their opinion that we were very well aligned in our values, ethos and approach, facilitated initial meetings and the partnership began. ZGF are committed to community led development where, "local community members work together to identify goals that are important to them, develop and implement plans to achieve those goals, and create collaborative relationships internally and with external actors—all while building on community strengths and local leadership" (Donohue et al, 2021:10). In ZGF,

[19] One village straddles the boundary between the two communities and as such, different groups from the same village identified as both communities and attended discussions in both (although not the same people).

[20] The names of the research team have been changed to protect their identity, all Irish language 'names' presented here are pseudonyms and are identified with a *.

I found a kindred spirit; my values, ethos and approach reflected back at me in theirs, Fiánta matched us well.

My committed research assistants, Fáidh* and Lách* (and Gáire*) who went beyond facilitation and translation to offer support, advice, mentorship, and warm friendship throughout the journey. Crucially, Treoir*, our driver, who amazed me with his innate GPS in arid bushland, without roads, signage or distinct features to guide our way; with whom I engaged in a mutual socio-cultural exchange on our long commutes and from whom I learned so much. The pseudonym's given to each research team member is an adjective in the Irish language which describes an aspect of their character which I particularly admired, a perhaps unconscious decolonial act. And finally, my peers in my Doctoral programme and research supervisor, who shared the journey with me through impromptu voice notes and a podcast of sorts, an embodied reflexive journaling exercise where I shared the joys and the dilemmas I encountered, at times seeking their opinion, advice, and critique, and always grateful for their company and support along the way.

While many would argue that of those mentioned above, only the research assistants are 'legitimate' members of the research team, I include them here to highlight the importance of relations and interdependence in feminist, qualitative participatory research, and their integrity in a strategy for enabling and enhancing reflexivity through the research process. Parsons and Letherby (2020:1) contest that collaborative and creative approaches to social research which strive to rebalance power relations and emphasise concepts such as democracy, equality, flexibility and reflexivity may "change the nature of the traditional research relationship", which was my intent with my chosen approach. This view is supported by Tandon and Srinivasan (2024:262) who see collaborative participatory research as an opportunity for change where collaborative, co-operative "learning from life" is key. Furthermore, Langdon, Larweh and Quarmyne (2020) emphasise reflexivity and consistent collective unlearning, challenging the power relations and Eurocentrism inherent in traditional development practice,

and which sustains a Western epistemic hegemony and therefore, knowledge injustice.

Ethical Considerations

My research plan, influenced by Moser (2008), commits to reflexivity, acknowledging my subjectivity and positionality and the resulting ethical considerations and approach, which puts the safety and welfare of communities involved at the heart of process and practice. The Maynooth University Research Ethics Policy (2020) further guided the research. Ethical considerations included the reliance on CSOs as gatekeepers, the power dynamic between the community and CSOs, and the potential for CSOs to influence 'free and informed consent', whose voice is heard and how knowledge is co-created. Research boundaries and independence were also considerations, along with an intent to do-no-harm which included a guarantee of confidentiality. Each of these considerations is discussed in this section.

Positionality

In addressing feminist research, Ackerly and True contest that, "a researcher needs to be aware how her own basket of privileges and experiences conditions her knowledge and research" (2010:24). In agreement, I am consistently aware of my own power in this research, shaped by and drawn from my privileged position as a white European female educated professional and a member of the academy. However, I also take on board the charge by Gani and Khan (2024:11) that "the colonial origins of reflexive methodology in Western academic contexts must be acknowledged and the (resulting) colonial and harmful possibilities in its corollary, positionality, rectified". I appreciate and accept their advice towards a reflexivity, humility and rejection of performativity to counter this, to hold my academic fields accountable for extractive processes and practices of the past and "to encourage future reparative scholarship in response" (ibid.), as is my aim with this research approach.

Therefore, I appreciate that this power and position effects the power dynamics in the research context. The balance of power and privilege are stacked heavily in my favour and can influence relationships, perspectives, research responses and ultimately the research findings. This power imbalance is present between the community research participants, some ZGF staff, community leaders and the research assistant to greater or lesser degrees and me. Therefore, I needed to remain constantly aware of my position and these power dynamics to guard against unintentionally influencing the integrity of the research by exerting power over research stakeholders. Different levels and types of power relations are also present in the various research spaces and relations, including between ZGF, traditional community leaders, the research assistants and community members and more. Indeed, my research approach sets out to interrogate and disrupt power, in agreement with the views of Gaventa and Cornwall (2008) that to counter hidden power and knowledge, marginalised voices need to be heard, need to participate in dialogue and decision making, empowered to contribute in a democratic space which balances out power between the powerful and 'powerless'. I made a conscious attempt to create a research space where diverse community voices are centred and where decisions in the research process are made by community groups. This was a deliberate strategy drawing on the work of Gaventa and Cornwall to attend to power dynamics in all its dimensions. I acknowledged the need to address; "knowledge - as a resource which affects decisions; action - which looks at who is involved in the production of such knowledge; and consciousness - which looks at how the production of knowledge changes the awareness or worldview of those involved" (2008:184). I made decisions to address all three taking heed of the advice of Gaventa and Cornwall (2008) that a focus on all three opens greater possibilities and the potential for change. In my view, this also reflects Madisons conceptualisation of a critical ethnographic approach where they argue that often theory and method are intertwined in such a way that "my theory was my method, and my method was my theory" (2011:21; in: Palmer and Caldas, 2015).

I attend to an analysis of power dynamics throughout my research and have tried to maintain critical reflexivity on the democratic and participative relations with all involved. I was cognisant of the potential sensitivity of the community in some of these power dynamics, which could result in community members opting in to participate in the research out of a sense of obligation, or giving the 'correct' responses to research questions and so paid special attention to mitigate this which I address in phase two.

Despite an awareness of my potential to exert power over, I do not see the communities as deficient or powerless, on the contrary, I understand and respect their agency to assert or attempt to assert their power over through the research process, such as through requests for support or other expectations. In such circumstances, I was open and honest with community groups regarding what I could and could not commit to or promise. I did make a commitment to represent their collective voice with as much accuracy, integrity and authenticity as possible, to document their knowledge, challenges and achievements and to return the research output to both ZGF and the research communities and to support them to present it in a format which is of use to them in support of social change and development. Indeed, it is my hope that the research process and output will amplify and strengthen their collective community power.

Reflexivity

Arber (2018:57) contests that, "reflexive practice is about recognising who we are and how we are part of the worlds we study". My research plan committed to reflexivity on the ethical considerations and approach throughout the process in congruence with Arbers' view and to ensure that I did not reproduce power inequalities or sustain dominant hierarchies or relations of power. My research approach and values attempt to guard against this by situating the research in context and incorporating critical analysis into the process. My aim was to effectively research, analyse, and theorise power relations with the research communities throughout the process and to make reflexive practice an integral aspect of my approach.

Following the advice of many including Arber (2018) and Etherington (2007:601), I embraced reflexivity as a strategy and a "tool whereby we can include our "selves" at any stage, making transparent the values and beliefs we hold that almost certainly influence the research process and its outcomes". I enabled this reflexivity by keeping a detailed reflexive journal which served to document specifics, highlight critical assumptions, flag issues of power, raise questions and draw attention to gaps or potential issues and to begin initial analysis. I used the learning from this journal to interrogate and address issues raised alone or in dialogue with others as elaborated in phase two. Dwyer and Buckle (2009) note that qualitative researchers appreciate that the human experience is not simple or static, accept and acknowledge similarity as well as difference, and value deeply ethical practice with a commitment to authenticity and reflexivity which resonates deeply with my ethos and research approach. They further suggest that as qualitative researchers, "we can only ever occupy the space between" (2009:61), neither fully an insider nor outsider in the research. While we are outsiders in terms of context and positionality, we share humanity, and in that, we share many relative commonalities and experiences which permeate our research relations, process and outcome and which reflexive practice brings our awareness to.

Power and co-creation

My participatory approach worked to create a space for a co-creative method where power and decision-making was shared with research participants. I endeavoured to be open, honest, clear, humble and respectful throughout the research process in an effort to shift the balance of power to a create a fairer, more ethical research space than is often available. However, I accept that my approach does not meet all the necessary criteria for a co-creative approach given that I set the agenda and research questions at the outset without the input of community members, and the challenges encountered in engaging with the communities beyond the initial stages of data analysis. Many authors including Hall and Tandon (2017), and Escrigas

et al. argue that it is important in collaborative and co-creative approaches that "the initial research question arises from the community" (2014: xxxvii). In this research, this was guided by my research interest but also largely a practical decision given the geographical distance and costs involved, and lack of means to communicate remotely with community groups. Once present with the communities, I shared power with and entrusted decision-making to the community groups as much as possible where relevant. I discuss related challenges at data analysis in phase three.

Practitioner experience

Through my experience from practice as an educator working with learners in diverse contexts, I am always aware of my 'being' in the space, and the implications of my multiple identities in terms of status, gender, and race on my relationship and interactions with the group. Years of experience have reinforced the importance of epistemic humility (Gebremariam, 2024) and personal humility, humanity, trust and honesty in all encounters. Therefore, I make the building of relationships and the establishment of trust a priority. I seek an agreement that participants will challenge me if I use language that they find complex, inappropriate or offensive and ask for permission to seek clarity on their idioms or dialect. What is most important is the creation of safe spaces, where we can communicate clearly and openly, conscious of cultural and linguistic barriers, safe spaces where we can learn from each other and actively participate in the creation of knowledge. However, this is neither easy nor straightforward, and the messy reality of how this was experienced in practice is shared in phase two.

Gaventa and Cornwall (2008:122) argue that "knowledge, power and freedom are inextricably intertwined… knowledge as power determines definitions of what is conceived as important, as possible, for and by whom". Further Dawson (2019:271 in Kothari et al., 2019) states that;

> There is a growing recognition that knowledge, rather than being fixed and in any sense representing objective truth, is in fact socially constructed, with meaning-making emerging from an ongoing iterative process of experimentation, questioning and reflection

> within the learning community. In this ongoing learning journey, and building on insights from Paolo Freire, there is a recognition that the language we use to interpret the world is not a true representation of some objective reality but rather that it emerges from structural power relations which, when unquestioned and unchallenged, it tends to insidiously perpetuate (Freire 2007).

As highlighted earlier, I believe that the opportunity to actively participate in the creation of knowledge is crucial, supporting learners to challenge existing knowledge and to recognise and value their own stories as knowledge can support experiences of empowerment and transformation. While acknowledging that this research alone cannot redress unjust and unequal power dynamics, my intention was for a considered and careful process that can be empowering and positive for all involved.

Research assistants

The communities that I would eventually work with speak Nyanja and Tonga predominantly. While some community members have English literacy ranging from basic to fluent, most do not, so the support of a research assistant acting as translator was vital to ensure the inclusion of all community voices. This brings a power dimension of its own, as a research assistant brings their own power, perspective and relationships, which may be reflected in the communication and interpretation of knowledge. Heeding the advice of Bloch (2004) on the importance of translators, I invested time and attention to the recruitment process to assess their experience and understanding of the research process, their power in that, their worldview and approach and the potential for their work to affect the integrity and rigour of the research. I needed to lean on the research assistants not only as translators but also as advisors on cultural ethics, as co-facilitators, as sounding boards to assist in reflexive practice, and much more. Bearing in mind that in qualitative research, words are data and that where language barriers exist, the methodological challenge grows (Suurmond et al., 2016), I explored social power relations and their implications for the research in relation to research assistant - community power dynamics, translation and interpretation with the prospective

research assistants through interviews and through references and endorsements. Further, Suurmond et al., (2016) and Temple and Young (2004) argue that there is power in translation, and both see the interpreter as co-constructor of knowledge. Where a translator acts as co-interviewer or co-facilitator, they influence the outcome of the interview or discussion, they influence what is found, they are not neutral. This is further influenced by the phrases they choose to ask questions, where they place emphasis, whether they lead or prompt, all of this impacts the outcome. They argue that in this case, the interpreter plays many roles in the interview process – communicative, editing, interpreting, explaining and so "interpreters act as co-constructors of the dialogue" (Suurmond, 2016:173).

I anticipated that a research assistant would accompany me at all times during my engagement with the community to facilitate communication by translating conversations. Communication was recorded using digital technology (with consent) and backed up with typed transcripts translated to English by the research assistant. This was supported by written observations throughout the process and in-person de-briefing sessions daily. Audio, visual and written records were backed up daily to the secure MU system and supplemented by further critical reflection in my research journal daily.

My positionality as a white European woman prompted other socio-cultural considerations. These included my lack of familiarity with local socio-cultural norms, behaviours, and customs in these particular communities and my desire to amplify the voices of women while including the male voice. I had discussed these considerations with Fiánta, and they had strongly advised that I work with two research assistants, one male and one female, to ensure that all voices would be heard. Women could be reluctant to speak freely in the company of a male research assistant, and men likewise in the company of a female research assistant and a white European woman. I also wanted to be able to rely on research assistants as socio-cultural mentors who could advise and guide me on norms and behaviours so that my presence in the

communities was felt softly and respectfully. It was important that I find experienced and reliable research assistants with the relevant language literacy to collaborate with me on the research. Importantly, I also needed people who would be ready to challenge me where they felt I was making errors in judgement or practice, which could negatively affect the research, communities or ZGF. Despite my years of experience, I would be stepping into their world, and every experience is new, unique and a learning opportunity. Fiánta shared their experience, resources and contacts with generosity, which led to online interviews and subsequently to contracts with male and female research assistants, Fáidh, Gáire and eventually, Lách.

Cognisant of these dynamics and the power of the research assistant in the research process and on the research outcomes, I started to invest in and develop relationships with the research assistants online and in person before we embarked on our almost daily journeys to the remote communities. Once we began engaging with community groups, I held debrief sessions with the research assistants at the end of every working day to reflect on and discuss issues, challenges and observations from that day's events, to discuss initial interpretation, to plan for the following group discussions based on these challenges, observations and interpretations and to allow an opportunity to address any issues before proceeding with the research process. Similarly, we used the commute to plan for the days ahead, to peer review each other's interpretation, approach, style and to offer each other constructive criticism and support. Suurmond et al. (2016:177) stress that such reflexivity "is essential in the case of cross-language research". I paid constant attention to trust and relations with research assistants as a priority, an aspect which Arber contests is key "in all stages of the ethnographic enterprise" (2018:np) and which has been highlighted as central to participatory development and research in previous chapters (Veda et al., 2021; Wood and McAteer, 2017; Hodgson et al., 2017, Eyben 2006 & 2010; Nadarajah and Grydehøj, 2024). I am very grateful that I did develop deep and trusting relations with research assistants, however, I did not take this for granted and paid consistent attention to maintaining

these relations, cognisant of the shifting nature of relationships in research, noted by Langdon et al. (2021) and Briggs (2012).

Relations and Gatekeepers

This value and acknowledgement of the importance of trusting, open, respectful relationships in supporting and building research was extended to all research partners and team on this research journey, and is a perspective shared by writers including Bloch (2004), Briggs (2012), Suleman (2023) Singh and Wassenaar (2016), and McAreavey and Das (2013).

Henning et al. (2004 in Suleman, 2023:4) describe qualitative research as a journey on which participants must accompany the researcher, noting that "it is important to choose the right participants with whom to wander". This good advice should be heeded with additional attention to the challenges of accessing research participants via gatekeepers, prompting me to reflect on empirical evidence of the complexity of navigating gatekeepers on the access pathway to research partner communities.

The journey to my research partners involved multiple layers and types of gatekeepers, an experience shared and documented by many including Singh and Wassenaar (2016) and Ahern (2014). Types of gatekeepers can be categorised as formal, informal and inadvertent (Ahern, 2014), or explicit and implicit (Singh and Wassenaar, 2016). In my journey, these included formal gatekeepers ranging from the MU Ethics Committee, Doctoral Programme Directors and my Head of Department, and the Zambian Governance Foundation (ZGF); informal include Fiánta, a colleague and friend who introduced and endorsed me to ZGF, Zambian traditional authorities, village head people, and community members. While acknowledging the multiple identities and layers of gatekeeper, I will focus on the specific gatekeepers involved in securing or preventing access to research partner communities.

During my initial conversations with ZGF, we discussed the ethics of a white academic engaging in research in the African context. The ZGF CEO

considered their role and pondered why they, a white European woman, is still leading a Zambian organisation and shared their quest to find a successor of Zambian origin. This resonated with my concerns regarding my positioning as a white western female academic carrying out research in Zambia rather than a local researcher. Our similar perspectives on positioning as outsider created common ground in addition to apparent shared values and ethics. In a later conversation with some ZGF staff, the CEO shared that it was my introduction through Fiánta that opened the door for me. This is similar to Suleman's (2023) experience, it was only with the support of an endorsement from a personal contact that he was able to access the gatekeeper. Fiánta is a trusted colleague of ZGF, their reputation and integrity with ZGF allowed them to endorse me, their influence was key to gaining access and without them I would have remained an unknown outsider to ZGF. The strength of my relationship with Fiánta and their experience of my work ethic and approach allowed them to endorse me to ZGF with confidence and integrity. It also served as a reminder that I had a moral and ethical obligation to Fiánta (and indeed all research stakeholders) to commit to excellent research and practice worthy of the endorsement, and that I respected the confidence entrusted to me by Fiánta, gatekeepers and community research partners, a key consideration according to Milgram (2012). This endorsement and indeed my previous professional experience with organisations and community groups highlights the importance of formal and personal relationships in building and sustaining ethical relationships of trust and integrity with gatekeepers and research communities, as noted by Milgram (2012), McAreavey and Das (2013), Singh and Wassenaar (2016), Suleman (2023).

Following our initial meetings, ZGF had confirmed that they were interested in supporting my research and hoped that in turn it would support the movement to #ShiftThePower by building a body of research evidence on community led development, the community philanthropy approach and on power in the development process. I met with ZGF staff by way of introduction, to begin building relations with staff and to discuss how we

would approach the final but most important access approval that I sought, from the research partner communities and their chief and traditional leaders. I had been clear from the outset that it was imperative to ensure that communities opt in to the research of their own free will based on informed consent, rather than a sense of obligation to an external organisation. In the case of the communities ZGF work with, this involves a traditional chief and village head people, plus community members themselves through community representatives.

There are also power dynamics between ZGF and I, which had the potential to influence how I engaged with the community, with whom I engaged and how knowledge was co-created. I relied on ZGF as gatekeepers, there exists a power dynamic between the community and ZGF and so exists the potential for ZGF to influence whose voice is heard and how knowledge is co-created. Relatedly, there is also my personal positioning and a risk that the community may feel obliged to engage due to my positioning or due to their existing relationship with ZGF. While I could not change my reliance on ZGF as gatekeepers, I invested in our relationship to develop and build a strong and trusting relationship with them based on respect, openness and shared values and goals. I had been clear and direct in my communication with them from the outset and we developed a collaborative strategy for our working partnership.

We developed a Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) to guide the process, which documents roles, boundaries, expectations, confidentiality, copyright, and use of the research etc. This MoA applies to all research partners and was developed collaboratively online with ZGF but without direct community involvement for several reasons. First, the community research partners had not been identified or approached at that stage. Given the participatory approach to the research and the pre-requisite free and informed community buy-in, it was acknowledged that identification and confirmation of the final research communities would be an emergent process, so the MoA was drafted in tandem with exploring community interest in the research. Second, given their isolation and lack of

communication technology, there was no way for me to engage with potential communities remotely. Finally, there was an urgency in preparing a draft which could be submitted to Maynooth University Research Ethics Committee in support of my ethics application, and which would be ready to present to communities for their consideration. Despite the constraints beyond my control, I felt uncomfortable about the lack of direct community participation in the development of the MoA. The irony of decisions being made on behalf of communities by ZGF and I in relation to research where participation and knowledge are central foci and in a format which represents a Western imposition was not lost on me.

To atone for this, we agreed not to sign the documents until communities were identified and had the opportunity to review the MoA and request amendments if necessary. Lenette et al. (2019) reflect on the complexities of planning for participatory research, including on the emotional labour that takes place behind the scenes when trying to marry hierarchical academic conditions and expectations with the context of community co-researchers. My worry about the inclusion or exclusion of community research partners from the development of the MoA is one such example of this emotional labour.

When research partner communities were identified, explicit steps[21] were taken to ensure that the research aims, expectations and approach and other details in the MOA was communicated clearly to communities and were understood. This supported their capacity to opt in to the research freely with the clear understanding that they were under no obligation to participate regardless of their relationship with ZGF. This aspect was very important to me personally and to the integrity of the research. I reiterated this directly with participants repeatedly throughout the research process to promote understanding, consent and free will in participants' decision-making process.

[21] Elaborated in the section to follow

There were socio-cultural norms, which may have been challenged by my presence and the research focus, such as gendered issues, social hierarchies and traditional leadership structures, which can disrupt power in the community at various levels. I was conscious that I needed to consider the potential to cause harm by encouraging and facilitating critical reflection on relationships, which may be based on unequal power relations, and the potential to positively or negatively change these relationships. However, ZGF had already been engaged with these communities exploring socio-cultural structural and systemic power and my presence and research builds on that exploration rather than expose and reflect on new power dynamics.

This critical consideration of power and measures taken to mitigate harmful effects of the dynamics presented here and, in the sections, to follow. Regular debriefing meetings with ZGF, coupled with reflexivity throughout the process, helped keep these potentially damaging power dynamics in focus constantly and managed effectively.

Free and Informed Consent

Making a connection with the communities and seeking their free and informed consent personally was something that I felt was integral to my participatory approach and critical ethnographic intent. I could meet ZGF staff virtually using online technologies, but this was not an option for rural, isolated communities with limited or no mobile internet connectivity. I needed an alternative and considered making a video where I would explain my research in simple terms, including what I was asking of the community, and most importantly, highlighting the issue of free and informed consent. I broached the idea with ZGF staff who were hesitant at first in light of the fact that the communities speak local languages and few community members have English literacy. However, after some discussion, they suggested that one of their staff could share and translate the video at community project meetings. The community members present could then share and discuss the research idea and request with others in their community. It was agreed and I went about creating a short introductory

video. I shared this with ZGF, seeking their feedback on the content and received their approval. At this stage, ZGF had focused in on two communities in Central Province that they felt would be a good fit based on their experience in community development, their continued active collaboration with ZGF, their proximity to each other and to Lusaka (for practical, logistical reasons) and their preliminary interest in participating in research. This coupled with the fact that they had little or no previous exposure to international NGOs and traditional development practice appealed to me and I was satisfied that we had found the research partner communities. We agreed that ZGF staff would share the video and further detailed information and seek the free and informed consent from the two communities. The relevant sections of the MoA would be shared with community leaders and signatures requested if consent was granted. ZGF discussed my research broadly with the traditional authorities seeking permission and access, and with community leaders seeking consent to participate at local authority level prior to presenting more detailed information, including demands and implications of participation, to community members at project meetings seeking their consent to participate as a group.



Image 4.0: Kaminembe MoA signing (Image courtesy of ZGF)

Some months later I received confirmation that two communities, Nyankanga and Kaminembe, had given free and informed consent to engage in the research as community research partners. ZGF shared the MoA signed by community leaders and a short report, which detailed a participatory

process at the community meetings where the research was discussed and consensual participation agreed. The report confirmed that my introductory video had been shared and included images of the meeting taking place, with community leaders and members discussing the proposed research, and with community leaders signing the MoA. Seeing the community members and location in images gave me a surge of motivation and heightened my sense of gratitude for the work that ZGF had invested to date, and for both research partners for their interest and engagement in the research which I hadn't assumed or taken for granted.

Informed consent was obtained at multiple levels, occasions, and means throughout the process with relevant research partners and authorities. Individual and collective consent to participate was sought on initial engagement with each group and again at each interaction with individuals throughout the process. With the support of the research assistant, we addressed group and individual consent consistently throughout the process, without ZGF input or presence. This process was included in the MoA. The agreement highlighted that only community members of at least 18 years of age would be invited to participate in the research process.

There are multiple considerations for obtaining consent from community research participants – language and literacy present challenges. The consent forms were adapted to allow for thumbprints or signatures to accommodate literacy issues. The consent forms were presented in multiple languages despite literacy issues present. I shared the translated consent forms with one of the key ZGF staff who suggested that we should translate the forms to Tonga rather than Nyanja but added that we should only print a few in Tonga and the rest in English. The rationale being that the majority of those who are literate can speak English and would like that acknowledged. I discussed this with the research team, and we agreed that we should follow the guidance of the ZGF staff member given their familiarity with these communities. All ZGF staff are proficient in the English language and so translated information or materials were not required.

Details, objectives and the process of the research, including research consent forms were communicated verbally to communities in advance of the research trip to explain their purpose, content and to allow for reflection and questions in the interim. They were communicated again verbally at each encounter with the participants in the process, encouraging and prompting questions to ensure understanding, and only then were participants asked to offer individual and group consent. The consent form was designed to be context and audience specific, aiming to communicate the essential information and seek permissions in simple terms which is appropriate to the communities concerned and which minimises the risk of bureaucracy induced fear and alienation of research participants. Despite this, I did question the appropriateness of a detailed consent form in a format and syntax that is of Western origin, alien to community groups and which exposes illiteracy. The insistence on written consent forms is inappropriate in a context of oral tradition where the collective takes precedence over the individual.

In contrast, arrangements for verbal consent were also put in place should participants prefer not to sign the consent form with a thumbprint. In fact, we forgot to carry the ink pad with us on our first visit to Nyankanga. Instead, verbal consent was conducted and recorded on a digital audio recording device following the process above to ensure understanding and informed consent. Each audio consent record was dated and time-stamped and given an identifier which was recorded separately by the researcher and saved electronically. Consent recordings and related written records were saved electronically daily as relevant and uploaded to the MU system where it was stored until the point of anonymisation (March 2024). Later, as I reflected on events, I recalled a presentation by Solis (2021) which connected illiteracy and dignity. Solis spoke of the practice that many development agencies adopted for high levels of illiteracy of having participants in project activities "sign" attendance sheets with inked thumb prints. Solis argued that after events, people would return to their homes branded illiterate by the ink stains on their fingers, stains that could take days to disappear. Solis

remarked that the stains defined participants not by what they had contributed to or gained from the events, but by what they lacked as humans. In hindsight, I was grateful that I had forgotten the ink pad and after sharing Solis' story with the research assistants, we agreed that we would rely on oral consent and a group consent form, signed by or on behalf of the group as appropriate to and directed by each community group.

Boundaries and Independence

In our initial communication and throughout the planning process, issues relating to research integrity and independence were discussed at length with ZGF staff and we established the understanding that while the research process and our relationship would be collaborative, it was vital that there were clear boundaries to the involvement of ZGF. We agreed that they would guide and facilitate where appropriate, for example, with initial introductions to community representatives and traditional leaders on the first visit to each community and guidance on appropriate and expected customs. However, in terms of direct engagement with community groups in the research process, it was essential to the integrity and rigour of the research that we established and maintained distinct roles and boundaries. This was agreed and documented in the Memorandum of Agreement.

Payment

Participants were not remunerated for their participation in this research. ZGF operate a strict policy of no remuneration in their work with communities and stakeholders. They specifically requested that I respect and align my actions with that policy. I agreed with this policy and was happy to comply.

Do No Harm

My approach was (and always is) to offer respect and support to those I engage with in my practice and to always strive to do no harm through this

engagement. Considering issues of power dynamics and relations, it was possible that individuals may be challenged and unsettled in the process despite best efforts to prevent this. Therefore, we agreed that ZGF would make organisational support available to research participants if required in the event that they were uncomfortable or distressed during or after participation in the research. In addition, an independent development worker was available to offer support and signposting to ZGF staff, community research partners and research assistants should the need arise.

On a personal level, in addition to common sense behaviours regarding personal security, health and well-being, I followed the guidance presented in the European Commissions "Research Ethics in Ethnography/Anthropology" guidelines, paying particular attention to reflexive practice and the safety checklist offered (Iphofen, 2013:40). I was also grateful for the trusted support of Zambian friends and colleagues with whom I have long-standing relationships and on whom I relied on for support and guidance.

Ultimately, risks to harm were mitigated with care, consideration and clear communication in the management of research relationships. The methods informed by participative and critical ethnographic theory created conditions to ensure that the benefits of the research far outweighed any risks present and in fact, positive research findings, which support a shift in power relations to a fairer, more equitable development practice, can benefit the communities involved.

Confidentiality

Initially, I anticipated that all research partners at all levels would be anonymised in research outputs. However, as I prepared and contemplated my ethics proposal for the University ethics committee, I began to question my right to decide on anonymity on behalf of communities who were intended research partners and co-creators of knowledge. While at this stage in the process, the final research communities had not been identified

and formalised and so it seemed best to plan for confidentiality of all research partners, I was cognisant that this jarred with the tenets of knowledge justice and considerations of power and choice. However, neither was it my prerogative to decide that research partners would be identified.

Research agreements, information and consent forms outlined a commitment to confidentiality. Methodology and documentation assured that all information collected about individuals and groups during the research would be kept confidential. No individual names would be identified at any time. While confidentiality at individual and village level was never questioned or challenged throughout the process, issues of community identity did demand attention in practice.

During my initial meetings with traditional and community leaders, I sensed that there was a lack of clarity regarding confidentiality in the research. I probed this a little and found that my senses were accurate. There was an expectation among the communities that although individuals would remain anonymised, the communities of Nyankanga and Kaminembe would be named in the research. Of course, they expected to be named at community level; I was seeking their knowledge, co-creating knowledge with them, validating their knowledge through the academic research process. How could this knowledge be recognised as belonging to them if the communities were not named? This reflected precisely what had been bothering me as I prepared my ethics application so in a sense, I was relieved that the issue had been raised by the communities themselves.

I decided not to draw attention to the misunderstanding among community leaders and members immediately. Instead, I mulled it over alone and then discussed the issue with the research team and my supervisor to fully explore my options rather than cause further confusion or mislead the research partners. I then discussed the issue with ZGF staff - if the communities were identified, it would be difficult to protect the identity of ZGF as there were few or no other organisations working directly with these communities. They were immediately open to being identified, as long as

they could be assured that the communities understood that identification would be at community level (rather than identifying specific villages, leaders, groups or individuals who participated in the research), understood the implications of being identified (particularly that the research would present both positive and negative findings), and that I would need to seek an official amendment to my ethics application. I encouraged them to discuss it at a staff meeting, as the same considerations were applicable to ZGF. They did so and informed me that they were willing to be identified at organisational level if this was the wish of the communities.

I prepared documentation which detailed the proposed amendment to the MoA and which included a caveat noting that the Maynooth University Ethics Committee must approve the proposed amendment in order to proceed, as detailed in the excerpt below.

Statement of origin of request and understanding of implications of proposed amendment:

- We, the research partners confirm that the proposed amendment to confidentiality originates with the community and organisational research partners.
- It is our wish that the communities of Kaminembe and Nyankanga, and the organisation ZGF, are identified in final research outputs as research partners and are credited for our participation, engagement and knowledge sharing and creation.
- We understand that individual staff, people and villages will remain anonymous and will not be identified.
- We understand that individual ZGF staff and individuals in the communities have the right to opt-out of participation if they are uncomfortable with this amendment.
- We confirm that all village communities in each zone wish for the overall community to be named.
- We understand that the proposed amendment must be approved by the Maynooth University Ethics Committee in order to proceed.
- We understand that the research may highlight findings that are both positive and negative and understand that all relevant findings will be reported.

I then met with the traditional community leadership to discuss the matter. Given that the understanding in the communities was that the communities *would be* named, to the leadership I seemed to be asking for their approval for something that they had already agreed. It proved more challenging to

explain that the original intention was that the communities *would not* be named. However, we took the time to explain the misunderstanding in detail, sharing the original rationale, ethical concerns and potential positive and negative implications of the proposed amendment. I explained that ethics approval for the proposed amendment was not guaranteed. We discussed the moral right of an ethics committee in Europe to make a decision on anonymity on behalf of a community in rural Zambia. Surely the decision-making power should lie with the communities themselves. I assured them that I agreed entirely and that I would present the amendment with accuracy and authenticity and was prepared to challenge a negative outcome if that transpired.

I felt frustrated with myself that I had not followed my instinct at ethics approval stage. I should have tackled the issue at that stage instead of accepting the norm in research practice. By doing so, I had taken the power and choice from my research partners, something that I was not pleased with myself about. I did seek and secure an amendment from the Maynooth University Ethics Committee on my return.

Scheduling

Scheduling of the research visit was a collaborative decision which took all parties into account. Considerations included trying to schedule the primary research visit to align with a period that worked for ZGF; which took account of harvest times, rainy season and access to communities; and which allowed me to spend sufficient time with the communities without adverse impact on my teaching commitments in the academic term. We agreed on a suitable period for the primary research trip - between late August and October 2023.

Phase Two – The Messy Reality

"Mess needs to be articulated… If accounts of research omit descriptions of the messy areas experienced by so many researchers, descriptions of research in practice remain incomplete and do not offer a true and honest picture of the research process" (Cook, 2009:4).

Phase Two – The Messy Reality	
• Building relations *Initial meetings with ZGF* *The research team* *A Goat in an Envelope* *Observing the journey and budding relations* *Initial meetings with traditional leaders and community representatives*	• Methods and process *Process and schedule* *Responsiveness put to the test* *Sampling* *On the spot decisions and managing the scale* *Participant Demographics* *Method* *Finding balance* *Peer Review and Initial Analysis*

Table 4.3: Phase Two – The Messy Reality

This second phase aims to elaborate on the process and practice of the research. Although I invested a lot of time and careful thought into the research planning phase, not everything went to plan. The research experience was organised yet at times chaotic, enjoyable yet challenging, inspiring yet sometimes depressing… the reality was often messy. Whether in educational practice, in development practice (as exemplified in chapter three), in research processes, and in life in general, the reality of the situation and experience can be messy. Life does not take place in a vacuum; plans and practice are influenced by occurrences in our context at different levels, often beyond our control. Reality is often messy.

The Zambia phase of the journey presented almost daily challenges which often demanded immediate but considered responses, drawing on embodied knowledge, sometimes alone but most often in relation with others. This happened in numerous ways, with support from a variety of

comrades but always began with an internal conversation and reflection, subsequently explored and documented in a variety of ways that were responsive to the time and physical limitations given full days. Although I had committed to a reflexive and responsive approach to the research process, I had not quite expected these aspects to be tested to such a high degree.

Those messy challenges are documented here in an attempt to offer "a true and honest picture of the research process" as advised by Cook (2009:4). Through years of practice in diverse contexts, I have come to expect and embrace the challenges and mess, continuous evolving strategy is necessary to adapt and respond to the mess, and most importantly, learning from the mess is vital and valuable. In the following pages I share this experiential learning.

Building relations

At initial online meetings with ZGF, we had discussed the importance of 'walking the talk', and I had emphasised that a participatory approach was integral to the research. More than that, it had to be collaborative, community voices needed to be amplified, and it had to share if not cede decision making to the communities. Given the community led focus in their work, we were of the same mind-set and felt that we would work well together and that I would 'fit' with the communities involved. ZGF are committed to community led development where, "local community members work together to identify goals that are important to them, develop and implement plans to achieve those goals, and create collaborative relationships internally and with external actors—all while building on community strengths and local leadership" (Donohue et al, 2021:10). In ZGF, I found congruent values, ethos and approach and I was excited to meet with them and start work when I arrived in Zambia. I was equally eager to meet with research assistants in person and most of all, to meet with the community research partners to hear how they would like us to proceed.

Initial meetings with ZGF

Feeling both excited and nervous, I made my way to the ZGF offices and met with staff members who I had been working with online and was also introduced to the wider staff body. We chatted easily, sharing introductions and areas of interest, debating some contemporary issues and challenges, and generally getting a feel for each other in person. I was struck by the warm and affectionate collegial dynamic between the staff present, there seemed to be a lot of respect and trust there, a reflection of the reality that I had imagined through our online communications.

We continued to talk about plans, logistics, the research team and other practical issues, remarking that I had a lot to do in a relatively short time (just under a month). Arrangements were made for initial meetings with the communities in order to schedule the work over the coming weeks. We agreed that a key ZGF staff member would accompany us on our initial visits to make introductions and assist us with community facilitation where necessary to reach decisions on schedules and the terms of our visits. We also agreed that when a schedule to engage with community members was agreed, that a staff member would also accompany us so that communities would be greeted with a familiar face, and to assist with directions and timing for initial visits at least.

The research team

I later met the research team in person. They were acquainted with each other from previous assignments and had a good rapport. I was very happy to meet them in person and felt instantly at ease with both. We discussed that we would not have a defined plan until we met with the community. While the intention was to be flexible and responsive to community decisions, actually not having a plan or schedule was disconcerting and quite a challenge for me. The research team reassured me that it would come together and that they were ready to be flexible and respond to whatever

schedule was agreed by the communities. I am quite organised and a perfectionist so feeling out of control is challenging. Taking consideration of the 'grey' zone highlighted by Lenette et al. (2019), common in participatory and ethnographic research, where processes and relations are not always clear cut, and acknowledging that my alarm was not reflected by the research team, I resolved to trust in the process.

We were to meet the Nyankanga and Kaminembe community leaders and representatives later in the week. We discussed the initial meetings and the intended approach with the community – of leaving the decision on schedules, timing, groups, locations and tools to the community – to reiterate and review our shared understanding of the centrality of the participatory critical ethnographic intent. We reviewed roles and responsibilities, discussed our expected long commute each way, and agreed a process of planning sessions for outward journeys and de-briefs for the return. I encouraged them to be open and honest with me, to act as mentors in my behaviour and approach with communities, and to be confident in sharing constructive criticism with me, and each other, throughout the process. We agreed logistical arrangements for our first journey, set up a platform for group communication, reviewed audio technology supports, discussed notetaking and observation and agreed to share an interview guide. I felt confident that I had a strong research team to support the process.

Unfortunately, the following day I received communication from Gáire that they were unwell and would not be able to accompany us to initial community meetings. We reassured them that Fáidh and I would manage the initial meetings and hoped that they would be well enough to join the research team the following week.

A Goat in an Envelope

Prior to our initial meeting in Nyankanga, Saoi advised that we must pay a courtesy call to the senior headman in each community to make formal introductions in respect of socio-cultural tradition. They also informed me

that I would need to bring a 'goat in an envelope' – a monetary payment - to the senior headman. This unsettled me. Fréamhaí had been very clear that the community should not be rewarded financially for participating in the research and we had intentionally included it in the MoA. Saoi explained that it was not a reward for participation in the research; it was a tradition, a customary practice which Fréamhaí approved. The money would be used to provide refreshment at community meetings or contribute otherwise to community events.

While I had experienced such traditions before, I was worried about the ethical and practical implications in the research context from the perspective of a Western Ethics committee (rather than a personal judgement). I was concerned that perhaps if the community knew I had made a payment to the headman that they would see their participation as mandatory, or that he would instruct people to attend in acknowledgment of payment. We arranged to present the gift to each headman privately, not in front of the community. Saoi and Fáidh supported me in stressing to each senior headman that this money was given to them as a gesture of respect for customary practice and that it was not a payment for participating in the research. I asked that the message we communicate was that while we appreciated the support, we asked them not to instruct people to participate. We asked them to ask community leaders to mobilise people to attend, to help spread the word and invite people to come and talk to us if they wished to participate but not to direct them to do so. This process was repeated with the senior headman in each community. We also arranged a suitable time for semi-structured interview with each headman, again pledging confidentiality and assuring anonymity. We had a very honest and open dialogue on research ethics and process, which contributed positively to our budding relationships.

Observing the journey and budding relations

The first visit to Nyankanga had a stressful start with a family emergency arising that threatened to prevent Fáidh from joining us but which ultimately meant a delayed start to the long road trip to Nyankanga. I was conscious

that the community would be waiting for us and hoped that they would not be too inconvenienced by the delay given that their time is a precious resource. However, I was relieved to have Fáidh with me as translator as otherwise I would have had to rely on Saoi alone, blurring the agreed boundaries of the research.

The communities are located in Central Province, in remote rural areas bordering Lusaka province. The long journey there required a robust vehicle and an experienced driver, travelling on the main paved road through Chongwe and beyond, eventually turning off the main road to travel on unpaved road and eventually bush tracks to reach each community. While a long journey, it afforded time to get to know each other, plan for the day and to become immersed in and observe life in Zambia on the journey supporting the development of 'thick descriptions' (Geertz, 1973) of the context and culture in my understanding. Those two and a half hours on the journey there were packed with learning through observations, questions and dialogue as we looked out on our surroundings and were punctuated with interesting debates and news bulletins on the radio.

Initial meetings with traditional leaders and community representatives

In the end, the decision to respect local custom and comply with the tradition of gifting a goat in an envelope was a good choice with positive outcomes. Both senior headmen voiced their appreciation that I had shown respect for their cultural tradition and that I had brought a gift for each from my own culture, a simple wall hanging with an Irish blessing[22], one that seemed appropriate for rural farming communities, and which conveyed my gratitude, solidarity and hope for them. The exchanges helped to establish a relationship and laid another initial layer of trust to that which had been established in the approach and invitation to collaborate as research

[22] *"May the road rise to meet you. May the wind be always at your back.*
May the sun shine warm upon your face, the rains fall soft upon your fields,
and until we meet again, may God hold you in the palm of His hand."

partners. One of the headmen commented that he appreciated the approach and was glad to meet me in person, having seen the introductory video shared when seeking informed consent. I had attempted to learn some basic Nyanja and Tonga, much to the delight and amusement of the headmen and communities in general, thankfully, humour goes a long way in establishing relationships.



Image 4.1: Kaminembe Primary School

We were greeted warmly in both communities, meeting Nyankanga community leaders and members under the shade of a tree near a school building, and in a school classroom in Kaminembe community. Initial meetings followed a traditional format, with Fáidh and I following the lead of community leaders who first introduced themselves and then invited us to speak. We did so and then outlined the research in detail again, taking the opportunity to draw special attention to the issue of free and informed consent. We also elaborated on the intended collaborative and co-constructive nature of the research approach and reiterated our ideas regarding process and method to minimise the burden and disruption on those participating. While those present were highly amused by the notion of the white woman helping them to herd their cattle, tend their gardens, fetch water or controversially, harvest wood for charcoal, they seemed to appreciate the sentiment and offer. Initial introductions followed a similar format in Kaminembe if a little less formal, more relaxed. I regularly used the Irish language to introduce myself and poked gentle fun at Fáidh or Saoi when they were unable to translate. The community gathered were both

amused and intrigued by my native language and I found myself writing 'as ghaelige' on the blackboard, sharing the spelling, origin and meaning of my family name at the request of curious community members. This helped to communicate a shared history of colonisation and led to a brief discussion on the Irish history of colonisation. Some present expressed surprised that any European country had been colonised and lamented the suffering and loss of language, culture and identity of our nations' shared experience of colonisation. I expect this honest sharing and bonding was facilitated in part due to the rapport that was building between Saoi, Fáidh and I, which was evident in our communications with each other and the community, where language and humour proved to be a tie that binds and builds relations.

In both communities, I emphasised that I was here to learn from their communities, I would be their student for the next few weeks. And learn I did, I was impressed and at times overwhelmed by their lived reality, their geographical isolation and the challenges that brings, and by their achievements despite the challenges present. They shared details of their achievements with pride – the school classrooms built by the community, the teachers' living quarters also built by the community, the health clinic in progress and much more. Their motivation for the development of their respective communities was evident in those initial meetings, as was their enthusiasm for the research.

Methods and process

The collaborative dimension is central to this research. My aim was to engage with communities in a participatory manner, which considers and respects their lived experience in context daily, in acknowledgement of their already challenging context and limited resources. This approach considers time as a limited resource and the burden of participation on this already scarce resource, especially for women, as highlighted by Veda et al. (2021), Kabeer (2017) and others.

My engagement with ZGF staff members as research participants aimed to explore their experiences, understanding and perspectives of the core research concepts and development practice. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with staff in the ZGF offices on the days in between community visits. The staff members included management and programme staff with varying experiences of development practice in different contexts and through different approaches. Some had years of experience while some were relatively new to the sector. Staff had been provided the information and consent form in advance, the content briefly reviewed at the start of the interview and the forms signed in my presence. I had not managed to carry out a pilot, so the first interview was conducted with the person with most experience and I asked for feedback and critique, which was forthcoming and positive. I had prepared well and had drawn from my experience and from previous conversations with staff in the planning process to prepare the guiding questions. Each interview was limited to one-hour at most and took place in a private space with assurances of confidentiality of responses in the research process and output.

Process and schedule

In each community, we gave community leaders the space and time to discuss and decide a research schedule without the research team or ZGF staff present. They decided where we should go and at what time, who would be our point of contact, and gathered any questions around expectations or otherwise that arose during their discussions. The decisions reached were community led, they discarded my ideas of moving from village to village to meet people, explaining that villages and homes were spread out across a large area and that it made more sense to meet at a central point, determined by them. Each community nominated a representative as point of contact and community mobiliser. They each proposed a schedule for the following weeks, visiting different villages in each community for full days of participatory research with community groups through group discussion.

Responsiveness put to the test

Unfortunately, I needed to find another research assistant over the weekend in advance of our first scheduled research meeting due to Gáire's ill-health which prevented them from joining the research team as planned. Once again, Fiánta offered support, reaching out to trusted contacts in search of an experienced research assistant with the necessary language skills and availability at such short notice. It was crucial that we have both genders represented in the research team to create a safe and encouraging space for both men and women to participate, and that they be a good fit with the rest of the team and with the research approach. Thankfully we found Lách, a warm and experienced person. Fiánta's support reminded me once again of the importance and value of strong relationships of trust and solidarity.

Sampling

While purposive sampling was used to identify the two community research partners, a non-purposive sampling approach was deemed appropriate within each community given the focus on collective knowledge and the intent to explore "behaviours, beliefs, and knowledge that are widely held in specific groups" (Kirner and Mills, 2020:52). I had anticipated that I would engage with approximately forty community members through the course of the research in small groups but as noted in phase one, we interacted with far more than anticipated. In total, over the course of a four-week research trip, we engaged with 18 groups of varying sizes across 9 villages, with each group discussion lasting on average 1 hour for smaller groups, 2 hours and longer for larger groups. In addition, 3 individual meetings took place with community leaders. All meetings were supported by research assistants, also acting as translators. A total of 289 people took part from the communities (in addition to ZGF staff SSIs)[23]. While the community representatives made the final decisions on schedule, process and methods,

[23] See table 4.4 for further detail

I had stressed that research participants should be over eighteen years of age, should represent diverse groups within the communities and should prioritise women's voices. I had emphasised that community groups should be informed and invited to participate rather than instructed to do so.

En route to Nyankanga on our first scheduled research day, we discussed the day ahead, talking through plans and trying to guess at how many people would be available to us. Cabhrach, a ZGF staff member, joined us for our first day with the community to assist with logistics and so that villagers would be greeted by a familiar face. We expected to meet at the headman's house initially but were prepared to go further afield to meet with community members as requested. Nothing could have prepared us for the sight that greeted us as we pulled into the headman's compound.

Waiting for us at the headman's house was a very large crowd of people, women, men and some children, at first guess we thought there must be well over one hundred people. We were shocked by the size of the crowd and that they had all disrupted their routines to gather here to greet us. We had anticipated meeting community members in whatever location and form they directed us, asking for no more than half an hour of their time each. However, the community had decided that we would meet as they do with all meetings, in a dedicated place, together, opening with formalities, introductions and a prayer.

On the spot decisions and managing the scale

Within the research team, we disagreed on how to proceed. My colleagues felt that there were far too many people to deal with in one day and that we should send some people home. I argued that sending people home was not acceptable in my view, we had invited people to participate, to speak and be heard. Cabhrach counted the adults present and reported that there were fifty-eight women and thirty-nine men waiting to speak with us. We agreed to work with bigger discussion groups than was ideal to ensure that nobody was excluded, we had little choice given the time available to us. I was

responsible for the safety of the research team and while participating, the community members present. We were far from any marked roadway; we needed to leave before dark to find our way back to the road and needed to ensure that community members could return safely to their homes before dark too. We divided women and men into bigger groups than ideal, but we had little choice other than sending people home.

Before we started, we had thanked people for coming and explained that while we were grateful for their presence, we had a small research team, and we would do our best to offer everyone an opportunity to speak but that meant that it would likely be a long day and that people were free to leave as they wished. All stayed and many did not leave until the end of the day as they had been separated from their family or neighbours when dividing people into smaller groups. We planned to allow people to self-select groups from then on to facilitate their return home with family members once the discussion was finished. We were wary that this often meant that family members, neighbours and friends were mixed in groups together, however, given our focus on collective knowledge and that these are small tight-knit villages anyway, this reflected existing social networks and dynamics. We did pay close attention to the dynamics within groups and related sensitivities in our discussion and gentle probing.

We communicated to community leaders in both communities that we appreciated the interest in participating in the research but that we were only a small research team, and it was challenging to engage with such large numbers in the time available. We hoped to engage with smaller groups at subsequent villages and while this was the case, particularly in Kaminembe community, the numbers who engaged were still quite high in Nyankanga throughout, as elaborated in the table below.

NW-Nyankanga women NM-Nyankanga men			KW - Kaminembe women KM - Kaminembe men							
Group ID	NW 1	NW 2	NW 3	NW 4	NW 5	NW 6	NW 7	KW 1	KW 2	KW 3
No. of participants	20	20	18	14	14	12	31	7	12	13
Group ID	NM 1	NM 2	NM 3	NM 4	NM 5	KM 1	KM 2	KM 3		
No. of participants	13	13	13	22	19	6	22	22		
Total participants: 291 (161 women, 130 men) divided across 18 groups from 9 villages										
Kaminembe: total participants: 84 → 32 women, 52 men Nyankanga: total participants: 210 → 129 women 81 men										

Table 4.4: Group Discussions

Participant Demographics

The large crowds attending that first day were made up of residents of two Nyankanga villages. Over the course of the following weeks, we engaged with a further three villages in Nyankanga and four villages in Kaminembe. In each community group, there was a diverse age range and overall research participants ranged in age from eighteen years old to in one case approximately 90 years old (they were not quite sure of the precise birth date).

Overall, women participants outnumbered men with 161 women and 133 men. However, there was a variance within communities, where the ratio of women to men in Nyankanga and Kaminembe were 129:81 and 32:52 respectively.

Most participants in all group discussions were adults ranging from mid-thirties to seventies. However, in Kaminembe most fell into the 36-50 age range (and above), whereas in Nyankanga participants were more evenly spread across the 25-60 age range (and above).

While youth in Zambia ranges from age 18 to 35 and generally the youth are the least vocal and often excluded from discussions, this was not the experience in these community groups. Most group participants in their

youth were in the older youth category, 25 and older still. Additionally, while the older youth category waited for their elders to speak first, they were vocal and participated equally when their turn arose. It was only the youngest in the youth category, under 25s who waited to be invited to speak. Once invited, they did speak but had less to say, often looking to elders for approval before they spoke (reflective of the socio-cultural norms).

Both communities are reliant on agriculture, mainly crops and livestock rearing, for their livelihood. For men, some supplement or gain an income from charcoal burning and skilled trades, such as bricklaying, or running bars. Livestock mainly consists of cattle, chickens and goats, with cattle linked to wealth and status. The crops grown were mostly maize, soya beans, groundnuts, sweet and Irish potatoes. For women, most work on the family farm as a duty, keep chickens and grow vegetables for consumption and for sale, which include those listed above and often cowpeas and beans. Some women run grocery stores either alone or with their husbands, are hairdressers or operate some small business to supplement their income in the lean season. Others operate hammer mills, which at Kaminembe school is run exclusively by women. A minority were teachers and health care workers.

Levels of education varied across groups, with men having a higher level of education than women overall. More women than men had low levels of literacy and limited primary school education. Additionally, more men than women held positions within the communities, with men holding positions in the community development committees, community foundations and co-operatives, whereas women held some positions in the former two, and in village development committees which hold limited power and influence. The most gender balance evident was in the community development committees.

It is important to note that while we invited community groups to share personal details such as age, marital status, employment and position, we did not insist upon it. We asked participants to share what they were

comfortable with and what they felt was important. While most did share these details, some chose not to, or omitted elements, while for others, the information was elicited through the course of their contribution to the discussion.

Method

Each group discussion began by explaining the research aims, intended output, and how that would be used to fulfil my requirements for a doctoral degree. We also agreed that I would return their documented knowledge to them in a format that was useful for them and for ZGF, and which might be used to lobby for support, demonstrating their capacity and achievements to date. With each group I made clear that I was not affiliated to an INGO or donor and could not make promises of financial or in-kind support other than their documented knowledge. This exercise to ensure understanding, facilitate informed consent and manage expectations took place in each group discussion. We read out the information and consent in local languages each time, allowed space for questions and checked understanding, and passed around a consent form which everyone signed, either with a signature, sign or symbol and we also recorded group consent electronically.

We followed consent each time by repeating the mantra that I had shared in initial introductions, I was their student, they were my teachers. I requested that they share their knowledge, teach me about knowledge and learning, power, participation and community development, as they understand and experience it. I encouraged them to see themselves as the experts, to look within their community for knowledge to share with me, as advanced by many community-led advocates including Djohossou et al. (2023b).

Finding balance

On the first day, we had agreed that Fáidh would start alone with one of the men's groups, and Lách and I would start with one of the groups of women. After the first group, I would switch over to join the second men's group. As it turned out, this did not happen, the women insisted that I stay with them, making the case that women rarely have a chance to speak, never mind speak with a European woman, and that it was more appropriate culturally that I stay with the women. I did as they asked. I had worried that either the men would hold back in my presence as Fiánta had warned or that they would 'perform' in my presence, an issue discussed at length by Madsion (2020). This has often been my experience with men in many contexts who are positioning themselves within a gendered socio-cultural pattern and hierarchy or who are intimidated by a strong, educated woman. This demand to remain with the women continued throughout until the final days when Fáidh dropped out of the research team due to ill-health and Lách and I had to speak to both the women and men's groups. I enjoyed the discussions with the men, and hearing their knowledge, experience and male perspective, and was a little regretful that I had not managed to interact with both groups throughout the research process.

Peer Review and Initial Analysis

We spent the long commute time planning and de-briefing and after the initial day we reflected on the day's events. We discussed the importance of framing questions appropriately, of the choice of language used in translation, of ensuring consistency in the questions with both gender groups and how we might guard against confirmation bias and promote reliability in the research. We agreed to share the initial audio recordings in an exercise to peer review each other's approach and framing, to highlight any omissions or concerns, and to offer an opportunity for each research assistant to back translate each other's work and offer critique. This proved a useful and helpful exercise for all the research team and the collegial approach further strengthened the rapport in the research team.

Phase Three - Interpreting Voice

Phase Three - Interpreting Voice	
• Research assistants and translation • Data Analysis – striving for accuracy and authenticity *Initial interpretation and analysis* *Subsequent interpretation and analysis* *Challenges in communication* *Navigating the data*	• Limitations *Researcher defined questions* *Translation* *Communications and member checking* *Generalisability*

Table 4.5: Phase Three - Interpreting Voice

This final section presents the third phase of the research process. This includes a discussion of the process, challenges and outcome of data analysis and interpretation of the collective community voices. This entails further reflection on research assistants and their role in translation and analysis. Finally, limitations of the research are presented.

Research assistants and translation

Very few community members spoke or understood English, so I was almost entirely reliant on my research team for communication. Likewise, while I had made an effort to learn simple greetings and phrases in local languages, I could not speak either Nyanja or Tonga so for much of the time I felt like I was on the outside looking in, a participant observer. At others I relied on body language, my gut feelings and instincts and felt like I moved between outside and the space in between as described by Dwyer and Buckle (2009). With the help of Lách, I worked to establish a rapport with the women's groups, often offering examples from an Irish context or from my life experience where relevant, to demonstrate relative similarities in our experiences or demonstrate understanding of an issue. I have found personally and, in my practice globally, that as humans we are more similar than different. Dwyer and Buckle (2009) suggest that this space in between helps to acknowledge that. They further argue that it can help create a deep

connection to research participants, working to overcome the separation between researcher and researched which is a core aspect of the participatory research model advocated by feminists and which I found helped to establish a rapport in my approach.

This embodied listening and connecting with the group members helped me to be sensitive to the socio-cultural hierarchies and varying statuses within the group as advised by Kwan et al (2011) in the context of group discussions, such as allowing the natural cultural order of things to flow, with elders and those of higher social status speaking first. It attuned me to be patient and to invite the youngest of the youth to speak when the time was right, and not to pressure them to do so. It helped me to tune into words which were not being translated, for example, where someone may have spoken for a good two minutes and yet Lách summarised it in just a few words, allowing me to prompt for more. It helped me to sense when someone had something to say but needed gentle encouragement to raise their voice because of reticence or in response to cultural norms, or when someone was trying to speak but was being overshadowed by an elder or stronger voice in the group. It allowed me to gauge when a joke or an example from my context was appropriate, and when silence was needed.

The women were so open and engaged that it was easy to get lost in their stories, and sometimes Lách did forget to translate. I felt that I missed out on the side conversations and comments that were going on around the speaker, as Lách focused on the speaker, the other group members comments were often missed in the moment, often coming to light later in the transcriptions. Most were repeated in the group discussion, but some were not, and some prompted a pang of regret that they had been missed, as they had offered a glimpse of nuance that would have enriched the discussion. However, such is the challenge of working without knowledge of the local language and of relying on a translator, who to be fair, can only translate one voice at a time. There were instances where Lách had decided not to translate something in the moment, perhaps out of fear that I might be offended or perhaps just not sure how to proceed for the best. For

example, when interviewing one of the headmen, he scolded me for not coming to his home to conduct the interview as initially arranged. It transpired that his wife had spent the evening shelling groundnuts to offer us, but we had to change plans due to the loss of Fáidh in our final days. However, Lách had not translated in the moment so I missed the opportunity to acknowledge the offense caused and to apologise. Ultimately, Lách needed to use their judgement at the time, and I had to trust their judgement.

Data Analysis – striving for accuracy and authenticity

Data analysis took both inductive and abductive approaches at different stages of the process. Initial interpretation and analysis during data gathering took a grounded inductive approach, while the desk-based process after the research trip took an abductive approach using thematic analysis to codify themes and concepts within the vast amount of data produced and which culminated in a conceptual framework. Initial codes identified during the data gathering process, coupled with codes (and related themes) emerging from thematic analysis were examined and framed in relation to the core concepts drawn from the research questions and then further expanded to include other emerging themes and codes within. A framework emerged from both a review of the literature and from the data, resulting in a conceptual framework of knowledge democracy. The initial inductive and later abductive approaches coupled with further rounds of analysis created the space to find hidden meaning in and interpretation of multiple realities and perspectives, facilitated a deeper exploration of themes and issues emerging (Saunders et. al., 2016), while maintaining reflexive ethnographic intent (Madison, 2005).

Initial interpretation and analysis

Initial analysis and interpretation had begun in the moment of each community based semi-structured interview and group discussion, a natural occurrence during the act of translation, questioning and clarification in a

critical dialogue process. This facilitated further questioning in the moment and often shaped the line of questioning or prompted deeper probing of an idea with the community group that followed, reflecting the grounded, critical and co-creative intent of the research. During our de-briefs on the commute (from and) back to Lusaka, we discussed, interpreted, analysed and debated community responses iteratively, sometimes agreeing to focus on an issue or concept that perhaps arose with one group but not another, or agreeing to seek clarification on a point that we were not clear on, or where responses appeared unclear or contradictory. This inductive and iterative approach allowed for successive comparison, interaction and member checking in the moment where data collection and analysis each informed and focused the other through the process, a grounded and robust approach promoted by Charmaz and Belgrave (2012).

Subsequent interpretation and analysis

In the period following data gathering when my research trip ended and I had returned to Ireland, I continued with the task of data analysis as a desk-based exercise. Initially, I began with a review of the transcripts from the community's, translated in detail by my research assistants and including additional explanatory notes and observations from their own field notes. I reviewed these one by one, seeking clarification from research assistants where text or meaning was unclear or differed from my own research notes and reflexive journal entries. I also relied on audio recordings and transcripts from our twice-daily debriefs, notes of our 'in the moment' understanding, interpretation and member checking during data gathering with the current group or the next where the relevant group had already dispersed, and my own reflexive journal entries and audio notes. This attention to accuracy, rigour and quality in initial and subsequent rounds of thematic analysis speaks to the emphasis in thematic analysis on "producing rigorous and high-quality analysis…[with] in built quality procedures such as a two-stage review process" (Clarke and Braun, 2017:297). Further, coded data from staff interviews, community group discussions, and individual community

SSIs were compared, patterns analysed and integrated during analysis in a process of triangulation aimed at enhancing the credibility of empirical evidence (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Bazeley, 2009).

Codes and themes which had emerged inductively during the data gathering stage (such as mind-set shift, life-sustaining knowledge, and exclusion) were mapped within and across the data as a starting point, seeking to understand and explore their source, differing experiences and perspectives, behaviour and practice from a critical lens to interrogate the patterns and meanings emerging, prompting further questions and deeper analysis, all tenets of thematic analysis (Clarke and Braun, 2017).

Following this, I moved to codes and themes which I had noted during initial reading and review of transcripts and continued to work back and forth within and across the different sets of data to identify new codes and themes. For each I carefully noted its source, looked for patterns emerging, described and compared within and across sources and related it to a theme linked to core concepts and research questions, similar to Bazeley's (2009:10) process of "describe, compare, relate". This process was iterative, moving and merging repeated codes and themes, and repeating codes across different themes as necessary, until I was satisfied that saturation was reached.

Challenges in communication

For staff semi-structured interviews, transcripts were shared directly with each staff respondent with an invitation to review and respond if any errors or issues were apparent. I was able to contact the staff directly via email for clarification on points or to seek their view on my interpretation of an issue or idea in the immediate period following my visit. This was helpful for interpretation and analysis. However, over time communication became more challenging. This coincided with a period of organisational change which offered a rationale for the difficult communication; however, I did find this a contrast to my previous experience with partners where I was usually

a contracted partner, with obligations tied to financial contracts. I found this a challenge, especially as I was reliant on ZGF to be my voice with the community research partners in my physical absence. Given that direct, formal and structured member checking with the research communities that are central to participatory research Fine (2016), Koelsch (2013) Weis & Fine (2004) was not possible due to the geographical distance and absence of a direct means of communication, I relied on research assistants alone for checking my interpretation and analysis of data. Therefore, data analysis at this stage was largely researcher led.

A few community groups had specifically asked that I keep my commitment to return to them with their co-created knowledge rather than simply extract data and leave, a point raised consistently in calls to decolonise development research, studies and practice, and explicitly stated by Peace Direct (2021). I had promised the community groups that I would not leave with their knowledge without returning and I worried that the lack of communication would make it appear as though I had vanished with their knowledge. I shared this concern to key ZGF staff, asking that they communicate my continued engagement to the communities and asked if they might share another short video message to the communities. I had created a short video message sharing some features in my small rural village that held relative similarity to issues and features in their communities and which we had discussed during our engagement. In the video I had reassured the communities that I was continuing to work with their knowledge and asked for their patience while I completed the task.

Navigating the data

Data analysis demanded the assistance of modern technology given the actual amount of data gathered in contrast to expectations, however this transpired to be another challenge. Eventually, I reverted to using old-school methods for data analysis, by hand with pen and highlighters, sticky notes and flip charts – a method I have tried and tested, and which works for me. I learn by doing and seeing, the physical act of writing forms a pathway to

memory, and visualising the data creates a photographic memory. This embodied practice deepened my familiarity with the community and staff voices far more than was possible with coding software, although retrieving specific quotations would have been much easier with the software. As Charmaz and Belgrave (2012:364) advise, "software can relieve much of the tedium of our work but not the hours devoted to reading, coding, rereading, pondering, writing memos, coding again, and more rereading". Therefore, overall, the approach used enabled a more integrated, embodied and reflexive engagement with the data.

At times, I felt lost in the data, overwhelmed by the sheer volume, at others struggling to match a specific remembered discussion with the right community group. On these occasions, I found my way with the aid of my reflexive journals both written and audio. The audio journals and recorded research team de-briefs were a constant source of motivation and inspiration when feeling lost and overwhelmed, taking me back to my Zambian colleagues in an instant. Much of this volume of data and knowledge co-created is presented in the following chapters.

Limitations

This section presents and explores the research limitations.

Researcher defined questions

Many theorists including Hall and Tandon (2017) contest that in co-constructed participatory research it is often the university partner that defines the problem, whereas the community partner should define the problem and set the research questions themselves. While the community research partners acknowledged that documenting their knowledge is important and useful for them, they did not identify the specific research questions therefore I present this as a limitation of this participatory research study. Equally, while ZGF were glad to participate in research which would contribute to an evidence base on community led development and community philanthropy, neither did they shape the research questions.

Translation

The research team were a valuable and necessary aspect of this research. The use of research assistants did also present challenges, especially given my reliance on them as translators in the research process. Their presence, behaviours, and approach influenced "the how" of knowledge production and while largely positive, did also pose risks, some of which have been discussed in previous sections. Each research assistant brought their own power, perspective and relationships, which may have been reflected in the communication and interpretation of knowledge as discussed in phase two.

Communications and member checking

While most of the primary research was conducted in person, online technology was used for one ZGF staff interview and continued follow up and feedback. Technology has proved particularly useful in the planning phase of this research, yet it frames communication in specific ways and poses limitations in the sense that it dilutes the human connection and rapport that comes from face-to-face human interaction.

Further, the lack of ICT proved a challenge in communicating with the community research partners throughout the research process, from planning, through co-creation to data analysis and beyond. While interpretation and data analysis was an iterative process that began and continued through the co-creation phase, the lack of means of communication prevented any further collaboration with the community groups in the analysis and interpretation phase.

Generalisability

My research explores processes of knowledge democracy, participation, decision making and transformative education in development practice, prompting critical reflection on issues of knowledge production, participation, empowerment, epistemic justice and community led

development. While personal experience and the literature reviewed suggests that issues and challenges in development practice are often replicated across communities and contexts, it is important to remember our discussion of the undeniable fact that context is everything. Therefore, in highlighting the specific context of this research, it should be noted that this research focuses on the development practice of an organisation dedicated to challenging and changing the usual deficit-based model in development practice through a community philanthropy approach. The limited exposure of these communities to external development assistance, and the community led achievements to date, suggests that human agency is high in this context, which may not be so in other contexts which have been exposed to imposed solutions, deficit-based models and dependency. This human agency and diverse and complex contexts are highlighted by Hammon and Wellington (2021) as factors in the generalisability in social research. While these factors may limit the generalisability of the research, it is nonetheless valid and valuable research, which is of relevance to all engaged in education and development practice in particular and indeed more broadly.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has presented the research in relation to research planning and process in three phases. The first phase is the research planning phase which includes a focus on positionality, research design, theoretical approach, research partners and team, and ethical considerations. The ethical considerations address issues of power, reflexivity, co-creation, research assistants, research relations and gatekeepers, free and informed consent, boundaries and independence, confidentiality and scheduling. Phase two presents the often challenging and messy reality of participatory research, offering an honest and reflective account of the experience, a change from the often-sanitised accounts offered in academic papers. This phase explores and emphasises the

importance of relationships in research, offering several examples of events where supportive relations offered solutions to disruptive and potentially damaging challenges. It further explores the challenges and strategies adopted in practice in research methods and process.

Finally, phase three presents and discusses interpretation and analysis, the challenges of research assistants and translation, the overwhelm of vast amounts of data and the strategies to manage that and finally, the limitations of the research.

As highlighted, overall, the research went as planned, however, there were many testing challenges along the way. Regardless, my resolve remained, and I adapted and responded to the messy reality with the support of my research team. The voices of the staff and community collectives are presented in the following findings chapters.

Chapter Five: Nzelu… (Knowledge) and Learning

"One thumb can't squeeze lice"

(An opinion voiced in the community in relation to learning and participation in community development to emphasise both as collective endeavours)

Introduction

This chapter and the two which follow, present knowledge and perspectives shared by Nyankanga and Kaminembe community members including traditional leaders, and ZGF staff. As outlined in the previous chapter, the response to and participation in this research far exceeded expectations and produced a vast amount of fieldwork. The knowledge presented here from this fieldwork was co-created with residents of eight villages spread across the two rural communities of Nyankanga and Kaminembe in Chisamba District (Central Province), Zambia with the support of the Zambian Governance Foundation for Civil Society (ZGF), a local civil society organisation (CSO). Community members engaged collectively through a total of eighteen discussion groups and three semi-structured interviews. A total of seven ZGF staff members also participated directly in the research through semi-structured interviews. A profile of these staff is elaborated further in tables 5.0 and 5.1 in the following section.

Issues and themes of knowledge and learning, participation, empowerment and exclusion, inclusion and the spirit of Ubuntu; which were raised repeatedly and with a sense of urgency by community members are given priority in the finding's chapters, with the voices of women placed centre stage. The amplification of women's voices is an acknowledgement of the heightened extent of silencing and exclusion experienced by these women.

The reader should be cognisant of the context in which this research takes places. The community research partners belong to villages in the

communities of Nyankanga and Kaminembe in Mwapula Ward, Chisamba District, Central province, Zambia. They are located approximately three hours' drive from Lusaka. These communities are in remote rural bush land, at least an hour's drive from a paved road, and at least half that again from an unpaved road. Villages are reached along dry tracks, some the width of a vehicle, others much narrower and human sized. The farthest villages require an additional hour to reach, for some, there are no roads, barely even tracks, just rocky mountainous terrain. The nearest large urban centre is Chongwe, close to two hours away by car, for some almost a day's walk on foot to pick up public transport at the paved road. The communities are isolated geographically and further isolated as a result of lack of investment in basic infrastructure such as roads, bridges, communications and transport infrastructure, and in basic services such as education, healthcare, livelihoods supports and access to markets.



Image 5.0: Smallholder farm with maize crop (researcher's own image)

To reiterate and complement community profile and demographics outlined in chapters one and four, a 2021 community profile report[24] estimated the population of Nyankanga and Kaminembe at 1326 and 1550 across 221 and 310 households respectively. The villages are quite spread out across rural

[24] Internal ZGF community profile documents (ZGF, 2021).

bushland and vary in size from the smallest with 15 households, to the largest with over 130 households, and an average of 47 households across the other villages. Most households consist of extended families ranging from 5 to more than 10 members. These are relatively youthful communities with over seventy-per cent of the population of both communities aged between 25-59 years of age. Both communities are reliant on agriculture, mainly crops and livestock rearing, for their livelihood. However, given the seasonal and often volatile nature of farming, most households rely on additional livelihoods to supplement their income. Almost all households engage in gardening or farming for domestic use.



Image 5.1: A household with charcoal for sale

The ZGF teams travel between three to four hours each way in company transport, an off-road vehicle capable of navigating the raw terrain. The staff team travels to each community a couple of times per month, depending on which community they are working with, what stage a project is at and what type of support is required. When they travel to each community, they meet village and community representatives at a central point, designated by community leaders, rarely if ever travelling to the individual villages. In fact, outlying villages rarely receive visitors at all. This is an important point to remember, especially in relation to issues of identity and belonging, isolation and exclusion, and representation which will be presented in this chapter.

Presentation

As the volume of knowledge documented is quite large, findings which reflect the key themes emerging from the findings are presented in three chapters – (5) collective knowledge, (6) participation, and (7) empowerment. Findings on exclusion, inclusion and the spirit of Ubuntu which are consistent throughout are integrated across the three chapters. The knowledge and perspectives shared by community members and staff are presented together in this chapter. However, within relevant sections, their voices are presented separately for two reasons; to prioritise and amplify the so often unheard collective community voice, as distinct from the individual perspectives and experience of each staff member, and to differentiate between their different roles and responsibilities. While there is much commonality between the responses, they are drawn from different perspectives of the lived community experiences and the professional experiences of staff.

Chapter 5: Knowledge and Learning	**Chapter 6: Participation**
Three Knots in a Chitenge – Knowledge and Learning · Formal education and learning · Non-formal education and learning · Informal learning and knowledge · Environmental Literacy · Value and Recognition of knowledge · Learning as lifelong and collective · Knowledge and Learning in Development Practice Knowledge as power · Collective knowledge · Knowledge denied · Exclusion from knowledge	Participation in community development Participation in development practice · Motivations for participation · Participation Defined · Supporting factors for community development · Participation as process · Participation Outputs Participatory approaches · Traditional and Results Based Approaches · Community led development · The community philanthropy approach Participation through the WDC · "Let me remove what is choking my throat" · Power and Representation in the WDC · Dignity and Recognition · Relationships and Trust

	· Empty Participation Isolation and Exclusion – Not part of this Nation · Identity and belonging · Isolation · Inequality · Representation
Chapter 7: Empowerment	
Empowering Spaces · Gender inequality · Dedicated women's spaces · Independence · Agency · Solidarity Inclusion: Voice and Agency, Inclusive representation, Dignity and Recognition	Critical education – an empowering approach · Mind-set shift – No more 'Boma Iyanganepo' · Collective action and agency · Transformation · Critical thinking The Spirit of Ubuntu

Table 5.0: Findings Chapters Layout

Notes on process

Collective voice

As noted in the methodology chapter, all but three research participants from the research partner communities shared their collective knowledge through group discussion rather than on an individual basis. In addition, specific villages and staff are not named to protect their identity, instead each collective community group and each staff member is represented by a code as elaborated in tables 5.1 and 5.2 below, as agreed with participants:

NW-Nyankanga women KW - Kaminembe women NM-Nyankanga men KM - Kaminembe men										
Group ID	NW1	NW2	NW3	NW4	NW5	NW6	NW7	KW1	KW2	KW3
No. of participants	20	20	18	14	14	12	31	7	12	13
Group ID	NM1	NM2	NM3	NM4	NM5	KM1	KM2	KM3		
No. of participants	13	13	13	22	19	6	22	22		
Total participants: 291 (161 women, 130 men) divided across 18 groups										
Kaminembe: total participants: 84 → 32 women, 52 men Nyankanga: total participants: 210 → 129 women 81 men										

Table 5.1 – Group discussion

NM-Nyankanga men KM - Kaminembe men SM – Staff member							
ID	SM1	SM2	SM3	SM4	SM5	SM6	SM7
Total 7 staff participants (4 women, 3 men)							
ID	NM1	KM1	KM1				
Total 3 participants: 3 men (leadership positions)							

Table 5.2 – Semi-structured interview

It is also important to highlight that I made an active decision to subsume the responses of community leadership from semi-structured interviews into group response codes from their respective communities. This decision is a deliberate attempt to protect the confidentiality of these participants who would be more easily identified and to mitigate the risk of offence and related conflict arising within and between their respective villages and communities, addressing a key concern of these respondents.

As discussed extensively in literature, and to follow in the findings presented, in communal societies such as these, the Ubuntu philosophy and the collective is primary. In this context and drawing on the work of Mutwarasibo & Iken (2019), I view collective decision-making and agreement as focusing on reaching consensus in a flexible process that encourages all voices be included, heard, and considered. Through this process, ideas and issues are examined through dialogue and the group reaches consensus, or in some cases, divergent views are expressed. Reaching consensus does not necessarily mean needing complete agreement. While in community groups, overall views, experiences and perspectives were shared and agreed collectively, there was some divergence across groups, especially those on the periphery. To make this clear and given that community responses reflect collective knowledge and perspectives of these communities rather than individualised responses, I further decided to use a descriptor scale to quantify the levels of the collective group responses from the eighteen groups as elaborated in table 5.3. To reach these figures, I calculated the number of instances that shared

and similar responses appeared within and across groups, and cross - checked them against notes during coding in the analysis process.

Few	Some	Many	Most	(Almost) All
1-3	4-7	8-11	12-15	16-18

Table 5.3 – Scale of responses for group discussions

For consistency, I adopted a similar scale to quantify responses from the seven staff members who participated, as elaborated in table 5.4.

One or two	Some	Most	All
1-2	3-4	5-6	7

Table 5.4 – Scale of responses for staff SSIs

Co-creation process

This research drew on Freirean principles of knowledge co-creation (Freire 1972, 1974, 2014). This co-creative approach was applied in the process of group discussions. Through group discussions we facilitated critical reflection lived reality and experience through collective critical dialogue. This occurred with and among group participants as they were questioned and challenged by the research team and each other, naming their world, reflecting on their experiences, perspectives and lived reality in an act of critical consciousness and learning. Drawing on literature such as Hall and Tandon (2020) and Grummell and Finnegan (2020) in addition to Freire we aimed for a collaborative research process. In this regard, we used the research themes as a guide to give some structure to the group discussions, however, we were not fixed to these themes and instead were responsive to the direction the group dialogue took and respecting their power and agency in the critical collaborative process. Reflexivity on the part of the research team was important here, iteratively challenging and examining assumptions in the process of group dialogue and beyond, interrogating meaning and understanding in the collective co-creation process.

Power dynamics

As with all community groups, a power dynamic and hierarchy exists within and across groups. I paid close attention to this, watching body language, observing the group to gauge who was speaking most, who was speaking on behalf of whom, who the group looked to for leadership, who wasn't speaking and so on. I also relied on the research assistant to listen to and observe the side conversations going on within the group or drew their attention to those I felt was leading the discussion or only engaging with one or two others separate from the larger group. This close attention to power dynamics allowed us to balance the conversation, check and challenge agreement and consensus, bring in those who were not engaged and explore group dynamics in a gentle manner, sensitive to the social and relational context.

We followed the customary local order, where elders and community leaders spoke first, followed by collectives within the wider group, and lastly the youngest group members, who usually did not speak until invited. We explained at the outset of each discussion that we wanted everyone to have the opportunity to contribute and we encouraged and repeated this throughout.

Broad themes emerging

Findings are presented in relation to core concepts drawn from the research questions – collective knowledge, participation, and empowerment in development practice. Themes that emerge within these core concepts are explored, with some appearing consistently throughout such as the spirit of Ubuntu, which appeared consistently in the community response. While overall shared themes emerged, there are some divergent views within those themes which are noted. Despite complex challenges, evidence of positive social progress and community-led development is abundantly visible in these communities. However, the community research participants spoke collectively of marginalisation and isolation, and of feeling voiceless or unheard. The communities' experience of exclusion is vocal and

consistent; gender inequality is evident with women shouldering the burden of responsibility and experiencing exclusion in multiple dimensions, and education emerges as an essential element which both sustains and enhances life.

Knowledge and Learning

"Knowledge, power and freedom are inextricably intertwined… knowledge as power determines definitions of what is conceived as important, as possible, for and by whom"

(Gaventa and Cornwall, 2006:122).

Three Knots in a Chitenge[25] – Knowledge and Learning

This first chapter of findings presents the different types, forms, focus and spaces of knowledge and learning expressed by community members and staff. The value and recognition of knowledge is presented from the collective perspective of community members and of individual ZGF staff. Finally, findings concerning the concept of knowledge as power and collective experience of the denial of, and exclusion from, knowledge are presented.

Chapter 5: Knowledge and Learning	
Three Knots in a Chitenge – Knowledge and Learning · Formal education and learning · Non-formal education and learning · Informal learning and knowledge · Environmental Literacy · Value and Recognition of knowledge · Learning as lifelong and collective · Knowledge and Learning in Development Practice	Knowledge as power · Collective knowledge · Knowledge denied · Exclusion from knowledge …of indigenous knowledge External recognition as knowers Self-recognition as knowers

Table 5.5: Findings Chapter 5

Initially, when most community members were asked if they had knowledge, what types of knowledge they had and where they gained this knowledge, quite often they needed gentle prompts in order to trigger a response. It

[25] Women shared that 'three knots in a chitenge' represents menstruation and is used to teach and inform about women's issues.

became apparent that when asked about knowledge, they thought of knowledge as, or related it to, formal education. Furthermore, they related formal education to literacy, and so particularly with the initial groups that we met, they interpreted knowledge within the frame of literacy and formal schooling. The fact that many community members, and especially women, have little or no formal education or literacy skills explains the often-stilted silence when initially asked about knowledge.

However, when encouraged to think beyond formal education and literacy, they all soon spoke about different types and sources of knowledge and talked of knowledge and learning in interconnected ways. While these findings are mainly presented here under headings of formal, non-formal and informal learning and knowledge, it is important to acknowledge the many other aspects of learning revealed in the findings presented which do not fit neatly into these headings (as discussed in chapters two and three). These include intergenerational, indigenous, traditional and cultural, and embodied knowledge which reflect context specific worldviews and knowledge; and technical, professional and practice-based learning and knowledge and others. Overall, they agreed that they do have knowledge and went on to describe the types and sources of that knowledge. However, while they claimed their knowledge proudly, they also lamented their lack of knowledge, indicative of the complexity of their relationship with learning as documented in the following sections.

Formal education and learning

Almost all community members discussed knowledge gained through formal education, especially in terms of literacy. Most women's groups also highlighted the life skills that they gained through domestic and production units in schools. These units supported skills such as sewing, cooking, planting and growing vegetables. Formal schooling also taught personal and social skills, which many groups described as being important.

"Going to school helps you learn how to read and write, maybe you could give me a letter full of insults but if I'm able to read, I will understand that it is actually insulting me" (NW1).

"We teach girls how to cook and manage their home from home and at school they also learn how to cook and how to sew. As they learn how to read and write and studying books it's also important that she also learns how to cook and how to sew…" (KW1).

Many groups (usually the men) also talked about professional qualifications acquired through academic studies, giving examples such as the vets that occasionally come to their communities and who hold professional academic qualifications. However, many were keen to highlight that some people in the community have some of the same knowledge and skills, learned from observing the vets as they worked and shared collectively, such as how to treat different ailments and issues in cattle, but they do not have the formal qualification. All groups see formal education as supporting progress, offering the educated better choices and better opportunities. In the same vein, they repeatedly spoke of formal education as life enhancing.

"A community that is developed is one where children are educated" (NM5).

"It is very good for the children to go to school… so that they can help us in future, we didn't go to school, let the children go to school so that they can help us in future" (NW2).

"Going to school is a good thing… the knowledge that they attain from school just enhances them to make better choices and achieve better things" (KW3).

It should be noted that this focus was primarily in relation to the formal education of their children and orientated towards the future, describing the collective community benefits from educated children. Many tended to focus on non-formal education for themselves as adults, such as literacy education, farming skills or financial management classes offered by NGOs.

Non-formal education and learning

While the specific term 'non-formal' was not used by the community, all groups identified non-formal education as a source of knowledge and described the types of knowledge that they learned through non-formal education in terms of skills, capacity, understanding and awareness. Women, in particular, voiced that the spaces where learning took place are important and often not only facilitated the exchange of knowledge but also generated peer support and further learning, building connections and confidence, often leading to empowerment and transformation personally and collectively.

"We get knowledge from different areas [spaces], at times we get this knowledge from the clubs. In the clubs we meet and sometimes we weave baskets. We sit together and this one will say this and that one will say that and the one that didn't know anything will pick something. Even though they didn't know how to sew they learn. Sometimes through church programs like Dorcas[26], when we meet… we learn a lot of things, and you find that someone who didn't know any life skills will learn one trade or the other. It's from such groups that we acquire knowledge… (NW3).

"Being in a group together creates some kind of bond… yes, it's beneficial… we are together…" (NW3).

These spaces of learning are most often initiated and facilitated by external actors, CSOs, NGOs or FBOs, albeit with choice of topic coming from the communities. In some instances, some community members reported experiences where non-formal learning supported a shift in attitudes and behaviours, leading to social change.

"A while back we learnt about green living from an organisation called MSIKA[27]. They taught us about planting specific types of trees that produce

[26] Dorcas is a Seventh Day Adventist Women's club that also teaches the women spiritual knowledge of God and life skills

[27] A commercial agri-business contracted by the Ministry of Agriculture to deliver extension services

seeds eaten by cows… the cows will often sit under that tree eating the seeds while excreting and leaving dung for you to use in the gardens. We have also learnt how to put up fishponds which can later be sold. So, we have learnt a lot of things through joining these groups. We usually choose [what we want to join], and say please go ahead and teach us, it's not a command and we are divided into different groups depending on one's interests…" (NW2).

Non-formal education was most often linked to community development initiatives with distinct community education components such as savings groups or livelihoods initiatives, which as discussed later, are seen as both life-sustaining and life-enhancing. Women especially argued that the learning gained in these spaces is very valuable to them.

Non-formal learning in areas such as literacy is highlighted as valuable by some community groups. Other learning documented as gained through non-formal education processes and spaces included trades, business management, financial management, agricultural skills and learning through government extension workers, and health knowledge and skills to support community-based healthcare, which is crucial in a community isolated from medical services. This emphasises the link between non formal learning and a need for resources.

An example is community health workers attached to a clinic in a neighbouring community and trained in infant and maternal health, whose knowledge and skills can be shared and applied in practice in the community, where their knowledge can be lifesaving.

"People have stopped giving birth in their homes, when they get to 8 months they travel to go and stay near the clinic… there is a very big improvement [to infant and maternal health] … they are even able to do scanning to see how the baby is positioned in the womb… they are able to see if the baby can be delivered at the clinic or not, and if there are any complications then the pregnant woman is referred to Chongwe to a bigger hospital" (KW2).

Informal learning and knowledge

Informal learning proved a tremendous focus for most community members, and they highlighted this learning as being *as* important as non-formal or formal learning, despite the contradictory language some used to describe informal learning;

"There is a way of knowing which is of lower level. There is knowledge that is acquired through experience… So, there is a difference… There is knowledge that is learnt from lecturers. This knowledge differs from that which is acquired through experience…" (NM2).

"We can compete with someone who studied agriculture... I might even do better than an agricultural graduate because I know farming by experience. That is how it is… there is a difference between a person who knows something by experience, and someone who learnt something from school. When you learn something by experience, chances of forgetting are almost zero. But it's easy to forget something you learnt from school. …" (NM2).

Many, especially the women, tend to talk about informal learning as life sustaining knowledge. Discussions on informal knowledge included traditional knowledge, indigenous knowledge, inter-generational knowledge and learning, peer learning, communal and individual experiential learning in the community or within the family, describing the latter as inherited and instinctive knowledge related to their lived context and experience. Informal collective learning in the community, whether from elders and family members, or friends and neighbours supports the skills and knowledge to care and provide for themselves, their family and each other.

"We use the types of knowledge to bring development in our community. I think through meeting and sharing ideas, you sit with your friends and discuss what you think… [together] you make an action plan and how you will implement the idea, the days when you will do the work and agree. If you

don't meet or share ideas, there is no way that knowledge can bring development in your community" (KM2).

"From childhood you are living with your children, and you tell your children, 'kids let's go to the field to cultivate the land', maybe you are weeding and if it's time to harvest, they harvest so the children are learning the life skills. So, when they grow up, they will know that in life there is farming, weeding, there is rearing of the cattle because boys look after the cattle and the girls learn how to cook and washing the dishes…" (NW3).

A few men highlighted the radio as being an important source of knowledge, particularly about agriculture. Many spoke of what they described as 'passive' and 'observed' learning from their daily interactions with others and personal learning from individual experiences. The majority shared the view of indigenous and traditional knowledge as vital, a perspective very much shaped by their isolation as much as their cultural ties. The community rely on indigenous knowledge such as herbal medicine, wild food sources and agricultural practices to be self-sufficient in these aspects because they are so isolated from resources and services.

"All knowledge is equally important... very important… it's [informal knowledge] important because we learn how to look after our families, how to look after our children and how to look after our guests" (KW3).

"*I think we learn [cultural and traditional knowledge] from the elders in the community. They explain everything to us. They also learnt from their forefathers. We have cultural beliefs. Every culture has its own tradition... those traditions are passed from generation to generation. So, with traditions, you are just told by word of mouth. What we learnt when growing up we pass it to the younger generation, and they will pass it on…" (NM2).*

The resounding description of this knowledge is vital. It is life sustaining, it is the basic skills, practical skills, personal, social, life skills, knowledge and abilities that sustains them daily and provide the scaffolding for coping

strategies in their living context. It supports resilience, adaptation and innovation in the face of the multiplicity and complexity of life.

"It's good because if you sit in the community to teach each other, each person will learn what they don't know. Maybe about how to look after your home, and marriage. Your friend will teach you that you are supposed to do this and that… Some of the things that we learn in the community, we also learn a lot about cooking, sewing, weaving… We also learn how someone can live and sustain themselves with other small businesses in life instead of just depending on one source of income…" (NW6).

Environmental Literacy

This section is presented as literacy rather than knowledge to highlight the depth of environmental wisdom held by the community and how skilfully they apply this knowledge. It is also used to convey that this literacy is tied to and rooted in their indigenous knowledge and their ability to read seasons and the natural environment.

Environmental literacy is very strong, very detailed in general and while it emerged from most groups, within that it was most often voiced by men in the communities. They spoke openly about charcoal burning as learned informally despite their awareness of the fact that charcoal burning is illegal due to the damage that it causes to the environment. However, they highlight that they do not burn charcoal for fun, they do it out of necessity as there is little viable livelihood alternative. They discuss their ability to read time and seasons and demonstrate comprehensive understanding and awareness of complex environmental impacts of harmful practices, and of climate change adaptation and coping strategies.

"How I see it, I saw my father buy one goat, later he bought another he goat. Then the goats started to increase in number. Even when a challenge arises, he finds it easy to sell one goat and use the money to address the challenge…" (NM4).

Many discuss the impact of clearing trees for charcoal and describe the measures that they take to reduce harm. When gathering firewood, or timber for burning charcoal, they try not to cut down trees, instead trying to work with nature by using trees that have fallen naturally, or find branches that are falling or will fall. They try to minimise their impact and shared awareness that cutting down trees leads to soil degradation and erosion. They take all measures possible to protect their environment because they are keenly aware that the land is a collective natural asset that they are heavily reliant on, again largely due to their isolation and exclusion.

"I was taught that you do not cut a tree on a level closer to the ground because it may take a lot of time to grow. So, I was taught to cut a tree from the stem so that it does not die, and trees do not finish in the area. You need to cut the tree at the top so that it can easily sprout. So, they taught me about chitemene system (cutting down trees)" (NM3).

"Then, secondly how to catch fish. They said that if the spaces of moono (fish trap) are big, it would not catch small fish, that meant that you are preserving fish. Up to date, I still recall those teachings… [they] helped us a lot, one, to catch fish, you do not eliminate the entire school of fish, also about the trees you do not finish them. So, that is what I could contribute based on the knowledge obtained from parents…" (NM3).

Their environmental literacy is tied into their indigenous knowledge. From knowledge which identifies trees which grow near a water source, to knowledge of plant medicines that are useful for human consumption as preventative or alternative medicine, or that support agricultural practice as pesticides, and fertilisers. Without doubt, their environmental literacy is apparent and strong, their connection to and respect for collective indigenous ways of knowing from nature is clear and this literacy is vital and life sustaining.

"Mukuyu is the tree that is found where there is a water source, where you find the Mukuyu tree is always a sign that there is water underground.

Villagers use the Mukuyu tree to determine where to dig a well because it always sits on a waterbed…" (KW1).

"For malaria… there was a herb which they used to call 'chase away the mosquitos'… a herb called mutanda mansenya... When someone has diarrhoea, we would boil the leaves of a Mukula tree to treat them… If it's Malaria, we give Mululwe[28]" (NW3).

"The point I'm driving to is that I go to a community… and then they walk us in the community, in the rural areas. Then they're naming the trees and their uses, and they say this tree, we just use it for firewood, now this tree, we use its wood for timber. This tree has food, and we really like this tree, this tree we can't use it for charcoal. No, this tree is not the same. So, when you hear them speak in terms of the variety of natural resources, trees they have. They have things for cleansing, things for… everything, they have all these types of medicine in the community" (SM3).

Value and Recognition of knowledge

As illustrated in the previous section, value and recognition emerged as a recurring theme in most groups, with clear awareness of the value and recognition of the knowledge the communities hold, and of them as knowledge holders, and their value and recognition of knowledge. This was evident in the different types of knowledge which they spoke about, illustrated in the image below.

[28] A bitter bark that is used to treat several ailments including Malaria

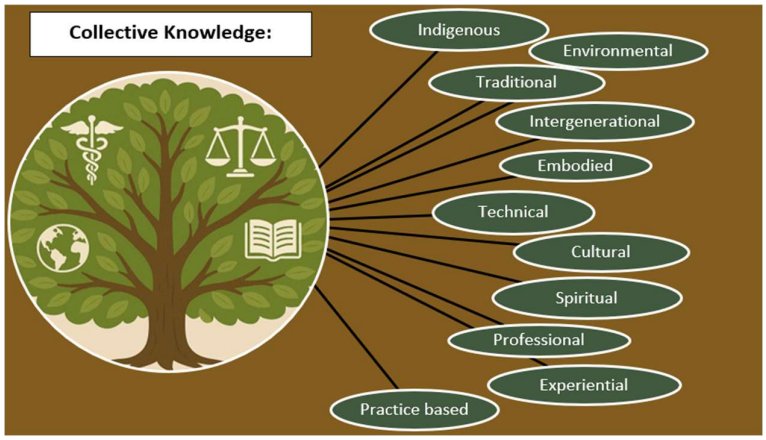


Image 5.2: Collective knowledge types (AI assisted graphic)

…of indigenous knowledge

Indigenous knowledge is most commonly held and passed on by elders in the community. While valued by elders and some older members of community, the elders and those in the older youth category comment that it is less valued by youth, particularly in relation to natural resources as traditional medicine. Many highlighted that they need to preserve and protect their indigenous knowledge, because if the youth are not interested in it, it will die out. In discussing traditional practices and medicine, they shared,

"These medicines are really there and they work because nowadays, we hear of herbal medicine meaning that they depend on the herbs and these trees for their herbals, meaning that they work… We sell it to the younger ones so that when we are gone, they can remain with that knowledge… The problem that is there is that these children of nowadays, even when you teach them, they disregard you saying ahhh… that's old fashioned and yet they work very well. Most of the time they just disregard you…" (KM3).

As some groups highlighted, they are reliant on plant medicines and indigenous knowledge given their lack of contemporary health services, *"If we didn't have that knowledge, we wouldn't be living well…" (NW3).*

Some staff members also commended indigenous environmental and traditional knowledge and highlighted the interdependent and collective nature of this relationship.

"I'll give you an example of communities that we work with on environmental issues… they have made vigilantes, people that watch over the forests… also they say we've asked to learn from the Nduna's, the local traditional leaders, how to protect [the forest]. One way of protecting it is for us to save even beehives, so that they can act like security. Nobody wants to get in the forest and be attacked by the beehives, by the bees. And in return we get money and honey? So, for me, actually they do [value their indigenous knowledge], and they use the indigenous knowledge to do things in a very smart way" (SM7).

"I think the only thing that I observed also is that information is more with the elderly. They are the ones who stay and tell us about all these trees and their usage…. I think I also noticed this year that the older generation have this understanding of the indigenous beliefs, there's some trees growing in the communities where if you go to that tree and make a wish of some kind, that wish should come true. These are some things we needed to do and that we should count [as knowledge]. So, they had this type of knowledge, indigenous knowledge. So, for me, I look at them as the experts of the community. And they understand the natural resources more than I can ever do…" (SM3).

However, while ZGF staff and many in the community recognise and value this knowledge, and members of both groups expressed concern regarding the loss of such valuable knowledge, the community members themselves did not voice any ideas or plans for how they might preserve and protect their indigenous knowledge.

External recognition as knowers

Many groups talked about value and recognition of their knowledge by others, and here there were differences in responses. Some said that

external actors, and particularly NGOs, value the knowledge that exists in the community. But then at the same time, some said that external actors come to build their knowledge by coming and telling them what to do. Others again said that no-one comes to hear their voice at all, that they are isolated, voiceless. The former two perspectives emerged from multiple groups with some disagreement between and among groups, while the latter was shared by collectives from peripheral isolated villages.

Despite the variations noted above, most feel that their collective knowledge, motivation and achievements are recognised by other NGOs, and that's why they come to work with them. Some specifically spoke about how they believe that ZGF chose to work with them because they had heard of their community-led development achievements, their proven collective motivation, of the knowledge that they hold, and that in recognition of that knowledge, active participation and motivation, they came to partner with them.

"When the NGOs come here, they are able to see that the people of this community want to improve the situation… they see and appreciate our knowledge …. they can see the commitment and participation from the community members. If there was no community participation they wouldn't have been coming here. And also, to add on we are not usually called by people from the NGOs, but we call our own general meeting with our knowledge, and we assign each other on what to do without the NGOs. So, they are able to come in after seeing the efforts that we make on our own" (KM3).

"Those who come appreciate and are happy that people in this community are knowledgeable. The people that come here are happy because the community members are able to ask questions and answer their questions. So, when they hear what the community members say, they know that the community members are knowledgeable…" (KM1).

While all ZGF staff value, recognise, and indeed rely on the knowledge that exists within the community, they draw on a broader knowledge of NGO

work with communities generally, disagreeing with the community perspective that outsiders recognise their knowledge. They all argue that generally external stakeholders make decisions on behalf of communities precisely because they do not value the community knowledge, see the community as lacking and rather see themselves as external experts.

SM4 talks specifically about the community's intellectual assets and says that external stakeholders do not take advantage of intellectual assets when looking at development of communities. They make a point that applies to organisations at all levels, whether third sector or government, they make the decisions and fail to consider local community assets.

SM7 does not think others value their knowledge enough and gives the example of government, saying that it is rare for government to go to see or hear of rural community's initiatives and achievements. They also gave an example of a community being displaced by the Zambia Authority of Wildlife because they had been living in a conservation area, even though they had been there for over 50 years side by side with the wildlife and had the knowledge to protect themselves and the animals in doing so.

Using ZGF as an example, SM2 believes that communities have knowledge but that in the beginning the communities are not so sure if what they know is appreciated and whether that knowledge has been taken on board. Eventually this changes when trust is built up. Often women's knowledge is likely not taken on board as much as they should because of power dynamics in the communities although ZGF try their best to challenge that and to get women on board. Despite their efforts, power relations within the community often dictates whose knowledge is counted in the community. Their approach emphasises the relevance of their knowledge in the asset mapping approach[29].

"I think women's knowledge is probably not taken on board as much as they should, because of the power dynamics in the communities. I think if you're

[29] Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approach

not making a deliberate effort of including women in meetings, then their knowledge would count even less, or would not be infused in those in those meetings, in anything we do. I think we're trying our best with the participatory grant making processes to get women on board. But then again, if there are then also the dynamics amongst themselves… also plays a big part. But I think our approach kind of emphasises the relevance of their knowledge" (SM2).

SM3 suggests that within the development system, the government and other powerful stakeholders see themselves as the experts. They may come into a community and get the views of the community but leave and make the decision themselves, which they describe as an artificial type of participation. They also state that communities often accept this, or expect it, even when they know best, they leave the decision to the external 'expert'.

"[External stakeholders] did not acknowledge the community as experts, but they see themselves as experts, that is why they make the decisions… And of course they are [experts], but at the same, they could get the views of the community into it, but it's that artificial type of participation, they were there, and they said this… but the actual decision… they're sort of not involved. So, there is that element but then it's also the job of the people now actually supporting the community [to ensure the community knowledge is valued]" (SM3).

These complexities also impact on the community's self-recognition as knowers, as presented in the section below.

Self-recognition as knowers

While many community members said that external people value and recognise their knowledge, their description of themselves as learners is quite complex. As previously noted, most community members primarily initially tend to think of knowledge in terms of and as related to formal education and literacy. One group of women discussed learning about saving

and financial management in a savings group but struggled to name this learning as knowledge, naming it a benefit rather than knowledge: *"knowledge or the benefit, we can talk about the benefits…" (KW1).* Initially many in the community, and in particular women, do not recognise their abundant knowledge until it is pointed out to them by others, such as ZGF staff when they conduct asset mapping with the community. Their intellectual assets, which become evident to community groups and ZGF staff in the process of mapping natural resource assets, for example. Their own value and self-recognition as knowers was slow to emerge at the outset but had increased by the end of the discussions. Initially, when community groups denied that they had any knowledge, we did not contradict them. Instead, we asked questions about their traditional medicine, or their farming techniques, and as their abundant knowledge emerged, we playfully acted out shock at the pages of notes on their knowledge I had recorded, despite their claim of no knowledge. In this way, as the group discussion progressed, the group grew in confidence and began to offer knowledge without prompts. The community men were more inclined to recognise and value their own knowledge and its importance for development. Nonetheless, during all group discussions, a pool of knowledge begins to emerge, free-flowing and whether it is from informal, non-formal or formal spaces, it is abundant and usually involves shared knowledge and learning and a focus on observation, discussion and collective learning.

"Here in this community the knowledge that we have mostly is acquired from the obstacles we face in daily lives… Knowledge is obtained by seeing what others are doing, then you imitate. Most of the knowledge that I have I did not obtain it from school. I learnt by observation, and trying what other people do… Like my colleague said, we learn from one another, but when you learn something, it's good that you practice. If you do not practice, it is difficult to learn" (NM5).

"I think it is important to share the knowledge we have with one another in the community. This can help to bring development to our community. We

should not keep the knowledge to oneself. If I am good at doing something, let it be known to the community so that others may also benefit…" (NM4).

Most ZGF staff members agree that many community members often struggle to name their own knowledge. SM5 voiced that the knowledge in the community is valued but it needs to be drawn out or made visible, often through processes like asset mapping which ZGF facilitated with them. They describe how the community need reminders that they have assets in the community to draw from rather than looking externally. When they use the assets that they have, they appreciate it more. They give an example of a community project and the tendency to look externally for labour and materials rather from their own resources, which infers an assumption that external is better.

"So, they do value it once it is brought out, in some communities you will find that they do utilise some of the assets that they have within the community… So, in Kaminembe for example, the first project that they chose to embark on is that of building a clinic… The one who did the design of the clinic is actually a member of the community, the one who actually did the construction itself, is a member of the community as well. … So, you find they're able to utilise the assets that they have. Some, yes need constant reminders to say, no, but this, you already have this in the community. Because let's say for example, the materials for making blocks, those materials are readily available within the communities. So as communities, there is no need for them to come to Lusaka or to go and buy blocks or bricks, they have the know-how of making the blocks, they have the sand, they have the stones, they're able to mould them, burn them. Then from what I understand those blocks are even much better than the blocks that we use here in Lusaka, they are much stronger and more durable…" (SM5).

SM3 also agrees that the community members tend to see external people and processes as better, more knowledgeable, as the 'experts', especially those who are formally educated.

"If I come as an outsider, in this case, even ZGF is an outsider, or even an outsider from outside the country comes and then promotes a particular system, which is the best in their country, in their context. And because there is... I can't think of a better term, a sort of inferiority complex because an outsider is better, that you understand [things better]. They don't see themselves as equal to other people, other people are more informed, the town people are more informed, they went to school, you went to school" (SM3).

ZGF staff give voice to the complexities of these power relationships, with empowerment and disempowerment being closely related in a complex and often contradictory dynamic. They continue that as a result, the community often says, 'just tell us how you want us to do it', so they hand you the power. They say it is a two-way thing, just as much as the system takes advantage, the communities tend to give power to the system.

"The communities also have a tendency of moving power, so of accepting or seeing themselves as not having that power to make a [decision], knowing best but they put it on you. You ask them a question and they just giving it as no answer and then they will they put it like, no just tell us, how you want us to do it or what you want to do and then we'll do it. You know what you want to do in your project… So, they sometimes have a tendency [to dismiss their knowledge and agency] ... so it's a two-way thing, just as much as the system takes advantage, the communities tend to give power to the system" (SM3).

Learning as lifelong and collective

The concept of learning as lifelong was raised over and again by many groups, accompanied by descriptions of knowledge as being unlimited, collective, endless, essential and continuously shared through stories and interactions. This is an expansive notion of learning happening in all spaces - formal, non-formal and informal. One group of women agreed that learning happens in everyday interactions,

"*the way we are sitting like this; we call each other as women and form clubs and in those clubs, we learn a lot of things. Even the way you have come to talk to us we will also learn a lot of things"* (NW7).

"It is unlimited, it's an ongoing thing whereby, if one has knowledge, he can even impart it to another person and that knowledge again will move from that person to another person. It is something which is endless. At the end of the day, knowledge can bring development" (KM2).

"So, learning does not cease and we will not stop learning, right, because in whatever we do, there is something that we can use to succeed. We learn every day in one way or the other. So, in whatever we do, be it farming, there is also room for improvement. That is why learning does not end. And we shall keep on learning. Learning is good because it moves us a step further from where we are. Learning is for the whole lifetime…" (NM2).

Knowledge and Learning in Development Practice

ZGF aim to strengthen local civil society by providing resources, partnerships, and capacity-building support to drive positive change. They support Zambian communities to lead their own development and promote local leadership and citizen participation in a community philanthropy approach. This approach values community assets, including community knowledge and capacity, and trusted relations as central. They see local knowledge, skills, networks, leadership and decision making as central to social change and development and so nurture, develop and strengthen these assets through their work with communities. They adopt a Freirean approach to community education and employ the Training for Transformation (TfT) model (Hope and Timmel, 2003) with community groups. They regard the communities as experts in their own contextual experience and challenges and value experiential and process learning in community development contexts.

While all staff respondents were positive and encouraging about the ZGF approach, for some this was their first experience of such a grounded

approach, having worked in organisations with more traditional development approaches in the past. These past and present experiences are shared in this section.

Staff members shared their experience and perspectives on learning from development processes and projects. All agreed that quite often in traditional development approaches which are focused on achieving and measuring fixed results, programme staff and evaluators are so focused on gathering evidence of results for donors that they miss out on valuable learning from process and the social impact. Evaluations are seen as very much external, taking place from the outside, looking in, and ticking boxes to please donors rather than a genuine interest in learning from individual or collective community knowledge.

"People would really learn from looking at the issues of impact, the social impact, people really know what change has taken place in their lives, but most of the evaluations have been an external consultant is contracted, is basically evaluating whether the money that was given has achieved each of its objectives… Mostly there is the outputs, the outcomes… this issue of being so quantitative, you know, can we solve the qualitative aspects about life, because life is really not only about quantity, it's about numbers but also softer issues that we should look at... What do people think? How do people make their decisions… who owns the power, who has got the power in this area…" (SM4).

Another staff member (SM1) highlighted the ZGF approach to learning from community led development, where change is measured through outcome harvesting, working backwards in conversation with the community to explore the change that has happened: when it happened, how it happened, who benefitted and what they learned and observed in the process. They do establish a baseline but do not set rigid results indicators and targets. It is a different approach than in traditional development practice. There is a lot more flexibility in its structure, the majority of information collected is qualitative, they seek out stories of both success and failure to learn from

both, it explores feelings and perceptions, how the community dealt with challenges, recommendations moving forward, and how they can replicate this in other communities.

"Yes, a lot more flexibility and most of and most of the information collected there is more qualitative as compared to quantitative. So, there are more stories, there's more success stories or I don't know how you call not success stories! So, all the lessons are drawn from there. So, it has got very little to do with numbers. It's how people feel about the intervention, it's how they deal with what's there, how they're recommending it can work forward, how they can replicate it to a nearby community" (SM1).

Knowledge as power

This section explores perspectives on power in relation to knowledge and learning. It has two main themes, collective knowledge, and knowledge denied, which explore perspectives on access to and mobilisation of collective power. The denial of access to processes and sites of learning, and to related information and knowledge, denies access to this source of power. The value and recognition that the communities place on knowledge is evident in how they see the connection between knowledge and power, and how they view knowledge as an asset for empowerment. Most groups talk about knowledge as a driver of and key to development, as both essential for survival and for enhancing life. They talk about the power of knowledge to drive and build communities.

"I believe knowledge is key to bring about community development, so is being creative, sharing ideas and working as a community. Then you may choose to walk in the same path with everyone... No one should degrade themselves because they feel disadvantaged financially, no one is poor. God did not create anyone poor. Knowledge is what needs to be applied…" (KM1).

Collective knowledge

A constant awareness of the centrality of the communal and collective 'we' in the research context is pivotal. This collective 'we', connected to context and place, is a vital aspect that shapes understanding and learning, and the collective knowledge held in these communities.

Over and again, almost all groups talked about knowledge as power. They all talked about shared knowledge, collective knowledge, as power and strength which provides the agency and capacity to act. Most contest that all knowledge is equal and gives power and strength, whether gained through formal education, everyday informal learning or otherwise. They talk about knowledge as empowering, regardless of the source, and that it leads to a sense of confidence and of empowerment within through power with others. Their collective knowledge seeds individual feelings of independent power, collective power, and the choice, agency and confidence to act.

"We learn together [in the clubs]. We learn how to rear and manage chickens and also how to manage the money which we received. When applying for the grant we wrote in the proposal what business we intended to do as a group… We looked at our community and decided that the best business we could do here was to rear chickens. We share what we know [for example] we sit down as a group and discuss how we are going to raise our children and we come up with decisions that will help our families" (NW5).

All see knowledge as an asset that should be shared, a communal asset, not individual, and harnessed as a resource for action, success and development. Many voiced it as an expansive resource that supports critical reflection, decision making and action based on knowledge and experience.

"Everyone should use their knowledge and should be able to come up with ideas. That is how we can bring about development. That is the knowledge about development I acquired, sharing ideas, creating action plans, learning together…" (KM1).

"So, if we are selfish with our knowledge, then it won't expand because we say knowledge is power, in order to achieve that power, it means we have to share the knowledge. Say if there are two people, if there is something that one of them knows, the other one will start learning what the friend knows, one day, you will not learn from the senior but from the one that was taught, then it goes on, it's a chain. The way a chain is made, it has hooks, the longer the chain, those hooks, that's the example that I can give about knowledge, it should always be linked, if we cut off one hook, it means one link is out, which means we are no longer together as a chain, that's what I can say" (KM2).

Understanding the critical link between knowledge and power as a collective force at the heart of the approach adopted by ZGF and is rooted in their values. They apply a co-creative approach in their work, integrating critical education and participatory approaches. Their communication style is open within the sector and with communities and they actively talk about decolonising aid, power imbalances, moving away from dependence on external support and making use of their own strengths (assets, capacity and capabilities). They strongly believe in the power of community education for transformation.

SM6 sees the link between knowledge and power as constant and important but emphasises that it is context specific, in this case, the different aspects of a rural, traditional cultural context, explaining,

"it's really about which type of power and which type of knowledge, for instance, the indigenous knowledge, a lot of that you see with maybe the head persons, or those in the older group. So, if you had that you have an older person, if you're talking about anything that has to do with the history of that area, and things like that, they will be the ones who are coming out more. Then when you're talking things about education and things like that, then now maybe the younger ones, and now, if you have teachers within that space, you see that they start coming out more, when you're talking food and things like that, then now you see the women, so it really just depends

on what you're talking about, then you get to see which group is coming out a little bit more than the others" (SM6).

SM3 suggests that power gained from knowledge can be mis-used or can bestow people with power and respect that is unearned and used to marginalise others. Some people thrive on the status of being called the experts, they do not always want other people to learn and grow or to be in a position to act for themselves.

"That's why it's easy to be the most respected in the community if you have education [formal, or knowledge from being exposed to urban or Western ways]. So, you see, people start feeding around that because that's how they go in the community. And then I'm the one they come to with the problems [the person with the education] ... And that's how people are able to say, 'that's going to be okay with him leading the show', because they have satisfaction and there are other experts who also thrive in being called experts" (SM3).

The critical relationship between knowledge and power is a central element of the findings presented throughout this chapter and a key to personal and collective social change. The community members are aware of this critical link and the impact of being denied knowledge, a source of power and strength. This includes access to knowledge and information through formal, non-formal and informal means, as elaborated in the following section and further explored in the discussion chapter.

Knowledge denied

Overwhelmingly, all community members voiced their exclusion from knowledge and information. They all recognise knowledge and information as important, and that they are very behind in that regard for several reasons, linked to their isolation and exclusion, their experience of inequality, their lack of access to services, their lack of access to mobile network and the means of communication with the world outside of their

remote communities. They are completely isolated and most see themselves as denied knowledge.

"Information is very important; we are very behind in that regard. Our phones are only being used for playing music, we cannot use them the way our friends in town use them. Those are the challenges that we face in community development" (KM2).

Literacy is highly valued, and one community group lamented the fact that, *"funding for adult education classes ceased" (KW2)* so they no longer have the opportunity to access literacy skills.

Many highlight the lack of roads, transport and distance to school as a challenge, which makes it difficult for children to access education, especially in rainy season when many rivers become impassable preventing children from reaching the school safely (NM5).

"Another challenge that we have is the school, it's very far for small children in early education especially those starting grade 1." (NW5).

Knowledge denied was highlighted repeatedly across groups in both communities.

The denial of knowledge was also discussed in relation to the required eligibility criteria for political representatives to have formal education. While within most groups, and especially the men's groups, some people had literacy skills and some level of formal education. However, when taken as an entire collective, many community members have limited or no formal education. Many voiced that there have been strong community leaders that would make a fantastic political representative, someone that shows strong leadership, who mobilises communities, who gets things done, but who does not meet the formal education eligibility criteria, so they do not qualify to stand as a representative. As a result, often you may have somebody who meets the minimum formal education criteria, but who is not motivated, lacks strong leadership skills, fails to mobilise people, and lacks the will to be a representative, but is pushed forward because they

have the necessary formal knowledge. Frustratingly, the lack of formal education and knowledge can block the path to politics for a potential community champion. They find themselves excluded from participation and further access to knowledge within the political sphere. Accordingly, this denies the community strong political representation and leadership, and reliable access to knowledge and information in the political sphere.

"There are people who are just born leaders and are very knowledgeable, even though they didn't go to school they can be chosen… and they use their knowledge to guide their friends on how to progress… Some people are just born intelligent and when you select them as leaders, they bring better development than someone that went to school but is a bad leader" (KW3).

A ZGF staff member offered another interesting perspective on knowledge denied arguing that local practices and ways of being were labelled as primitive and less than, and western ways, foods, practices and beliefs were promoted as more advanced, better. They grounded their point using the example of the community philanthropy approach, which is now being embraced and promoted by a small number of western donors. They stress that for them this is not a new concept, it has always been their way of life, local giving is part of the African philosophy of Ubuntu, yet it is promoted as if it is a western concept from a western expert.

"So, they also have these types of influence and they're all basically trying to say that… we told you to change your way of life, now you should go to the local giving, the philosophy of Ubuntu, we are surprised the West has heard of Ubuntu. This is African and now we are seeing some of these coming from Europe, some of them who know about Ubuntu, they might do the research and when you explain the philosophy of Ubuntu, they say oh yes, that's what we do. That is our African way of life, yes" (SM3).

Exclusion from knowledge

All groups talked about the different ways that they feel excluded from knowledge, information and communication. The most common challenging

factor voiced is the fact that they have no consistent mobile network. Most community members have mobile phones, but you must climb a tree or walk far to find a rare spot where there is network coverage because there is no mobile mast. As a result, it is difficult to send or receive text messages or voice calls. It makes organising extremely difficult, for example, posing difficulty contacting each other to organise community initiatives, contacting markets, suppliers, health services, or accessing mobile money.

The lack of mobile network means that they have limited means of communication, whether that be with emergency services, with each other for organising community meetings, notifying people of savings groups or the planned arrival of supports or services such as health or agriculture. It makes life difficult and to remain included and informed, they all rely heavily on word of mouth. This regularly means that some groups are excluded from information, especially those in peripheral villages, so they cannot easily access information about opportunities such as savings clubs, the constituency development fund, livelihoods supports or health information. They are all unable to access the internet, so there is a world of information out there that they cannot consume. They all face challenges in access to mobile money, a real disadvantage given the growing reliance on digital financial payments.

"The biggest challenge that we have is network, everything today is online so how can we be online when we have no network. We are in the forest; we feel isolated from the rest of the Zambian people because we have no network…" (KM3).

"I had joined [a livelihoods] club but I was always left out of most of the activities because here we have no network so when they call for a meeting, I wouldn't even know about it" (NW7).

"Roads are a challenge and poor mobile network. We lack telecommunication. We fail to talk to our relatives that are far. You need to move about a kilometre from home to be able to make a phone call. The

phones that we have we rarely use them for calls. Mostly we use them to play music. It is difficult for our children to access online education. There is no internet. These are the serious challenges we have here… Once we have mobile network and good roads, we shall have a good place like other places that we admire in Zambia…" (KM1).

"Another challenge is lack of knowledge because we don't even know how the CDF for this location has been utilised. Whether that money is still there or not we don't know. We are just moving like blind people" (NW2).

"When you get to the check point on your way to Chongwe that's when you switch on your phone. This problem is now a big problem. Even if war broke out in the city, we wouldn't know anything because we have no communication" (KM3).

The lack of a network excludes them from all this knowledge, which also excludes them from opportunities to participate in community development and society more broadly. Their limited access to schools and services excludes them from knowledge production, consumption and dissemination. While there is a primary school in each of these communities because of community led development, they are not well resourced. A stark example emerged in Kaminembe Primary School, where the government had provided equipment to facilitate the teaching of computer studies on the curriculum from grades 8 to 12. These desktop computers have been sitting in boxes in the headmaster's office for several years, unused, as there is no electricity in the school. While the government ministry may have fulfilled their mandate to provide the resource, the school does not have the means to use them. However, there is a solar panel that powers the borehole right next to the school. They could run a connection from the solar panel to bring power into the school so they can connect the computers, deliver the curriculum, and provide pupils with computer literacy skills and knowledge. Unfortunately, despite their requests to the Ministry of Education, that has not been done.

There are no secondary schools in these communities and no roads or transport available to take pupils to the nearest secondary school. In fact, the lack of roads infrastructure and transport makes it difficult for many in the communities to reach the available primary schools. This is particularly the case for the villages that are a distance away at the community's edge. It is important to bear in mind that a 'distance away' could be several hours walk along bush roads or tracks, where there are often wild animals or where the rivers flood in rainy season. It is an exhausting and often dangerous trek without roads or bridges.

Without access to schools, many pupils are excluded from education. There is no early childhood education, which provides a foundation for children's education, but also provides early childhood care so that parents can earn money to further support the family and finance children's education in later years. When discussing their access to education, groups related education with development. All groups said that they just want development, but they are excluded, especially those in peripheral villages.

"Children just sit around without education in this village, without going to school and they may end up doing wrong things because a community that is developed is one where children are educated" (NM5).

It is isolating and disempowering here and on a broader level. Moving beyond the tangible and practical to the political, knowledge exclusion impacts on their participation and contribution to local relevant political policy and strategy.

As mentioned earlier, it was highlighted that many are also excluded from leadership in the political sphere due to illiteracy and lack of formal education. While not explicitly stated in guidelines (LGAZ, 2023), nomination forms for WDC representatives request a declaration of literacy as a criterion for nomination. In addition, formal education certified at grade twelve is a requirement for the role of councillor[30]. Given the low literacy rates and

[30] A Councillor includes: • A person who represents his or her electorate in the ward, • A Mayor or Council Chairperson elected directly • A Chief in the district (LGAZ, 2016:27).

limited access to formal education among these communities, they are disadvantaged in political representation as they have a limited pool of qualifying candidates to draw from.

"Here in the village, you find that we have the same leaders because the others didn't go to school and they can't read and write" (KW3).

As mentioned above, some groups in the communities felt very strongly that there are people within their communities who are natural leaders, who have demonstrated strong leadership, motivation, wisdom and knowledge from their life experience, from non-formal and informal education, but who are excluded due to the literacy or formal education criteria. They argued that these people could be fantastic political representatives, but they are denied the opportunity and instead the community rely on representatives who meet the criteria but many of whom lack the motivation and leadership skills and who fail to represent the communities as they deserve.

"In places like this, it's a challenge to find a suitable person, so they just choose anyhow just to fill that position. So sometimes it can be difficult because you can have someone that is active, but you find that the person that is active doesn't qualify" (KW2).

One group offered a suggestion to improve communications, transparency and accountability, through collective participation on a support committee for example, demonstrating the willingness and motivation to be proactive in addressing this aspect of exclusion.

"Maybe just on that point, the councillor also needs a committee that needs to be pushing him to follow-up on these issues and when he makes those follow-ups, he should inform the committee who will in turn tell the whole community about what was discussed in those meeting. Now when he goes alone, we don't even know what he discusses when he goes there, he can even come and say we discussed this and that when he is not even participating there so it's very difficult to tell" (KW2).

As noted through this section, the critical relationship between knowledge and power is a key to personal and collective social change. Being denied knowledge excludes in a myriad of ways, including the ability to claim power, actively participate, exert influence, exercise agency and be included in all aspects of life. A deeper analysis of this critical relationship, the operation of power and exclusion and the implications for the communities are explored in the discussion chapter.

Conclusion

This first of the findings chapters has explored the collective knowledge and perspectives on learning and knowledge of the community through a presentation of their views and responses in community discussion groups. The depth and breadth of knowledge in the community is evident and their collective and interdependent ways of knowing, learning and being are clear to see. However, equally evident is the complexity of their relationship with knowledge or more specifically, views on what constitutes knowledge are very much influenced by formal Western education and knowledge. While their collective indigenous, traditional, environmental knowledge is generated and shared within the community, the opportunities to share their knowledge externally or to access external knowledge is limited by their isolation and exclusion.

Collective knowledge, experience and understandings of the concept of participation in development practice and in relation to the Ward Development Committee (WDC) are presented in the following chapter 6 where it becomes evident that knowledge exclusion in all its forms limits participation in development and political processes and structures.

Chapter Six: Participation

"Participation involves political struggle whereby the powerful fight to retain their privileges. Even many supposedly pro-participation Development Agencies are incredibly powerful and show a marked reluctance to release control. Participation is a… process whereby the less powerful must struggle for increased control over their lives" (Mohan, 2001:4).

Participation in community development

This second chapter in the presentation of findings explores participation in community development and is presented in two strands, the first focuses on participation in community development in partnership with third sector organisations, mainly ZGF, and alone in a community led and community philanthropy approach, which I refer to here as 'development practice'. The second tends to the participation in community development with the Ward Development Committee (WDC). Initially, I had not anticipated that the WDC would feature so prominently but as "the sub district structures which serve as legal platforms for people's participation in local development at ward level" (LGAZ, 2023:4) and an integral element of participation in community development in this context, it is pertinent. Besides which, the sheer will of the communities to voice their despair of the system and structure, and their pleas that I amplify this despair insists that it features. The desire to include participation in relation to the WDC emerges as a decision made by the community and duly implemented in the writing of this chapter in recognition and respect of the community as co-creators and decision makers in this research project. This acknowledgement of the community as stakeholders and active participants with decision making power is particularly important given the emerging findings in the following sections. This final section of this chapter accentuates and summarises the experience of isolation and exclusion felt by these rural communities. Findings tell the story of two communities marginalised through isolation and exclusion from information and knowledge, weak political representation, poor

infrastructure including roads, transport and communications, and limited access to education, healthcare, and markets.

Many feel alienated from the rest of Zambia, hidden in the bush, unable to benefit from government initiatives, digital media, or economic opportunities, with isolation and inequality affecting groups across both communities, but with collectives of women, youth, and peripheral villages most affected. Participation in community philanthropy initiatives is often more challenging for those with limited financial assets in a context where social hierarchies tied to wealth and status persist.

Chapter 6: Participation	
Participation in community development Participation in development practice · Motivations for participation · Participation Defined · True Participation · Supporting factors for community development · Leadership · Resources for development · Love · An Enabling Environment · Participation as process · Participation Outputs · Collective Learning · Unity · Partnership · Progress · Ownership · Determination · Equality and Fairness · Power	Participatory approaches · Traditional and Results Based Approaches · Top-down processes and Dependency · Rigid and inflexible · Agenda setting and decision making · Partnership and Relationship · Community led development · The community philanthropy approach · Community Foundations · Relationships and trust Participation through the WDC · "Let me remove what is choking my throat" · Power and Representation in the WDC · Dignity and Recognition · Relationships and Trust · Empty Participation Isolation and Exclusion – Not part of this Nation · Identity and belonging · Isolation · Inequality · Representation

Table 6.0: Findings Chapter 6

Participation in development practice

The collective nature of community development is clear in the findings presented, a contrast to the individual focus in traditional development practice as discussed in chapter two. In discussing participation in development practice, it was important to explore motivations for and understandings of 'participation' among the community and staff. These understandings are presented in the sections which follow, however, first I share a frustrated staff member's view on the disingenuous use of the term participation in traditional practice in order to provide a sense of the divergence that exists in relation to the concept.

SM2 argues that you complete a box about project participation in a proposal form. As long as the project is delivered, and the report is in, participation is good to have on paper regardless of the level of participation, donors never check. They further argue that it is unfair to expect communities to participate in a 'fictional' funding proposal.

"The likelihood of getting funding for a proposal unless there is a warm relationship, a trusting relationship with a progressive funder is 5%, globally, of winning a call for proposal. Why would I bother communities to discuss a fictional project that might never happen, I'm just wasting their time. I mean, even those demands are too big, to be honest, they're outrageous" (SM2).

This perspective was echoed by another staff member (SM6) who made a similar comment saying that often organisations engaged with communities, drafted proposals based on their participation, received funding but did not return to use the money in the community who participated. Their view is that funding organisations should be willing to support communities to set their own agenda, define their own needs and plan projects with an existing pledge of support in a trusted partnership.

In contrast, the development practice that I learned of in these communities is community led, participatory and sometimes (but not always) in partnership with or supported by an external actor. As elaborated in

previous chapters, in the focus of this research, the community's collaboration with ZGF follows a community philanthropy model (see for example Pond and Hodgson, 2018; Keidan, 2016) which embraces, and indeed insists upon, local participation and ownership (as discussed in chapter two). In these communities, the community members are the lead actors. Development is led by communities; decision making and agenda setting is the responsibility of the community, ZGF plays a supporting role, important but in the wings. While the communities shared positive experiences and practices throughout this research, the data also exposed some flaws, revealing instances and experiences of division, inequality, and exclusion within communities.

Motivations for participation

The communities expressed their various motivations for participation in community development. Primarily they are all motivated by progress and development. They all seek a better future, social justice and equality, dignity and recognition, and access to services and supports through the development process. Most are also seeking independence and empowerment through community education strands offered in development initiatives such as livelihoods projects, savings groups or clubs.

"When I hear matters to do with community development, people develop that inner drive of wanting to be involved. This is because of the challenges we face as a community…." (NM2).

"The beauty is that, even though some people do not cooperate the majority of people in the communities are really committed to working together in terms of donations to ensure that there is money to complete the school project. If it were not for that commitment, we would not have managed to complete the building of the school and the houses for the teachers. So, there is commitment. When they ask for donations, people that have do contribute…" (NM4).

Many are also motivated by pride and fulfilment, especially voiced by the women in the community. They enjoy participating in community development, they like working together as a collective in their community. It gives them a sense of pride, and it makes them happy.

"It makes us happy because we are coming together to develop our area" (NW4).

"When we agree to work on something, we choose the day. People come in numbers. So, we divide each other in groups [and] work without supervision… If they want to, on the day of work, they provide lunch for the entire group. So, when it comes to participation in development projects, we are doing a good job…" (KM1).

Generally, this motivation is also connected to their sense of identity and belonging, many expressed a sense of belonging in their community when they participate.

"I think for me, it's being part of the community, the first thing that comes in my mind is, ok in my case, I am quite old. So, when we meet with colleagues to work, that which I am doing, I do it for the younger generation. When they grow, they will learn and follow in our footsteps…." (NM1).

However, the discussion of motivation also revealed a contradiction - some groups confirmed that while they do participate in community development initiatives, they do not identify as part of that particular community. These groups shared that they do not feel recognised, valued, or equal in that community, they do not feel they belong, yet they participate as a collective regardless, reflecting the collective 'we' emphasised through Ubuntu. This contradiction will be examined further in the section on identity and belonging.

Overall, ZGF staff spoke very positively about community participation, and their shared opinion that the people participate because they want development, they want improved livelihoods and better opportunities for themselves and their children. One staff member offered a lengthy but

insightful gendered perspective on motivations for men and women in general in community development based on their experience (not only specific to these particular communities);

"Really participation at the end of the day is from deep down in one's heart to see the responsibility, to feel obliged to do something about the situation, to me that is the core of participation. We find if a programme is well planned together with the community, identified with the community, you find mostly we have the female participants, people acknowledge that in developmental programmes, women participate more than the men. Why? It's because the man wants immediate rewards, whereas the woman may not really look at the immediate, where they have more care, it's beyond the individual instinct, you know, so we find women having a bigger participation, wherever you see men participate, just know that most of them it's because they have seen there's money coming their way… and so, initially, you have seen times where the programme would come in the community or project. This the patriarchy you know, the patriarchal kind of society, where men be in the forefront, the women are in back. But when men come to realise, oh, so there is no immediate gain. That's when attendance, you know, the absenteeism would be noticed. So, you see a trend whereby now the women will take over, you know, things really happen, you know, because the women are in charge, you know, so the men now take the backseat... but men would love to be in the position. But you know, the challenge is, you find men rushing for leadership positions and they want women to do the donkey work. But after some time, when the men come to realise, okay, this position does not bring me any gain, then they will be absent. So, we see the women are taking over, and the women are taking over the leadership" (SM4).

Participation Defined

Participation was defined by most groups as having a voice, being part of discussions, dialogue and decision making by consensus, setting their own agenda in a fair process where they can all contribute.

"It is doing something, contributing so that you can feel that you also helped… We discuss so that all our views can be unified as one so that we can achieve one goal. So, people give opinions, how about if we do it like this or like that, they put all the ideas together and come up with one voice… We speak for ourselves…" (NW2).

One group (NM5) offer an encompassing definition of collective participation as: engaging through knowledge sharing and decision making, deciding on the contributions that they would make, financial and otherwise, and then working together to bring a project to completion, engaged in all stages of the process and having ownership of all stages of the process. This definition represents a higher level of participation on Pretty's (1995) ladder, discussed in chapter three, than is the norm in development practice, perhaps a reflection of their limited prior engagement with external actors in community development.

True Participation

All ZGF staff made a distinction between what they generally described as 'true participation' and performative participation. One staff member (SM4) offered a description of true participation which sums up the perspectives of all staff members:

"The question is who sets the agenda? To me, participation is where the agenda is set by the citizen themselves. As long as there's a term of a beneficiary, then they're not participating, they're just taking part... you're just involving them, they shouldn't look at themselves as beneficiaries, they should look at themselves as actors. The beneficiary would entail there's a benefactor, somebody who's helping them and they are at the receiving end. But if we can call them the stakeholders in this thing, they're holding the stake also, the equal participants in the process, then they shouldn't look at themselves as beneficiaries… They should be seen to be the ones that are… just harvesting what they sowed" (SM4).

Only when people are active actors and see themselves as such, setting the agenda and making decisions, did they describe it as true participation which reflects true local ownership.

Another staff member agreed and was wary of the community saying that they participated in the decision of an NGO in relation to a particular project in their community. They felt that just because community members attended a meeting with the NGO does not mean that they had any input into the type of project that was going to go ahead. They argue that; *"just because you took part in the meeting does not exactly mean you participated in something" (SM6).* They insisted that active decision making, and agenda setting is a necessary element of true participation.

Another highlighted the importance of context specific participation, inclusion and power dynamics as vital considerations in support of true participation.

"It's inclusive, everyone's voice and idea are being heard, making a check to get hold of the dominant authorities and getting to know the dynamics and say, who is who, how can everyone participate? What is the context and how even in a patrimonial culture [to include the women] without offending the cultural system, cause you just can't go in and ignore the culture, everyone would be ballistic so it's easy for some communities because women are just coming, talking, men are understanding... but in others… [it's more difficult]" (SM7).

While the community and staff offered very similar definitions of participation, most in the community did not say that their experiences always met this definition, particularly in relation to participation in community development through the WDC as noted at the introduction to this section. Performative participation and power relations will be elaborated throughout the findings and debated in the discussion chapter.

Supporting factors for community development

Some groups highlighted specific factors which support their participation in community development and the process itself. These include leadership, resources and love.

Leadership

Leadership was highlighted by some as an essential support, driver, and resource, at village and community level. Some groups spoke about the need for strong leadership, somebody who mobilises the community, who is enthusiastic and persistent in encouraging the community to come together to work on community issues. In describing the characteristics of a good leader, some community members shared that they need to be open, supportive and encouraging, positive, someone who is available, who advocates for and upholds accountability, who is transparent and willing to be held accountable themselves. Someone who, *"understands the problems and challenges of his people and seeks to find a solution for the problem" (KW2).*

"They are good leaders because they don't relent or get discouraged when it comes to motivating the community, even when they see that the community is moving backwards, they try to pull us back up to try and work together. And they don't get annoyed; they are always pleading with us to come and work and forge ahead…" (KW1).

Similar views on leadership also apply in relation to ZGF. So, while their work is community led, and leadership comes from within the community and villages, most look to ZGF for leadership and support, and respect them as actors with positions of power and leadership. Most look to ZGF for mobilisation, encouragement and direction, despite the fact that ZGF expects the communities to take the lead.

The importance of trusting, respectful solidarity relations emerge throughout the findings and is further elaborated in a later dedicated section.

Resources for development

Many groups also described participation as a resource for community development. Many described the nature of their collective participation as contributing something to the development process, their participation as a resource - their time, labour, ideas, knowledge, and their voice. This is understood both as participation and as the resources needed to support participation.

"Bit by bit we started to develop until we reached where we are today. We have a lot of knowledge about development… because had it not been so we could not have managed to live here…" (KM2).

"People give good response when called for community work. When it's time to work, they come in good numbers. Because one thumb cannot squeeze lice. When you work as a team, the task becomes easy, and the people of Kaminembe embrace that…" (KM1).

Many staff agreed with the understanding of community members, with the nature of people's participation in terms of time being highlighted as significant. In contrast to the notion of passive beneficiaries (Kimambo and Shallwani, 2025), the community invests their time, and their time is money because they are farmers. This investment builds ownership. One staff member speaks about community members organising their time to be able to participate, demonstrating their willingness to invest their resources for development;

"People came and worked… most of the people that we work with are farmers, so time for them is money, something that I've always appreciated, they will say, no we are harvesting, but then, we will harvest tomorrow… it shows their willingness…" (SM7).

Most staff members express community assets as resources for development reflecting their ABCD[31] approach to community development. One staff member (SM4) speaks of people being alienated from their own

[31] Asset Based Community Development

problems. They say that recognising their assets makes a huge difference in how they view the problem and their agency in the situation. Rather than seeing themselves as vulnerable, they can see options, choice and agency. They describe categories of assets as social, moral, intellectual, reputational and financial assets. SM4 highlights that in these communities, people may not have a lot of money, but they do have social networks, moral assets that make them stand out, good reputations that can attract people, and intellectual assets abound, although often in the wider development sector; *"there's little acknowledgement of those assets" (SM4).* As noted in chapter two, traditional development approaches tend to view marginalised communities as deficient (Ziai, 2016) whereas community and staff responses dispute this view.

Love 

Something that arose in some of the discussions as being important for participation in community development is love. One group explained that ZGF emphasised love for each other, for them as a collective, as a key to community development. In the same vein, many spoke of related values of solidarity, care, collaboration, togetherness and unity as being important. Their sense of identity as a collective, collaborative, unified community arose repeatedly. Their united community was highlighted in all the groups but the concept of love as being important to participation and community development, as being a resource for participation, came from some men's groups where it was named specifically as love. They shared that ZGF staff emphasised their existing collective way of being and their existing worldview, if one person develops, they should all develop – and invited them to consider this as love for the collective. This solidarity and the explicit naming of love for the community is something that surprised me, a refreshing perspective.

"Development, to start with, we look at it within the community where we are, and your neighbours, the people you live with... As neighbours, we ought to love one another first if we are to bring development to the community.

This is coupled by sharing ideas. If there is good understanding, your neighbour will support your idea if it's a good idea. Love is an important factor to community development. If people do not like you in the community, regardless of how wise you are they will not get anything from you. If you are not united, even if the government donated some resources to the community, you may not manage to put it to good use…" (KM1).

However, some women's groups also emphasised similar sentiments, stating that women are more caring and empathetic than men in their approach. These women talked about the community social fund which can be accessed if somebody is sick or needs support with a wedding or funeral, or another urgent issue which needs financial support. The women placed great value and emphasis on the social fund, understandable given that the burden of responsibility falls to women in the caring and community roles.

"We encourage each other and support each other. When we work and make a profit, we share the little profit so that each member can benefit and help their families" (KW3).

"We also have a social fund that we contribute as members of the community and when one of us is very sick, that is the money which is utilised to take that person to the hospital when they are critically ill…" (NW1).

The spirit of Ubuntu and values of mutuality, interdependence and solidarity are very much evident in these responses.

An Enabling Environment

Many ZGF staff members spoke about the colonial impact of dependency which was evident in a mind-set of waiting for external help in Zambia rather than be independent and proactive. Some talk about how important an enabling environment is to development work, especially for social and economic development. Some connect this to active citizenship education and the establishment of community foundations. In the process of creating community foundations, they educate the community on the

systems and structures required, and make the connection to government structures, so the community learns about both, naming their world in the process. They talk about the importance of a government supported enabling environment as a community resource, among others;

"So, it's the creation of an enabling environment and we have all these resources within our community, we need to be active citizens, take a lead in the development work that we are doing but it will take a long time" (SM1).

Participation as process

All groups talked about the process of participation in community development and what is important for them in terms of how this happens. Most shared how community members can approach traditional leadership to raise an issue or idea for the community to discuss. If the leadership agree that it is appropriate for discussion, they call a meeting to discuss the issue or idea. Alternatively, they come together to discuss their needs, of which there are many, and they then discuss and agree on their priority needs. They engage in dialogue on the issue or ideas, share their knowledge and experience on the issue, and eventually they reach a decision by consensus. In most groups, they agreed that everyone has a voice, everyone has the opportunity to participate, and that decisions are reached by consensus and agenda setting is a collective process. It was apparent that for many community members, the journey involves critical reflection through dialogue and is as important as the destination.

"When you look at the community at large, you check, what are some of the things that can help us as a community? Such projects [a health facility] we decide as a community to work on them... we sit down as a community, make decisions, and start to mould bricks, and thereafter ask for assistance from NGOs, or the government so that they help us with what is needed to run a health facility…" (NM1).

Some groups noted that this participatory process generates knowledge through the process of dialogue and decision making when they are sharing

knowledge, ideas, and learning from experience. In these groups they described peer, collective and experiential learning, making plans based on analysis and critical reflection, demonstrating the depth of learning that happens in the process of participation in development practice.

Decision making and being part of the decision-making process was highlighted as being important to all groups. Additionally, most talked about them setting the agenda, so that it belongs to them, the ownership lies with them. While the process is typically led by the traditional authority, it is communal and organised.

"They usually call us to come [to a meeting] and sit, the same way we are sitting here then we discuss, [for example] dear friends how are going to finish building that house. Then we will say each household should contribute k100 and we do so, but we make our own bricks, so the things we buy are cement, the iron roofing sheets and the window frames, door frames and the planks... All of us agree… The whole group usually agrees to the decision on the table…" (NW2).

"Each headman has committee members, and the committee sits down and discuss after which they pass through each house to invite us to the meeting at the headman's house to discuss the project. After the discussions we all agree and come together to work on the project" (NW5).

"The ZGF people asked us what we wanted and the challenges that we have in the community. They said you are the ones that know what you want so list them down, so we had a meeting as a community where we listed down what we wanted and the things that we needed help with…" (KW1).

Staff member SM2 encapsulates the community perspective and that of other staff, describing participatory development as a process where people can identify, decide and design their own agendas, alone or in co-creation with others and also have the opportunity to co-invest in their own development. SM6 additionally highlights the knowledge sharing and collective learning as part of process;

"There's a lot of learning, you literally see some… like a light bulb moment, 'Oh, even this, we have to think about it'… So, there's a lot of meaning and with the individuals taking up the tasks, you could see this building of confidence because they're able to lead others… But also I think it helps in community building, because they're bringing all their different knowledge together… I've learned a lot of things, I will become a builder very soon. [Laughs]. Like you are supposed to put there some wire… [for strength]. There's always that knowledge that this person knows a little bit of this, a little bit of that. And they're all bringing it in together".

Collective learning is acknowledged as both part of the process and an output of participation as voiced by the community in the section below.

Participation Outputs

Several issues were highlighted as both process and output, such as collective learning, unity partnership and shared risk. Others were described as resulting from the process and include ownership, progress, determination, and equality and fairness. They are identified here in this way because the community groups and ZGF staff members described them this way, distinguishing between participatory processes and results of those processes. This distinction is also valuable because the focus of most traditional results-based approaches is on the outputs and outcomes and the push from donors is for tangible, measurable results, things that can be measured. The softer and relational outputs are overlooked, and the journey or process is largely disregarded, the learning and relational aspects ignored, not measured, not valued (by donors), as discussed in chapter two (e.g. Norren and Seehawer, 2025). In contrast, all are detailed below.

Collective Learning

Collective learning was highlighted by many groups in relation to the learning that happens in the participatory community led process in the everyday discussions. Some groups commented on the collective learning

that happened in the research process. The latter drew attention to what they had learned from each other through the research discussions, what they had learned from me and vice versa. I reiterated what I had learned from them, and together we agreed that this collective learning happens on a continuous, everyday basis.

"We have also learnt something [at this meeting]; I didn't know the meaning of the three knots tied to a chitenge" (NW4).

"The knowledge that we acquire by doing community work, mostly if you do not attend, you may be left behind. But when you join the community to work, you learn a lot of things, implying that you have more knowledge as you go back home through working with others…
Working together as a community gave us the knowledge on how to perform some skills… [for example] by working together, people learned to mould bricks from those who had the skill…" (NM1).

SM6 acknowledges this collective learning as part of process and communicates their hopes that it will enhance their capacity and agency for future development work;

"We expect at the end of the day, that they should be able to, if another partner goes there, they should be able to have this [learning], they shouldn't stand in this position of vulnerability, but they should be able to say, as a community, we've been able to do this, and this and this, look at this evidence of what we've been able to do. And then they can have such discussions with other people also. But also, it's for them to learn what they can actually do. How far can they stretch themselves as a community? … And it's their development, if they don't do it, who will?" (SM6).

A few staff members point out that every interaction with communities is a learning moment for them too. Another staff member describes the CLD and CPA experience as liberating and conveys their appreciation for the sense of freedom and collective learning through truly participatory process and within a network promoting the community philanthropy approach;

"We have connected to so many international regional players that we have learned so much from and we are part of this community that's so supportive, the shift the power community is so supportive" (SM2).

Collective and continuous learning from participation is not limited to the communities, it happens for ZGF staff involved and has a ripple effect within the organisation and beyond through networks and fora.

Unity

Many groups described the unity that is created through active participation in the process. They see that active participation brings people together and fosters this sense of unity, and that the community is united and strengthened through participation in community development. These groups insist that unity and collaboration is a requirement of community development, you cannot succeed without it, so it is essential to the process and enhanced unity is also a result of the process,

"We discuss so that all our views can be unified as one so that we can achieve one goal. So people give opinions… they put all the ideas together and come up with one voice… I can say that we all have power and when we come together, we choose leaders to direct us so that we can all move together… we are united" (NM2).

"… if you want to develop as a community you need to come together, create ideas, and make decisions… I have learnt that people must always come together to bring about development. It is difficult to bring about development as an individual…" (KM1).

Partnership

Most groups expressed conviction that new external partnerships are formed in recognition of their existing knowledge, motivation and community led development efforts. This was mentioned earlier in the section on knowledge in relation to recognition and value with an example

shared of their belief that NGOs choose to work with them due to their demonstrated knowledge and pro-active efforts.

"We want development… we contribute money when we have, us old women we usually go for piece work and make a little something so that the work continues... we also need help because we are limited with resources, that's why we also want people who are willing to help… it's always better when we start and other people that come just come in to help us complete, we really need help… Yes [we feel proud], it makes us very happy…" (KW3).

"From the things we have done… collaborating with ZGF… on the health facility project starting from the design of the plan, and the materials used. So, we have seen goodness and success in the project of the health facility, and the works are going very well… we are happy and pretty sure that we shall conclude soon… we are confident with ZGF that they will keep on helping us going forward by continued partnership with the community foundation. So, we are sure that some challenges will be a thing of the past because of cooperation…" (KM1).

This perspective on partnership in recognition of their achievements is shared by staff, as articulated as a hope for the community by SM6 in the section above on collective learning.

Progress

The most named benefit of participation is progress and a sense of achievement in their collective effort. All groups talk about it as moving forward, many describe it as 'self-help', as boosting their independence, and overwhelmingly, most feel that community development efforts lead to life enhancing change and opportunity for all.

"Here at Kaminembe, I think 90% of the projects you are seeing is self-help, people work by themselves... The headmen have a very big task. Every day we contribute towards community projects. We got used to that. We do not look up to the government, no. The government just does little, but 90% of the work we do it…" (KM1).

However, as mentioned in other sections, it seems that regardless of the collective effort, not everyone benefits equally from progress achieved, a point elaborated in a summary of exclusion to follow.

Ownership

Another result highlighted by many groups is that participation in community development promotes and fosters ownership. Here they are talking very specifically about partnership approaches such as that they are engaged in with ZGF, the community philanthropy approach. Given that participation and ownership through all stages of the process are central to this approach, many feel the development output belongs to them because they have been involved at all stages and have invested in the initiative, they own what they have created or achieved. The approach supports ownership, and this in turn fosters a sense of responsibility, because it belongs to them, they will take care of it.

An example of this was shared in relation to the water pump at a community borehole. The women had created the finished groundworks around the water pump. One woman talked about seeing some youths behaving irresponsibly around the borehole and causing damage. She was furious and explained that she had broken rocks with her bare hands to create those groundworks and action was taken to remedy the damage.

"In my opinion, when we lay a hand its always better because we are more caring towards the item, for example there is an NGO that came to say that they will put up a borehole for us, and they asked us to crush the stones at the site, and sometimes the hammer used to smash our fingers, so when I see someone misusing the pump it pains me because I remember the pain that I endured when crushing the stones for that pump..." (NW6).

The sense of ownership and responsibility was evident in the pride in their achievements voiced by many groups and ensures sustainability of their achievements and their efforts. This is in stark contrast to the many examples of government-owned hammer mills which lie unused or

vandalised and which the community ignore, instead saying Boma Iyanganepo[32].

"When they [NGOs] make something for us it's usually good standard, but when we actually contribute the standard is better" (KW3).

Most staff members raised the strong link between ownership and sustainability, noting that participatory processes such as the CPA and the establishment of the Community Foundation supports the sustainability dimension of development. The community as a whole is represented in the Community Foundation, they invest financially in the foundation, projects are initiated by them, and so community members can feel ownership of the initiatives from the outset. Similar to the community response above, SM5 grounds this in an example of the difference in community attitudes and care towards their community solar hammer mill and the similar government mills.

"So, a lot of solar hammer mills were placed in a lot of communities. We go there now, most of them are white elephants in the sense that they have been vandalised or damaged. I don't know if there's any that still functions, maybe just one or two… nobody's even doing anything to stop that vandalising. He will sit while they're stealing panels and what not, then they'll just watch them... [They say] for BOMA. It's for the government. But then, with the hammer mill and the solar hub… [initiated by a Community Foundation], one time someone attempted to steal the batteries for the solar hub. They also stole the hair clip from the solar machine… they broke in, stole and disappeared. When the community realised that they've been robbed… They did not let it go. They did not rest until they got to the bottom of it" (SM5).

[32] A Nyanja expression which translates as "let the government deal with it/face it".

Determination

A few groups voiced that the culmination of their participatory community development efforts builds and strengthens their determination. Those that did spoke of the broader community as proactive, persistent, strong and unified, self-reliant, resilient, and solution-focused, and state that all of that supports and builds their determination. It is difficult to disagree with this perspective having witnessed each community's collective achievements in education and health projects despite their challenges.

"The project about our school, it started as a thatched infrastructure. Then parents through village headmen had to sit and discuss how the children will obtain education in our area where we did not have good infrastructure for educational purposes. Then we started working toward registration of the school. When we achieved that we had to sit again to share the task of moulding bricks. We had four village headmen at that time, and each village was given a target, every village was to mould at least five thousand (5,000) bricks. After that we agreed that every headman should build one house for a teacher… every headman and his family moulded 10,000 bricks. Then every family in the community, every couple donated K50.00 that was to be used to buy building materials. Then within the community, we looked for bricklayers… and some helpers that would do a good job. At the same time, the community had to provide food for the bricklayers through the headmen. After a house was complete, it would be handed over to the school that this is the house we built… Building sand, building stones, roofing sheets, building of toilets – all this work including transportation of materials was done by the community. That is how the school was built. People had to put their heads together, and through cooperation the school was built. Most of the work was done by the community. The government only built one classroom..." (NM4).

All staff speak admirably of the cumulative determination evident in these communities. SM7 describes rural communities generally as *'unsung heroes'*, praising their determination.

Equality and Fairness

Many of the groups spoke about equality and fairness, suggesting that collective participation in community development benefits everyone equally and results in collective development. They shared examples of addressing individual needs with solutions that benefit the collective. The perspective on equal benefits was challenged between and within some groups, not all agree that everyone benefits equally. I explore it further when I present exclusion more explicitly, but there was a stance that some communities benefit more than others. For example, villages and people who live close to a borehole that they have all worked on as a community benefit from the borehole but for those that live in villages further away, the borehole is of little benefit to them. Often it is too far away to be practical, so they still use streams as a water source, streams which are shared with animals, so they still have unsafe water, even though they have contributed to the creation of the borehole.

"In line with development, what we do here if a person cannot afford to buy a need, let us say for instance a bicycle, we sit down as a community to make contributions for that person. Because we feel if one person has a bicycle in the community, it can be used to help any of us, let us say if someone falls sick. That bicycle can be used to carry them…" (KM2).

"Water is better ever since they sunk a borehole at the school…" (NW2).

"For us who live that far from the school, we don't have water and that is still a challenge for us…" (NW2).

"You live near the school that's why you are saying water is not a challenge, for the rest of us it's a challenge…" (NW2).

What is unique here is that even though they do not all reap the benefit equally from community development, they still participate regardless, because *someone* is benefiting from it, and that is important to note. From the collective 'we' perspective of Ubuntu, the project is a success, even though it might not appear that way from a Western individualised view.

Power

Many talked about the power they draw from participation in community development. For some, participation fosters individual power, they feel seen, and they feel heard. It supports a sense of agency in the individual, power within and power to. Many also talked about it as generating collective power, collective agency and autonomy. Reflecting expressions of power as vital or transformative (Miller et al., 2006), they share that together they can achieve, that they can make collective decisions and act themselves reflecting their collective exercise of power with (each other to make decisions and address issues), power to (take individual decisions and actions for change) and power for (broader social change where all these expressions of power converge).

"I can say that we all have power and when we come together, we choose leaders to direct us so that we can all move together…" (NW2).

"We come together to address issues that need our attention as a community. Because if you just order people to perform certain roles, they may not agree, and the task will not be done… We feel fully involved, and we are truly involved in community development projects. Because some decisions…most of the decisions are made by us as a community… We agree that we should work on this project... Nobody makes decisions as an individual." (NM1).

Some groups shared that they look for and welcome external support but because they are participating in the process at all stages, from inception right through to implementation and completion, they feel a sense of autonomy and agency, and the power to influence the process to some degree. In this context, the constraints of poverty mean that they have multiple complex challenges to address, so they do not have the privilege of looking a gift horse in the mouth. However, their sense of autonomy and agency buoys them to ask for their priority needs to be addressed, and to speak up if a proposal is too big a commitment for them, for example, in terms of time or contributions.

"We usually agree to their help… [but if it is not what we want/like] we are able to say No, we say that decision is too heavy for us… There is no sensible person who can come to do something bad, people who come here bring good things with good intentions…" (NW2).

"If someone came to control us by doing what they want, we have the right to refuse. We could welcome their proposal, but we can tell them that this is what we want, not what that donor wants. We can tell them that since you have not yet bought what you want to give us, we would like that you do this for us instead. But we cannot ask a donor to go away no matter how difficult they are because of poverty, but not to do what he wants. We can just tell them what we want… "(NM2).

Most staff agree and shared the opinion that participation through a community led approach increases the collective 'power within' and 'power to' of the community. SM4 feels that the process of making decisions, learning new skills and knowledge, setting their own agenda and leading their development fosters a sense of power and agency. SM1 views CLD and the community philanthropy approach as empowering;

"There is a level of empowerment given the fact that these ideas are really coming from the community themselves. So, OK… we'll need some capacity building, and we'll need to know if we need governance structures, financial management and stuff like that. So, there will be that sort of a keen interest in actually learning about financial management and governance for them to ensure that, OK, we reach our ultimate goal" (SM1).

While power is expressed as a positive output of participation by community members, many ZGF staff voiced that power and influence within communities can present challenges to participation.

SM5 commented that the power dynamics in communities can be quite strong and on occasion, quite disruptive. They gave an example linked to leadership in a different community where there was a very good chairperson, but he was not indigenous to that area. Power struggles began

to creep in, and the community started campaigning to push him out because he is viewed as an outsider and they eventually succeeded. An accepted local chairperson was elected but he was dispassionate about the work and so the once active community became quite passive and limped along. They also offered another example of two villages in one community where the head people in each village were close relations, and they started having friction and instructing people not to go to meetings which disrupted community mobilisation and action.

Many discussions offered insight into the layers and complexity present in the collective community relationships and power flows. SM3 shared that while there are primarily participation and consensus in decision making, they also see instances where people can influence the decision reached;

"There is consensus, but there is also a bit of influence, and people who are more influential who can dictate things and that is the things which are difficult to move in any society".

This is often reflected in co-ops where men tend to control resources and make decisions on behalf of women members at meetings, or in community committees where respected elders or those with status (tied to wealth) have stronger voice and influence, or in meetings of community representatives where some community groups have stronger leadership than others. However, some staff and community groups noted that strong motivated community members often speak out on behalf of their community group and are heard despite not having an official 'position'. Similarly, youth may have good ideas but need support getting their idea to the table due to the power relations in cultural traditions, as elaborated below.

Despite the collective nature of community participation, in terms of strategies to mitigate this influence on the decisions reached, SM3 feels it is important for the facilitator to try to ensure that everyone has an equal voice, explaining that;

"What we try to do is create an environment where, for instance, you bring everyone almost to an equal basis, of course it's difficult, because they have social status in their community. So yeah, but you also when you're having the meetings, you try to emphasise that everyone has a voice and their voice, their perspective or voice matters. So, it's now for me that one, it's up to the facilitator to have that understanding, I think these are the group dynamics".

Most staff reiterate the importance of a good facilitator who can understand existing power dynamics and context of the community. This allows them to manage group dynamics, to guard against pressured groups decisions by mediating the dialogue where necessary, such as where cultural power dynamics arise. SM3 specifically refers to the cultural context, giving an example of where youth have the best idea or solution but may not be heard because they are youth and so it takes a strong facilitator to present their ideas, manage and mediate between the different power flows in a group. Others suggest hearing youth ideas separately and present them to older members of the group without youth present. The latter strategy is advocated by SM3. However, some staff also spoke of the importance of finding balance in facilitating, mediating and supporting, of doing so in a gentle way to avoid causing offense by disrupting traditional cultural systems and patterns.

Participatory approaches

The various participatory approaches to development experienced and discussed by community members and staff are presented here. Community responses focused more on community led development and their experience of the community philanthropy approach and community foundations given that most have limited experience of NGOs and the traditional approach. Included here is the traditional and results-based approach favoured by most donors, which purported to be a participatory model, in theory at least but is embedded in neo-liberal systems imperatives as discussed in chapter two. While staff responses focused on both, some

are focused heavily on traditional development practice as it has been the 'norm' for them throughout their career so far. Contrary to most of the findings presented, in this section the staff voice appears first, sharing their experience of traditional development practice, setting the scene for the reader and supporting the reader in comparing this to the more grounded approaches which follow.

Traditional and Results Based Approaches

Staff members shared their individual experience and perspectives drawing from practice in the development sector as researchers, consultants and programme staff in aid agencies, multilateral organisations, government bodies, CSOs, and INGOs and in different thematic areas in those roles. Their experience ranged from 5 to 30 years individually, an impressive pool of collective knowledge and practice. Apart from one or two project related exceptions shared, all stated that their experience of development practice conformed to traditional donor driven norms and practices within a neoliberal model. All were overwhelmingly critical of traditional results-based approaches which they describe as top-down, dysfunctional, rigid, unequal, unsustainable, unfair, imposed and more. One staff member was scathing of the entire aid system, echoing Dutt (2025) and decolonisation debates explored in chapter two.

"You're seeing the reality of aid on the ground, you see how it doesn't result in what it's supposed to achieve… I also think the aid system generally is dysfunctional. And there is a huge [power] imbalance between agencies, institutional funders, and INGOs, institutional bilateral and multilaterals, and those institutions who receive aid. And this imbalance creates a lot of inefficiencies… I think the aid system needs a complete overhaul…" (SM2).

Top-down processes and dependency

All staff relayed stories of their experiences of development practice, while a few had positive experiences of CSOs at least attempting to work in a grounded approach, most had fewer positive experiences of top-down

process and practice. One staff member shared that their usual experience has been traditional top-down development practice in terms of participation and recognition of local knowledge, with donors, NGOs or the ministry deciding on the needs and solutions without the input of communities,

"It is usually you know, a donor says 'OK, we want to improve water sanitation in this area, source the funds… engage the ministry… and they just take it to the community" (SM1).

SM6 shares their view of power, process and dependency. Interestingly they talk about CSOs replicating the top-down model and view of communities at deficient seeing themselves as the expert, superior to community members.

"I think to some extent… the CSOs, we've created this environment with the different communities… of them being vulnerable, because we've always gone there and said, 'we are the people who know things, you don't know things. So, we are bringing you things'. The aspect of taking things to the community [top down] that one is a whole lot" (SM6).

SM6 further suggests that this practice has *'created a monster really'*, it has set expectations where communities are rewarded for engaging or 'participating' in top-down processes and that it is difficult to work with communities where that precedent has been set.

SM4 agrees adding that a focus on short term fixes leads to dependency syndrome where the people look to the government to have everything done for them, so impacting sustainability.

"The kind of development that we have seen… whereas the INGOs will look at, okay, there's a problem in Zambia, maybe … there's no food or there's no water, okay. Feasibility studies conducted, talk to individuals, okay, we want to put a borehole here, a borehole there, or maybe a classroom block there or clinic there... In that case, really, decisions are not being made by the local people. That's a fast way to do things, you are fixing things but in terms of sustainability, that leaves much to be desired, [and] it gives this dependence

syndrome on the part of the people... the government give promises, and then so we shall do this for you... so people end up saying, let government see to it… so the people look to the municipality or the central government to sort it out, why, because the people are alienated from their own problems… On the other hand, what I think is more sustainable is where people themselves identify what their problems are" (SM4).

The idea of being alienated from their own problems reflects a passivity, a meek citizenship that expects the *'government to sort it out'* yet does not seek to hold the government to account for rights and entitlements denied or recognise their role in this. This same staff member discusses the temptation for NGOs and CSOs to replicate what they already know, to do what they have always done, and implement that. They talk about conforming and very little room for divergent views, not looking to see what exists locally, never mind local assets.

SM1 gave examples of projects they worked on in the past which they described as imposed on the community, where community members were seen as individual beneficiaries of what was brought to them. They shared an example of a Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) fowl project where the project failed badly. The MoA did not consult the community, which takes time but when seeking sustainable effective change it is worth the investment.

"That was bad… we distributed chickens in the hot season and 95% of them died. But if we had asked… we would have known that you can't rear chickens there in the hot season, and we would have known what the community actually wanted or needed" (SM1).

Another staff member talks about how projects designed in the traditional linear approach are not aligned with the local contextual reality. Life does not fit neatly into a results framework matrix, life happens, projects get delayed, outputs and outcomes are not met but there may be other very valid results or learning that are not counted. They expressed that the results-based approach is not fit for the local context, and it "*is not how*

development is happening. This is the typically old-fashioned colonial top-down approach" (SM2).

Rigid and inflexible

Some staff describe the difference between community led development and traditional development practice as the latter being less flexible, more rigid, fixed within set criteria which must be met. One staff member notes that NGOs adopting traditional models often do not work with communities if they do not meet their criteria, whereas in community led development it is a much more flexible relationship that SM6 describes as a conversation.

"It was a lot about there's a criteria set. This is the criteria. If you meet the criteria, we fund, if you don't meet the criteria, we can't fund. With the discussions with community led development there is no criteria. Okay. So, it's more flexible" (SM6).

SM4 agrees and laments how the linear framework and processes of traditional development practice focus on accountability, timeframes, and results, which makes it rigid and prevents an organic grounded process. It focuses on get the work done, do what you said you would do, within the timeframe, regardless.

"The solution to us, the answer, really should be very local. But it is a long journey because with the timeframes, which projects come with, people don't have the patience to have the organic growth, organic way of looking at finding solutions? There are all these budgets… this is the fiscal year… the money has to be accounted for… there are these issues of accountability. So, this is the project, you know, and then boom [gesture of time passing] it goes… you evaluate, and you see [did you deliver] …" (SM4).

Another staff member criticises the rigid system with restrictive funding cycles, expressing regret that often grassroots NGOs lose their original value driven agenda when they become dependent on external funding,

"the majority of NGOs are pleasers, or they are depending so much on external aid… Why would you step on your funders' feet? Why would you criticise… there's very few I know that have stayed, that's stuck to their beliefs, very few" (SM2).

Agenda setting and decision making

SM5 argued that most big NGOs make decisions on behalf of communities they are working with, neglecting local context and knowledge, and most funds are spent on administration, overheads and fundraising with little reaching communities,

"Most of what they [external stakeholders] do is they make decisions on behalf of the communities where they are going. So, most of the time, they're in meetings … busy discussing the problems of the communities where they're going to do the implementation without really understanding the context or the real issues that are on the ground... So, the focus is more on them. So, the more they are known, the more they are in the media and all that, the more they attract more funding to themselves, because at the international level, they are the ones that are ahead. On the ground, these small emerging organisations that are actually doing the work are not heard because they don't have access to the media, they don't have access to the big funding organisations. So, you find most of the times they are overlooked" (SM5).

Similarly, SM4 agreed that NGOs, or government usually decide what needs to be done, what the issues are, they set the agenda, decisions are not made by the local people. They further argue that people are at the heart of development and must not only participate in but must lead development processes.

"Development is about people, not things, because people cannot be developed. But then people develop themselves and can act for themselves and their interest, once convinced that the obstacles they're facing can be solved by their own efforts" (SM4).

Further, SM6 shared that often you are not sure if the benefits even trickle down to the community in the traditional approach and if it is what they want. They argued that most decisions are made in the boardrooms on behalf of the community and made a very clear point that it is often not even on behalf of communities because decisions are often made before engaging with a community, where they have an agenda and they choose a community that fits that agenda. We discussed the example of computers being provided to Kaminembe school to meet the agenda and targets of educational policy even though the school has no electricity or internet connection to use the computers, meaning the only beneficiary in this example is the government education statistics, a box-ticking exercise.

"Yes, in the curriculum right now we have computer studies for schools, but we have schools where there is no electricity. Why do we have a subject in the curriculum that is not supported? But then we still claim we are giving development to our people." (SM6).

Partnership and Relationship

The majority of INGOs claim to practice a partnership model, working in partnership with local NGOs and CSOs. SM7 questions this partnership, asking when it will be horizontal partnership, less bureaucratic, less unequal in terms of power. When will it become more representative of a solidarity partnership where the western INGO shares power and offers support in solidarity without conditions attached,

"*Where international funders will say… we are in equal partnership with these people, we don't have to send them these types of papers and wait for us to want to be motivated to help them. Let's just do it because we are in partnership… whatever threatens Zambia can affect you, even if we are far apart" (SM7).*

SM2 talks about how real partnership and participation could come about if donors committed time to building open and trusted relationships and truly learning from the process. The importance of relationships and the type of

relations advocated here reflect those discussed in the literature as central to community philanthropy – committed, continuous, sustained relationships of deep mutual knowing where learning and failure are a valued part of the process.

"They should take interest in what institutions do, if they come to ZGF they should know that this is what we're doing, and they should buy into it or not buy into it. They should look at the DNA of the organisation, at the motivation of the people, at the leadership, into what is the fabric of this organisation? What are the people all about, are they serious and really into it?... They never spend that kind of time… in relationship building… They should invest the time in building relationships… It creates very different dynamics, and it creates openness… you can have open discussions about failures. You don't have to be scared to say, 'you know what; this hasn't worked at all'… now we know why it was partly a failure. But we needed to fail to realise that… So, it's learning..." (SM2).

Some other staff agreed that most donors and INGOs claim to be learning institutions but that's not really the case, everything is a project and if you fail in the project, they no longer fund you, you are punished rather than learning from the experience because it is too risky for them to fund potential failure. Without an open trusting relationship there is no partnership.

Community led development

Some community groups talked about their participation in, and experience of community led development, describing it as 'self-help' and as developing their collective independence. Many stressed that community led development needs full community participation from the outset, while some added that it should be supported by external partners, such as an NGO, the WDC, or other government supports. They were clear that they can do some of the work alone but that they cannot do it all due to their limited resources and isolation. Some challenges, such as mobile network,

require political will and infrastructural investment, so there are boundaries to what they can achieve.

"Comparing to the way the government empowers us when they give us the fertilizers, we pay a small amount, and they top up for us. So… we need to have somewhere to start from on our own so that the government can also come in and help us with the bigger part. Now at the point where they are coming in to help you, they have to find you involved and invested in what you want to achieve. It is better we work together…" (NM5).

"As residents of this community, I feel it is cardinal for us to begin working on some projects so that when we receive visitors from charity organisations like this [ZGF], they are able to see what we are doing, and they just help us finish. But [if] we are going to wait for the donors to do everything for us, it might take a lot of time… Let us help ourselves start, then they just come in and help us finish…" (NM3).

"We just want development, for example there are things that we can't even contribute to, we have been asking for network for the longest time and if we could contribute money we could have done it a long time ago, but we need someone to just come and help us, Communication is a challenge, even when there are meetings we don't hear anything and most of the time we don't know anything because there is no network" (KW3).

Unsurprisingly, all ZGF staff advocated for community-led development and showcased its merits. All stated that community-led development is a more sustainable approach as it is locally owned through participation, local agenda setting and decision-making processes and that this strengthens community development. One staff member (SM3) agrees but advises patience, warning that progress involves them leading and contributing to their own development, a change in mindset from let the government deal with it, a change which is a slow process;

"the community should see themselves as drivers of that development idea. And that entails changing their mindset, and what we're seeing, you can't expect it to be fast…" (SM3).

SM5 agrees that the community led approach requires a shift in mindset from vulnerability and passive dependency to independent agents of change as a community. They also say it is a slow process, that change takes time to become internalised and is a challenge when other actors persist with a welfare model.

"it's one of those things where… you motivated them at the end of the session. When you left, obviously a few days later or so it will go back to the default" (SM5).

SM4 also highlights the added layers of complexity which arise when other external actors are also present in communities and where a contradiction in messaging and approach is at play. Such complexity can influence understandings, perspectives, expectations and actions in the community and among other actors, such as internalisation of a deficit mindset of vulnerability rather than capability, or perspectives of government support as 'help' as opposed to entitlements, as exemplified in this insightful staff response.

"The other challenge for them to understand this that we call community led development. They say how do we lead our own development when we're so poor, so it's the mindset change… you know, where they feel that we are… too poor to lead our own development, to decide for ourselves. And there is of course, the (outside) influence, the other challenge has been that we're not the only players in these communities. There are other players… [maybe INGOs, government] …, you find that an issue of contradictory messages coming to the community, for example, while we are encouraging people to have their own cooperatives or their own savings groups, so that they start building their own resources. The government comes in with the Constituency Development Fund (CDF), where now they are giving handouts. You know… that message on one hand, we are telling people that they should fend for themselves. On the other hand, the politicians are bringing money as grants, to these communities… So, it's these contradictions we find, not

being the only player because the politician sometimes can have a louder voice than our voice" (SM4).

In such a challenging context, it is small wonder that some community members show up when they are likely to benefit without any effort. Add to this the repeated messaging that 'poor', rural' and 'uneducated' renders you deficient as voiced in previous sections and it is easy to comprehend how such mindset and behaviour persists.

The community philanthropy approach

Throughout participation findings presented, groups are reflecting on their experience of community philanthropy in most of their responses as they have limited experience of other approaches, and they have been relying on community philanthropy in their own CLD efforts. This section attempts to focus on the community philanthropy approach (CPA) with ZGF explicitly and also incorporate prior community experience of the CPA with others.

All groups explained that in community philanthropy, having collectively made decisions and agreed on an agenda, they pool their ideas and collective resources (knowledge, information, skills, materials, contacts, time, labour, monetary contributions…) to find a solution and the required resources for the challenge. Then they seek external support for the shortfall.

"Ideas should not be kept to oneself. Then when the community accepts the idea, you can sit down and discuss… Like in our case here at Kaminembe, we call the village headmen. If the idea is adopted, we decide and discuss the way forward. We do not work as individuals. When people agree, we look for ideas where we can find things that we may not be able to provide ourselves. Then through our knowledge about development, we may decide to go to well-wishers [who]… come on board to help us. Projects start to be worked on…" (KM1).

One group of women shared a story of a clinic, which is not within the boundaries of either of the communities that was engaged in the project, but because some of the villages straddle two communities, they often work on initiatives in more than one community. The neighbouring community had prioritised health services and partnered with a Japanese NGO to build a clinic and housing for medical staff. Adopting a CPA, the community built one house for medical staff, and the Japanese NGO built the clinic and one other house for medical staff. They speak highly of this clinic, and in fact, some of the community members shared that they received training in health responses, and that they now work as community health workers on infant maternal mortality with the Safe Mothers Action Group (SMAG). This successful initiative has enhanced their lives individually and collectively and has saved lives in the community.

"There is a very big improvement [in maternal health and mortality rates], they are even able to do scanning to see how the baby is positioned in the womb, it just doesn't show the sex. But they can see if the baby can be delivered at the clinic or not, and if there are any complications then the pregnant woman is referred to Chongwe to a bigger hospital" (KW2).

This positive experience of community philanthropy with the Japanese NGO in a neighbouring community is similarly reflected in the research communities' experience. Overall, the experience of community philanthropy with ZGF is mostly positive as exemplified in earlier findings and the partnership approach is valued. As highlighted in earlier sections, participation builds a sense of pride and unity, and ownership lies with the community, a positive outcome.

"I would say that is how we feel [a sense of power, control and agency in CPA], because we have been working with this organisation for some time now, we did not start recently. If we were not comfortable at any point, I believe this partnership would have been a thing of the past. We would have refused it. We feel involved in all the programs. From the time we started, we have benefited a lot..." (NM3).

A few groups noted that their collective approach allows for risk sharing, making opportunities more viable and less frightening for them. One group (NW4) shared an example in relation to a women's club, where costs (and the related risk) are shared, such as the costs of rearing and breeding donated pigs. The risk is shared among a collective, together with a partner, so minimising the risk burden. A few groups highlighted that they are encouraged to contribute in community philanthropy as they see the risk as shared collectively between the community and partner, as is the case in their partnership with ZGF.

"Yes, it is good [CPA] because ZGF gives us what they have to give and we also add our percent and the program succeeds, that is how it's done most of the time" (KM1).

However, some community members express frustration at the financial contribution. For some it is a burden, with a few groups describing them as 'forced contributions'. However, many pointed out that they all struggle to meet the financial contributions which collectively form the community monetary contributions for the project and that even those who fail to participate can reap the benefits. Overall, positive experiences were shared on the success of community philanthropy approaches, albeit with a few exceptions.

Community Foundations

In both communities, community foundations were set up with the support of ZGF as community structures to facilitate CLD and community philanthropy. A few groups stated explicitly that they highly value the community foundations, describing them as empowering processes and experiences. ZGF use the Training for Transformation (TfT) model (Hope and Timmel, 2003) in establishing and supporting the community foundations. They adopt critical education as a strategic choice as advocated by many in the literature review (Gaventa and Bivens, 2014; Freire, 1971; Fricker, 2006) to challenge perceptions of communities as deficient, as mere passengers in

their life journey, as mere objects of knowledge. TfT fosters and supports critical thinking through critical education, encouraging them to think, analyse and explore their world, and introduces them to processes and skills that they may not otherwise be involved in or aware of, such as the function and governance structures of boards of management, formal committees, strategic planning, financial management, and networking skills. Through the community foundations, ZGF supports community led development,

"They teach us to come together as a club like cooperatives… They teach us how to go about it and work together… We have even managed to get certificates in our cooperatives, legal papers for the cooperatives" (KM3).

"*When ZGF came in, we thought they came to mock us. But we later realised that they meant well because they came to help us. They gave us the knowledge about some important skills and worked with us in developmental projects [through the community foundation]" (NM2).*

The Community Foundations support their collective independence, and that is what they want most of all, together with development and partnership.

Relationships and trust

All ZGF staff are committed to the community philanthropy approach, and their discussions mirror the community experience. One relationship in this context is imperative. ZGF looks to traditional leadership for endorsement and authority, a vital context specific relationship which acts as a gatekeeper to the communities.

"We can't go in the village without going to them first (traditional leaders). They are like the guards of the villages, we have to respect them, we must uphold the way they run things in the village, and they'll give us authority. Okay, now you can go, meet this Nduna, meet these people, this person is very good at this topic. Then with that person, they even help us, they point to a person who is good at mobilising. When you respect, we just (gesture take off). So, it's really powerful" (SM7).

Adding to the community experience outlined in the previous section, one staff member articulated the belief that the community philanthropy approach builds (mutual) accountability, trust and respect, creating an enabling and trusting space for collaboration.

"We don't interfere so much in terms of how the community goes about doing their contribution. For us, our role is to say, 'you said you would do this', so we are holding you accountable to this, just as they hold us accountable to what we said we would do. So, as we say okay, we're going to buy you bricks, how we go about buying you the bricks is really not your [concern]. We'll buy you the bricks so then with them when they say, 'oh, we are going to build a shelter'. How they go about building the shelter is something they need to handle, for us, it's just let's monitor where are you now?... Okay, are there any challenges we are facing? What is going on? And sort of just try to do some community mobilisation, and things like that but not to get into the nitty gritty of no, those households that didn't contribute, no. So, there's a certain limit, we have to also reach, to respect their space" (SM6).

They go on to elaborate the importance of respect and dignity in the approach;

"Even me as a person… I love my space… when I've committed to something, give me the space to deliver. Yes. If I don't deliver, then let's have the conversation. If you didn't deliver, why did you not deliver?... This is a relationship about trust. So, we've come together, and we've said, we are all going to fill up this water bottle, the agreement is ZGF fills it up to 500? You fill it up to 1000. So, we have to trust each other that the bottle will be filled, when there are challenges along the way, of course, let's sit down and talk, every time you go there… how are we doing?" (SM6).

Relationships and trust are also voiced by community groups as an essential element of partnership and community development and many groups shared positive experiences of engagement with external actors where

relations of trust are established. They highlight continuity of partnership and relationships where they feel and express mutual value and respect as important. Essential elements of a trusted partnership are voiced by many as one that supports active participation, collaboration, and local ownership, and which is based on clear and open communication. Many spoke with pride and satisfaction of the longevity of their relationship with ZGF, noting that they had been working in partnership for several years now. Some gave examples of positive experiences with other NGOs who have partnered with the community on water and sanitation, and health care initiatives but highlighted that there is no established continuity in those relationships, so the opportunity to build strong relationships of trust are limited.

"At first, we as a community did not believe in ZGF, and some people refused to donate some money. They said that they did not know where the money would go. But when we started receiving the desks, we were delighted, and we appreciated the goodness of working together as a community…" (NM4).

"We are confident with ZGF that they will keep on helping us going forward by continued partnership with the community foundation. So, we are sure that some challenges will be a thing of the past because of cooperation…" (KM1).

"We have benefited a lot from ZGF. In addition, if this partnership continues, I am very confident that our community will be transformed…
These people (ZGF) from the time we started working together, we have seen a lot of benefits. … They taught us a lot… helped us in many sectors and paved a way for community development. ZGF is the only donor that was there for us…" (NM1).

Overall, most members of both communities value their relationship with ZGF and appreciate the participatory approach, their collaboration, support and the continuity of their partnership. They speak with pride of their collaboration and achievements, and the mutual respect and trust is evident. The aspects highlighted here as important criteria for relationships - active participation, collaboration, local ownership, communication,

continuity and longevity are important criteria for solidarity partnerships and community philanthropy - are further explored in this regard in chapter eight.

However, a few groups were less enthusiastic about the relationship with ZGF highlighting feelings of mistrust in the community foundations.

"We know about ZGF because we have contributed money for the desks. The one thing we can say is that sometimes when [community foundation] meetings are called, usually we are not called and neither do we know what would have transpired there" (NW4).

It is interesting to note that some groups see the community foundation as ZGF, even though the community foundations are locally owned and led, with positions held exclusively by community members. As described in the previous section, ZGF supports the establishment of the community foundation and works with them in the initial and intervening periods to strengthen capacity and provide advice and guidance. Those few groups complained that they have little input or communication with their representative in the community foundation and feel that there is inequality in terms of benefits from, and power in, the partnership. Most complaints of this nature arose from collectives in the isolated villages, far from the community hubs where schools and services are located, and where community meetings take place. Members of these villages lamented the fact that ZGF has never visited their village to engage directly with community members or experience their daily reality. This highlights a diversity of conditions and perspectives within these communities which other community collectives, and other external actors, including ZGF are not attuned to.

While ZGF staff seemed unaware of the specific lapses in trust raised above by some community members, universally ZGF staff reiterated the gravity of relationships and trust in the CPA and all participatory processes;

"I think over the time, as we have worked and started doing things with them… we've gained a relationship where we now trust each other. Yes, and we understand each other as well. So, we know we have something in common that we all want. And that is to bring development and empowerment… And so, I'd like to believe it's because we have built this relationship with them. And so, they trust us, we trust them. And our common ground is what brings them every other time when we are there to come and be in this space with us" (SM6).

Continuity of relationship is highlighted over and again by most groups and all staff, as is trust within the community. The subject and importance of relationships was raised consistently as a central aspect of development by both community and staff and therefore cannot be understated. The layers, complexity and integral nature of relations is articulated by SM3, who is clearly and consistently adamant that;

"relationship is important. And the most important thing in the whole processes of shifting the power is actually relationship building, which is closely connected with issues of trust. Because there's no relationship without trust. Does the community trust? Does the community trust what we're saying to them? And do they trust that we mean well, and even in trust between us and the community, and trust between them and other stakeholders, and even more important, maybe, trust between themselves. Because there is also a community [foundation] which is formed, which needs to be responsible, and they are supposed to be giving to that. Because if they don't trust that committee, and then they say, there is need to contribute resources, how are they going to do that? The way we tell them to contribute resources for this cause, and we'll help you register, for instance… So, they need to trust us that we won't run away with their money, we will actually do what we say. If we ask them, we're going to build this and then contribute, and we will match whatever you're going to do, they need to trust that we are going to match what they said" (SM3).

The findings presented in this section highlight the importance of relations in community development. They also raise some issues of mistrust, misunderstanding and instances where the relationship between some collectives on the periphery of the community and ZGF needs attention. Power relations within and between community members, and ZGF, almost certainly effect these relationships, an issue which is elaborated throughout the findings and explored specifically in the discussion chapter.

Participation through the WDC

"Let me remove what is choking my throat"[33]

As noted at the initial introduction to the finding's chapters, the Ward Development Committee, the official government support structure for community development, arose consistently in group discussions. Although not the central focus of this research, given their relevance to the development space in the Zambian context and the dynamics of community development on a local level in these communities, findings relating to collective community participation through the WDC are presented here.

Unfortunately, with all groups who spoke about participation in community development through the Ward Development Committee (WDC), the narrative is not positive. Overwhelmingly, they describe the WDC structure as ineffective, weak, a waste of their time, and in their opinion, it simply does not work. Most agree that this ineffectiveness is a product of many issues, broadly including lack of feedback, unequal power and poor representation, weak relations and a lack of trust in relationships among others which further entrenches their experience of exclusion.

"There are problems, they are not working, straight forward, they are not working… when we ask them to do something for us, they don't give us any

[33] An expression used to announce that one intends to speak the truth freely at last

feedback, even just feedback that they went to such and such a place, there is nothing…" (KM1).

"They don't work… They don't work they are useless… They are just good at writing down people's complaints but nothing good ever comes to pass…" (KM3).

"No, they [WDC] don't work… There is no network, when have you ever seen them call a meeting here… they like to be given positions of WDC but they don't do their work" (KW3).

Despite the fact that almost all groups were critical of the WDC, a few groups have received some funds from the CDF on occasion. Conversely, the majority praised the traditional authority structures and system within their communities and were positive in their responses in this regard. While the WDC was not a distinct focus of discussions with ZGF staff, some staff did refer to it and also highlighted similar issues raised by community members, adding that the WDC is overly bureaucratic and can be plagued with political interference (SM6).

Power and Representation in the WDC

Almost all community members agreed that the power that exists in and through the WDC is weak and connect this to ineffective representatives. Many argue that community representatives do not have meaningful power, they have advocacy power only. While they hold positions of power within the government system, they do not actually have the power to make decisions and get anything done, and so their power is ineffective.

"The councillor is useless; he does not represent us well at the district… It's as if we don't have a councillor… Yes, we chose him, but he is voiceless, he doesn't represent our wishes at district level… we don't know if he takes our concerns to the district because nothing has happened… Nothing has been done over our concerns" (NW6).

"We thought they had the power but clearly they don't have… They only advocate… They have no power because something would have been done, because right now we don't even have our phones… up to this time we don't have anything… Words are there but no action… We have been discussing this issue [network] for ten years" (KM3).

Some groups also say that some of the leaders that they have are not suitable, describing them as weak leaders who lack either the skills or motivation for the role, or both. They argue that some born leaders are excluded due to the education criteria for representatives in the WDC. This issue was highlighted in the previous chapter on knowledge where community members explained that some people who have very good leadership skills do not have the opportunity to act as community representatives in the WDC because of their lack of formal education, and so the existing criteria excludes suitable candidates from participation as political representatives. However, some argue that even if they could put forward stronger candidates to act as their representatives on the WDC, they only have advocacy power, so the system is ineffective for the communities.

Dignity and Recognition

Dignity is understood here as our inherent value and worth as human beings (Hicks, 2013).

Some community members also talked about their lack of power within the community, and their feelings of being less valued and less worthy. These feelings are buoyed by limited formal education and literacy skills, and due to their isolation, their experiences of disadvantage and of inequality of access to the benefits of community development, and the limited voice they are afforded by representatives because of their position within the community. One group referred to themselves as '*outcasts*', another as '*unseen*' and another group commented that '*it's as if we are not part of this nation*', often linking perceptions of themselves as poor, without power and isolated to their self-perception of dignity and recognition. While not

exclusively so, these responses mainly emerge from villages on the periphery of the communities, suggesting that the collective knowledge, participation and experience of these groups are often excluded.

"We feel neglected by the government because they have been giving a deaf ear to our complaints. We have bad roads, and poor mobile networks. We tried enough to push for this. Even if they visit, once they visit when they go back, we still do not see any positive response. Our communication system with the government is poor…" (NM1).

For some villages within the community that do not have strong leadership, they have less power than other villages within the community that do have strong leadership who are representatives in the WDC. Some groups argue that there is inequality within communities depending on whether they have a strong representative on the WDC from their village.

Some discuss a hierarchy of representation within the community, saying that some people hold more powerful positions than others, and it depends on whether your village has representation in various forums such as the WDC, traditional authority positions and the community foundations, acting as a champion for your village.

"Unfortunately, you find that because the councillor comes from another village, we just hear that the councillor had called a meeting and the Nyankanga community was called but us from this village are left out maybe because we are at the edge of the community" (NW4).

Some groups argue that this hierarchy is replicated in access to benefits of development as even when they do get support through the WDC, they do not all access the available supports or benefits equally, so they experience disadvantage. While disadvantage in access to benefits is most often voiced by those in the most isolated villages, this is not always true, others who live in more central villages also complained of being disadvantaged, citing examples of access to the school and clean water from boreholes.

All groups talked about being excluded because they have no network, which excludes them from information, knowledge, communication,

participation and development. Often the fact that they do not have network means that they do not get information related to community meetings, relating to the WDC or opportunities to access supports from the Community Development Fund (CDF), or issues are not communicated back to them. Their power and opportunity to participate is affected by this exclusion from mobile network services. The sitting Minister for Communication[34] is from their district and many groups lament that despite promises from their Minister, they are still isolated from communications, unworthy of the investment. As KW1 complains;

"She [Minister] promises all the time, 'after 2 weeks I will bring' but nothing has ever happened… The same councillor is the one that is supposed to follow her [but doesn't]".

Relationships and Trust

Once again, the issue of relationships and trust is raised as important for participation in community development, this time in relation to the WDC. This is related to an issue raised by many groups which is the absence of a communication and feedback system between communities and the WDC, councillors, and local authorities. This again puts them at a disadvantage in terms of access to information, equal opportunity and participation. Furthermore, the absence of a reliable communication channel for feedback and information sharing leads to mistrust and scepticism between community members and their political representatives.

Many groups highlighted issues of lack of accountability and transparency, where they either do not receive information and feedback, or they do not trust the feedback shared by their elected representative. For example, community members admit that they choose their representative for the WDC and councillors through an election process. However, once elected, community members often do not know if they are relaying the community voice on their development needs and priorities to the appropriate forum

[34] At the time of fieldwork

and advocating on their behalf or not. As there is no robust feedback mechanism, they have no idea if they have been represented or not, leaving the communities feeling voiceless. It leads to a lack of trust in the representatives and many groups voiced that they feel excluded from the whole process.

This relationship then effects their access to the Constituency Development Fund (CDF). When funds are available, applications for funding are made through the WDC and/or councillor. Some groups noted that sometimes they hear that they were late with their application due to information delays and there are no funds remaining, other times they hear that they have been awarded funds, but the funds never materialise. The lack of communication puts them at a disadvantage, and the weak relationships and representation leaves them feeling ignored or exploited, and relationships deteriorate further.

"They make us sign different forms to access [CDF] loans, but nothing has ever come out of it… They are always asking us to get certificates to show that we are a cooperative and we even opened an account for the cooperative so that if there is any money that comes in, it can go into that account… [we receive] nothing, those things don't work, we have all the certificates and accounts but nothing has come out of it, nothing. Here… only 2 people have received. The chair and the secretary because they hold positions there" (KW3).

However, while evidently all community members feel that the WDC is broadly ineffective, there are some positive stories shared where the communities successfully accessed funding from the CDF and other government support.

"The government supports us by giving us some money. Some of us have received government grants through these [women's] clubs… With the government grant that we were given, as a club we rear chickens, layers" (NW5).

Most of the success stories were shared in conversation with women and related to funding secured for a savings group or women's club, spaces and resources which are of great importance to the women (as discussed in earlier sections).

Empty Participation

Some groups shared experiences of 'empty participation', where there is participation for no return. They invest time in attending meeting after meeting with the WDC, councillor or other government representative, where they voice their ideas, needs, and priorities, and make their request for support; they hear promises which fail to come to fruition, and that after the meeting, there is no communication, no change, just silence.

"Even if they say certain things, nothing happens… if you look around there is nothing that you can point at to say this was done by the government. The local council came, and they promised us a borehole. It has been five years now and nothing has been done. Even when people of high-profile visit, they drink from the stream…" (NM1).

Some among these groups also shared that 'empty participation' has happened with NGOs in the past too, where they have had NGOs come talk to them and promise them support but they leave and then never come back, a phenomenon also highlighted by SM6 earlier.

"The other challenge that we have between the government and the NGOs is that they promise a lot of things when they come but they don't fulfil their promises, so it's a big challenge where we have been sitting in meeting after meeting but we don't see the things that are promised to be done" (KM3).

In contrast to participation as 'self-help' articulated in earlier sections, this 'empty participation' sits at the opposite end of Pretty's (1995) participation ladder. As mentioned in the methodology chapter, some community members specifically related this phenomenon of 'empty participation' to our collaboration on this research and asked that I do not treat them that

way. They asked that I do come back to them as intended, to work together with the research findings and to present them in an appropriate format that can assist with lobbying and advocacy for support for community development, and that can communicate their issues to relevant parties such as NGOs and government bodies.

Isolation and Exclusion – Not part of this Nation

As highlighted throughout the findings presented, the expression of the collective community experience of isolation and exclusion in multiple forms and spaces is stark. This isolation and exclusion is expressed by all groups in relation to some issues, and more prominent for, or only expressed by, some groups in relation to others. This section attempts to elaborate these experiences further linked to various issues emerging.

"If development were to happen, things would have been better except we don't have these things and we don't have people to look after our cattle (the vet), they don't even know this place… Cattle die a lot here. Cattle is wealth. We have a lot of problems here because of the things that I mentioned… it's almost as if we are not part of this nation" (KM2).

Identity and belonging

A struggle with identity and belonging was voiced consistently by all community members, albeit for differing reasons, with groups on the periphery particularly vocal. Overall, the collective community feel that their positioning and collective identity as isolated rural communities excludes, which effects their participation and inclusion in development and society in general. One group of women in the community described themselves as 'outcasts' from society, unseen and unheard in comparison to urban areas;

"Sometimes, I wonder how different we are from those that live in urban areas. We are one Zambia, one nation. There should be fairness. In town, roads that go to people houses are tarred but here roads are bad. There are a lot of things that we lack, but we are also Zambians……" (NM2).

For some groups within the communities, an issue that was raised over and again was an insistence from some that they do not belong to the particular community that they are named under - Kaminembe or Nyankanga as relevant. When that is probed, it is not that they do not belong to their ascribed community in official terms. They belong to it, but they either straddle two communities and feel a stronger sense of belonging with the other community, or as is more often the case in peripheral villages, that they do not feel that they belong to the community because they do not feel included in or the benefit from community development.

"All the villages that utilise those facilities take part in the contributions and work that takes place there… So, when they are building, they will ask this village to make the bricks, they will ask another village to take river sand and another village to do something else and they will look for builders within the villages to go and build for free… We have children that go to Kaminembe and other children that go to Mwapula, so we go for work and make contributions at both places, that's how it is" (KW2).

For the more distant villages, some feel unable to participate as much in community development so the unity that others express does not resonate with them. There is a strong, unified community centred around the senior headman's house and the villages closer to the senior headman's house in both communities. However, beyond that, some groups that are more isolated or a greater distance away do not have equal access to the same benefits, do not have equal opportunity to participate or are often not aware of opportunities to participate, and as such, they struggle with their sense of identity and belonging. Some groups describe themselves as different to others within the community because they feel further disadvantaged, isolated and excluded.

"When we started you said that we are under Nyankanga, but we are not Nyankanga, this is [village name] community… because the Nyankanga guys don't consider us here. We want direct communication with us here and not including us in the Nyankanga programs, we don't get anything here… if

there are any projects you should consider the people that are going to represent Nyankanga, we should have our own people from [this village] to represent us in Nyankanga as a community… we are not recognised" (NW7).

"They are not here [NGOs]… only at Kaminembe, that's where you have those people from governance (ZGF) otherwise here there is nothing" (KW2).

These groups are aware of the community foundations and community development committees but often hear about meetings after the fact for a variety of reasons. This may be due to their geographical distance from the centre, due to lack of communication technology so they miss notification of meetings, due to poor representation or poor communication from their representatives, or the distance and time of meetings precludes attendance. There is also a sense that they are forgotten about in community organising as they are rarely seen at central places where meetings take place and few make the journey to visit their villages.

For some groups who do not have WDC representatives, that also affects their identity. They have no representation connecting them with the political system, and this was particular to isolated villages who rarely receive visitors and never see a politician. These groups feel that their struggles are unseen and unheard, they have no one to complain to about not getting messages about community meetings and community events, that they are too far from the school to send their kids, that they are too far from the savings groups to participate, that they do not get the messages to participate because of the network, and even if they did, they cannot participate because they are far away and there are no roads or transport options. All of this affects their identity and their experience of social exclusion, as highlighted at the introduction to this section with a really striking quote from a group who lamented, "*it's almost as if we are not part of this nation" (KM2).*

Another element of identity and belonging is linked to power and social status. Initially I was concerned that if the chairman, or others with a

position, for example, in the village, district or WDC, participated in group discussions that it would affect the responses. However, in the context of this community, it is not official position that gives you voice, instead people with longevity and assets are afforded more respect and are heard. With longevity, respect correlates with age, you are listened to and respected as an elder. Secondly, the assets you have determines the respect and voice you command, this can be in terms of knowledge and formal education, wealth in the form of finances, livestock, or access to resources etc. One group of men related wealth to social status very clearly when discussing challenges to community development;

"Some of the challenges that we experience are at household level. This is because of different social statuses; we are not on the same level. During community work… we may say let everyone contribute a K50.00… when it is time to collect the contributions, you find that some do not have the money. This is because of different social statuses. So, we are forced to increase the time frame so that some may have the money to contribute…. Sometimes we are forced to borrow so that a project may be completed. So, having different social statuses also becomes a challenge in doing community developmental works…" (NM1).

The least included, respected and with the lowest voice is youth, and that was sometimes evident in the community meetings. In Zambia, youth are defined as at least nineteen years of age and under thirty-five years and represent almost twenty-seven per cent of the Zambian population (MYSA, 2024). Youth were in the minority of research participants and among those who did participate, the majority were older youth, with some young mothers also attending. While older youth actively participated, the younger group rarely contributed to the discussions and actively participated only when prompted or encouraged to speak. They did not speak out above the older people in the group without an invitation to speak, so their identity, power and position in society affects their experience of exclusion also.

Isolation

Generally, community members experience isolation in several ways, geographical isolation, social isolation and political isolation which often overlap. These collective experiences result in isolation from development in practice. Broadly, the communities are isolated from basic life sustaining resources and services such as healthcare, education, markets, roads and public transport, emergency services and more. Some groups are isolated to a greater extent in some spheres, such as education or healthcare, whereas all experience similar isolation in terms of roads, transport, access to markets and emergency services. For example, Kaminembe community are developing a community-led health clinic as there is no healthcare facility in either community at present. There is a clinic in neighbouring Mwapula community but for most groups, it is still a couple of hours away with no roads. One group commented that they are still living like their parents and grandparents did, even though the world has developed around them. There are now services, resources, and systems that can make life so much easier, but that they are excluded from them due to their isolation. They feel stuck in the past and feel that they will forever be stuck in the past.

"But if community development came in, all that could be a thing of the past. We wouldn't be living the way our parents were living a long time ago, we are now in the twenty-first century. At least water should not be an issue…. We also want a situation where when we are walking outside at night, it's just the same as during the day because there is electricity. That is the life we want…" (NM2).

Their collective isolation impacts their quality of life and many feel that they are excluded because they are rural poor, and as such it is connected to their experience of recognition and dignity, their perceived value and worth as human beings. For some, they interpret their exclusion as a reflection of their worth, that they are not worthy of investment (see following section on representation) or connection to the rest of society.

"When a woman goes to fetch water, it takes 2hrs 30min for them to come back with the water… it's a stream, we share the water with cows, goats and wild pigs…
We can grow gardens and rear chickens but when it comes to going to the market to sell our produce so that we can come back with some money, there is no road…
We also don't have any shops here; the shops are located very far from the village" (NM5).

Their isolation hugely impacts livelihoods in terms of their access to markets, access to skills, resources, knowledge and communications. Some groups gave examples of how their isolation affects their livelihoods as farmers, many of whom predominantly grow maize. They explain that when they harvest their crop, they face many challenges in getting it to market without roads, communications and other services.

"Markets where we have customers are very far, in the process, we lose money. Basically, that's what drags us behind. Yes, if you choose to sell the products in Chongwe, the money that you are charged for transport makes the profit earned insignificant" (NM3).

The challenge in accessing markets is far reaching but it is also about access to skills and resources. These farming communities are reliant on the government for agricultural inputs and skills, and the extension workers do not visit often. The fertiliser available in co-ops is often limited. Their challenge in reaching urban centres limits their access to resources, knowledge, and livelihood skills and opportunities. Their access to information about opportunities and schemes for government support is also limited because of their isolation.

Their isolation also impacts their community work making it difficult to communicate, plan, organise and implement projects and can be disruptive and frustrating for the community.

Inequality

As highlighted throughout the findings, inequality was raised over and again by collectives within the communities. There were two perspectives on inequality shared; one relates to their inequality relative to broader society, in terms of access to services, communications, knowledge, healthcare, representation and participation in the political system, etc. as elaborated in previous sections. This perspective is shared by all community members.

The other perspective is shared by community members in several of the more isolated villages and relates to inequality within the communities. Some groups spoke of inequality within the community linked to the traditional authority, where they expressed the opinion that they do not have strong representation within the traditional authorities for their villages and without strong leadership, they have no one to advocate for them in the traditional space. Without political representation from their villages advocating for them in the WDC, they are further disadvantaged. While no-one was bold enough to state it explicitly, some of these groups implied that the senior headmen look after those near them first, with most of the resources, services, clubs and meetings located at these places, far from the outlying villages.

"In Nyankanga, night and day we are called to go and dig the toilets and the money for CDF was released to this community of Nyankanga but it doesn't reach here, and if you had gone to see the community school [which we are building here] you can feel pity… the main reason why we built the community school is because the Nyankanga school is very far. It's about sixteen kilometres and the little children fail to travel the distance." (NM5).

As mentioned earlier, there is an impression among many groups that everyone has equal opportunity to participate in community development, and everyone enjoys the benefits of that development equally. Conversely, some groups, once again especially in the more outlying villages complain that there is not equality of opportunity and access and in reality, they do not enjoy the benefits equally. This was voiced loudly and while outlying

villages are most affected, it was voiced by some other groups too where they also feel that they are too far from where the clubs, services or resources are, which tends to be at or near the school at the centre of the community.

"We still drink water from the streams we share with the cattle, goats and chickens… The taps are for the school, and the community have to source their water elsewhere…" (KM3).

"I really appreciate [the support from ZGF], though the distance to the milling centre is quite significant, it is manageable. Again, they sunk a borehole. My encouragement is, we have challenges with safe water. But those that live near the school are privileged…" (NM3).

It is important to remember that this is a sprawling community covering a large area with no public transport, so it means perhaps two or three hours walk to get from the furthest edges of the community to the centre where the school, and in the case of Kaminembe, where the clinic is being built beside the school. It is a long distance and takes great effort to get to those places, to access those services. Furthermore, these are the spaces where all the community meetings and savings groups are held so some groups are disadvantaged.

Representation

As outlined in many sections above, most groups talked about exclusion from appropriate, strong, effective representation. They argue that the processes of WDCs are ineffective, and that literacy and formal education criteria to serve as a community representative in the political sphere excludes potential good, motivated community leaders from participating.

"The councillor is not very active… the one who was active lacked papers, the government needed for him to qualify. He was just selected because he had a grade twelve certificate, but he is not that good. He is not even a good public speaker "(KW2).

Even though the Minister for Communications is from their area, they still have not made any progress on mobile network infrastructure for these communities. Most groups shared that the MP had visited the communities and had made promises but has not delivered on getting a mobile mast erected in the area for these communities. While some community members were of the opinion that this failure reflected their lack of worth or importance as isolated rural folk, others argued that the reason is economic, it is simply not in the interest of mobile communications companies to invest there as there are not enough people living there to use the service and give the company a profitable return on their investment[35]. You could argue that if they provided the mobile technologies, more people might stay there or move there, because they would be connected to rather than isolated from the outside world.

Regardless, the communities present their lack of strong, effective representation as an impediment to development and a testament to their exclusion. They cite systemic and structural issues related to the WDC, the mechanism through which they participate in their community development as problematic.

One thing is very clear regarding participation and the WDC, the communities' isolation and exclusion is the crux of the problem. Although their representatives may indeed be weak with limited power, and the system itself is perhaps less than effective, the lack of communication and the means of communication and participation affect everything. Most cannot build relationships of trust with government representatives and structures because they do not have reliable means of communication to access information and knowledge, they are excluded from knowledge sharing and consumption. Many are excluded from the opportunity to participate because they often miss information entirely, or because it does not reach them in time. Since they do not have a means of communication, or a functioning feedback mechanism, most cannot query anything, or even

[35] A point corroborated in research such as the 2024 GSMA report "Driving Digitalisation of the Economy in Zambia: Leveraging policy reforms".

advocate on their own behalf, because they do not have the means to contact Government representatives.

"Another challenge is lack of knowledge because we don't even know how the CDF for this location has been utilised. Whether that money is still there or not we don't know. We are just moving like blind people… I'm talking about knowledge to know what is happening in front. Because we don't know if this was given and distributed… we don't know. So should we wait until 2026 for them to come and tell us different lies…" (NW2).

"Here we are at the edge at the boundary of this constituency therefore when it comes to assistance, that assistance does not reach us… They (Government officials) come here once in a while and then when they go, they go for good…" (NW3).

Their experience of isolation and exclusion has many layers and impacts the broader and distinct collectives in these communities.

Conclusion

This second findings chapter has explored the theme of participation, presenting the collective experiences and perspectives of community members engaging in community development, both with other third sector actors and with the official government structure, the WDC. Perspectives of staff were shared throughout with a focus on approaches to development practice.

The section on participation in development practice revealed diverse understandings of the concept and motivations behind community-led initiatives. It has presented key enabling factors for community development, including love as an unexpected factor emerging. Participation was viewed as both process and output and has highlighted the importance of participation as a resource for development, along with collective assets such as knowledge, skills, values, relationships and pooled finances. The continued reference to collective community resources

portrays a community with ability rather than vulnerability, a contrast to top-down deficit-based models of development which dominate.

While staff expressed strong criticism of traditional development approaches, research partners overwhelmingly supported community-led development and community philanthropy. However, some negative experiences were noted, particularly among collectives from peripheral villages, pointing to issues of identity, inclusion and equity in representation and benefits. Relationships of trust, longevity and solidarity emerged as vital to the development process, along with the importance of enabling spaces that foster participation and empowerment.

Although not the central focus of this research, findings related to participation through the WDC were included due to its relevance to the development space in the Zambian context. Findings in this regard mainly represented the community voice and are overwhelmingly critical of the WDC, citing issues with power and representation, poor communication and feedback, relationships and trust (again), and isolation and exclusion broadly. These issues pose significant challenges to the legitimacy and effectiveness of the WDC as a partner in community philanthropy and community-led development in this specific context.

The final findings chapter presents on the theme of empowerment, which includes a focus on empowering spaces and processes, especially important for women's collectives. The role of critical education in these spaces and processes of empowerment is also featured.

Chapter Seven: Empowerment

"My understanding of the notion of empowerment is that it is inescapably bound up with the condition of disempowerment and refers to the processes by which those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such an ability" (Kabeer, 1999:437).

Empowerment

This final chapter of the findings presents knowledge, perspectives, understandings and experiences of empowerment. This includes a focus on gender and a critical approach to development practice which advocates critical education and promotes active citizenship. The voices of community members and staff complement each other throughout for the most part. However, most of the final section is drawn from the collective community voice rather than ZGF, sharing instances of inclusion voiced by the community's, a counter to the stark experience of exclusion voiced, offering a glimpse of the potential and hope which exists in the community development space. The chapter closes with some final words on the spirit of Ubuntu which is embodied by the collective community throughout this research.

Chapter 7: Empowerment	
"Instead of waiting with your hands folded" Empowering Spaces · Gender inequality · Dedicated women's spaces · Independence · Agency · Solidarity Critical education – an empowering approach · Mind-set shift – No more 'Boma Iyanganepo'? · Collective action and agency · Transformation · Critical thinking.	Inclusion · Voice and Agency · Inclusive representation · Dignity and Recognition The Spirit of Ubuntu

Table 7.0: Findings Chapter 7

"Instead of waiting with your hands folded"

In discussions with one group of women in the community, one woman defined empowerment as, *"instead of waiting with your hands folded"*, a vivid definition which the following community voices elaborate. While all groups were familiar with the concept of empowerment, it is not a term used in the local language. Instead, they refer to power as 'strength', and empowerment as gaining or increasing that strength. Strength is articulated as independence, capacity and agency in an environment of support and solidarity.

Some staff members offered their own similar definitions and perspectives on empowerment.

SM7 defines empowerment as having the power to make a change through obtaining knowledge, information, skills or confidence. They use their own example of what makes them feel empowered and for them that is reflects power within - their voice, the confidence to say no and to stand up for themselves. In doing that they have resources such as capacity, knowledge, information, and confidence to draw on and the agency to use those resources to their benefit.

SM3 describes the community led approach as empowering for those who actively participate while another staff member warns against using the term too freely and suggests that all too often development actors inaccurately describe their work as '*empowering people*'.

They specifically relate this experience to traditional development practice and are keen to argue that there is a greater level of empowerment in the community led approach, creating an empowering space as elaborated in the next section.

Empowering Spaces

One group of men spoke about the research creating a space of safety, an empowering space. They expressed that the guarantee of anonymity that

was afforded to them in their participation in the research supported feelings of protection, safety and trust. This gave them the confidence to raise their voice and discuss issues openly and honestly, where otherwise they may have stayed silent, and so it encouraged participation and fostered conditions for empowerment in a created space.

"Thank you, in the beginning you said that the identity of the people that will participate today will be kept confidential and that our names will not be mentioned so I thought the reasons for this meeting were good…" (KM3).

Interestingly, empowering spaces is a recurring theme through the findings, for the broader collective community, most see the community development space as an empowering, enabling space. Collectives within the broader community offered additional perspectives, such as, the women's group who discussed how the community development space motivates and empowers through the need to invest in the community (such as the commitment to engage and act).

"For me, the benefit that I found is that you cannot just sit relaxed, it pushes me to do this and that, it keeps me busy doing this and that and selling that because at the end of each month I have to send my monthly contribution. It keeps me thinking intelligently because I am always looking for ways of making money. I have stopped sitting around the way I used to be a long time ago…" (NW2).

There was consensus among staff that the community led approach fosters an empowering space. SM1 feels that there is a greater level of empowerment with the community led approach given the fact that the ideas are coming from the community themselves and there is a keen interest from the community in learning about things like financial management and governance for them to reach their ultimate goal. Making decisions, learning new skills and knowledge, setting their own agenda and leading their development is empowering. With greater levels of

participation, there is greater levels of empowerment and decision making in the community led space.

Gender inequality

Unfortunately, but not unexpectedly, issues related to gender inequality arose consistently through all women's groups and among staff. I introduce it here in this section to emphasise the gendered context and challenges, and to support the rationale and emphasis in the sections which follow.

Gender inequality can create challenges for ZGF in ensuring that the community development space is enabling and empowering for everyone. ZGF promote gender equality in their work, but they also acknowledge that it is challenging work, for them and community members. As discussed in the literature review, Zambian culture, "is based more on patriarchal values across tribes and are highly conservative. Therefore, headship is conferred on men, and this perpetuates women's subordination in ownership, inheritance of assets and decision-making in public and private spheres" (MoG, 2019:2). Decision-making in the home and personal space lies predominantly with the men. Men control assets and resources, including women as both an asset and resource, while women carry the burden of responsibility.

Changing gender relations means challenging socio-cultural norms, examples of these challenges are shared by some staff, in relation to the empowerment of women through savings groups, and in valuing and promoting women's knowledge and voice.

"Now the savings it would mean that this woman is able to save the money and do the little business and contribute to their household. She has the power to contribute to their own, instead of depending on the man to give her money. Okay, so she has got this money and she has power on how to use it. So that is really good. [So, it's also changing who makes the decisions?] Yeah, of course, to some men that initially was like a threat, you know,

thinking if women have got money on their own means I have no power. Or they come to realise that after all… that women can make decisions" (SM4).

"I think women's knowledge is probably not taken on board as much as they should, because of the power dynamics in the communities. I think if you're not making a deliberate effort of including women in meetings, then their knowledge would count even less, or would not be infused in those meetings, in anything we do. I think we're trying our best with the participatory grant making processes to get women on board. But then again, if there are then also the dynamics amongst themselves… probably also plays a big part." (SM2).

Despite these concerns and challenges in relation to gender equality in decision making. Overall, women clearly expressed that they have a voice and are involved in decision making in community development process. However, household decision making and decision making in mixed-gender spaces like co-ops is a different story, prompting calls for women-only spaces.

Dedicated women's spaces

A central issue raised consistently by many women's groups in support of women's participation in development is the need for dedicated women's spaces, which women see as empowering spaces. Overwhelmingly, one of the key takeaways from this research and talking to women across both communities is the clear, loud, stated desire for women-only spaces. Many women feel that these spaces are important for learning, for mutual support, for sharing, for independence and control, to give them choice, for power, for freedom, independence and autonomy. Some of those groups very strongly expressed a desire for women-only spaces in the form of savings clubs, women's groups, and the much-requested dedicated women's co-ops.

"The other knowledge that we are acquiring especially in this time and age for us women is learning how each person should sustain themselves, so

sometimes we come and make these groups where if one of the members has a problem, we consult each other and put resources together to help our friend… that is one of the ways we share knowledge.." (NW1).

Many women's groups talked about freedom, autonomy and independence in terms of control of resources and decision making around their own resources. They are looking for equal power, equal choice, and equal independence as their husbands, they do not seek *power over* their husbands, they just want to share power equally.

"It would be nice for the women to also have a women's cooperative; we are really pushing so that we can have our own women's club…
It's nice to have our own cooperative as women because we can grow our own maize and sell so that women can earn money to start their own businesses and also support their business so that their business can grow and they can help themselves…
Also, we have women that can't join the mixed cooperative because they are extremely shy but if we have our own women's cooperative all the women can be free to join and speak freely. There are so many things that we teach each other that we can't discuss in the presence of the men…
[We] are very mindful on how the money should be utilised because we are the ones that look after our children hence, we are always mindful on how the money will be utilised and we are always looking for ways to multiply that money…that is why we want to have our own women's cooperative" (NW7).

"We want to stop being completely dependent on our husbands, we want to have our own club" (KW2).

Most cooperatives are mixed gender, and members receive an allocation of farming inputs, mostly fertiliser. While the women have an allocation too, it is the men who receive the fertiliser, and sometimes he will give some to his wife for her vegetable garden, sometimes not. Some complain that their husbands register their names to get more fertiliser and then never share the benefits, which is why they want women only co-ops. Some women

discussed how men have control over the agricultural resources, including labour and production. One particular group of women complained that the women are expected to work on the farm and feed the labourers during and after the working day, while also responsible for all the household chores. They complain that when men discuss controlling the resources, that this includes women as a resource. Usually, their husband may only give them one day a week off to tend to all of their other responsibilities and might only give them an hour off in a working day and they are expected to have food ready at the end of a hard day in the fields.

"We spend most of the time working in his field and he only gives us a day or two in the week to work in our own fields..." (NW1).

It is clear that the burden of responsibility lies very heavily on the women in all spheres.

While women's spaces provide support towards gender equality, the women also highlighted how they often indirectly provide protection from gender-based violence (GBV). One example shared relates to savings groups which can support or provide financial freedom as a means to reduce gender-based violence. If women have their own financial means, they do not have to ask for money, so it does not trigger violence and can be a means to reduce GBV and to keep the peace in the home.

"When we have our own [money] its better, some men are very wasteful with money and if try to ask about it they get annoyed, they can even beat you" (NW7).

Unfortunately, some women shared that they do not join savings groups because they have *"difficult husbands"* (NW2) and cannot take the risk of asking for the money for the savings group in the first instance, so they do not have the opportunity to earn their own money.

Some women who cannot join the savings group due to 'difficult husbands' find other spaces and means to participate, demonstrating strategic

thinking, determination, and resourcefulness, *"when it comes to skill clubs like the ones for tailoring, we do join but not savings clubs…" (NW2).*

When asked whether the creation of or increase in women only spaces and groups might create conflict or animosity between the women and the men, most said that they believe that would not be the case. They do not believe that segregated spaces and groups are conflict inducing, on the contrary, culturally, gender segregated activities and spaces are common.

Independence

Many groups highlighted the independence gained through empowering and enabling spaces. Among these groups, members of the community described two spheres of independence, individual independence and collective independence as significant. Interestingly, there were gendered responses in the identification of each sphere.

The concept of individual independence arose mostly with women's groups where they spoke about independence as empowering. In the main, they referred to the independence that they gained from economic empowerment. However, this independence often came about because of collective action. There was consensus across groups that this did not mean independence from their husbands, or power over their husbands.

"It makes us feel good and empowered especially when you farm and sell your produce and make K2000. It motivates you to even work harder so that the following year I should make even more money than I did this year" (NW4).

"We don't want to work too hard and be too proud to surpass the men, that can be bad… When you are fair to each other and agreeing in the decisions that you make, it means that you are going to work well together, there is respect and equality in all the things that you do… disagreements in the home usually come if the woman has money and the man has none and you show as if you are more powerful than he is, then that would be a problem" (NW7).

It also was not about broad decision making, it specifically refers to control over their own resources, whether that be interest earned on deposits in a savings group or their own allocation of fertiliser from a women's co-op. The independence they seek is achievable through spaces of learning, support and empowerment, particularly savings groups, which many do not have access to given their isolation. One woman described how she had joined a savings group but missed meetings regularly as she did not receive the communication about when the meeting would take place, or if she did receive the schedule, she was unable to attend due the time of the meeting and the distance from her village, almost two hours walk, often with the return journey in the dark, with no roads or transport, with wild animals present and no network to call for help if needed. As a result, she feels excluded from access to opportunities, as do other women, to create financial independence or some level of finances that are their own, that belong to them. There was also consensus among these groups that they can choose to spend this money on urgent needs, such as healthcare, gardening inputs and education, which makes independence empowering and life sustaining.

A second sphere of independence discussed is community independence. The concept of community independence was voiced more often by the men's groups, although not exclusively men. Some groups spoke about being able to raise their voice, exercise agency and take action which strengthens and empowers them as a community. This independence too is connected to that safe community space, where they are united as a collective, offering mutual support and the protection of a group, where they can feel confident to voice their concerns and ideas. KM3 shared that collective independence occurs in their community when they are empowered to do their community work, giving them collective "*strength as community members with decision making, participation…".*

Some staff also noted the community independence gained through participation and learning in community development initiatives and being empowered by knowledge gained. One example offered relates to start-up

of and participation in savings groups supported by ZGF which is operated independently by the community after a short time, facilitating independent community access to savings and credit in their community.

"we've got a module, and step by step… how to form a community savings group, how to select their own leaders, and then how to save…then also, you come to the first time they're trying to give out loans, and then they're left on their own for some time to do their own business and it comes to another level, you come in to educate them. And so, after the first cycle, then they will be independent…" (SM4).

Agency

Again, discussions about empowerment overwhelmingly came from women where many talked about the sense of agency gained from empowering spaces, particularly spaces of learning. They described empowerment as having a sense of agency over their finances, personal agency, the agency to negotiate and manage relationships and initiatives, and to engage in shared business ventures. Understandings and descriptions of empowerment and agency were often intertwined and overlapping.

"It makes us happy because if you have little money and you want to achieve something big, then it is not possible so through saving little by little when you go get that saved money at one time you can achieve something big. Because if you want something and when you go to ask your husband for money, he will tell you that he doesn't have money but through my savings if I want something then I can buy it or achieve something big. I can achieve it because it's my money and I have the strength and power to do whatever I want with my money..." (NW1).

Some staff spoke about collective agency built through community led development;

"The benefits is networking with supporting NGOs like us, is them being exposed to others… where we link them to the DC to interact… how can the government help… we get you registered so that you can go to offices and

they get to know you, we are this Community Foundation? We want this, you are known, so… "(SM7).

As SM7 demonstrates, one of the benefits of working with the community-led approach is the exposure of communities through an organised and recognised structure of the community foundation to donors, government agencies, the district commissioner, the networking and relationships that follow, and the strengthening of the communities and agency of the community that builds as a result.

Solidarity

Many groups spoke of people in solidarity as encouraging and a positive support for empowerment. For the men, they saw their work through the Community Foundation with ZGF as solidarity which supports community empowerment. Key aspects of solidarity highlighted are continued trusting and caring relations (within the community and externally), recognition of community worth in terms of knowledge, capacity and achievements, including the capacity to make decisions and decide their own agenda as elaborated in findings on knowledge and participation. The emphasis for all these groups was on the collective, once again mirroring the 'we' in Ubuntu.

"It was like a dream come true when we began to see the benefits of our partnership. There are people who did not believe in them at first. They thought ZGF were scammers. We did not have desks at our school. Then ZGF asked us to contribute 25%, and they would contribute 75% to achieve 100% so that they help us allocate desks… We have benefited a lot from ZGF. In addition, if this partnership continues, I am very confident that our community will be transformed" (NM1).

A staff member (SM5) describes their partnership as solidarity, explaining that these communities are often overlooked by the general donor community. Their understanding of external support has been very much 'Boma Iyanganepo' - the government will come through to help us – which

fosters a dependency mentality. Relations of solidarity instead foster a sense of agency and empowerment.

"The collaboration [with ZGF] is better, it's good… Free things are bad… [because] when someone comes to give you something for free, they will not come back to give you again, but if someone gives you something where you are collaborating, you will just be moving forward together because it will be an ongoing thing. The one who has given you for free will leave you on the point where they left you with the gift… Free things don't last… They [the community] like the fact that they contribute to the project because they feel like they're part of that project…" (NW3).

A staff member (SM4) shares that a real positive from working with the 'shift the power' movement and the donors that support their approach is the space to co-create opportunities with them. This space allows ideas to develop and be implemented without the rigid timelines and metrics of traditional approaches. It is adaptive and values learning, from process and results, from both success and failure. This approach is then mirrored with the communities they work with, ZGF are not arriving with some pre-determined agenda. Staff describe this co-creation as solidarity.

"One thing we have liked about the shift the power programme that we have with [named donors] is the co-creation… You know, so the same thing that we like to do when you're in the community… You're creating something together. I think that's one thing I've come to appreciate… that kind of engagement… And that's one thing we like to promote more with our communities and others CSOs" (SM4).

ZGF facilitated the establishment of the community foundation and supports its continued operation. An emphasis is placed on critical education in the process, strengthening and reinforcing existing knowledge, promoting rights, and boosting a sense of agency. They also place an emphasis on love and solidarity as mentioned earlier, encouraging unity and collective independence. All of this takes place through collaboration in a solidarity partnership with ZGF, a trusted relationship for most groups.

Many women's groups also described people in solidarity when they spoke about economic empowerment through women's groups and savings clubs. As mentioned earlier, they value these women only spaces where they can share knowledge and resources, offer each other support and motivation, gain and build confidence, and be a source of encouragement for each other. This is a site of encouragement and solidarity.

"This one is the women's club. It's in that club where we seek assistance because most of the time us women suffer. We came together to uplift each other... We encourage each other and support each other… we learn from each other" (KW3).

Similarly, a few men's groups talked about the importance of local solidarity and support. As they are so isolated and access to markets is challenging, they were advocating within the communities to buy from within the community, supporting local producers and supporting each other, which is very admirable and a strong example of solidarity and active citizenship.

"We also develop by buying local products. For instance, not everyone here grows vegetables. So, when we want to buy vegetables, we do not buy from far area, we buy local. That aids development. I do not buy from Chongwe; we buy within the community…" (NM4).

It emerges that the places and spaces of empowerment, and empowering actions very much stem from active participation, education and collaboration in trusted relationships and safe spaces. Where community members feel safe to voice ideas and challenges, feel supported and encouraged to be creative and take risks, and feel confident both as part of a collective and individually.

Critical education – an empowering approach

Adopting a critical approach and promoting critical thinking emerged as being fundamental to the gradual process of sustainable transformative change for all ZGF staff. Shifting mind-sets through critical education is a crucial element of their critical approach as highlighted in earlier sections,

which encourages an enabling environment. Critical education models such as TfT and active citizenship education support this critical process, which staff insist can and does lead to transformative change in the community. Aspects of critical education such as conscientisation, collective knowledge, action and agency, critical thinking and analysis, praxis, and experiential learning come to the fore as elements of good empowerment processes. These aspects are elaborated in the following sub-sections.

SM1 stresses that the community need to understand certain concepts, processes, and terminology to understand their world, community philanthropy, community foundations and the structures and processes involved. They feel that their education component is critical to community understanding of their world and lived experience, supports citizens to make connections between those experiences, rights and entitlements and politics. It further justifies why certain things need to be done, such as setting up community foundations, for them to be independent and successful active citizens.

"That's why we have all these policies. But most people do not understand that. So, and when you try to explain to them say OK, this is what the government is supposed to do, that is why now we have [this and that] … So, in a sense, when we have those community foundations now it's trying to explain to them… what governing bodies actually do. So, when we're doing active citizenship training, we explain this is the government… the role of legislature, the executive... So that you explain all that... it's the creation of an enabling environment and we have all these resources within our community, and we need to be active citizens and take a lead in the development work that we are doing but it will take a long time" (SM1).

In particular, SM4 talks about how critical community education has been important in terms of encouraging the shift in mind set regarding holding the government to account and seeing support in terms of rights and entitlements rather than handouts and help. They share examples of how critical discussions can open people's minds to critical thought;

"So that [tax income] is the money that your government is using to bring back to you development. So, from that perspective they say oh, so it's our money after all. So can you hold the government accountable. So don't look at it as free money coming from the government. Of course, they get money from [others] but you have also contributed to this money. So, it's money coming back to yourselves, so keep them accountable. So, it's these dynamics where people can be active citizens… [participating] in their own development, both social, economic, and even political" (SM4).

SM4 further shares that an active citizenship module which supports and encourages these critical thought processes has been delivered by ZGF to some community groups, but they have many more to reach. Where it has been delivered, they notice a positive shift in mind-set. However, it is important to note that critical education is a constant through all their work with communities in the community philanthropy approach as articulated by community members and staff below.

Mind-set shift – No more 'Boma Iyanganepo'?

Most ZGF staff talked about the community philanthropy approach as advocating for a mind-set shift, a crucial element to support changes in attitude, behaviour and practice, and importantly to shift power. This mind-set shift is evident throughout many community responses presented in previous sections. One striking aspect of group discussions was the focus on independence in relation to community development, with a lot of expressions of actions which reflect independence as a community, rather than being dependent on external NGOs or government bodies. This represents a shift in thinking from experience and practice which is reflective of the Pan-African call to shift mindset from one of deficiency and vulnerability to capability and independence (Mungwini, 2017). Many community responses demonstrated a vocal desire for local ownership as opposed to external ownership which is different to the prevailing attitude of the past – boma iyanganepo.

"We had challenges in the past to convince people that community development is for everyone's benefit. Village headmen experienced a lot of challenges to persuade people to work toward a community goal. People cared less because they felt that community work was of less benefits to them. There was not much understanding of how community development would benefit everyone. That used to be a challenge. But nowadays most people in our community have a positive attitude toward community work because they can see the works that have been achieved in the past, and how they are benefiting the community…" (NM4).

"And when it is given to you free of charge, no one puts up any guidelines or any mind to it. They say or never mind its care, that's government property" (NW6).

Many community members expressed clearly and proudly that ownership is important to them. In Nyankanga, they state clearly that the school, borehole and hammer mill belongs to them. In Kaminembe, that the clinic under development belongs to them, and the school, borehole, tap stands, toilet facilities and hammer mill belongs to them. Development belongs to them, rather than belonging to some external actor.

At the same time, there is a clear distinction in the community where some groups talk about rights while others talk about 'help', emphasising the variance in how power is felt and expressed across the communities. Many groups spoke about lobbying and advocacy while others used passive language of aid and welfare. The former described how they come together as a community, and through community participation and decision making, they set agendas, decide how to achieve the change, what contribution they will make, before lobbying the government or other external actors for support in order to reach their goals.

"The people [community members] accepted the proposal [to build a school] and came to make the bricks and when I went to Kabwe to lobby for funds, that's when they asked me where we wanted to build the school and the NGOs came…" (KM3).

Conversely, many groups in the community talked consistently about asking the government for help. In these groups, we discussed whether they need to ask for help, or if instead they should be claiming their rights and demanding that their needs are met. The response to such questions was often an empty silence or a sense of apathy and a stern reminder for me that the government do not care about poor rural communities. So, while there is a shift in attitudes and behaviours, there is also a divergence in the community in this regard.

Collective action and agency

Many women's groups in particular demonstrated evidence of another mind-set shift - a cultural shift to a savings culture. Savings groups featured a lot in discussions, particularly among the women. Previous to engaging in these savings groups, there was not a culture of financial saving before, people saved food stocks and livelihood assets to get them through the lean season but otherwise, sustenance was very much hand to mouth. This cultural shift to a savings culture for those engaged in savings groups (or those who expressed a desire to have access to savings groups) is a significant change and is important to them because it allows them to make life enhancing changes, rather than life sustaining actions alone.

"In this community, it is a community that had a lot of challenges, but when the community sat together with Plan International Zambia (NGO) they brought great ideas, inviting other NGOs to come and teach us how to make and manage our budgets as families. [They] taught us how to make clubs… to save money and deposit our contributions to the club… So that was where the foundation of development in the community started from. It was from receiving that lump sum of money that the women were able to start gardening, growing popcorn and groundnuts. Before… saving money was very hard…" (NW1).

While ZGF has promoted financial management through education related to the community foundation and community philanthropy approach,

initially savings groups were introduced to the communities by Plan International Zambia with the Banking on Change[36] initiative, known locally as OSAWA savings groups. ZGF also explained that this culture of saving and giving is embedded in the community philanthropy approach where households make small financial contributions regularly which help fund community initiatives. A few staff members also drew attention to this change as a significant mind-set shift;

"the culture of saving is very low among our people, you know, basically because there are so many needs that come, its hand to mouth. So, it requires a lot of discipline. So instead of them saving as individuals, then this group pressure among themselves so that they're saving together [which supports this shift]" (SM4).

Another mind-set shift evident during the discussions with community members was the shift from self-perception as communities without knowledge to self-recognition as communities with knowledge, capacity and value, and the community philanthropy approach hugely supports this shift. SM3 sees this as a hugely significant shift;

"they're not taught to think that they are experts. And for someone to come in and tell them, when they have never seen themselves as the experts, or the key custodian of information, even their own local context"

They shared that for community members to state that yes, they have knowledge in their own right, that is significant. However, all staff express caution that it does not happen overnight, *"they still expect you to be an expert" (SM3)* and will slide back into their *"default position"* (SM5) of vulnerability until over time they acknowledge and claim their power. While an encouraging shift, the caution expressed by staff once again highlights the fragile and gradual nature of change. All staff spoke of this complicated and slow process, *"it takes time for people to appreciate that they have the knowledge" (SM4)* but agreed that it is a worthwhile process.

[36] Own Savings for Asset and Wealth Creation (OSAWA) – Banking for Change

It is also important to note that collective knowledge and action have a ripple effect in community development. Those who are actively engaged in community education and development, who are consuming and producing knowledge and whose mind-set has been challenged do have an impact on others around them. They are putting their knowledge into action and transferring knowledge, sharing learning, and changing attitudes in practice. Those changes may be slower to take hold, but certainly there is a ripple effect.

Transformation

For me, mindset-change reflects a degree of conscientisation, an expanded understanding or view which results in a change in attitude, opinion, perception and so on, while transformational change involves empowerment and action. However, community groups and staff demonstrated a mix of understandings.

Some staff relate transformational change with mind-set change, as conscientisation and a shift in attitude, agency and action. While others see it in more simple terms, such as SM1 who defines transformation simply as change. They feel it takes a long time; it is not something that you expect immediately. However, while SM1 defines it in simple terms, the change they refer to is significant in the lives of those affected. SM4 shares examples of transformational change that they are documenting through retrospective evaluations, for example, in savings groups, they are not just measuring how much people saved and if they saved. Instead, they are looking at what is happening for people, communities, and households in terms of confidence, decision making, freedom, choice and agency to make decisions about their livelihood, for example, based on their learning, their ability to save, their assets and how these decisions transform their lives.

Some groups talked about transformation, describing personal and collective transformative events. While the concept of transformation is debated, some group members describe events as significant and

transformative *for them*, and share personal transformative experiences, such as the agency and capacity to join a savings group or co-op, or the confidence to take a position on a community committee. Some groups describe the community led and community philanthropy approach, where they set their own agendas and priorities and invest in their own development, as transformative. They spoke about how the establishment of the Community Foundation, and working in this way, opens their minds, strengthens their knowledge, builds their confidence, opens opportunities, builds agency, shifts their mind-sets, cultural attitudes and behaviours. Further some groups describe some cultural shifts as transformative, and this shift to self-reliance, rather than relying on the government to support them, is transformative for them. However, while significant for the community groups and related to political structures at local level, the transformation is more at the personal political level rather than overtly challenging the political in the Freirean sense.

"Most of the projects here we did them by ourselves. For us to reach this far in terms of developing this community, it was not by command. It is community participation; we are usually called for meetings by our village headmen. If there is something to be worked on, they do not just call us to work. They first call for a meeting and tell the community what they suggest should be done and ask us what we think. We exhaust the matter until we find a resolution. We are not pushed to work. Nobody questions that; why didn't you come yesterday? No. We have the spirit of working together here at Kaminembe" (KM1).

Critical thinking

Critical thinking as a key element which supports empowerment processes is evident in findings on CLD and CPA approaches. Critical thinking was very strongly demonstrated in their description of the process of planning for development, where most groups demonstrate active citizenship and critical thinking through their participatory collective approach to their community development. This participatory approach affords everyone a voice (albeit

acknowledging that those on the periphery disagree about the extent that this voice heard), an opportunity to state their view and their needs, to participate in problem analysis and share their experiences and challenges, and to make collective decisions through a democratic process, which demonstrates active citizenship in the community philanthropy approach.

Some groups shared that the participatory process is analysis focused, based on an analysis of issues, needs, and root causes, using their individual and collective shared experiences to inform their problem analysis and assist them in agenda setting. Many groups focused on agenda setting which involves an analysis of the opportunities that exist in their context, informed by asset mapping. Asset mapping is an important activity within the community foundation to assess their collective assets and to explore how they can draw on those collective assets to meet their identified need. So critical thinking was very much evident in their planning processes for community development.

"Before you start working on something, it is important to analyse the matter and see if you are going to manage, and how. If you do not do that, then you may work without knowledge. So, for things to work out, you need to sit down, discuss, and make a final decision. So, now as a community we are making decisions on how we are going to live tomorrow..." (KM1).

Praxis was demonstrated where many groups made a clear link between knowledge, practice, reflection, and action both as a collective in the planning process, and otherwise where they talked about applying knowledge and reflecting on practice to adapt and improve. Many talked about experiential learning and how it supports critical thinking and decision making. For example, learning a new method for farming, applying the learning, making mistakes and analysing what happened, what they could have done differently. Some talked about figuring out for themselves or engaging with a group within the community to discuss and reflect on similar experiences, drawing on collective knowledge so as to adapt and improve, supporting critical thought and decision making. Praxis, experiential

learning and collective knowledge emerged in discussions as key elements for critical thinking and empowerment processes.

"I am a farmer, I grow tomatoes, and if my colleague wishes to learn from me, he may come to me and ask, my brother, how did you manage to grow the tomatoes? We sit down and discuss. When he obtains the knowledge about farming, he can also teach another person. In that way, we can bring development to the community through farming…
Like my colleague said, we learn from one another, but when you learn something, it's good that you practice. If you do not practice, it is difficult to learn. That is how I understand it… (NM4).

Critical thinking, active citizenship and critical education was evident in the communities, but not for everyone. It seems that those who are more actively engaged in community development project committees or with the Community Foundation have had more opportunities to engage in critical education and capacity strengthening. Those who are not so actively involved or do not have the opportunity to actively participate due to their geographical isolation, or are just not motivated to participate, or they just simply do not have the capacity, because life is a challenge already, miss out on a powerful resource for change. So, for lots of reasons, there is an imbalance within the community in this area. Regardless, even for many of those actively engaged, they are at the early stages of critical thinking and conscientisation at community level, some making initial political connections beyond the community, but still far to go to reach the politicised sense of conscientisation and critical transitivity of Freire (1972, 1981) and hooks (1994).

Inclusion

While there are many positives presented in the findings overall, the experience of exclusion voiced by the communities is quite stark. In contrast to this, some groups shared experiences of inclusion which are facilitated

and supported by the participatory community development space and processes therein as documented in the following subsections.

Voice and Agency

Many women's groups talked positively about voice and agency. Among them, they appreciate and value their freedom of expression in the community philanthropy process. Some women said they feel heard in the community development space through a community philanthropy process, where their knowledge and opinion are a valued asset, where they can speak, to share their ideas, and be involved in dialogue and decision making. Some groups shared that they feel that they have equal voice and agency in the decision-making processes in the approach, where decisions are made with men and they feel included.

"Nowadays, there is gender. Whoever raises up their hand whether it's a man or a woman as long as their opinion makes sense. In fact, us the women are in the fore front in voicing out our opinions… As long as what you are saying is meaningful, they will listen to you" (NW6).

"Our voices are heard, nowadays they respect the women and hear our views… Yes, we do… [we] work together with the men and women to make the one decision that will move the development forward…" (KW1)

Inclusive representation

A few women's groups in the community talked about inclusive representation. These women gave praise for the village development committees (VDCs), saying that they are active and effective at village level and that there are women members of the village development committees. However, they were keen to highlight that the councillor does not engage with the village development committees, they only engage with the WDC.

"Yes, it is here [the VDC] … it works and includes women… I am a member and my friend there is also part of the committee… the councillors have never called us…" (KW2).

At times some groups questioned my motivation for being there and asked legitimate critical questions relating to how they would benefit from the research and how their knowledge would be used. Some made valid explicit requests and demands of me and in all groups, we discussed these issues in detail. Without exception, all groups were very welcoming and seemed pleased to participate and appreciated the safe space of confidentiality and inclusion.

"Thank you… And to all the things that have been mentioned may all the issues that have been raised be reflected in the reports so that they can reach the intended people" (KM3).

The intended people that KM3 mentions includes relevant government actors, such as the Ministry for Education and the Minister for Communications among others. It also includes potential solidarity partners who can support their community philanthropy efforts.

Once again enabling and empowering spaces emerge as an important factor, in this instance fostering a sense of inclusion.

Dignity and Recognition

Further, some groups of men and women in both communities talked about dignity and recognition in relation to their participation in the research. They expressed that they felt recognised as a result of being invited to participate in the research and that their participation in the research made them feel seen and heard. Among these groups, the majority were collectives on the periphery of the communities. These groups expressed their appreciation of the fact that I came to speak to them on their turf, regardless of where they were in the community, and that when they asked that I travel to the individual villages, that I agreed without question and arrived as agreed. They observed that I made the effort to go to where they are, where nobody ever goes, not government officials, not ZGF, not the MP or the councillor and they really valued that. They felt recognised, and they felt happy that I valued their voices enough to hear them. They expressed joy at being seen, heard, and included.

"So here we have a big problem… the main reason why we have been neglected is as if we are people that live at the end of a tunnel where there is no light, so we are crying and are happy to see you because most of the time no one ever comes here to hear our concerns. We are really isolated in a corner and no one has come here to listen to us, so the fact that she has come here that's why we are really crying a lot to her" (NW7).

"This is very important, sitting with our people in the village, the coming of our visitor, her not saying I can't go there or there, this has made us happy, and it should continue, development will come" (KM2).

One group sang, *"we're no longer outcasts, because you've come to listen to us",* which is both absolutely uplifting and heart breaking to hear, and which emphasises the importance of inclusive participatory processes.

The Spirit of Ubuntu

The spirit of Ubuntu is evident throughout the findings with the collective 'we' elicited in embodied responses and shared ways of knowing being and doing. The productivity, interrelatedness, mutuality, care and compassion which emerges from the findings reflects this collective 'we'.

One staff member spoke explicitly of Ubuntu, acknowledging its existence and merits but also perhaps suggesting that this collective spirit is stronger in rural communities than elsewhere in Zambia. They offered some final words of caution relating to the ethics and responsibility of power relations and shifting power. SM3 urges us to remember that we have power as stakeholders and we should be mindful in how we use that power, of the impact of our actions, and of perceptions of us because of that power. They advocate that we need to walk the talk when we speak of the Spirit of Ubuntu, reflecting these principles in everything we do and lead by example.

"The thing which is very important in this shift the power is actually the realisation that we have power, you have power, as stakeholders. Then we should be mindful of how we then use that power … which means that we

also should be involved in changing mind-set or talk about mind-set. We always talk about them changing their mind-set, but also us changing our mind-set and seeing them and seeing ourselves equal to them, and also trying to get them to understand that we are equals… Yes, I might have a bit of education, but you are also local experts, you know this community better, so trying to see ourselves in that regard. It also should be right to say that … our way of life, by that I mean the spirit of Ubuntu, there is a funeral, there is a birth, which means that we need to now make it this thing we talk about - our way of life... our homes, our life, where we work at our workplace… if we're saying we're shifting the power, all the principles of community led development, then let them reflect in our homes, then they can reflect in everything that we do. Because then this is similar to leading, practice what you preach, there is no way you can do that by telling people the things which you don't believe or you're not doing. So, this type of work should not be seen like other types of work, you should be actually believe in it. Also be actually advocating and practicing the very thing…" (SM3).

Conclusion

This chapter has presented community and staff insights on empowerment (expressed as strength in this Zambian context) in community development practice, highlighting expressions of empowerment through independence, agency, solidarity, and participation. The community led and community philanthropy approaches are voiced as supportive to empowerment, with staff suggesting that these approaches foster greater empowerment than traditional development approaches.

Empowering and enabling spaces emerged as vital, especially for women, in gaining confidence, voice, and decision-making power. Gender inequality sustains an unequal power dynamic, with women's groups advocating strongly for women-only spaces such as savings groups and cooperatives to gain confidence, financial independence, agency and reduce gender-based violence. The community development space is an empowering space for most, one that supports both individual and collective independence, building on and expanding existing unity, solidarity, and mutual support,

while also shifting cultural norms around saving and self-reliance. The collective 'we' of Ubuntu is clearly visible.

Staff emphasise the central role played by critical education and active citizenship in transforming mind-sets from dependency and welfare to ownership and accountability, where communities harness their collective knowledgeable and assets to engage as co-investors and co-creators of their own development. Significant challenges remain, especially regarding gender inequality, instances of exclusion and unequal power and participation, and a largely ineffective local government structure in the WDC. However, continued empowerment, supported by solidarity relations, critical thinking, and collective action emerges as a transformative path toward long-term independence and sustainable, community-driven development.

Positively, groups also highlight experiences of inclusion, particularly in the participatory community development space. Women's groups noted a heightened sense of agency, voice, equality and inclusion in the community philanthropy approach, while both men and women express a sense of dignity and recognition in being seen, heard, and consulted in both the research and community development spaces.

The collective spirit of Ubuntu is alive and well in these rural communities, an embodied presence which unites and nurtures the collective well-being, and which motivates and supports their collective community-led development.

The following chapter presents an analysis and discussion of these findings through frameworks of knowledge democracy and power.

Chapter Eight: Kukambirana (Discussion)

"Those who constitute local civil society are currently being overlooked, and their context-specific knowledge, innovativeness and strong local networks are not mobilised to their potential" (Peace Direct, 2021:38).

Introduction

This chapter discusses key aspects of the findings presented in the previous chapters. A significant amount of knowledge has been documented and presented, as previously noted, far more than imagined or intended. As I move to discussion, I intend to focus on key aspects of the findings which emerged in relation to the research focus and objective; the experience of knowledge democracy in community led development practice, with an explicit focus on collective community knowledge, participation and empowerment in a community philanthropy approach. I deliberately add research partner voice in places to assist with clarity or to emphasise a point and to always centre the community voice.

This discussion, grounded in data and literature, is centred around these themes and core concepts in findings through a conceptual framework of knowledge democracy. Core to this conceptual framework is an analysis of power relations and the exercise of power in the context of this research drawing on critical feminism and Gaventa's power cube framework, which was an iterative process in interpretation and analysis. In the discussion of the exercise of power through the elements of the conceptual framework, I emphasise the forms, spaces and levels of power throughout, while the critical feminist 'vital' view of power is most visible in relation to gendered dimensions of knowledge, power and participation. The chapter concludes with an example and explanation of community success and learning in action.

The chapter sections and subsections are presented in table 8.0 below.

Knowledge Democracy - a conceptual framework		
Equitable production and consumption of knowledge and information Social inclusion and learning Meaningful participatory processes • A note on recognition and Ubuntu		
Unpacking the Layers of Knowledge Democracy		
Knowledge Justice	Spaces of Social Inclusion and Justice	Meaningful Participatory Processes
Knowledge and learning – a lifelong imperative Local Microcosm of Knowledge Justice Gendered Knowledge (In)Justice and Empowerment Spaces of Learning and Sharing The External Gaze: Deficient and Vulnerable Knowledge Denied Powerful Learning Relations and Processes	Spaces of Learning (Un)Invited Spaces A Seat at the Table Solidarity Relations as Enabling Environments Power in Every Space Disabling Space Empowering Spaces and Processes	External Experts and Localisation A Participation Revolution Community-Led Development and the Community Philanthropy Approach Participation as Performance Locally led development Motivations for Participation Relationships for Social Change Assets and Co-investors A Growth Mindset Power and Participation Generative Processes Critical Education and Collective Conscientisation
Community success and learning in action		

Table 8.0: Discussion Sections and Sub-sections

The empirical evidence from this research context validates Camfield's (2024:429) view that "knowledge itself is something that cannot be individually owned—the notion of expertise is redundant. Instead, it is something that is negotiated, communal and contextual". This brokered, context specific, collective knowledge is vital to the survival of these communities and is often life sustaining, life enhancing and indeed lifesaving. However, the value and recognition placed on this knowledge varies, at times acknowledged and recognised by the community themselves, third sector actors, government bodies and other stakeholders;

and at times overlooked and undervalued by these same actors, exemplifying the pervasive deficit model in development highlighted by Ziai (2016) and van Selm et al. (2025) among others; and often diminished by the community themselves in internalised acts of deference to outsider experts (Djohossou et al., 2023a). This knowledge is a powerful asset which can support individual and collective agency and action, raise voices and enhance lives, as exemplified by the successful initiatives completed and in progress in these communities in a community philanthropy approach which draws on their collective intellectual and other assets. Unfortunately, despite this wealth of collective community-based knowledge, the broader socio-political context brings a denial and silencing of knowledge in these communities. This is often expressed in tangible aspects such as, the collective criticism of the Ward Development Committees, the despair related to lack of communication technologies and access to knowledge and information. This collective denial and silencing is indicative of underlying power inequalities that lead to or enhance their experience of isolation, exclusion, and inequality and is discussed further later in this chapter.

Knowledge Democracy - a conceptual framework

Knowledge Democracy - a conceptual framework	
°	Equitable production and consumption of knowledge and information
°	Social inclusion and learning
°	Meaningful participatory processes
°	A note on recognition

Table 8.1: Knowledge Democracy - a conceptual framework

The findings are discussed in the following sections through an emergent conceptual framework of knowledge democracy which includes learning in knowledge justice, and which draws from the research partner voice and on the work of theorists in this field of practice such as Gaventa and Cornwall (2006), Hall and Tandon (2017, 2020). I also draw on aspects of the work of Fricker (2006, 2007, 2017) and other philosophers (Dotson, 2011; Kidd et. al.; 2017, Pérez, 2019; Hänel, 2020) to support the discussion.

It is important to note that this framework is related to and drawn from the specific context and experience of this piece of research. As Pohlhaus (2017) suggests, knowledge justice is not bounded. They argue that the scale of knowledge injustice globally is inexhaustive, the depth and growth of global inequality is vast, and given the continuing trend of shrinking civil society space and participation; to attempt to suggest a framework as being all encompassing would risk being exclusive.

An overarching pre-requisite for knowledge democracy is the recognition of all people as dignified global citizens, with equal and inalienable human rights as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)[37]. This recognition as global citizens with equality and rights underscores the concepts of, and entitlement to, dignity and respect, to voice and the right to be heard, and supports identity and belonging. This is important to remember considering that community research participants spoke collectively of experiences of marginalisation and isolation, of feeling voiceless or unheard, and of a sense of estrangement and denial of national identity. This focus on recognition and rights is highlighted by many including Anderson et al. (2022), Howard et al. (2014), Cornwall and Edwards (2010), Freire (1972, 1981) often with a focus on the importance of enabling spaces to claim those rights, bearing in mind that claiming those rights may need created spaces sympathetic to collective local ways of 'doing, being and becoming' which prioritise collective rather than individual rights (van Norren and Seehawer, 2025). Spaces of knowledge democracy foster an enabling environment where social, economic and cultural rights can be claimed and upheld, and where climate justice can be amplified and advanced.

This emergent conceptual framework interprets knowledge democracy, which includes knowledge justice, as the equitable production and consumption of knowledge and information, social inclusion and learning,

[37] United Nations General Assembly (1948) Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Resolution A/RES/217(III)A. 10 December 1948.

and meaningful participatory processes as standard practice, elaborated below.

Equitable production and consumption of knowledge and information

- acceptance of multiple types, forms and sources of knowledge
- recognition of all people as citizen knowers, without discrimination,
- capable of holding, creating and sharing knowledge and information in multiple representations and forms.

Social inclusion and learning

- access to information, services and knowledge (schools, ICT, media, social movements…)
- access to multiple spaces, forms and processes of learning
- effective representation and feedback mechanisms

Meaningful participatory processes

- which recognise existing knowledge, rights, capacity, and agency
- view citizens as key stakeholders and partners in political processes
- view citizens similarly in development actions and processes with the right to participate asserted and locally led,
- where decision making and agenda setting rests with affected communities.

While as presented above, this conceptual framework offers broad conceptual frames and sub-concepts within those, the reality is much less distinct, with many cross-cutting and intersecting layers, a reflection of Hall and Tandon's view of knowledge democracy as "interrelationship of phenomena" (2017:13). Multiple attempts to present them distinctly has resigned me to this reality, as such, each overarching concept is presented in the sections to follow as a whole and as part of the others, with many intersections and much overlap.

Notes on recognition and Ubuntu

While theories of recognition are not foregrounded in the discussion, it is nonetheless important to draw attention to dignity and recognition given its

emergence consistently in the findings. Sen's capabilities approach proposes that the capabilities of "political freedom, social opportunities and protective security" (2001:10) are essential to the realisation of human development. Central to meaningful human development are dignity and recognition (Nussbaum, 2011), the latter we have seen glimpses of but have learned is not to be taken for granted in these isolated and excluded communities. Le Grange (2012) presents Ubuntu as an architectonic capability, highlighting dignity, the collective and interconnectedness as central to the philosophy. These are communities with inherent dignity like any other, and who are entitled to, and deserve, recognition as global citizens with rights but perhaps more urgently, recognition of their accomplishments and of their knowledge, assets, and capacity to take ownership of their collective endeavours. Most of all, this discussion aims to focus on and celebrate their abundant capability, rather than their vulnerability, turning the looking glass on its head in a change from the deficit-based model and imposed helplessness which are currently the norm from a Global North development lens.

The flow, influence and exercise of power in these communities and in development practice is critical and shapes the experiences of and outcomes for community development. A clear expression of power articulated by community groups reflects the collective power of Ubuntu, articulated by Le Grange (2019:325) as, "the manifestation of the power within all beings that serves to enhance life, and not thwart it. This is a power that is productive, that connects and engenders care and compassion – it is the power of the multitude that gives impetus to social movements".

Abdi (2021) highlights the complementarity between Freire's educational philosophy and the African philosophy of Ubuntu, emphasising that both; prioritise the community and social context in the learning process, advocate for the enlightenment of people and the end of oppression through education, emphasise critical consciousness and collective action, inclusivity, life-long learning and contextual learning and knowledge. Abdi (ibid) further argues that both see power as inherent in education and

therefore see education as a political space, with Freire criticising the dominance of elites, while Ubuntu advocates for collective ownership of political power. Gaventa's theories of power intersect with both, with the investigation of communal and elite power in spaces of education and beyond seeking to disrupt oppression and challenge elitist educational and other political structures.

Regardless of the expression of the vital force of Ubuntu evident in these communities, power in its various forms, shapes and sustains the experience of isolation and exclusion of collectives in these communities, and many others throughout the world (see Gaventa, 2007; Cheng, 2000, Miller et al., 2006, Ziai, 2017). As discussed in the literature, the lived expression of Ubuntu does not always reflect its inherent philosophy and values and can change according to community context and geography, urban or rural, influenced by age, position and interest, as noted by ZGF staff in their experiences with urban and rural communities (Karsten and Illa, 2005; Mwipikeni, 2018). In the case of the research communities, they are geographically and technically isolated from broader society and the modern influences therein, much more reliant on and rooted in old ways of being and doing at present. The youth are respectful of these ways and of the Ubuntu way of life, however, there is a visible divide in the generations in terms of their interest and engagement with indigenous knowledge and practice. This exemplifies that "the way in which the values are lived and translated into social action is continuously contested and negotiated… It is through dialogue and conversation among the members of the collective that the practices associated with Ubuntu are defined, implemented and routinized" (Mutwarasibo & Iken, 2019:21). The view of Ubuntu in terms of power which is "co-created and mutually empowering" (Tavernaro-Haidarian, 2018; in Topidi, 2022:55) and one that is debated, evolving and so sometimes abused politically and interpreted in multiple ways could be seen to be reflected in the dysfunctional and exclusive operation of the WDC in this context.

However, Harley's (2025) discussion of Ubuhlalism as grounded in and dependent on basic truths rooted in equality, participation, agency, voice and inclusion is reflected in the lived practice of Ubuntu in these communities, for the most part. Her emphasis on human dignity, inclusion and equality, knowledge justice, active participation in decision making and local leadership in a living politic which "is owned by the people… a space where people represent themselves and take decisions for themselves" (ibid:162) resonates with these communities practice and the framework for knowledge democracy presented here.

Unpacking the Layers of Knowledge Democracy

Unpacking the Layers of Knowledge Democracy		
Knowledge Justice	Spaces of Social Inclusion and Learning	Meaningful Participatory Processes
· Knowledge and learning – a lifelong imperative · Local Microcosm of Knowledge Justice · Gendered Knowledge (In)Justice and Empowerment · Spaces of Learning and Sharing · The External Gaze: Deficient and Vulnerable · Knowledge Denied · Powerful Learning Relations and Processes	· Spaces of Learning · (Un)Invited Spaces · A Seat at the Table · Solidarity Relations as Enabling Environments · Power in Every Space · Disabling Space · Empowering Spaces and Processes	· External Experts and Localisation · A Participation Revolution · Community-Led Development and the Community Philanthropy Approach · Participation as Performance · Locally led development · Motivations for Participation · Relationships for Social Change · Assets and Co-investors · A Growth Mindset · Power and Participation · Generative Processes · Critical Education and Collective Conscientisation

Table 8.2: Unpacking the Layers of Knowledge Democracy

In this section I intend to unpack some of the layers of the framework and findings which have emerged through analysis. The layers that I foreground are collective knowledge production and consumption, spaces and forms of learning, and participatory approaches with a focus on the collective in a community philanthropy approach. I focus on these to highlight; the communities' experience of exclusion from knowledge production and consumption and the expression of this power in practice and its consequences; to draw attention to spaces and forms of learning which are crucial to challenging this experience of exclusion and silencing, and finally to highlight the community philanthropy approach as an inclusive and empowering space for transformation and sustainable social change.

In these communities, exclusion from knowledge production and consumption limits opportunity, constrains meaningful participation in some spaces, and leads to exclusion from appropriate, strong, effective traditional and formal representation. Geographical, social, economic and political isolation both from broader society and within the communities impacts the individual and collective experience of equality, and of individual and collective perceptions of identity and belonging. This holistic experience is detrimental to the lived reality and quality of life of these communities, an undeniable injustice which accounts for a community group stating that, *"it's almost as if we are not part of this nation" (KM2).* It is indicative of the broader socio-political systems curtailing their lives. Babalola sees exclusion as a barrier to epistemic justice, advocating attention to its opposite expression, inclusion and arguing that "together, epistemic justice and inclusion can contribute to more equitable, diverse, and inclusive societies" (2024:7).

It is important to highlight that while limited in comparison to experiences of exclusion, some instances of inclusion arising from the participatory community development space are highlighted. Community groups spoke of finding voice and agency in enabling community development spaces. Women feel heard and feel that they have a say in decision making in the community development process and attribute this change to the gender

equality agenda. *"Yes, we do… [we] work together with the men and women to make the one decision that will move the development forward…" (KW1).* Women praised active and inclusive representation at village development committee level, while men appreciated the safety and inclusion offered by the research space. The experience of inclusion in the research space fostered a sense of dignity and recognition for all community groups. Indeed, dignity and recognition are at the heart of the ethics and values of the African philosophy of Ubuntu, whose spirit is clearly evident and a vital force (van Norren and Seehawer, 2025:6) in these communities. Hence, experiences of inclusion and exclusion co-exist and intermingle throughout the lives of these communities, indicative of the underlying flows and dynamics of power in these spaces.

Knowledge Justice

Unpacking the Layers of Knowledge Democracy
Knowledge Justice
· Knowledge and learning – a lifelong imperative · Local Microcosm of Knowledge Justice · Gendered Knowledge (In)Justice and Empowerment · Spaces of Learning and Sharing · The External Gaze: Deficient and Vulnerable · Knowledge Denied · Powerful Learning Relations and Processes

Table 8.3: Knowledge Justice

Knowledge justice, viewed as the equitable production and consumption of knowledge and information, demands the acceptance of multiple types, forms and sources of knowledge as legitimate knowledge, and the recognition of all people as citizen knowers, without discrimination, capable of holding, creating and sharing knowledge and information in multiple representations and forms (Hall, Heck and Godrie, 2020; Gaventa,1995; Tandon, Sing, Clover and Hall, 2016; Babalola, 2024). In a knowledge democracy, the wrongs of the colonial past (Hall and Tandon, 2017; Letherby, 2003) and academic present (Nadarajah and Grydehøj, 2024) can be reversed, embracing the multiple and diverse knowledges dismissed, suppressed and ridiculed by hegemonic oppressor's past and present in an

act of decolonial defiance. In these communities, an 'alternative' worldview and related systems of knowledge exist, illuminated through the data as evidence of the, "pluriverse of ways of living, being, knowing, acting, and dreaming" (Kothari, 2024:67).

Knowledge and learning – a lifelong imperative

The presentation of findings in the previous chapter leaves little doubt that these are communities with rich and complex knowledge, and much of which is drawn from within the community itself, passed through generations, informally and collectively generated and shared in intimate, private and community spaces. This empirical evidence of the depth, multiplicity and diversity of knowledge held by and produced in these communities contradicts the knowledge injustice supported by dichotomies of outsider experts and empty vessels locally which the literature highlights (see Ziai, 2016, 2017; Girvan, 2007) has persisted for centuries and which staff respondents say persists in mainstream development practice. It further documents the vitality of everyday knowledge and the continuous and lifelong dimensions of learning, supporting the work of others such as Escrigas et al. (2014), Coombs and Ahmed (1974), Gaventa and Bivens (2014) and Tandon and Srinivasan (2024). *"So, learning does not cease and we will not stop learning, right, because in whatever we do, there is something that we can use to succeed. We learn every day in one way or the other…" (NM2).*

Equally, learned from praxis in a continuous process of learning and unlearning, both through necessity to sustain life, and in the hope of enhancing the individual or collective livelihood and wellbeing. Process learning through participation in community endeavours is well documented in findings, as are the development of affective senses of unity and identity, among others.

However, the literature laments that learning from process is usually dismissed in development practice where the focus is on specific tangible, measurable often quantitative evidence for results (Liddy and Gallwey,

2020; Eyben et al. 2015; Wallace et al. 2007) generally measured at individual rather than collective levels (Carlsson and Wohlgemuth, 2000; Kimambo and Shallwani, 2025). Initial struggles with self-recognition as knowers and a reluctance to name and to distinguish literacy from functional literacy, or everyday learning as knowledge equal to that 'from books', are reflected in similar struggles in rural communities in India documented by Shukla (2025). These struggles elicited gendered perspectives of different forms of knowledge as of varying status, *"there is a way of knowing which is of lower level" (NM2)* attaching varying value and attributes to knowledge such as life-sustaining, -enhancing, or -saving, and revealed the complexity of relationship with knowledge and learning. This complexity and struggle suggest that community education efforts which instigate a mind-set shift and a 'constant awakening' as advocated by Mungwini (2017) and Djohossou (2023b) are justified and necessary. Through open discussions of mutual respect and care, sharing and dialogue, a general initial consensus on the wealth, depth and breadth of knowledge in the community, and its value and importance, was reached. However, it is important not to become complacent, as evidenced in theory and in practice, mind-set shift is difficult to achieve and even more difficult to sustain.

Local Microcosm of Knowledge Justice

There exists an imperfect microcosm of knowledge justice in these local spaces, where community members are seen, heard and valued as knowers in a process of mutual recognition in a variety of constituent collective forms within and across communities. This collective contextual knowledge emerges from communities who share a view of life as biocentric and interdependent, a common view in Southern epistemologies as noted by van Norren and Seehawer (2025), and a challenge to the bias inherent in Western knowledge systems highlighted by Sloane Perry and Couchois Duncan (2017) and Widenhorn (2014). An example of this view of life as biocentric and interdependent emerges in relation to environmental literacy where a group shared how they learn from nature, "*Mukuyu is the tree that*

is found where there is a water source… Villagers use the Mukuyu tree to determine where to dig a well because it always sits on a waterbed" (KW1).

Many such examples were shared in collectives which include elders as the keepers of traditional and indigenous knowledge, men expert in farming, crop production, building, planning and repairs, the latter two of prudence and necessity. Collectives of women, experts on a multitude of knowledges – from birthing and caregiving to crop production and gardening, healthcare and traditional medicine, to community work, a clear reflection of the burden of their 'triple role' (Moser, 1993). Many community groups spoke of the breadth of collective knowledge that exists within the community and the added value and power of that knowledge if collated and shared among the community, *"…if you don't meet or share ideas, there is no way that knowledge can bring development in your community" (KM2)* advising me that "*one hand cannot kill lice*" (KM2), reflecting the view of Pohlhaus (2017:16) that "our epistemic lives are fundamentally intertwined with one another such that one cannot simply ignore other knowers and know well"; we are interconnected through relations of knowledge.

Hall and Tandon agree, adding that in a knowledge democracy, these multiple diverse sources and forms of knowledge are, "a powerful tool for taking action in social movements and elsewhere to deepen democracy and to struggle for a fairer and healthier world… Knowledge democracy is about intentionally linking values of justice, fairness and action to the process of using knowledge (2017:13). Community groups shared this sentiment sharing that, *"…knowledge is key to bring about community development, so is being creative, sharing ideas and working as a community. Then you may choose to walk in the same path with everyone... No one should degrade themselves because they feel disadvantaged financially, no one is poor. God did not create anyone poor. Knowledge is what needs to be applied…" (KM1).* This sentiment is shared by others, such as Freire (1972, 1981), Freire et al. (2014) and Ziadah and Hanieh (2010) emphasising the situated and collective nature of knowledge production in action for social justice. It is further emphasised by many as central to decolonisation, localisation, CLD

and a CPA, such as Matthews and Castellsagué, 2025, Djohossou et al. (2023a), Veda et al. (2021:10), and Hodgson and Pond, (2018), Hodgson and Knight (2016) among many others. Ryan and Murphy (2018) add to this argument, contending that the adult and community education space can facilitate the disruption of deeply held assumptions and taken for granted knowledge and form connections between knowledge and global inequalities, so supporting knowledge justice.

However, while collective and contextual epistemologies are recognised in discourse and among community members as pertinent to knowledge democracy and a tool for social change, the acknowledgement of these repositories of knowledge may not be vocalised or universal within and across communities, particularly for women in private and intimate spaces (Miller at al., 2006), such as those with *"difficult husbands" (NW2)*, exposing knowledge injustice and silencing within these communities, scaffolded by invisible or internalised power dynamics.

Gendered Knowledge (In)Justice and Empowerment

For women educated in the formal sense or empowered through non-formal or informal learning in community initiatives and women's clubs, or who experience education and economic empowerment in savings clubs, it does not mean that their burden is reduced. As Kabeer (2017) argues, a focus on learning towards economic empowerment fails to give due weight to structural and systemic issues at the root of gender inequality. Additionally, there is a tendency to ignore the possibility that women's economic empowerment may have pros and cons broadly, the latter being for example a challenge to power dynamics in the private space or adding yet another responsibility to the women's already heavy burden, with disruptive and disempowering consequences. Research by Veda at al. (2021) suggests that participation can add to women's burden, finding, "that CLD could increase demands on women and vulnerable groups, in part through its reliance on voluntary work" (2021:13). This position is validated by a staff member who

shares that, *"… you find mostly we have the female participants; people acknowledge that in developmental programmes, women participate more than the men." (SM4).*

Neither does it mean that their empowerment is ever present, as power in one space does not necessarily mean power in others as noted by many including Anderson et al. (2022), Kabeer (2017), Cornwall and Edwards (2010). The spaces and levels where women can exercise their power vary on an individual basis and the demand on women's time in their triple role emerged consistently and collectively in the findings, mostly in a resigned way rather than a complaint. Time is a valuable resource as highlighted by all community members; indeed, women's time is seen as a resource to be controlled by men, *"We spend most of the time working in his field and he only gives us a day or two in the week to work in our own fields..." (NW1).* Women repeatedly spoke of their desire to have control over their own resources, including their time. Many women feel that they have the *power to* and collective *power with* to voice their knowledge, and that it is recognised and valued in their community development efforts, *"Nowadays, there is gender… us the women are in the fore front in voicing out our opinions…" (NW6).* However, others do not feel the same sense of agency and choice in accessing knowledge and the enabling spaces where it is often shared, such as collectives in peripheral villages, *"I had joined [a livelihoods] club but I was always left out of most of the activities because here we have no network so when they call for a meeting I wouldn't even know about it" (NW7)* or those who feel empowered in safe women's spaces such as women's clubs, but not in private and intimate spaces as highlighted in the previous section. Within the community, women's inclusion and knowledge justice is not to be taken for granted as highlighted by a staff member, *"I think women's knowledge is probably not taken on board as much as they should, because of the power dynamics in the communities. I think if you're not making a deliberate effort of including women in meetings, then their knowledge would count even less" (SM2).*

The findings suggest that while some progress has been made towards gendered knowledge justice, there is a way to go, and as Anderson et al. (2022) and others note above, the power dynamics in different spaces for different collectives needs constant attention.

Spaces of Learning and Sharing

Inclusive and accessible spaces of learning, sharing and co-creation of information and knowledge are vitally important and as such are given more attention in the next section on social inclusion. However, it is important to acknowledge the experience of exclusion from these spaces in this context. Those excluded from spaces of learning may have a wealth of knowledge to share and co-create or may have other skills and assets of value which remain undiscovered and untapped. These can include groups excluded due to distance, e.g. members of remote villages or the wider community lacking transport infrastructure and services, or due to age, as is often the case for youth who are deemed too young to have anything to offer or due to an assumption of laziness and disinterest. It can also include the wider community as a collective due to systemic communications issues such as lack of mobile network, radio or other means of communication. Veda et al. (2021) found that these factors can limit participation in CLD generally, so limiting opportunities for learning and empowerment. Inclusive and accessible spaces of learning, sharing and co-creation of information and knowledge are vitally important and as such are given more attention in the next section on social inclusion.

The External Gaze: Deficient and Vulnerable

Moving from the local internal to the external public levels locally and beyond, production and consumption of knowledge reduces and changes, becoming less available, less acknowledged, less valued. It is rare that external stakeholders seek out the community's knowledge, assigned an identity of rural poor and uneducated, viewed as deficient rather than abundant, an example of pre-emptive testimonial injustice (Fricker, 2007)

enacted by public, private and third sectors actors and civil society at large. Those at the grassroots perceived as lacking the "knowledge and sophistication necessary for effective action" (Gaventa 1995:29), a bias which Sloane Perry and Couchois Duncan (2017) highlight exists in the non-profit sector. Many in the communities agree with these viewpoints saying that they are rarely visited or asked for their knowledge or perspective and referred to themselves as '*outcasts*', '*unseen*' and '*it's as if we are not part of this nation*', often linking perceptions of themselves as poor, without power and isolated to their experience of dignity and recognition. This view is corroborated by SM7 who does not think the government values community knowledge enough, saying that it is rare for government to visit and acknowledge rural communities' initiatives and achievements. While not exclusively so, these responses mainly emerge from villages on the periphery of the communities, suggesting that the collective knowledge and experience of these groups are often excluded, in a mirroring of Dutt's (2025) observation of the concept of development in the periphery consistently portrayed as deficient in development studies. Such viewpoints in agreement with the literature is further exemplified in collective responses related to government representatives and the WDC, where groups highlight knowledge injustice in the production and consumption of knowledge and information.

A common thread among discourse presented in the literature review (Gibson Nangle et al., 2025; Cummings et al., 2018; Djohossou et al., 2023b) is the view in the development sector of marginalised communities as deficient, in need of external experts to come to the rescue, dismissing the diversity and wealth of knowledge that exists, failing to question the knowledge injustice or the structural inequalities and exclusion experienced by these communities. In a common scenario noted by Gaventa and Bivens (2014), they are viewed as passive consumers rather than active producers of knowledge, not recognised as citizen knowers or creators, the community mere passengers on the journey to development. Again, these views are supported in the data, in this case, in the collective view of staff members

based on their experiences in the development sector, articulated here by SM3, that generally external stakeholders do not, *"acknowledge the community as experts, but they see themselves as experts, that is why they make the decisions"* on behalf of communities. Staff members acknowledge how this deficient view is problematic and has been internalised and replicated by CSO's assuming the role of expert, superior to community members. As noted in a previous section, in contrast to this injustice, within the community exists an imperfect microcosm of knowledge democracy in the CLD and CPA space and I return to a focus on these spaces later in discussion.

Knowledge Denied

The community's ability to consume knowledge is limited by their isolation and exclusion, within broader socio-political and economic contexts, evident in the fact that access to knowledge and learning through the public education system is limited in and beyond primary level as a consequence of their isolation and exclusion. The fact that government supported primary schools exist in these communities is due to the sheer determination and tenacity of the communities who created these spaces as informal village schools initially, eventually meeting the criteria for government support through their CLD efforts which allowed them to claim the space as government schools. Despite their achievements, primary education access is limited and unequal, due to financial, gender, infrastructure, transport and attitudinal barriers, these at first created and claimed spaces remain closed to many children in the community.

These communities are further denied access to knowledge and learning through social systems such as ICT due to lack of mobile communications, from services such as health information and knowledge, from social networks and organisations outside of their own community due to their exclusion and isolation. Their ability to access and exchange information, interact with and receive feedback from state, private and third sector actors is additionally rejected. The lack of investment in these rural communities is

significant, such that at every turn, these communities are denied knowledge and information, are prevented from sharing theirs, and experience a deep level of knowledge inequality, a fact presented by community groups consistently in discussions, "i*nformation is very important; we are very behind in that regard. Our phones are only being used for playing music" (KM2).* This denial is a form of epistemic violence, the marginalisation of rural communities "implicitly excluded and inferior" (Pérez, 2019), which limits and controls their access to and perhaps awareness of the places and spaces which these citizens could and should have available to them. Mohanty and Tandon (2006:10) argue that the notion of citizenship implies a degree of participation in society that extends beyond voting or involvement as recipients of state welfare initiatives, such that, "participatory citizenship is both a discourse and a set of practice about the inclusion of the excluded groups". Access to information and knowledge through formal, non-formal and informal learning systems, through ICT, access to resources and services, and more are vital to an informed citizenry and a necessary support for active citizenship. The continued denial of communication technologies and systems in particular hinders their collective communicative, "agency, articulation and mobilisation in their attempt to change existing relationship and turn their overwhelming exclusionary citizenship experience into an inclusive one" (ibid).

Powerful Learning Relations and Processes

In addition to the denial of access to the spaces, structures and mechanisms where knowledge and learning is exchanged, what is considered legitimate knowledge is also controlled, denied and silenced. All staff agreed that collective knowledge and process learning in community development projects has long been sidelined by NGOs and donors in traditional development approaches in favour of individual, tangible and measurable results, as SM4 shared, *"people really know what change has taken place in their lives, but most of the evaluations have been… basically evaluating whether the money that was given has achieved each of its objectives"*. The

relational aspects usually dismissed and undervalued, the learning and solidarity in these relationships ignored and discouraged. The trivialising of such learning and relations is well documented (Eyben, 2010; Eyben et al., 2015; Valters et al. 2016; VeneKlasen and Miller, 2002), with Wallace et al. (2007) explicitly critical of its depoliticising effect.

Contrastingly, Veda, (2023) describes CLD and CPA as complexity theory in action where learning happens and knowledge is co-created through social interactions, networks and relations. Community responses highlight learning through the CLD process and express feelings of self-worth and self-confidence, *"…we all have power and when we come together, we choose leaders to direct us so that we can all move together…" (NW2),* through trusted solidarity relationships, and see learning and knowledge creation as both as both process and outcome of participatory development.

Process learning is equally valued by ZGF staff in their professional practice. However, this learning goes unrecognised in traditional development approaches, the knowledge created hidden in a matrix of measures, silenced but not lost.

These social relations are valued by the community where equality in dignity and recognition, consistency and continuity, and trust are named as conditions of solidarity relations. They see solidarity relations as recognition of their collective knowledge, their worth, their participation and contribution, of an equal power-sharing partnership of mutual respect, most of all it is a partnership, not charity. A few community groups spoke of love for each other, while many spoke of related values of solidarity, care, collaboration, togetherness and unity as being important. The concept of love as a resource and as a key to community development is encouraged by ZGF in their engagement, where ZGF staff emphasise their collective way of being and their existing Ubuntu worldview, if one person develops, they should all develop – and invited them to consider this as love for the collective. This solidarity and the explicit naming of love for the community reflects the view held by Djohossou et al. (2023b) and others (Cameron et

al., 2018; Dirik, 2016; Kabeer and Huq, 2010) which sees relations of solidarity as an affective emotional endeavour. The concept of solidarity emerged consistently in findings and as such appears and is elaborated consistently throughout the discussion.

The motivation, sense of unity and determination to change and develop which process learning generates, prompts deep critical reflection on whether the focus on tangible and measurable results more generally in traditional approaches and practice is the exercise of hidden power, over what counts as results and evidence, what counts as learning and knowledge, over whose reality is valid and valued, as suggested by Chambers (1997, 2017). This hidden power is a strategy to intentionally direct citizens away from engagement in a more complex focus on and analyses of 'their world' and the systems and structures which oppress. Such strategies depoliticise community education and development initiatives and weaken the potential for empowering transformative or radical action as lamented by Wallace et al. (2007) and Batliwala (2007). The powerful elite do not want conscientised citizen knowers, preferring an obedient civil society who do not resist (Mansuri and Rao, 2013; Girvan, 2007) when policy and laws are introduced which shrink or close civil society space, disabling formerly enabling spaces. Girvan (2007:17) argues that in the current dominant neoliberal system, local knowledge and citizen knowers are treated as objects of knowledge who simply serve to inform powerful decision makers "what it is in the local situation that needs to be "corrected" to allow the world of optimally functioning markets to operate. Local knowledge cannot be the source of original solutions, since the general answers are universally prescribed". Furthermore, Gaynor argues that "many NGOs are embroiled in informal networks of power which lead to their co-option" (2022:130) which controls or limits empowerment and transformation, to sustain the status quo rather than change it, an argument also made by van Selm et al. (2025) and McCloskey (2023) in relation to grassroots organisations.

Spaces of Social Inclusion and Learning

Unpacking the Layers of Knowledge Democracy
Spaces of Social Inclusion and Learning
· Spaces of Learning · (Un)Invited Spaces · A Seat at the Table · Solidarity Relations as Enabling Environments · Power in Every Space · Disabling Space · Empowering Spaces and Processes

Table 8.4: Spaces of Social Inclusion and Learning

This places an emphasis on social inclusion and learning where citizens have consistent access to information and knowledge; through equal access to multiple spaces, forms and processes of learning; through effective representation and feedback mechanisms in the public sphere, for example, through local traditional and state authorities and structures; and equal access to a free and independent media and ICT in all its forms. The latter a glaring failing in the research community context where access to mobile and digital technologies is extremely limited and where even the radio is silent. These spaces, forms and processes, whether physical or virtual, are vital.

Spaces of Learning

Safe and trusted spaces of learning emerged consistently as crucial for access to, and sharing and creation of knowledge, with calls for dedicated women's spaces reverberating, *"it would be nice for the women to also have a women's cooperative; we are really pushing so that we can have our own women's club…" (NW7)*. These formal and informal spaces exist at different levels and are often created by the community themselves, for example, cooperatives, village development committees and women's clubs. At community level and elsewhere, these spaces of learning, sharing and dialogue are not new, they have existed through time and place, flourishing in pre-colonial times (Gaynor, 2022) until supressed by colonisers in the exercise of power over colonised communities to close civic space and the

power therein. Such created spaces can take many forms and can be as informal and 'organic' (Cornwall, 2002) as women sharing tacit and experiential knowledge of vegetable gardening with neighbours, or farmers sharing their stories of success and failure in relation to crop production or livestock rearing among themselves as they gather for farming chores. What is key is that there is recognition of these types of collective spaces, and resources allocated as necessary. Such spaces are highlighted over and again in findings and are important to collectives, especially women, who find learning, solidarity and some degree of independence in these spaces, *"the other knowledge that we are acquiring especially in this time and age for us women is learning how each person should sustain themselves, so sometimes we come and make these groups where if one of the members has a problem we consult each other and put resources together to help our friend… that is one of the ways we share knowledge.." (NW1).* Shukla (2025:112) describes a multiplicity of learning spaces, "including farms, mountains, villages, roads and temples, illustrating that all informal, non-institutionalised spaces are conducive to creating literacy". These collective spaces are sometimes deliberately created, others inadvertently so, and must be supported and nourished in light of the socio-cultural and systemic exclusion impacts on women outlined in the previous section.

(Un)Invited Spaces

In other cases, they are invited spaces, facilitated by external actors with specific focuses, in this research context, spaces such as Ministry of Agriculture skills trainings, NGO community health initiatives, and ZGF global citizenship education and other critical education initiatives. Gaynor (2022) advises that spaces which are intended or presumed to be invited spaces, including dedicated community development spaces, can be closed to some community members, often replicating existing exclusionary power dynamics and inequalities. In this research, this observation by Gaynor is evident in the findings, for example, related to the WDC or NGO supported savings clubs, the former closed through education criteria, *"the councillor is not very active… the one who was active lacked the papers the government*

needed for him to qualify." (KW2), and the latter as a consequence of geography, infrastructure, and communication barriers. In the case of the invited WDC space, which the community lament is a waste of time as it simply does not work, Miller et al. (2006) suggest that such an invited space may serve to legitimise the status quo. The community energy invested there may be wasted rather than focused on things they can change, and since the community are not involved on policy discussion in this space, they have little opportunity to change the status quo. This argument prompts reflection on many community groups describing their community development successes as 'self-help', a continuation of their independent struggle for social change, applauded as 'self-mobilisation', the lack of government support and the continuation of the status quo ignored. *"90% of the projects you are seeing it 's self-help, people work by themselves.... We do not look up to the government, no." (KM1).* As Cornwall (2008) argues, their 'self-mobilisation' often means left to their own devices to take responsibility for their own needs rather than the state, reflecting bad to worse rather than an improvement.

Further, the community describe participation in the WDC as 'empty participation' where they voice grievances through the WDC representative, but nothing comes of it. Similar experiences are recounted when government representatives (rarely) come to speak with them, the Minister responsible for mobile communications a prime example. This empty participation culminates in what Gaventa (1980) describes as non-decisions and is an example of hidden power in an invited space, *"the government and the NGOs… they promise a lot of things… we have been sitting in meeting after meeting, but we don't see the things that are promised to be done" (KM3).* This power over communities leads to reduced expectations, a sense of apathy, or leads to them not raising grievance at all, as many pointed out when faced with the idea that they should be claiming their rights and demanding that their needs are met rather than 'seeking help', as they feel that the government do not care about poor rural communities, therefore, raising a grievance is a pointless exercise.

A Seat at the Table

Invited spaces can be systematic and organised with powerful actors taking the lead, such as, traditional leadership within the community, ZGF staff or WDC representatives. Who is invited to participate in these spaces needs to be critically examined, for example, in the research partner communities, all the community chairpersons I encountered were men. Most were educated to some degree, had wealth in terms of assets and so had status. The women on the other hand shared that they tend to hold secretary positions or were chairpersons in village development committee (VDC) but there is no power in the VDC positions. They are not decision makers and in fact they are not considered as worthy of participation even at a consultative level by their elected representatives, as lamented by some of the women in the community and indicative of the gendered dimensions of power in Zambian society.

While women's groups are invaluable as a space of safety where women feel valued, supported and are free to express themselves and bond in their various expressions of identity, often the political aspect of women in associations is limited (Gaynor, 2022), as exemplified with the women acting as secretaries or serving in the VDC. This is an act of pre-emptive testimonial injustice (Fricker, 2007) levelled at women and the exercise of hidden power within the community setting. There is nothing new there, as many writers including Letherby (2003) state, women have long been excluded as legitimate knowers and continue to experience this objectification and dismissal in everyday experiences. However, ZGF do try to attend to gender equality and promote everyone equally as citizen knowers in their CPA with the community. I return to this point later in the discussion along with an attention to who participates in each space, as noted, experience suggests is often those with status, education, wealth and networks. For invited spaces to be just spaces, they need a more inclusive guest list and enabling conditions.

Solidarity Relations as Enabling Environments

It is important to highlight that enabling environments or enabling spaces are context specific, as Howard et al. (2014:13) notes, "the best judge of the enabling environment must be those who have to work with it" and as discussed previously, what constitutes an enabling environment in broader civil society, may be very different at local community level. Regardless, these spaces need to be safe, trusted and accessible in order to embody an enabling environment. Social relationships of mutual trust and respect are important, and continuity of relations is key to building strong relationships of solidarity as highlighted in the previous section. The longevity and continuity of relationship between the collective communities through the community foundations and ZGF was highlighted as testament to the strength of their relations and appeared as a key factor in building and maintaining trust and respect. These findings mirror those of Kabeer and Huq (2010) who attest that enabling spaces supported by trusted social relations are key to learning and empowerment.

Unfortunately, the relations between research partner communities and ZGF has been less consistent since my time with the communities which raises concerns of continued community trust and confidence in ZGF, and in themselves given that they saw the strong consistent relationship as an endorsement of their capacity, knowledge and worth. *"When the NGOs come here, they can see that the people of this community want to improve the situation… they can see the commitment and participation from community members" (KM3).*

The disruption in relations was connected to reduced development funding which meant that ZGF could not travel to the communities in person in support of projects as regularly as previously. This lapse is further exacerbated by communication challenges due to lack of mobile network. This highlights the crippling impact of project-specific funding tied to time, results and metrics in development and which fails to value the relational aspects of social change. Almost two decades ago, Kabeer (1999) argued that funders need to recognise the power of relations and of power with,

the significance of raising consciousness and dismantling structural barriers, and that only by funding the conditions for an enabling environment is sustainable change possible. Unfortunately, lessons on the relational aspect appear to have fallen on deaf ears in the donor domain and points to the significance of economic power.

Despite these challenges, the relationship between communities and ZGF has continued albeit on an intermittent basis for a period, resuming with both communities encouraged and supported by ZGF to participate in a reverse call for funding[38], with Nyankanga finding success in 2025. This more recent development a clear reflection of the values of CLD promoted by Hodgson et al. (2017) where funding partners invest in communities by adding value through non-financial capital such as knowledge and reputation, and by setting out to actively learn, collaborate and cooperate with peers and partners, perhaps through communities of practice. This continued support and community success is elaborated in the final section on meaningful participatory practice.

Aside from continued and consistent trusting and respectful relations, there are other key considerations for ensuring that spaces are enabling. Kabeer and Huq (2010) also highlight that simply creating space is not enough on its own, the strategy and approach of the powerful actor must also be enabling and inclusive. Others agree (Anderson et al., 2022; Cornwall and Edwards, 2010). Considering the lapse in relations and the reliance of NGOs and CSOs on external funding shared above, particularly from donors who fail to value and fund relational aspects, the challenge and risk to maintaining continued trusting relations is high. This further strengthens the argument for funding strategies which take a holistic relational view, and which are mindful of the complex power dynamics between funders and recipients inherent in the sector. In addressing this challenge, it seems that the urgent need for community philanthropy with more flexible funding mechanisms as advocated by Gibson Nangle et al. (2025) is further justified.

[38] Elaborated in section 'Community success and learning in action' to follow.

Power in Every Space

While findings suggest that the CLD space and the CPA approach adopted by ZGF is an enabling one for those engaged with it, it is not universally inclusive despite its best intentions. *"They are not here [NGOs]… only at Kaminembe, that's where you have those people from governance (ZGF) otherwise here there is nothing" (KW2).* In an effort not to impose decisions *on* or exert power *over* the communities, an honourable intention, patterns of exclusion are replicated by ZGF, preventing relationship building with and the participation of those on the margins of the communities. As a result, the spaces on the margins often remain disabling rather than enabling. In their deliberate effort to counter the traditional top-down approach and avert hidden power by insisting that all decisions are made by the communities, ZGF unintentionally wield hidden power. Bachrach and Baratz (1970) quoted in Gaventa (1980), assert in the two-dimensional approach to power that when the powerful is so entrenched and secure in their position they may not be aware that those experiencing oppression have any issues or grievances to air. If this is the case, they may be unaware that their position and actions may be oppressive, disempowering, unjust and worse. While this is often the case with powerful institutions, I do not intend to suggest any conscious negative intent in the exercise of power over communities in this instance, in fact, the opposite is true. It seems that ZGF were so focused on taking a step back in their strategy to shift power *to* communities, a strategy which is the essence of CPA according to Keidan (2016) that they neglected consideration of how this was replicating existing power dynamics and patterns of exclusion within the communities. This evidence of an unintentional disempowering action supports the argument by Kimambo and Shallwani (2025) and Hodgson and Knight (2016) that the CPA journey is messy, disorganised, organic and contextually nuanced.

Cognisant of the power dynamics that have revealed themselves within the community, and acknowledging that power relations will always exist regardless, the creation of new spaces need to be carefully supported and

negotiated where feasible, particularly where external actors are involved. This includes paying attention to the unequal power and exclusion experienced by different groups within communities, such as women, youth, isolated villages, and under-represented villages to avoid the phenomenon of false consensus as portrayed by Cheng (2000) or a situation where community groups internalise their experience of invisible power and blame themselves for their situation as argued by Miller at al. (2006) and exemplified by some community groups, *"sometimes, I wonder how different we are from those that live in urban areas. We are one Zambia, one nation…" (NM2).* It is also important to consider that organic and everyday spaces of learning exist with similar power dynamics, however, a critical and active awareness of power is needed to make these spaces more inclusive and equal. Active listening and attention to power in created community spaces could assist for example, in truly hearing the voices of women lobbying for women-only co-ops, or the voices of isolated villages who do not always share the sense of belonging and identity as community members, or the youth who are not always valued as legitimate knowers in their cultural context, too young to have wisdom to offer as highlighted by some staff. Gaventa and Cornwall (2006) advise that without paying due attention to power, we are in danger of replicating the status quo with a democratic face. Therefore, the communities themselves need to review and reflect on power and equality within their community spaces, as do external actors who engage with them, including ZGF.

In a development as a result of the research process based on knowledge and feedback shared with partners at the end of the fieldwork period, ZGF have taken steps to remedy this by speaking to the community representatives and sharing the feedback. Success for one community in the reverse call for proposals mentioned earlier saw them take this feedback on board and insist on conditions of the partnership which aim at inclusion and equality of opportunity for all community collectives, a success elaborated in the final section.

Disabling Space

Unfortunately, the WDC space, intentionally created to encourage and enable democratic citizen participation proves the point about invited spaces outlined by Kabeer and Huq (2010) presented earlier. The creation of this invited space has achieved little for these communities, it is found to be disempowering rather than empowering and excludes through unfair education requirements which rewards based on merit rather than motivation or ability, lack of effective feedback mechanisms and is plagued by non-decisions. Some community members highlight the inability of their WDC representatives to exercise power, revealing the hidden power in this invited space. *"They [WDC] don't work… we thought they had the power but clearly, they don't have… They only advocate… They have no power … Words are there but no action…" (KM3).*

The use of knowledge and education as a power lever which admits or excludes is a common occurrence, with literacy often being a condition for admission and inclusion as emerged in the findings, *"here in the village you find that we have the same leaders because the others didn't go to school and they can't read and write" (KW3)* similar to the attempted exclusion of women based on gender and literacy in the Ada Songor Salt Movements in Ghana (Langdon et al., 2021) and the historical practice of exclusion of black voters in the US based on literacy tests (Gaventa, 1995). All examples of two-dimensional power in practice by applying levers in invited spaces to determine who gets to play the game. In the case of the WDC, the structure, criteria and approach adopted by the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development in its operation prevents rather than "facilitates community participation in decision making and development" (MoLGRD, 2021:1), making it a disabling space for these communities.

Empowering Spaces and Processes

Empowerment, a term often used inaccurately or patronisingly (for example see Kabeer, 2017; Batliwala, 2007, Gaynor, 2022), is collectively defined by community and staff members as independence, capacity, voice and agency

in an enabling space of support and solidarity. For NW2, it is also motivating, "*the benefit that I found is that you cannot just sit relaxed, it pushes me to do this and that… It keeps me thinking intelligently… I have stopped sitting around the way I used to be a long time ago…" (NW2).*

Echoing Anderson et al. (2022) and Kabeer and Huq (2010), these enabling spaces foster feelings of protection, safety, and trust which encourages reluctant voices to surface, offer spaces of learning, encouragement, motivation and mutual support, particularly for women who have been invisible or subordinated, revealing enabling spaces as indispensable for citizen empowerment and gender equality, "*we have women that can't join the mixed cooperative… but if we have our own women's cooperative all the women can be free to join and speak freely. There are so many things that we teach each other that we can't discuss in the presence of the men… (NW7)*. The predominant socio-cultural norms in this patriarchal society limit women's equal recognition, participation and autonomy. While this is slowly being challenged and changed, it currently means that women experience an added layer of exclusion and oppression, leaving them more exposed and vulnerable, *"We want to stop being completely dependent on our husbands, we want to have our own club" (KW2).* The need for enabling spaces and critical education where mind-set shift can be prompted and encouraged and where the slow but achievable transformational change can result becomes even more evident and urgent.

However, these enabling spaces and critical education need to aim further than the community level conscientisation and empowerment evidenced here and highlighted in findings chapter seven. For the most part, the empowerment evident here is limited to problematisation, as community members are naming their worlds and making the connection with their role as agents for social change through the process of praxis 'as action and reflection upon the world in order to change it' (hooks, 1994:14). While this early stage of conscientisation is hugely significant and transformative for some community groups, there are limitations in terms of the shift to critical transitivity and conscientisation as proposed by Freire (1972, 1981).

With a few exceptions as highlighted in previous sections, the various local community spaces of individual and collective learning have proven invaluable, enabling learning, exchange, solidarity and the generation of collective knowledge and are critical for these communities. The motivation, unity, power, determination, sense of belonging and support the community have drawn from these organic, everyday, created, and invited spaces and experiences is notable. They are not solely spaces where life opportunities can be enhanced but primarily, and crucially, spaces where life sustaining collective knowledge and practice can be recognised, shared, created, and preserved in relationships of mutuality and interdependence. In these communities, the collective 'we' of Ubuntu is centred and constantly present, an embodiment of Mbembe's (2021) "*place of the sharing community"*.

Supporting the view of VeneKlasen and Miller (2002) the findings show that these are empowering spaces which build confidence through individual and collective learning, that can support conscientisation and mobilise action to challenge and change systemic and structural inequalities. Therefore, such empowering spaces must be encouraged, supported and protected. Without these accessible open and consistent spaces, community members are denied access to knowledge and information and denied the opportunity to voice and create collective knowledge and share important information.

However, it is important to acknowledge that "*knowing takes place*… Knowing and knowledge systems are developed collectively through relations between peoples and places" (Nadarajah and Grydehøj, 2024:1), conscientisation is situated and takes place, knowledge is shared and created in everyday spaces and will continue to do so in spite of experiences of exclusion and the existence of hidden and invisible power in these spaces. Continued access to enabling, empowering spaces, such as those which exist and emerge in the CLD and community philanthropy space can result in their continued collective lived experience shifting to one of knowledge justice in a knowledge democracy where their 'alternative' ways of knowing, being and doing are recognised as legitimate.

Meaningful Participatory Processes

Unpacking the Layers of Knowledge Democracy
Meaningful Participatory Processes
· External Experts and Localisation · A Participation Revolution · Community-Led Development and the Community Philanthropy Approach · Participation as Performance · Locally led development · Motivations for Participation · Relationships for Social Change · Assets and Co-investors · A Growth Mindset · Power and Participation · Generative Processes · Critical Education and Collective Conscientisation

Table 8.5: Meaningful Participatory Processes

Despite their isolation and exclusion, these are active communities, deeply engaged in community led development and community philanthropy in their own right and in collaboration with ZGF, as exemplified through their collective community achievements such as the primary schools and health clinic. The data reveals that unity, pride, strength, determination and the motivation for change is collective and abundant in these communities, and among ZGF staff. The community members and ZGF staff articulated multiple examples of community success, including empowering and transformative experiences of community education and development projects. The community experience of participation through the community led and community philanthropy approach is positive and empowering overall, while the experience of participation through the WDC is overwhelmingly negative and disempowering. Regardless, outcomes of both are often unequal.

The community philanthropy approach (CPA) places emphasis on community participation, assets, capacity, trusting relations, ownership, solidarity, the collective, and power, among others (Hodgson et al., 2017). The practice of the CPA that I experienced during this research is very different to the dominant model of development documented in existing

literature (for example, Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Veda, 2023, Gibson, 2017) and witnessed in the majority of my practice, where participation is generally only invited at programme implementation. Although the communities spoke of 'partnership' with other NGOs in the past, for the most part, these partnerships demonstrated limited participation, a conclusion shared by staff members, and while the participation went further than that witnessed in my professional experience, it still happened after decisions were made and agendas were set, fostering some limited sense of ownership but not agency.

The CPA favoured by ZGF on the other hand embraces local participation and ownership, where communities make identify their own needs and priorities, make collective decisions and set their own agenda. Without detracting from its merits, the data also exposed some flaws, which may exist regardless of the approach of ZGF, perhaps revealed in the glare of the CPA spotlight but that are urgent all the same.

Despite these flaws, the community philanthropy approach supported by ZGF emerges as a powerful strategy and support mechanism for authentic and meaningful participatory community-led development. This approach promotes an asset-based model, community ownership through collective deliberation, decision-making and agenda setting supported by critical education and active citizenship in an enabling environment, challenging knowledge injustice and fostering social change in a knowledge democracy, at collective community level at the least.

Furthermore, some of the flaws exposed have been acknowledged and addressed to some extent by the community in Nyankanga, through knowledge sharing and dialogue which resulted in community reflection and action. This is an example of transformational change and one that I elaborate further later in the discussion.

Meaningful participatory processes should be the rule rather than the exception as advocated for decades by many theorists such as Freire,

Chambers, Gaventa, Cornwall and others. Participatory processes which can empower and transform, which recognise existing knowledge, assets, rights, capacity, and agency, and can support the achievement of social justice are central to knowledge democracy. Van Brabant and Patel support a participation revolution which no longer "treat[s] local and national actors as subordinate" (2018:16) as do other advocates for decolonisation and localisation such as Ranawana (2023) and Peace Direct (2021). Citizens must be viewed as key stakeholders and partners in political processes with public policy setting shaped by multiple knowledge perspectives. Citizens must be viewed similarly in development actions and processes with the right to participate claimed and locally led, where decision making and agenda setting rests with affected communities. This is a rare event at present in the broader development sector as evidenced in the literature (for example; Carlsson and Wohlgemuth, 2000; Khoury and Scott, 2024) and in collective staff responses of practice in the field which articulate a top-down approach as the norm, with external actors deciding on the needs and solutions without the input of communities.

External Experts and Localisation

As articulated in the literature, the aid model has viewed developing communities through a deficit lens for decades, staff agree and further argue that this deficit lens and a welfare model exclude communities from participation and decision-making and generally focuses on short term solutions which foster dependency. Staff discussed the temptation for NGOs and CSOs to replicate what they already know, to do what they have always done, and implement that, regardless of context. They talk about conforming and very little room for divergent views, not looking to see what exists locally in the specific context, never mind local assets, taking a siloed approach to development as observed by Djohossou et al. (2023a) and Carlsson and Wohlgemuth (2000). Echoing Edgren (2000) and van Selm et al. (2025), some staff express regret that often grassroots NGOs lose their

original value driven agenda when they become dependent on external funding, directed instead by these external experts.

Despite such global commitments to localisation in theory, truly local participatory process is not the norm at present, as evidenced in the findings where staff repeatedly share that true participation requires community decision making and agenda-setting, *"participation is in the agenda setting, the needs and the priority setting, but also, the decision-making... But then it requires one to go deeper into who has the actual power even in these processes?" (SM3).* This position echoes the views shared in literature (such as Cornwall, 2008; Gaventa and Petit, 2010; Wallace at al., 2007), which argue that many donors and practitioners claim to support it but most often the practice lacks integrity or any semblance of meaningful participation, with 'participation' continuing to be labelled a mere buzzword by many; Cornwall and Brock, (2005) Cornwall (2007), Veda (2023), Gibson (2017) and Romain Murphy (2025).

A Participation Revolution

Few organisations and funders are supporting or practising authentic community-led development at present and as highlighted by a staff respondent, those who do stray from the prescriptive and linear norms of traditional development practice are generally given the cold shoulder by funders and the sector alike, marginalised or excluded for upsetting the status quo and disrupting established patterns and hierarchies of power, *"like yesterday, we were uninvited (to a sectoral event) because they were scared because they know how straightforward we are when it comes to those power imbalances" (SM2)*. However, as evidenced in the literature, there is an urgent and growing movement for authentic community led development (for example, Veda 2023; Djohossou, 2023a, 2023b; Acosta, 2019), in part in response to the call for decolonisation and localisation, and more recently in response to shrinking aid budgets and a shift in humanitarian and development policy and strategy. This offers a welcome optimism and hope, and a realistic opportunity for community led initiatives

which are truly participatory and lead to locally owned sustainable change as exemplified by the research partners.

Many authors (such as Chakma et al. 2024; Hall et al., 2013; Gaventa and Bivens, 2014) argue that with the growth of community-led and participatory initiatives in community development and research fields, the evidence base and what counts as 'legitimate' evidence will grow, voices will become even louder as people become empowered through inclusive participation and knowledge justice. This next and final section in the discussion chapter adds to this evidence base through the collective knowledge and experience of these communities in CLD and CPA.

Community-Led Development and the Community Philanthropy Approach

Community-led development and community giving was not introduced to the community by ZGF, this is an approach inherent in their culture as reflected in the Ubuntu philosophy (see LeGrange, 2012; Molefe, 2024). As one respondent noted with irony, the community philanthropy approach (CPA) is now being promoted by Global North actors as if it is a novel idea, presented in new packaging rather than as Ubuntu, the African way of being that has existed for generations, *"we told you to change your way of life, now you should go to the local giving, the philosophy of Ubuntu, we are surprised the West has heard of Ubuntu…" (SM3).* The community proudly shared examples of their community-led initiatives in the past, initiated prior to their partnership with ZGF, such as the initial primary schools, which led to the formal education institutions which exist in the communities today. These successful initiatives drew on the collective community assets and collective participation which includes assets such as knowledge, skills, time, connections and affective emotions, the Spirit of Ubuntu ever present. Matthews and Castellsagué (2025) suggest that just such an approach which draws on Southern imaginaries of collective knowledge and other collective assets, valuing and legitimising these 'subaltern' ways of knowing, understanding, interacting, and being, is needed. Others such as Romain Murphy further add that if we want authentic, meaningful change then we

need to truly commit to community-led development "and the values of solidarity, equity, inclusion, justice, mutual aid and collective action that it promotes" (2025; np). The findings agree and suggest that we do indeed need to shift the power and follow these communities' lead.

Focusing on the community philanthropy approach in this CLD space, it emerges that the CPA fosters an inclusive and empowering space for most community members, a space where they are seen and heard, where they make their own decisions and set their own agendas, *"we come together to address issues that need our attention as a community. …most of the decisions are made by us as a community… We agree that we should work on this project... Nobody makes decisions as an individual." (NM1),* seek their own solutions and lead their own development on their terms, claiming ownership of their own development initiatives. *"In my opinion, when we lay a hand its always better because we are more caring towards the item…" (NW6).* This empirical evidence reflects the theory of community philanthropy presented in the literature (such as Hodgson and Pond, 2018; Keidan, 2016; Hodgson and Knight, 2016) as a framework for a locally driven approach to development that prioritises community agenda setting, decision-making, ownership, trust-building, and the use of local assets, shifting power from the external to the local, and I suggest one that clearly challenges the narrative of deficient beneficiary which has persisted in the wider discourse.

However, as highlighted throughout this chapter and previous chapters, it is important to acknowledge that it is not experienced as an inclusive participatory space equally for all community members, despite its intentions. The findings exposed power inequalities and exclusion from this space, with power unequally shared, exercised and experienced in different spaces and levels within the community-led space, and the benefits of CLD likewise unequally shared for some. These inequalities are very real for those affected and demand urgent attention, and which I attend to in sections to follow. However, CLD and a CPA certainly offers a far more authentic

participatory space than exists in traditional development practice as I briefly discuss below.

Participation as Performance

Participation in traditional development practice and approaches has been widely criticised in the literature reviewed as ranging from manipulative and passive, to functional at best. Gaventa and Bivens (2014), suggest that at the nexus of knowledge, power and participation in community development, communities are regarded as passengers in the process, mere consumers of knowledge, a situation that others (Freire, 1972; Fricker, 2006, 2007) raise issue with, highlighting the objectification of collectives and lack of conscientisation and disempowerment inherent in this. This view is corroborated in the findings as presented through previous sections, mainly through staff experiences in professional practice given that community experience with external development actors is limited to ZGF for most respondents. It is also highlighted by some community members in relation to engagement with NGOs and participation in the Ward Development Committee (WDC). Staff distinguished between 'true' and 'performative' participation, with most staff contesting that if communities are not making the decisions and setting their own agenda then they are not truly participating, their presence at meetings is just a performance. As one staff member argued, this relegates them to mere 'beneficiaries' rather than leaders and stakeholders in the process.

As discussed earlier, community members complained of 'empty' participation, where 'performative' and 'empty' participation results in breaches of trust, damages relations, acts as a box ticking exercise for those with power over and often culminates in 'non-decisions' and the disempowerment of citizens, leaving them on the bottom rung of Pretty's (1995) participation ladder.

Staff overwhelmingly described common experiences and descriptors of the traditional approach as rigid, limiting, dysfunctional, top-down, dismissive of

local knowledge, capacity and assets, which resonates with the deficit model as described by Hodgson et al. (2017) among others.

Locally led development

In contrast to the usual limiting and imposed processes of traditional development practice, the community philanthropy approach in CLD starts by and with the community in the lead role. In a CPA, development happens on the community terms, within their available schedule and capacity, to meet their identified needs and priorities in their context specific way, as described by the community, *"when we agree to work on something, we choose the day. People come in numbers. So, we divide each other in groups [and] work without supervision…" (KM1).* In the community philanthropy approach, decision-making and agenda setting rests with the community, supported by ZGF. One community group collectively offered a definition of participation as, engaging through knowledge sharing and decision making, deciding on the contributions that they would make, financial and otherwise, and then working together to bring a project to completion, engaged in all stages of the process and having ownership of all stages of the process, similar to Veda's (2023) description of participatory development starting and ending with the community. This definition and broader findings further accentuate the collective community assets on which the CPA depends, highlighting the community's collective capabilities as opposed to vulnerabilities. This focus on capabilities and assets is further discussed in sections to follow.

Motivations for Participation

The fact that community-led development starts and ends with the collective community is in itself a motivating factor for participation. As Djohossou et al. (2023a) argue no-one wants to be told to participate in their own life by an outsider, they must be self-motivated. Community members are motivated by progress and development, the chance of a better quality of life, independence and empowerment, and equal access to services and

supports. *"We want development… it's always better when we start and the other people that come just come in to help us complete because we really need help…" (KW3).* They are also motivated by each other in an expression of *power with*, the collective endeavour and the sense of pride, fulfilment, unity and a sense of identity and belonging. For the older generation, it is an act of investment in the future generation, sharing knowledge and experience, modelling communal behaviour, and safeguarding the welfare of generations to come. Even those who share that they do not identify as part of the given community, who do not articulate that same sense of belonging or who feel that they do not benefit equally, still participate regardless, because someone benefits, someone will thrive because of their contribution to the process. These findings are congruent with the view of van Norren and Seehawer (2025) who highlight the collective nature of 'alternative' epistemologies where the journey and process are prioritised over end goals. In the act of mutuality, once again the spirit of Ubuntu appears, unfazed by the unfairness and disparity present.

Relationships for Social Change

The relational aspect of social change has been highlighted consistently by Eyben (2006, 2010) who posits that social relations and networks are crucial and a powerful resource in change processes. These important relations emerged in the findings both within and outside of communities with external stakeholders. Within the communities, groups spoke repeatedly of a sense of identity as a unified collective, *"we discuss so that all our views can be unified as one so that we can achieve one goal... they put all the ideas together and come up with one voice" (NM2).* This sense of *power with* and care for the collective is mirrored in various accounts such as Kabeer and Huq (2010) and Djohossou et al. (2023a) who call attention to emotional and affective aspects of relations with others which strengthen bonds, builds and maintains trust and mutual respect and solidarity. In the Ubuntu philosophy, this interdependent relationship or 'vital force' extends to nature, spirits, generations past, present and future, which emerges as an expression of

power within, *power with*, *power to* and *power for* in the collective 'we', which resonates with the generative view of power as life affirming or vital proposed by Miller et al. (2006).

Key strengths of this solidarity relationship with ZGF noted by the communities are the longevity, consistency, trust, respect, and commitment. *"I would say that is how we feel [a sense of power, control and agency in CPA], because we have been working with this organisation for some time now (NM3).* As a result, the communities are confident that the partnership will continue and prosper. These findings portray relations that align with Dirik's view of solidarity, which they argue "is not a charity undertaking, but a horizontal, multidimensional, educational and multidirectional process that contributes to the emancipation of everyone involved. Solidarity means to be on an eye-to-eye level with one another, to stand shoulder to shoulder. It means to share skills, experience, knowledge and ideas without perpetuating relations based on power. (2016:np)". In the CPA, power dynamics are in constant focus and Gibson Nangle et al. (2025) suggest that trusting solidarity relations steer this focus and while not infallible, can guard against gatekeeping and perpetuating existing power imbalances.

The continuity in the solidarity relationship was temporarily disrupted due to a period of change and challenge as highlighted previously, which likely affected the sense of trust in the relationship for some if not all community groups, especially with the added difficulty in communication due to lack of mobile network and the geographical distance between partners. The temporal aspect of relationship is to be expected according to Dirik (2016) who argues that solidarity relations are expected to change over time.

In fact, the Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approach promoted by ZGF as a strategy within their CPA recognises social relations and networks as a valuable asset. They place great emphasis on building and maintaining existing relations, and establishing new strategic relations through networks and collaboration with key actors such as local government representatives as discussed below.

Assets and Co-investors

Advocates of community philanthropy promote and prioritise the recognition of collective community assets as a valuable resource for CLD, in an approach which values and seeks out capability rather than vulnerability, a contrast to the norm according to staff where, *"there's little acknowledgement of those assets" (SM4)*. The ABCD approach recommended by the many in the Movement for Community-Led Development including (Hodgson et al., 2017; Veda et al., 2021; Veda, 2023) and promoted by ZGF as central to the CPA, recognises assets, including intellectual, social, moral, reputational and financial assets. In this approach, collective knowledge matters, relationships matter, social networks and reputation matters, morals and values matter, and valuable financial assets matter. Time as a financial asset is highlighted by staff members, for example, as articulated by SM7 in that, *"people came and worked… that's time. And also, that's labour… Because most of the people that we work with are farmers, so time for them is money, something that I've always appreciated (SM7).* This motivation and investment of time and other assets support the argument proposed by Hodgson and Pond (2018) and Kimambo and Shallwani (2025) for community to members to be framed as collective co-investors rather than passive individual beneficiaries, lacking in, "the knowledge or sophistication necessary for effective…action" (Gaventa 1995:29).

A Growth Mindset

An asset-based approach disrupts the pattern of people being alienated from their own problems by exploring the collective assets that they have, seeing themselves from a perspective of capability, rather than of vulnerability, again challenging the aid sector's deficit model. The process of creating an inventory of their collective intellectual assets is often a challenging experience as some community groups struggle to define knowledge and literacy beyond formal education and functional literacy as noted earlier. However, through dialogue with ZGF staff and other

community members, their collective knowledge becomes apparent in its abundance. As SM3 shared, *"I look at them as the experts of the community… they understand the natural resources more than I can ever do"*. Similarly, some community members talk about the work that 'they' (ZGF) have done in the community, rather than the work 'we' (community members) have done which suggests that they struggle with owning and claiming the credit for their participation contribution, and perhaps with the confidence to say 'we' achieved that. This contrasts with others in their community who speak with pride of their collaboration and achievements. To further complicate matters, ZGF must contend with contradictory messages and approaches from other actors, such as NGOs and the WDC who respectively persist with top-down approaches or handouts making the shift to a growth mindset as advocated by Djohossou (2023a) more difficult. *"There are other players, so they can be [INGOs, government, etc.] …, you find that an issue of contradictory messages coming to the community… The government comes in with … handouts... the politician sometimes can have a louder voice than our voice" (SM4).*

Shifting mindsets or changing to a growth mindset (Djohossou, 2023b) is two-steps forward, three steps back dance, slow and clumsy but worth persevering through for the learning and power generated within the movement. Similarly, staff have found that this change from a deficit mindset to a growth mindset, or from vulnerability to capability, is a slow and arduous task. As SM4 notes, *"it takes time for people to appreciate that they have the knowledge",* these communities have been labelled as rural poor, uneducated, an example of marginalisation and discrimination based on an ascribed identity, resulting in experiences of testimonial injustice (Fricker, 2007), and of epistemic objectification (Dotson, 2011) and epistemic violence (Pérez, 2019) which sees them objectified, stripped of the epistemic agency and that subjects them to personal and collective ethical harm. They are conditioned by hidden and invisible power systems and structures to internalise and believe that they are indeed vulnerable, less capable, less knowledgeable than others.

In challenging invisible power, a mindset shift is potentially powerful and can support sustainable and transformative change, as Cornwall and Gaventa contest, "the control of knowledge as a way of influencing consciousness is critical to the exercise of power" (2001: 71). This consciousness is 'internalised' by the majority of citizens and the status quo sustained unless the accepted internalised 'reality' is called into question and challenged through forms of critical education and advocacy.

Mungwini's (2017) calls for a mindset shift and a change of practice, together with Wood and McAteer's (2017) advocacy for levelling the playing field come to mind. I suggest that their views are relevant to many contexts, where knowledge creation may not be the primary driving force but is an important feature of both process and outcome, nonetheless. Wood and McAteer advocate for inclusive and democratic participatory approaches which value contextual and cultural lived experience and local knowledge, which "creates space for active participation, holistic learning and relationship building… [with] people who do not usually self-identify as knowledge producers… to help community members find their own voices to bring their knowledge to the table" (2017:252). However, who has a seat at the table, or not, demands attention.

Power and Participation

The findings revealed many expressions of power with, over, to and within; in the community groups at different levels from individual and household, to village and community level; related to location, status and authority, and shaped by gender and other nuanced inequalities such as wealth and education. These same expressions and their impact are visible between community groups and external actors, including my position as researcher which I address in the methodology chapter, and others such as ZGF, other private and third sector actors, and state representatives and bodies. The attitudes, norms and ideology which inform and shape the expression of power is evident through a critical view of power in the development sector, exercised through policy and practice in various approaches and strategies

(Ziai, 2016, 2017; van Norren and Seehawer, 2025:np; Sjöstedt, 2013; Naylor, 2011; Furness et al., 2020). These include those which make participatory claims, such as 'community-led' initiatives in traditional development practice and those in alternative approaches such as the community philanthropy approach. The correlation between power and knowledge justice is clearly apparent in the findings.

The collective learning aspect of active participation is articulated by one community group who suggested that those who do not participate get left behind, *"the knowledge that we acquire by doing community work… you learn a lot of things, implying that you have more knowledge as you go back home through working with others…" (NM1)*. There appeared to be a correlation between confidence and active participation in community initiatives, which offers another possible interpretation of the fact that some express themselves with confidence and others do not.

Other groups complain that they are usually excluded from the process, other than when required to contribute, *"we know about ZGF because we have contributed money for the desks" ...* While visible challenges such as lack of mobile network for communication and lack of roads network and geographical isolation are clearly factors in the exclusion of collectives on the periphery from the process, power dynamics also play a role.

Those invited to bring their knowledge to the table needs attention, both as a collective and within the collective, as collectives consist of multiple identities, and no space is neutral. The operation of hidden power can mobilise bias which controls rules of the game and who gets to play. While 'community' may be invited to bring their knowledge to the table, power dynamics within the community may confer expertise on some to the exclusion of others, or those who are invited to co-create may be carefully selected, included in light of the views or priorities they hold and the related knowledge and decisions they are likely to elicit.

Mansuri and Rao (2013) and NORAD (2013) found that it is often the case that those who do participate are the local 'experts', the educated or those with status within the community, an argument supported in this research context, as highlighted that, *"some of the challenges that we experience are at household level. This is because of different social statuses; we are not on the same level" (NM1).* While NORAD (2013) further argue that this phenomenon is more prevalent in traditional development approaches and the often 'induced' participation than in meaningful participatory practice associated with CLD and CPA, this context shows that status related to wealth can be a point of contention in a CPA. Therefore, it is worth repeating that no space is power neutral and even organic created spaces can replicate the unequal power dynamics and relations of broader society, be they status, gender, age or other aspects, shaped by those that created them and the boundaries that limit them (Cornwall, 2002; Gaventa, 2003b).

While as evidenced earlier in the discussion, ZGF support the community from the wings, in a deliberate attempt not to exercise *power over* the communities and instead support them to shift the power to the grass roots. At the same time, they are cognisant of power dynamics within communities and try to facilitate a level playing field, *"what we try to do is create an environment where, for instance, you bring everyone almost to an equal basis, of course it's difficult, because they have social status in their community".* While specifically in reference to traditional development practice, Gibson Nangle et al. (2025) argue that power disparities create gatekeepers with the power to direct resources. This dynamic is relevant to local community contexts also and is evident in the view of some community groups who imply that those in villages closest to the power centre of the traditional leaders are included and benefit more from community development processes than those on the periphery, *"here we are at the edge at the boundary of this constituency therefore when it comes to assistance, that assistance does not reach us…" (NW3).*

Generative Processes

There is vast learning in the community development space, and vast learning from the participatory process as evidenced by the findings and relating to both staff and community research partners. Chakma et al. remind us of that the "fundamental value of participation should not be overlooked" (2024:20) and further stress that;

> the participatory process is not a means to a predefined end. The process itself is an invaluable outcome. The participatory process contributes to important changes, including at individual, interpersonal and community levels, such as building relationships, boosting confidence and enthusiasm, generating knowledge and learning, and strengthening the fabric of movements and societies (ibid).

This view is reflected in findings where community members consistently described participation, and related learning, as both process and outcome, learning is documented in the CLD space and in the research space, *"we have also learnt something [at this meeting] …" (NW4).* From staff learning new indigenous, traditional and environmental knowledge from *"the experts of the community" (SM2)* through the asset mapping process, to learning, sharing, co-creation and conscientisation experienced by community members in the community development space. The learning in the CLD and CPA space is indeed everyday and continuous, validating the views of Veda (2023); Hodgson et al. (2017) and Tandon and Srinivasan (2024). However, the contradictions highlighted above suggest that not all community members are exposed to or have the same opportunities for learning in the community development process and in the interest of fairness, equality, progress and the collective, this warrants attention in practice.

Critical Education and Collective Conscientisation

Tandon and Srinivasan (2024) and Anderson et al. (2022) argue that for marginalised citizens, calling for social change carries risk and the safest route can be through collective learning and action. Langdon, Larweh and Quarmyne (2020) agree and emphasise that consistent collective unlearning supports a challenge to the power relations which sustain knowledge

injustice. The urgent need for collective unlearning – or relearning - is justified in the findings which depict the complex relationship that community collectives have with knowledge, where most see knowledge as power, but who often struggle to recognise their own knowledge as legitimate and powerful. While they do utilise their collective knowledge and other collective assets in their CPA, staff member SM3 suggests there is a persistent deference to outsider experts which sees the collectives relinquish power as a habitual act. *"The communities also have a tendency of moving power, of accepting or seeing themselves as not having that power to make a [decision]... so it's a two-way thing, just as much as the system takes advantage, the communities tend to give power to the system" (SM3).*

Giroux sees education as a "site of struggle over agency, identities and values… and [critical] pedagogy as an empowering practice that gets people to think about their own sense of agency in relation to knowledge and their ability to engage in critical and collective struggle" (2022:198). Critical collective learning from process through dialogue emerged in the research space where issues of knowledge and learning, power and participation, rights and entitlements, identity and belonging, political representation and more were prompted and deliberated and is evident in the findings presented and appears through this discussion chapter. The setting up of the Community Foundations, established through the CPA in these communities are a pedagogy in practice. Critical and active citizenship education are core aspects of the process of setting up the formal and legal structures of the community foundations and cooperatives. The Training for Transformation (TfT) model (Hope and Timmel, 2003) which fosters and supports critical thinking through critical education, encouraging them to think, analyse and explore their world is used in establishing and supporting the community foundations, while creating links and establishing relations between the community foundations and other actors such as government bodies, potential funders and solidarity partners.

While overall a shared sense of identity and belonging, and an expression of unified collectives was revealed in the research space, there was at times a

sense of struggle with divided identities between collectives. While active citizenship is pertinent in CLD and a CPA, this division represents a challenge to active citizenship, this is congruent with VeneKlasen and Miller's view that active citizenship is difficult to encourage and promote among people, "who have been marginalised from politics… [and] are marked by battles that determine whose concerns get incorporated as legitimate and whose get excluded" (2002:30). Giroux (2020) further argues that popular education can bring these individual and intersecting identities together to form solidarity partnerships and mobilise for change, and this is evident in findings in the solidarity relationships within and outside of the communities, and in more recent developments on foot of the research which are elaborated in the final section.

Community success and learning in action

As highlighted earlier, while the CPA approach and practice by ZGF is a positive and enabling approach overall in the communities, it is not universally inclusive despite its best intentions. In taking a step back in their strategy to shift power, with the intent of shifting power *to* communities rather than to impose on or exert power *over* the communities, some existing community patterns of unequal power and exclusion are replicated by ZGF, *"we are not Nyankanga, this is [village name] community… because the Nyankanga guys don't consider us here. We want direct communication with us here and not including us in the Nyankanga programs, we don't get anything here" (NW7).* This has created some distrust, *"they are not here [NGOs]… only at Kaminembe, that's where you have those people from governance (ZGF) otherwise here there is nothing" (KW2)* and prevents relationship building with and the participation of some of those collectives on the margins of the communities. As a result, the spaces on the margins often remain disabled and disempowered.

However, in a development as a result of the research process based on critical conversation throughout the participatory research process, and knowledge and feedback shared among partners at the end of the fieldwork

period, there have been steps taken to remedy this experience of exclusion voiced by villages on the periphery. In Nyankanga, the community has responded in their successful reverse call for funding by insisting that the partner NGO should visit and include all villages, not just those in more convenient, accessible locations, aiming for inclusion and equality of opportunity for all community collectives. The Reverse Call for Proposals is a prototype where local community organisations issue a call to international actors to provide support for locally led development initiatives, aiming "to build on the spirit of placing power in the hands of local organisations, with international actors being accountable to those they serve" (RINGO, 2025:np).



Image 8.0: Reverse Call for Proposals (adapted from RINGO, 2025).

The support offered can be financial or in-kind, once off or continuous. This is a positive development and evidence of critical learning and transformative education in the participatory research and community development process, contributing to the enabling conditions necessary to support social change and justice. Shifting power within the community as exemplified above does not necessarily mean that the changes will be maintained or the benefits shared equally, that remains to be seen in practice as their new community initiative develops. The CPA approach and the reverse call outlined here offer empirical evidence of the viewpoint of Gibson Nangle et al. (2025), Acosta (2019) and Djohossou et al. (2023a) who contend that adopting alternative approaches does not mean rejecting the existing knowledge of and relations with powerful development actors but

shifting the power relations in favour of local communities. It further provides empirical evidence of the Mi'kmaw nation concept of 'two-eyed seeing', which advocates for bringing contrasting epistemologies together, one eye from each perspective, perhaps extending to van Norren and Seehawer's (2025) multiple eyed seeing. This means moving beyond coexistence towards knowledge complementing enriching and challenging each other and where power truly shifts to the grass roots in a representation of the localisation advocated by Van Brabant and Patel (2017), moving beyond mere decentralisation, to transformative practice.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the research findings through a conceptual framework for knowledge democracy which assisted in the investigation of collective knowledge, participation and empowerment in spaces of international development and in the systems and structures relevant to this specific Zambian context.

This framework of knowledge democracy provided some structure to analysis and discussion of the complex research space and related findings. While not perfect or comprehensive, this framework coupled with an analytical lens of power, facilitated discussions around three core concepts of knowledge justice, social inclusion and learning, and meaningful participation. Through this discussion it emerges that findings support debates calling for decolonisation and localisation, conceding that traditional development practice persists with a top-down power dynamic and disempowering performative participation which excludes 'alternative' worldviews and local knowledge, and which promotes the individual over the collective, in contrast to context specific epistemologies. Evidence from this research is congruent with the discourse in the stated aims, values and benefits of community led development and a community philanthropy approach. However, it also revealed instances of exclusion and inequality, mainly experienced by communities on the geographical periphery, which

remind us that “power is everywhere” and serve as a warning that shifting power is a complex process which can reinforce existing inequalities when left too much to its own devices instead of relying on multiple-eyed seeing throughout the process the process.

These conclusions are elaborated in the final chapter together with some recommendations for development practice drawn from the knowledge co-created in this research process.

Chapter Nine: Conclusion

"…if it [decolonization and shift the power movements] does not lead to a focused permanent transformation of a system… then all we are doing is romance. It will just be a matter of time before this wind goes, and another starts blowing.

(Rowlands Kaotcha, Malawi)", (In Djohossou et al. 2023b).

Introduction

This research has explored knowledge democracy, participation, empowerment, decision-making and transformative education through a critical theory approach, drawing on critical ethnography and participatory theory, to the examination of development practice in marginalised communities in rural Zambia. This exploration focused on collective knowledge and learning in the context of a community philanthropy approach to community led development practice. The research questions have explored:

- How collective community knowledge in its diversity of form and source is recognised and respected in the international development space;
- What the nature of the collective participation and empowerment processes experienced by these communities in community led development and a community philanthropy approach is;
- What makes community led development authentic for these communities; and what role knowledge democracy plays in community led development.

This chapter responds to these questions by presenting core lessons learned and offering some conclusions and recommendations for the development studies, adult and community education, international development and community development sectors broadly both locally and globally. The findings of this research and related conclusions and recommendations are

also of relevance to donors and policy makers at local, national and global levels.

First, I present a summary of themes, issues and concepts explored and the research approach. I then present key contributions and core lessons learned, followed by an emergent framework for knowledge democracy presented as a manifesto to guide just, meaningful and potentially transformative engagement with communities globally. Finally, I offer conclusions and recommendations which I believe can support epistemic justice, meaningful participation, more effective and relevant development efforts and wider inclusion if taken on board by relevant actors and sectors.

Summary of themes, concepts and research approach

This research has presented a brief history and context of development practice and ODA. It has drawn attention to context as a critical aspect in development and investigated calls for decolonising development practice, studies and knowledge. It promotes a shift from hierarchical, deficit based, universal development models and approaches, toward locally led, inclusive, and participatory approaches grounded in diverse context-specific epistemologies. It has presented more recent developments in grassroots and participatory approaches such as the movement for CLD and the community philanthropy approach that aim to recover local agency and promote transformative, context-specific frameworks for just, inclusive and sustainable development. The research argues for the need to build relations of solidarity, to practice constant reflexivity, and to recognise and value the diversity of local knowledge systems. This research has explored a local rural Zambian context where development is occurring with meaningful collective participation, local decision making and agenda setting and which draws on community knowledge and assets rather than imposing solutions in a top-down process which assumes deficiency as the starting point, demonstrating the value and potential of such approaches. The community philanthropy approach is relevant and appropriate for this

rural Zambian context where the tenets of Ubuntu such as mutuality, the collective, and interdependence are evident and such values aligned in both.

The research has investigated and acknowledged diverse ways of knowing and explored the intricate and interwoven relationship between knowledge and power, and related concepts of participation and empowerment which are central to this research. It has examined how both concepts are embedded in the existing structures and practices of development. It has drawn from Gaventa's theories and frameworks of power coupled with critical feminist perspectives to interrogate both negative and positive expressions of power in the research space and beyond.

Theories on knowledge democracy, a concept grounded in equity, participation, and justice were reviewed together with related discussions of epistemic injustice, inclusion, and participation. The roots of dominant forms and sources of knowledge, originating in a history of colonialism and imperialism were explored drawing on critical feminist and Gaventa's theories of power, with an acknowledgement that this dominant knowledge permeates development discourse and practice. It has emphasised the role of critical education in advancing critical consciousness and as a catalyst for a transition from mere theoretical ideals to practical imperatives for social change.

The research design and approach were framed by feminist, reflexive, and critical theories and draws upon critical ethnographic approaches while adopting a participatory, co-creative approach to this qualitative research. The methodology and methods practiced are congruent with tenets of knowledge democracy and with theories of development, colonialism and critical education. They also align with values inherent in meaningful participation, localisation of knowledge and development, and the Ubuntu philosophy and other marginalised worldviews and epistemologies.

Key Contributions and Core Learning

The key contributions of the research are outlined below together with implications of the insights for theories of learning and development, and of community development theory and practice more broadly. This is followed by a more detailed summary of core learning supporting these knowledge claims.

Research contributions

- **Advances understanding of knowledge democracy and knowledge justice** by examining how collective knowledge is produced, shared and used within community-led development.
- **Provides empirical evidence on community philanthropy as a model for community-led development**, addressing a recognised gap in research on locally led development approaches.
- **Critically explores participation, decision-making and empowerment processes** within community philanthropy, assessing their opportunities and limitations in practice.
- **Contributes to debates on decolonising development practice** by investigating how locally grounded knowledge and community agency can challenge dominant development paradigms.
- **Extends scholarship on transformative education** by demonstrating the role of collective learning and knowledge production in enabling community empowerment.
- **Strengthens the evidence base for alternative development approaches**, supporting greater recognition of community philanthropy and other locally led, participatory models.
- **Offers practical insights for development policy and practice**, informing more equitable approaches to localisation, meaningful participation and power sharing.
- **Advances understanding of the methodological tensions between community-based participatory research and institutional ethics**

requirements, demonstrating how university research governance can inadvertently reproduce knowledge injustice and constrain equitable community–academic partnerships.

Core Learning

This research has documented deep, rich, diverse collective community knowledge; a sense of unity, pride, ownership and belonging through meaningful participation; community success despite ineffective macro-level government support; and the motivation to work as a collective in a community philanthropy approach. These communities are not opting to work alone or suggesting that they can develop alone, rather they are stating their commitment and desire to make their own decisions, set their own development priorities, and desire to be acknowledged and valued for their capabilities rather than their vulnerabilities. They are aware that they need support from the public, private and third sectors to meet the systemic shortfalls, and that there are challenges which they cannot address alone. However, they are motivated to find local solutions to local challenges through a collective community approach. They believe that they can find solidarity partners to support their efforts precisely because of their collective knowledge, assets, motivation as evidenced in their locally led community philanthropy achievements to date.

Drawing from this, the following represents a summary of the core learning from this research. The interrelated aspect of each is unambiguous, deserving attention in their own right, and in relation to each other.

'Authentic' community led development

This research broadly aligns with the views of Djohossou et. al. (2023a & b) and others affiliated to the Movement for Community Led Development arguing that authentic 'community led' and community 'ownership' entails development that is of the community, that emerges from within from the outset. It must go beyond functional participation to meaningful participation. This means that action is mobilised by the community themselves, through local structures and systems, such as through the

traditional structures and community foundations in this research. Core to authentic community led development is that the identification of needs and priorities, decision making, agenda setting, project planning, financial management and operational management is locally led and managed. The community collective should have the first say and the final say in all decisions when working in partnership with an external agency.

This research suggests that this is an ideal 'authentic' model and practice, however, it also highlights that it is not a simple process. In reality, the process and practice can be messy and challenging, embedded in existing power relations and can reinforce and sustain existing collective inequalities. This is evident in this research in the power dynamics that play out between central and peripheral villages, between men and women, between some community groups and ZGF, and between most community groups and the WDC. However, in comparison to traditional approaches, many elements which authenticity demands are present, particularly voice and agency in meaningful participatory processes where the first and final say rests with the community collective. While not exclusively so, much of the inequality and exclusion highlighted by community groups relates to the unequal benefits of community led development initiatives more so than participation in decision making. However, some peripheral collectives also complained of issues of exclusion and transparency in decision making processes which highlights the need for attention to power dynamics and contexts in the planning and decision-making spaces in community led approaches. Relations are key and need constant attention.

From vulnerability to capability

In this research context, community collectives shared their achievements with pride, highlighting their assets and capabilities rather than their vulnerabilities. This shift from a lens of vulnerability to capability is a necessity in these isolated rural communities. It is also a source of empowerment, where an asset-based model draws attention to and values social, traditional, intellectual, relational and financial community assets.

This highlights community strengths, including local knowledge, and their contributions, naming their value and worth. This contrasts with the deficit model of development which has persisted for decades (Ziai, 2016) and the bias inherent in dominant culture towards Western ways of knowing, also evident in the non-profit sector (Sloane Perry and Couchois Duncan, 2017). In this research context, it has highlighted the philosophy of Ubuntu in theory and practice, further advocating for knowledge justice, and asset-based models which promote and foster a growth mindset, challenging dependency. This aspect of learning from this research is interlinked with and central to all others.

Solidarity Relations

Relations of solidarity are central in this research context and the expression of these relations lead to a call for enduring, non-benevolent relations of support. Authentic community-led development, where local voices, needs, and priorities drive decision-making, and where attention is paid to existing power dynamics, emerge as essential for equitable and sustainable progress. However, challenges such as funding and capacity strengthening often necessitate external support. This research highlights how support rooted in solidarity rather than charity, based on mutuality and partnership, where commitment and continuity are key, reinforces a community-driven approach.

Knowledge justice, recognition and respect as equal partners with capability and capacity, as co-creators and co-investors, rather than hierarchical benefactor and beneficiary relations, is key. Consistent with the views of Djohossou et al. (2023a), recognition of the existence of values core to solidarity in context specific ontologies and epistemologies is imperative. In this case, a recognition of the values of mutuality, relatedness and interdependence, the collective and the contextualised ways of doing, being and becoming.

This research highlights solidarity with ZGF to be a core motivating factor for communities working through a community philanthropy approach. These

findings underscore that effective solidarity must be based on mutual respect, trust, and long-term commitment. Dignity and recognition are important, rather than being seen as passive beneficiaries, community members are recognised as epistemic agents, equal partners and co-investors. Such relationships affirm, empower, and mobilise communities, fostering sustainable development where top-down dominant 'partnerships' have often fallen short. Key points to consider include that:

- Building relations of trust and respect takes time, this is not a short-term exercise, partnerships tied solely to funding and specified projects are often short-lived, attention to inclusion and power dynamics are key
- Communities were sceptical of ZGF at first but through consistent engagement and meeting commitments, trust slowly developed with mutual accountability.
- This works both ways, ZGF also learned that their trust in the communities is warranted, creating space to deliver on respective commitments, without the pressure of targets, timelines and metrics, is enabling.
- ZGF's engagement with communities on an equal level fostered respect and trust, with recognition of community knowledge, capacity, motivation and achievements as a starting point.
- Recognition of community assets and capabilities rather than vulnerability boosts community moral, confidence and agency. This empowers communities to self-recognise as epistemic agents and co-investors (rather than deference to donor experts).
- The collective community ways of thinking, being, and doing underpin solidarity (and CLD and CPA), not all community collectives benefit equally from community initiatives, but they participate regardless because *someone* in the community benefits.
- Continuous relations over the long term, not solely tied to projects, but through investment in non-financial capital, is important to communities and makes them feel valued, seen and supported.

Enabling spaces

Enabling spaces emerge as vital for social inclusion and learning. These include spaces where access to information and knowledge is consistent, including access to a free and independent media and ICT in all its forms; multiple spaces, forms and processes of learning that are accessible to all and context specific; and spaces for effective representation and with feedback mechanisms in the public sphere. These spaces, forms and processes, whether physical or virtual, are vital.

This research advocates enabling spaces as crucial to knowledge, learning and development. Authentic community led development emerged as an enabling space and as a space of learning, where local community spaces of individual and collective learning have proven invaluable, enabling learning, exchange, solidarity and the generation of collective knowledge. These organic, everyday, created, and invited spaces support and generate collective motivation, unity, power, determination, and a sense of belonging. They are spaces where life opportunities can be enhanced and where life sustaining collective knowledge and practice can be recognised shared, created, and preserved in relationships of mutuality and interdependence. They are spaces consistently embedded with the spirit of Ubuntu.

Congruent with the views of Doan (2019), community philanthropy in CLD is evident as both a practice and a learning process supporting the creation, consumption and sharing of knowledge. Dedicated women's spaces are revealed as vital for many personal, economic, practical and strategic reasons, while the status and voice of young people remain key. While the practice and process of community philanthropy can support the enabling CLD space, these power relations need constant attention and can support or disrupt empowerment, and even with the best of intentions, not all CLD spaces are enabling. Therefore, once again, attention to power dynamics, participation and inclusion is evident as a key concern.

The importance of empowering community spaces that foster confidence, collective learning, and conscientisation, which facilitate collective

interrogation and understanding of their world, and which can instigate a challenge to systemic inequalities is evident in this research in support of the views of VeneKlasen and Miller (2002) and others. These spaces must be protected and supported, as they enable access to knowledge and the sharing of lived experiences. The relevance and value of knowledge that is relational and place-based is reiterated, a salient point which emphasises that even in the face of exclusion and hidden power, communities continue to create and share knowledge. Sustained access to enabling, empowering spaces, such as those which exist and emerge in the CLD and community philanthropy space can lead to knowledge justice in a knowledge democracy where their 'alternative' ways of knowing, being and doing are recognised as legitimate.

Conclusions

This research supports the position that knowledge democracy is crucial for social change. Diverse worldviews and 'alternative' epistemologies, and the collective community knowledge central to and evident in this research context receives little recognition and respect in the dominant international development space. While recent decades have seen a focus on theories of decolonisation, traditional development practice persists with a deficit model of development which tends to dismiss existing knowledge, assets, rights, capacity, and agency. Instead, dominant Western knowledge is viewed as the source of expertise and solutions, external to the communities, imposed from above. Meaningful participation tends to be absent in this model which "treat[s] local and national actors as subordinate" (Van Brabant and Patel, 2018:16). Measures of social change and 'development' are usually focused on the individual fixed tangible metrics as evidence, rather than local collective perspectives which value aspects of process and relations as evidence of change.

Collective participation in these communities reflects the spirit of Ubuntu where community groups invest knowledge, skills, time, relations and affective emotions in an approach which draws on Southern imaginaries of

collective knowledge and other collective assets, valuing and legitimising these 'subaltern' ways of knowing, understanding, interacting, and being, as advocated by Matthews and Castellsagué (2025). This collective participation is motivated instinctively by values of mutuality, relatedness and interdependence inherent to Ubuntu, and further motivated by the prospect of progress and development, the chance of a better quality of life, independence and empowerment, and the hope of equal access to services and supports. They are also motivated by each other in an expression of *power with*, the collective endeavour and the sense of pride, fulfilment, unity and a sense of identity and belonging which most community collectives find empowering.

These isolated rural communities have engaged in community led development with a community philanthropy approach through necessity due to marginalisation from socio-economic services and supports broadly, and the limited support available from ineffective local government structures. Their approach to community led development facilitates meaningful participation and supports an imperfect microcosm of knowledge justice in these local spaces, where community members are seen, heard and valued as knowers in a process of mutual recognition in a variety of constituent collective forms within and across communities. This meaningful participation ensures that collective community voice is central and that local knowledge, practices and systems are at the core of their analysis and planning. It is these local voices that identify needs, decide their own priorities and set their own agenda.

This collective approach where knowledge and agency emerge from collectives within the community, culminating in decisions that are made and owned by the community, offers a glimpse of authentic community led development in practice. In this research context, it is imperfect, yet it reflects aspects of knowledge democracy at local community level, particularly elements of knowledge justice and meaningful participation. However, even at the local level, social inclusion needs attention, revealing experiences of exclusion and inequality among some community collectives.

Community philanthropy enhances their collective community development approach through a focus on and appreciation for collective community assets. This focus highlights capabilities and capacity rather than vulnerability, positioning community collectives as co-investors rather than beneficiaries, which in turn further strengthens ownership and sustainability. Collective analysis and planning which draws on local, situated, everyday knowledge and engages the community through dialogue prompts conscientisation and transformative education, enhancing learning in the process. The critical education approach favoured by ZGF in their solidarity partnership with communities, emphasises rights and entitlements, promoting active citizenship, rather than aid and dependency.

Knowledge Democracy

As introduced in previous chapters, a conceptual framework for knowledge democracy has emerged from this research. This framework interprets knowledge democracy, which includes knowledge justice in a diversity of epistemologies, as the equitable production and consumption of knowledge and information, social inclusion and learning, and meaningful participatory processes as standard practice, as presented earlier and to follow. However, the decision related to the form and presentation of this framework in this concluding chapter demanded some further critical reflection, as elaborated next.

Manifesto or Guiding Principles…

From the outset, this research has always been more than a means to an end (a doctoral award), rather it has always aimed to contribute to positive social change in a meaningful way, at grassroots level and more broadly. Critical theory sets out with the intent to find, interrogate, disrupt and change patterns of social injustice**,** and a critical ethnographic approach aims to advocate for that change. Therefore, a traditional concluding chapter in the format of conclusions and recommendations stated firmly but quietly at the end seemed inappropriate. I considered how my research partners might

communicate the learning from this study and thought; loudly, colourfully and with purpose and determination. My research partners and I share a passion for and commitment to justice and fairness, especially for those who find themselves on the margins. So, in the spirit of Ubuntu, on behalf of the collective 'we' research partners: ZGF, the community collectives of Nyankanga and Kaminembe, and myself, a manifesto for knowledge democracy was decided.

However, in the process of reaching that decision, I have debated whether to present the conceptual framework for knowledge democracy as a manifesto or as guiding principles. My initial thoughts were that a manifesto is more authoritative, rigid and bounded and suggested that a manifesto did not sit well with the intent and the core values of knowledge democracy.

I decided to interrogate the roots of my discomfort by reflecting on my understandings of a 'manifesto', something I have not found cause to do before. I eventually came to the realisation that my understandings and assumptions are shaped by invisible power, my association of manifestos with political ideology, and specifically 'communists' and my internalisation of the view that communism is bad, is representative of the enemy, something to be dismantled. I grew up in the nineteen-eighties towards the end of the Cold War. I associate memories of the fall of the Berlin wall with the fall of communism (and by extension, the concept of the manifesto). I recall a time of celebration as the internalised communist 'enemy' was defeated, even though I had little interest or understanding of communism or politics at that time.

If it is not obvious why I share this story, let me explain. It strikes me as ironic that as I write the concluding chapter of my doctoral thesis; my positioning, my situated knowledge and experience, the invisible power exercised and internalised through media reporting and representations in my formative years, and the dominant worldview that suggests that there is no space or need for alternatives, is ever present. These influence the choice of form and language I choose to present a proposed framework for knowledge

democracy. Now having interrogated my assumptions and challenged the newly discovered unconscious bias, I have developed a new perspective of the concept. I now understand a manifesto as the advancement of a set of ideas, which in this case critique and seek to change the status quo, and which support and promote a new approach or movement. Additionally, viewing it from a social justice perspective, a manifesto seems fitting.

I was also reminded of the views of Pohlhaus (2017), that bounding understandings of epistemic justice is in a sense the antithesis of what epistemic justice is. Surely similarly, concepts of knowledge democracy should not be bound. With this in mind, 'we' – the collective peoples involved in this research – offer this as a manifesto for change, to complement and advance the work of others in knowledge democracy, in development studies and practice, and more broadly. We suggest that it one set of ideas, unbounded and flexible, that could be adapted to fit the context in which it arises, as after all, context is everything.

Manifesto for Knowledge Democracy:

Evidence from this research supports counsel that in all actions to advance this manifesto (or elements of), power dynamics demand constant close attention given the complexity and sensitivity of shifts in power relations. The core learning presented from this research underpins and intersects with the ideas presented in this manifesto. Drawing on the work of others, including Hall, Heck, and Godrie (2020), Babalola (2024), and Nadarajah and Grydehøj (2024) and from the findings of this research and context, we offer this manifesto for knowledge democracy.

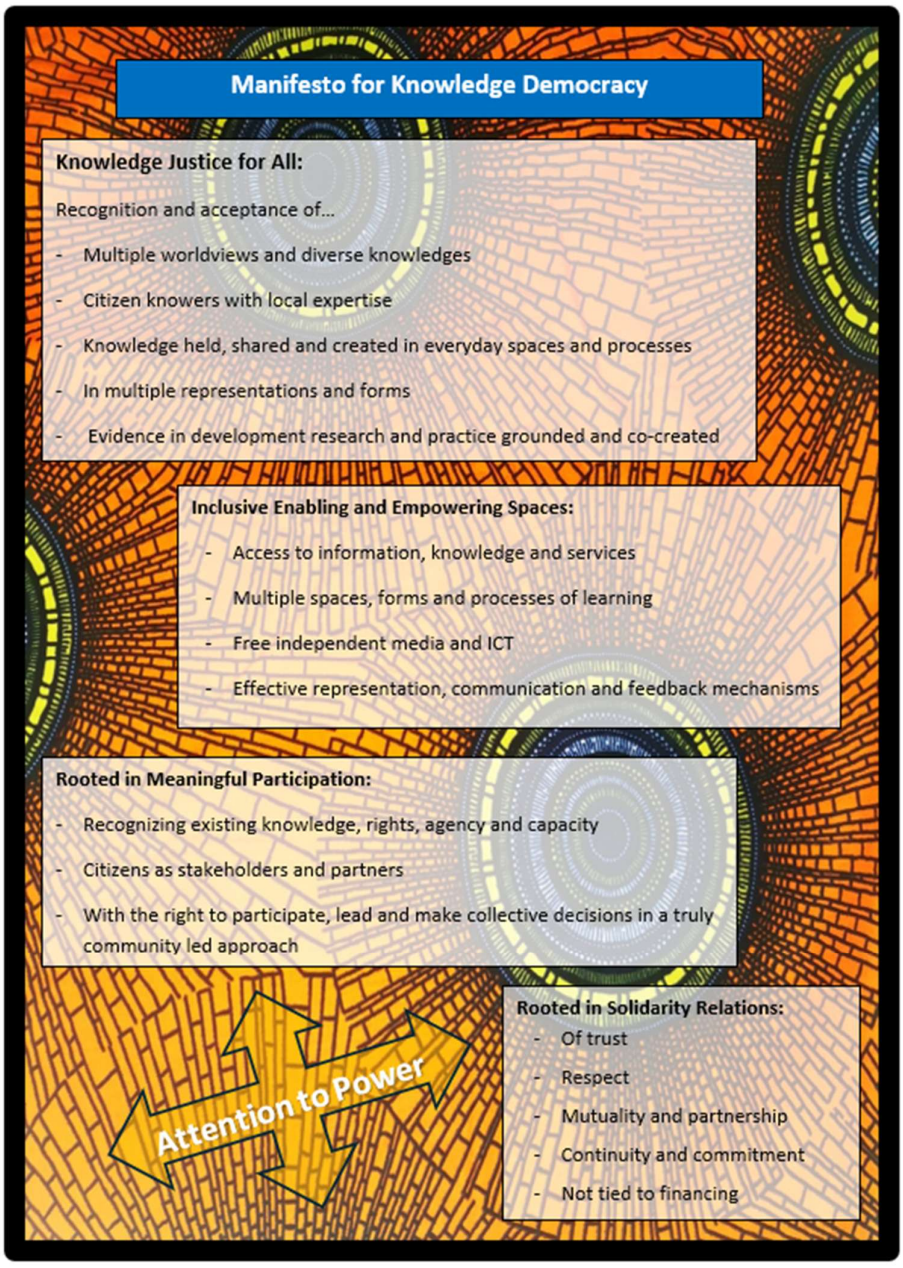


Image 9.0: Manifesto for Knowledge Democracy

Parting Thoughts

This research provides empirical evidence and further justification for a change from deficit-based models of development research, education and practice to asset-based models and approaches which recognise and value capability rather than vulnerability. It adds to the decade's long participation debate, defining and advocating for meaningful participation which value and support local knowledge, capacity and agency. The

importance of solidarity relations rather than benefactor relations is highlighted, emphasising a need for continuity and long-term commitment. The values and approaches promoted by the Movement for Community Led Development including the community philanthropy approach are evident in the research communities.

This empirical evidence suggests that community philanthropy offers an effective approach to community led development which enhances community agency, empowerment, and ownership, fosters unity, social cohesion and pride, and is a further mobilising factor for continued active community participation in development processes, which enhances the prospects for sustainability of initiatives and outcomes. Therefore, this research endorses a community philanthropy approach which is truly community led, where participation is meaningful, and which is supported by committed solidarity partners. Finally, this research supports existing calls for a commitment to transformative rather than technical approaches to localisation in practice.

The time for transformative localisation, to relinquish power to local communities, for a meaningful and inclusive participation revolution, and for knowledge justice for all, is long overdue. In global solidarity, let us make the change now.

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Appendix A: Chapter Layout Guide

Chapter Four: Methodology - Phase Tables

Phase One - Considered Plans

- Research design
- The "ologies" - theoretical approach
- 'Me' in the research
- Research Partners and Team
- Ethical Considerations

Positionality
Reflexivity
Power and co-creation
Practitioner Experience
Research assistants
Relations and Gatekeepers
Free and Informed Consent

Boundaries and Independence
Payment
Do No Harm
Confidentiality
Scheduling

Phase Two – The Messy Reality

Building relations

Initial meetings with ZGF
The research team
A Goat in an Envelope
Observing the journey and budding relations
Initial meetings with traditional leaders and community representatives

Methods and process

Process and schedule
Responsiveness put to the test
Sampling
On the spot decisions and managing the scale
Method
Finding balance
Peer Review and Initial Analysis

Phase Three - Interpreting Voice

- Research assistants and translation
- Data Analysis – striving for accuracy and authenticity

Initial interpretation and analysis
Subsequent interpretation and analysis
Challenges in communication
Navigating the data

- Limitations

Researcher defined questions
Translation
Communications and member checking
Generalisability

Chapter Five, Six and Seven: Findings – Themes Tables

Chapter 5: Knowledge and Learning	Chapter 6: Participation
Three Knots in a Chitenge – Knowledge and Learning - Formal education and learning - Non-formal education and learning - Informal learning and knowledge - Environmental Literacy - Value and Recognition of knowledge - Learning as lifelong and collective - Knowledge and Learning in Development Practice Knowledge as power - Collective knowledge - Knowledge denied - Exclusion from knowledge	Participation in community development Participation in development practice - Motivations for participation - Participation Defined - Supporting factors for community development - Participation as process - Participation Outputs Participatory approaches - Traditional and Results Based Approaches - Community led development - The community philanthropy approach Participation through the WDC - "Let me remove what is choking my throat" - Power and Representation in the WDC - Dignity and Recognition - Relationships and Trust - Empty Participation Isolation and Exclusion – Not part of this Nation - Identity and belonging - Isolation - Inequality - Representation
Chapter 7: Empowerment	
"Instead of waiting with your hands folded" Empowering Spaces - Gender inequality - Dedicated women's spaces - Independence - Agency - Solidarity Critical education – an empowering approach - Mind-set shift – No more 'Boma Iyanganepo' - Collective action and agency - Transformation - Critical thinking	Inclusion - Voice and Agency - Inclusive representation - Dignity and Recognition The Spirit of Ubuntu

Chapter 8: Discussion Phase Tables

Knowledge Democracy - a conceptual framework		
Equitable production and consumption of knowledge and information Social inclusion and learning Meaningful participatory processes • A note on recognition and Ubuntu		
Unpacking the Layers of Knowledge Democracy		
Knowledge Justice	Spaces of Social Inclusion and Justice	Meaningful Participatory Processes
Knowledge and learning – a lifelong imperative Local Microcosm of Knowledge Justice Gendered Knowledge (In)Justice and Empowerment Spaces of Learning and Sharing The External Gaze: Deficient and Vulnerable Knowledge Denied Powerful Learning Relations and Processes	Spaces of Learning (Un)Invited Spaces A Seat at the Table Solidarity Relations as Enabling Environments Power in Every Space Disabling Space Empowering Spaces and Processes	External Experts and Localisation A Participation Revolution Community-Led Development and the Community Philanthropy Approach Participation as Performance Locally led development Motivations for Participation Relationships for Social Change Assets and Co-investors A Growth Mindset Power and Participation Generative Processes Critical Education and Collective Conscientisation
Community success and learning in action		

Appendix B: Information sheet and Consent Form – ZGF staff

INFORMATION SHEET & CONSENT FORM FOR ZGF STAFF

Information Sheet

Purpose of the Study. I am Niamh Rooney, a doctoral student, in the Department of International Development, Maynooth University, Ireland.

> As part of the requirements for Doctorate in Higher and Adult Education, I am undertaking a research study under the supervision of Dr. Bernie Grummell.

The study is concerned with development practice in communities with whom ZGF collaborates. It seeks to understand what is valued and recognised as knowledge and how knowledge is produced. It also seeks to understand participation, decision making and empowerment at community level and to understand how change happens in development practice and how this supports sustainable development.

Who has approved this study? This study has been reviewed and received ethical approval from Maynooth University Research Ethics Committee. You may have a copy of this approval if requested.

What will participating in the study involve? You will be asked to commit to spending some time engaging with the researcher and research assistant in a collaborative research process over the course of 2-3 weeks in total during the research visit and possibly via online communications in the period following the research visit.

What information will be collected? You will be invited to engage in qualitative research methods to explore your experiences, understanding and perspectives of the issues of participation, decision-making, empowerment, and power in development practice. I expect that ultimately this will take the form of focus group discussions or semi-structured interviews due to time constraints and work pressures. The study will gather information on your opinions, ideas, experience and knowledge with the research assistant and researcher during the selected research activities.

Why have you been asked to take part? You have been asked to take part because you are a ZGF staff member with experience in development practice with communities in general and/or specifically with communities engaged in this study.

Do you have to take part?
No, you are under no obligation whatsoever to take part in this research. It is entirely up to you to decide whether you would like to take part. If you decide to do so, you will be asked to sign a consent form and be given a copy of this and the information sheet for your own records. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw your information up until such time as the research findings are *anonymised*. A decision to withdraw at any time, or a decision not to take part, will not affect your relationships with the researcher or with other ZGF staff.

Will your participation in the study be kept confidential? Yes, all information that is collected about you during the research will be kept confidential. No individual names will be identified at any time. All hard copy information will be held in a locked cabinet at the researchers' place of work; electronic information will be encrypted and held securely on MU PC or servers and will be accessed only by Niamh Rooney.

No information will be distributed to any other unauthorised individual or third party. If you so wish, the data that you provide can also be made available to you at your own discretion.

'It must be recognised that, in some circumstances, confidentiality of research data and records may be overridden by courts in the event of litigation or in the course of investigation by lawful authority. In such circumstances the University will take all reasonable steps within law to ensure that confidentiality is maintained to the greatest possible extent.'

What will happen to the information which you give? All the information you provide will be kept at Maynooth University in a way that it will not be possible to identify you. On completion of the research, the data will be retained on the MU server. You can access your data up to the point of anonymisation on (1st March 2024) by contacting Niamh Rooney. Manual data will be shredded confidentially and electronic data will be reformatted or overwritten by Niamh Rooney.

What will happen to the results? The research will be written up and presented as a thesis, may be presented at National and International conferences and may be published in academic journals. A copy of the research findings will be made available to the community in an appropriate and accessible format and shared with ZGF as a research report.

What are the possible disadvantages of taking part? I do not envisage any negative consequences for you in taking part. However, if there are any topics that you feel uncomfortable with during the process, please communicate this and I will stop the process and move to a new topic. Mpala Nkonkomalimba, an

independent development worker will be available to offer support and signposting to ZGF staff should the need arise.

It is anticipated that your research activities will take place in appropriate private spaces. Any staff members not participating in the activity will be respectfully asked to give the space and privacy to conduct activities undisturbed. Where you are uncomfortable or dis-satisfied with the level of privacy available, the activity will be halted and efforts taken to improve the privacy conditions, or the activity postponed until issues can be addressed.

What if there is a problem? At the end of each research session, I will discuss with you how you found the experience and how you are feeling. If you experience any distress as a result of your participation, you may discuss it further with the researcher and research assistant, or you may request independent support which can be arranged by the researcher. You may contact my supervisor Dr. Bernie Grummell *(bernie.grummell@mu.ie)* if you feel the research has not been carried out as described above.

Any further queries? If you need any further information, you can contact me: Niamh Rooney, niamh.rooney@mu.ie

If you agree to take part in the study, please complete and sign the consent form overleaf.

Thank you for taking the time to read this

Consent Form - ZGF Staff Members (semi-structured interview)

I……agree to participate in Niamh Rooney's research study: *Who Knows? An exploration of epistemic justice and equality in development practice and the potential for transformative sustainable development.*

Please tick each statement below:

The purpose and nature of the study have been explained to me verbally & in writing. I've been able to ask questions, which were answered satisfactorily.

☐

I am participating voluntarily.

☐

I give permission for the interview to be audio recorded.

☐

I give permission for the researcher to record notes about the research.

☐

I understand that I can withdraw from the study, without repercussions, at any time, whether that is before it starts or while I am participating.

☐

I understand that I can withdraw permission to use my data up to anonymisation stage (1st March 2024). ☐

It has been explained to me how my data will be managed and that I may access it on request.

☐

I understand the limits of confidentiality as described in the information sheet.

☐

I agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview.

☐

OR

I do not agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview.

☐

Signed…….. Date……

Participant Name in block capitals ……..

I the undersigned have taken the time to fully explain to the above participant the nature and purpose of this study in a manner that they could understand. I have explained the risks involved as well as the possible benefits. I have invited them to ask questions on any aspect of the study that concerned them.

Signed…….. Date…….

Researcher Name in block capitals: NIAMH ROONEY

If during your participation in this study you feel the information and guidelines that you were given have been neglected or disregarded in any way, or if you are unhappy about the process, please contact the Secretary of the Maynooth University Ethics Committee at research.ethics@mu.ie or +353 (0)1 708 6019. Please be assured that your concerns will be dealt with in a sensitive manner.

For your information the Data Controller for this research project is Maynooth University, Maynooth, Co. Kildare. Maynooth University Data Protection officer is Ann McKeon in Humanity house, room 17, who can be contacted at ann.mckeon@mu.ie. Maynooth University Data Privacy policies can be found at https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/data-protection.

Two copies to be made: 1 for participant, 1 for researcher

Appendix C: Information sheet and Consent Form – Community Members

INFORMATION SHEET & CONSENT FORM FOR COMMUNITY RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Information Sheet

Purpose of the Study. I am Niamh Rooney, a doctoral student, in the Department of International Development, Maynooth University, Ireland.

> As part of the requirements for Doctorate in Higher and Adult Education, I am undertaking a research study` under the supervision of Dr. Bernie Grummell.

The study is concerned with development projects in your community. It seeks to understand what is valued and recognised as knowledge and how knowledge is produced. It also seeks to understand participation, decision making and empowerment at community level and to understand how change happens in your community and how this supports sustainable development.

All research participants must be at least 18 years of age in order to be invited to participate and to give consent to participation in this research process.

Who has approved this study? This study has been reviewed and received ethical approval from Maynooth University Research Ethics Committee. You may have a copy of this approval if requested.

What will participating in the study involve? You will be asked to commit to spending some time in your community engaging with the researcher and research assistant during everyday activities and/or project activities in the community to co-create knowledge in a collaborative research process over the course of 2-3 weeks in total.

What information will be collected? The study will gather information on your opinions, ideas, experience and knowledge through informal conversations with the research assistant and researcher during everyday activities. These informal conversations will initially help you to understand the research study and help you to make an informed decision on your consent to participate in the study. Should

you decide to participate, you will be invited to collaborate with the researcher on the research schedule and the most appropriate methods for gathering information in your community through continued informal conversations. You may also be invited to attend other activities such as group discussion, which will be scheduled alongside project activities for your convenience. Photographs may be taken during the research process, however, any images taken and used will be of locations and spaces with no identifiable people, features, names or signs included.

Why have you been asked to take part? You have been asked to take part because your community is engaged in community development projects with the support of the Zambian Governance Foundation (ZGF).

Do you have to take part?

No, you are under no obligation whatsoever to take part in this research. It is entirely up to you to decide whether you would like to take part. If you decide to do so, you will be asked to sign a consent form and be given a copy of this and the information sheet for your own records. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw your information up until such time as the research findings are *anonymised*. A decision to withdraw at any time, or a decision not to take part, will not affect your relationships with the researcher or with ZGF staff.

Will your participation in the study be kept confidential? Yes, all information that is collected about you during the research will be kept confidential. No individual names will be identified at any time. All hard copy information will be held in a locked cabinet at the researchers' place of work; electronic information will be encrypted and held securely on MU PC or servers and will be accessed only by Niamh Rooney.

No information will be distributed to any other unauthorised individual or third party. If you so wish, the data that you provide can also be made available to you at your own discretion.

'It must be recognised that, in some circumstances, confidentiality of research data and records may be overridden by courts in the event of litigation or in the course of investigation by lawful authority. In such circumstances the University will take all reasonable steps within law to ensure that confidentiality is maintained to the greatest possible extent.'

What will happen to the information which you give? All the information you provide will be kept at Maynooth University in such a way that it will not be possible to identify you. On completion of the research, the data will be retained on the MU server. You can access your data up to the point of anonymisation on (1st March 2024) by contacting Niamh Rooney. Manual data will be shredded confidentially and electronic data will be reformatted or overwritten by Niamh Rooney in Maynooth University.

What will happen to the results? The research will be written up and presented as a thesis, discussed at internal group meetings, may be presented at national and international conferences and may be published in scientific journals. A copy of the research findings will be made available to the community in an appropriate format.

What are the possible disadvantages of taking part? I do not envisage any negative consequences for you in taking part. However, if there are any topics that you feel uncomfortable with during the process, please tell me and I will stop the process and address the issue.
ZGF will make available the personal project supports currently available to you if the need arises in the event that you are uncomfortable or distressed during or after participation in the research. In addition, Mpala Nkonkomalimba, an independent development worker will be available to offer support and signposting to you should the need arise.

The researcher and research assistant plan to attend project meetings as observers in order to learn about the ongoing community development work. Our presence and purpose will be explained to all present and permission sought from all community members in attendance on each occasion before we join the meeting. If anyone objects or is uncomfortable, both the researcher and research assistant will step away.

Where the researcher and research assistant engages with you in informal conversations and participation in daily chores, these activities will be limited to public settings, such as public community spaces. In the interest of safety and welfare of all parties, the researcher and research assistant do not expect to visit your home.

It is anticipated that formal research meetings will take place in indoor community spaces when available and outdoors if necessary. Where research meetings take place in public spaces, community members not participating in the activity will be respectfully asked to give the space and privacy to conduct activities undisturbed. If you feel uncomfortable or dis-satisfied with the level of privacy available, the activity will be halted and efforts taken to improve the privacy conditions, or the activity postponed until issues can be addressed.

What if there is a problem? At the end of each research session, I will discuss with you how you found the experience and how you are feeling. If you experience any distress as a result of your participation, you may discuss it further with the researcher and research assistant, or you may request independent support which can be arranged by the researcher. You may contact my supervisor Dr. Bernie Grummell (*bernie.grummell@mu.ie*) if you feel the research has not been carried out as described above.

Any further queries? If you need any further information, you can contact me:

Niamh Rooney, niamh.rooney@mu.ie

If you agree to take part in the study, please complete and sign the consent form overleaf.

Thank you for taking the time to read this

Consent Form - Community Research Participants

I……agree to participate in Niamh Rooney's research study: *Who Knows? An exploration of epistemic justice and equality in development practice and the potential for transformative sustainable development* (as detailed in the information sheet).

Please tick each statement below:

The purpose and nature of the study have been explained to me verbally & in writing in a language that I understand. I've been able to ask questions, which were answered satisfactorily.

☐

I am participating voluntarily.

☐

I give permission for any interview with me to be audio recorded

☐

I give permission for the researcher to record notes about the research

☐

I give permission for the researcher to take photos of research activities (with no people identified) ☐

I understand that I can withdraw from the study, without repercussions, at any time, whether that is before it starts or while I am participating.

☐

I understand that I can withdraw permission to use my data up to anonymisation stage (1st March 2024). ☐

It has been explained to me how my data will be managed and that I may access it on request.

☐

I understand the limits of confidentiality as described in the information sheet

☐

I agree to quotation/publication of extracts from interviews or research notes

☐

OR

I do not agree to quotation/publication of extracts from interview or research notes

☐

Participant's signature/ thumbprint*	

Printed name of witness* _____ Date: _____

Printed name of person obtaining consent _____

I attest that I have explained the study information accurately to _____, and was understood to the best of my knowledge by, the participant. He/she has freely given consent to participate *in the presence of the above-named witness (where applicable).

Signature of person obtaining consent _____ Date _____

* Only required if the participant is unable to read or write.

If during your participation in this study you feel the information and guidelines that you were given have been neglected or disregarded in any way, or if you are unhappy about the process, please contact the Secretary of the Maynooth University Ethics Committee at research.ethics@mu.ie or +353 (0)1 708 6019. Please be assured that your concerns will be dealt with in a sensitive manner.

For your information the Data Controller for this research project is Maynooth University, Maynooth, Co. Kildare. Maynooth University Data Protection officer is Ann McKeon in Humanity house, room 17, who can be contacted at ann.mckeon@mu.ie. Maynooth University Data Privacy policies can be found at https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/data-protection.

Two copies to be made: 1 for participant, 1 for researcher

Appendix D: Themes to be explored with ZGF staff

Themes to be explored with ZGF staff

- Individual and collective experience in the area of community development and community education
- Individual and collective experience of working with national and international funding bodies
- Values and principles guiding work in community development/education
- Understandings of and views on knowledge, participation, empowerment, transformation, power and decision-making at community level
- Influences informing these views and how these views shape and inform practice with communities
- Awareness of and engagement with national networks/bodies engaged in critical debates on development practice
- Views on sustainable development – now and in the future

Appendix E: Themes to be explored with Community Research Participants

Themes to be explored with Community Research Participants*

- Understandings of and views on knowledge, participation, empowerment, transformation, power and decision-making in their community and in wider society

- Influences informing these views and how these views shape and inform their everyday experiences and their experiences of community development work

- Individual and collective views on sources and types of knowledge existing in their community, the value placed on this knowledge, and the application and use of this knowledge in community development work

- Experiences of community development and community education – successes and challenges

- Views on sustainable development – now and in the future

* As I intend to be adaptive and responsive through a design that co-creates knowledge with communities in a collaborative research process, I am open to being guided by the community in terms of what they feel is important to discuss. Therefore, I aim to leave space in the identification of themes to allow for the emergent.

Appendix F: Manifesto for Knowledge Democracy – extended text

Manifesto for Knowledge Democracy:

Knowledge Justice for All

This demands the recognition and acceptance of multiple worldviews and diverse knowledges often dismissed in the colonial past and academic present in a challenge to the current persistent dominant bias towards Western ways of knowing, being, doing and becoming. This means a shift in development theory and practice from a deficit model of development research, planning and practice where the outsider is seen as the expert, to one which acknowledges and embraces local knowledge and expertise. This shift further demands a collaborative approach of solidarity and co-creation with the:

- acceptance of multiple types, forms and sources of knowledge
- recognition of all people as citizen knowers, without discrimination,
- capable of holding, creating and sharing knowledge and information in multiple representations and forms.
- evidence in development research and practice grounded and co-created

Evidence for social change

This draws attention to the depth and value of learning that happens in development processes and the diversity of ways of knowing, being and doing that exists locally. Therefore, it suggests that evidence for results should emerge from and be determined by community collectives, recognising the collective nature of social change beyond individual change and imposed metrics.

Similarly, the ideas presented here offer justification and rationale for community-based research partnerships which support and promote knowledge justice, and which address knowledge injustice and inequality in academic research.

Inclusive Enabling and Empowering Spaces

Attention to accessible, enabling and empowering spaces of social inclusion and learning is essential. Safe and trusted spaces of learning should be prioritised as crucial for access to existing knowledge and information, and for knowledge sharing and creation. These spaces are especially vital for women and other marginalised groups. Existing spaces need review, and attention paid to dimensions of power, including who is included and excluded from the space, and the criteria and levers applied in the process. Whether existing closed or invited spaces, or claimed and created, consideration should be given to:

- access to information, services and knowledge (schools, ICT, media, social movements...)
- access to multiple spaces, forms and processes of learning
- effective representation and feedback mechanisms

Rooted in Meaningful Participation

Participation debates have taken centre stage for decades, with various trends and approaches advocating for meaningful participation entering and leaving the spotlight through that time with often limited or short-term success. More recent developments have seen the concept of localisation enter the stage. However, fear and evidence of co-optation of the concept has led to critique with a recognition that truly shifting power to the grassroots is a complex endeavour which requires long term commitment and a solidarity rather than charity approach.

This manifesto advocates for meaningful participation that goes beyond passive or functional participation where communities are considered mere passengers in the process, and mere consumers of knowledge. This supports and advocates action that is mobilised by the community themselves, through local structures and systems, and:

- which recognise existing knowledge, rights, capacity, and agency
- view citizens as key stakeholders and partners in political processes
- view citizens similarly in development actions and processes with the right to participate asserted and locally led,

- where decision making and agenda setting rests with affected communities.

Community Led Development and a Community Philanthropy approach

The values and approaches promoted by the Movement for Community Led Development including the community philanthropy approach offer an effective approach to community led development which enhances community agency, empowerment, and ownership, fosters unity, social cohesion and pride, and is a further mobilising factor for continued active community participation in development processes, which enhances the prospects for sustainability of initiatives and outcomes. Therefore, this manifesto endorses a community philanthropy approach which is truly community led, where participation is meaningful, and which is supported by committed solidarity partners.

Rooted in Solidarity Relations

These solidarity partners, be they state, private or third sector, are important to enhance community empowerment and to ensure that communities are supported rather than left to their own devices to take responsibility for their own needs, avoiding situations where participation results in changes from bad to worse rather than bad to good.

This support should be rooted in solidarity rather than charity, based on mutuality and partnership, where commitment and continuity are key, reinforcing a truly community-driven approach.

Solidarity partnerships must be continued and consistent and should not be solely dependent on funding relations. These solidarity relations should equally value and share knowledge, expertise, social connections and networks, and technical supports.

Strong solidarity relations are trust based. Therefore, allowing each partner the space to deliver on their commitments without the pressure of targets, timelines and metrics is an enabling exercise.

Power Relations

Power relations need constant attention and even with the best of intentions, not all spaces and relations are enabling. Therefore, attention to power dynamics is always a key concern which should be addressed directly through meaningful participation, transformative education and participatory social power analysis.

Appendix G: Nyankanga Community – Women's Song Translation

NYANKANGA COMMUNITY WOMEN'S GREETING SONG

CONTEXT

The song is sung to welcome visitors or guests to an event or function, appreciating their presence, showing gratitude and making them feel at home. It is usually sung at parties, weddings, meetings and special events.

Song (Tonga)

Lead: I celebrate my visitors, my visitors...

Women's Response: "Ndindi" (a word of affirmation for "indeed" or "for sure").

Lead: I celebrate my visitors

Women's Response: my visitors for sure.

Lead: all of these here are my…?

Women's Response: my visitors for sure.

Lead: all of these here are my…?

Women's Response: my visitors for sure.