Stakeholders' Experiences of the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) Approach in Makhanda, South Africa: An Analysis of the Siyakhana@Makhanda Programme

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By

Simphiwe Gongqa
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7059-4623

Supervisor: Professor Sally Matthews

Department of Political and International Studies

Rhodes University

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Abstract

This study explores and analyses stakeholders' experiences of the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach in Makhanda, South Africa. The ABCD approach has gained some momentum in the community engagement field at universities in the past decade. However, in that time, there has also been doubt cast on the efficacy of the approach. This study focuses on the implementation strategies, effectiveness, and challenges of the approach. To contribute to the advancement of knowledge and add to the discussion on the efficacy of the approach, the Siyakhana@Makhanda programme of the Rhodes University Community Engagement (RUCE) division is utilised as the case study.

Through various qualitative methods of data collection and analysis, the study presents findings on the experiences of the ABCD approach from stakeholders involved in the Siyakhana@Makhanda programme. Findings in this study suggest that the stakeholders experience ABCD as an effective approach that promotes social cohesion through mutually beneficial partnerships and provides inclusive, empowering, and sustainable community engagement. However, stakeholders also encounter some challenges which include participation apathy and some implementation hurdles.

This study concludes that the implementation of the ABCD approach in this context is experienced as effective albeit with some challenges that disrupt the project process. The study is intended to contribute to studies analysing the implementation, effectiveness, and challenges of the ABCD approach in the community engagement field at universities.

Key words: community development, participatory development, asset-based community development, university-community partnerships, Makhanda context

Abbreviations and Acronyms

ABCD	Asset-Based Community Development
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
AJHECE	African Journal of Higher Education Community Engagement
CA	Capability Approach
CBO	Community-Based Organisation
CES	Community Engagement Symposium
ECDC	Early Childhood Development Centre
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PALAR	Participatory Action Learning and Action Research
PCB	Participatory Capacity Building
PD	Participatory Development
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
RRA	Rapid Rural Appraisal
RUCE	Rhodes University Community Engagement

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Chapter One

Introduction: Community Development in Makhanda

1.1 Research Context

Mainstream 'top-down' community development approaches have been criticised for only catering to immediate needs thereby treating the symptoms of poverty while failing to eliminate the root causes (Haines, 2014; Stoltenberg-Bruursema, 2015). In response to such criticism, many civic organisations, entrepreneurs, universities, and academics favour an Asset-Based Community-led Development (ABCD) approach for inclusive, empowering, and sustainable community development (Stoltenberg-Bruursema, 2015; Harrison et al., 2019). ABCD is a highly participatory approach that has gained some clout as an alternative 'bottom-up' community development tool (Ware, 2013; Ward, 2023). ABCD proponents assert that the approach develops skills and resources (assets) already in people's possession so they can develop their communities from the inside (Mathie and Cunningham, 2003; Bergdall, 2012). It is said that a community that develops itself from the inside gains the necessary confidence to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty and thrives by utilising its multifaceted assets (Kretzmann and McKnight, 1993). As assets grow, communities gain more strength and can thrive in a sustainable manner (Garcia, 2020; McKnight and Russell, 2018).

When it comes to sub-Saharan Africa, the region is struggling with poverty and conflict and has a lot of at-risk youth (Fosu, 2015; Nwani and Osuji, 2020). Therefore, a community development approach that takes into consideration these factors is essential (Ssewamala et al., 2010:441). Hence, the ABCD approach is increasingly being applied in this context (Skhosana, 2021; Chen et al., 2024). Moreover, when looking specifically at the South African context, a study by Nel (2018:848) found that when compared to the traditional needs-based community development approach, the alternative asset-based community development approach resulted in "more ground-level, self-driven, and independent interventions". As a result of its perceived success, ABCD is being increasingly applied by community engagement programmes at universities as their approach to local community development (Preece, 2016; Chinyowa et al., 2016; Morales, 2023). However, as ABCD is being increasingly applied in more community engagement programmes at universities, careful thought is required for the appropriation and application of such an approach for use in these programmes.

Accordingly, this study investigates the experiences of ABCD on community engagement stakeholders in the Makhanda context. The study specifically investigates the implementation strategies, effectiveness, and challenges that the ABCD approach encounters in this context. The purpose of the study is to analyse whether the implementation of the highly participatory ABCD approach by the Siyakhana@Makhanda programme at Rhodes University has produced a community engagement process that is community-led instead of a process that is university-led for the Makhanda community. The study investigates the Rhodes University Community Engagement's (RUCE) Siyakhana@Makhanda programme. If ABCD is being endorsed as an inclusive, empowering, and sustainable approach that is community-led and is being applied in more community engagement programmes at universities, it is crucial to analyse how ABCD is being experienced in such programmes.

1.2 Research Site

Makhanda, formerly known as Grahamstown, is a town located in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. The town was created in 1812 as an outpost for the British military force (Irvine, 2021). It became a military border that separated the conflicting Cape Colony and the amaXhosa people who had been pushed past the Fish River (Irvine, 2021). With the arrival of the 1820 Settlers, the town was transformed into a bustling social and economic hub (Irvine, 2021). The town's structural development is archetypal of the colonial-settler and segregation-apartheid points in history that are common in a lot of South African towns and cities (Irvine, 2021). Thirty years into the post-apartheid era, the town has kept most of the legacies of its colonial-settler roots except for a few things, such as the name of the town. Nonetheless, segregation-apartheid structural practices still dominate, but to a lesser extent than formerly, and divisions are sustained by socio-economic restrictions that keep the black, coloured, and white populations of the town mostly segregated (Irvine, 2021). Even with structural changes in the town that led to intense urbanisation and densification, little has changed in the segregated structure of the town that is based on the apartheid period (Irvine, 2021).

In addition to Makhanda's urban and geographical structure being characterised by apartheid legacies, the town's educational, employment, and income levels also mirror apartheid's legacies. The Western side of Makhanda is mostly comprised of individuals with high levels of education, who are employed, and live in high-income households (Mutumbi et al., 2021:6). In contrast, the Eastern side (township) generally comprises of individuals with low levels of

education, has a high unemployment rate, and people live in small homesteads, government houses, and shacks (informal houses) (Mutumbi et al., 2021:6). A lot of the unemployed people who live in Makhanda-East are dependent on state-issued social grants, with many young people, people with disabilities, and older people dependent on the childcare grant, disability grant, and older person grant, respectively (Patel et al., 2023). Because of the low levels of education, employment and income and a malfunctioning and failing municipality that struggles to deliver basic services and maintain infrastructure, the future of Makhanda is considered to be in danger (Mutumbi et al., 2021:6). Several strategies have been initiated to tackle the challenges that put the town under threat. These strategies include community development initiatives.

At the heart of community development initiatives, is the role played by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to facilitate them. For the most part, NGOs have been welcomed and their mission has been accepted in the Makhanda township (Nomsenge, 2019:5). Their mission mainly entails working towards creating developmental and education-related services using participatory development interventions, particularly ABCD (Nomsenge, 2019:5). Their programmes offer training, mentoring, tutoring, computer literacy resources, and career guidance (Nomsenge, 2019:5). These programmes are supported by various actors such as Rhodes University. NGOs are, therefore, well-established in the Makhanda township and provide support services and resources to the youth of Makhanda-East (Nomsenge, 2019:5).

As mentioned above, many of the NGO programmes in Makhanda are supported by Rhodes University, mainly by the Rhodes University Community Engagement (RUCE) division whose work is underpinned by ABCD principles. The university has a lot of influence in the town given that it has the most resources and thereby produces the largest community development activity in the Makhanda public schooling system and the town in general (Nomsenge, 2019:7). Furthermore, the Makhanda community benefits from affiliations with individual departments in the university, such as the Rhodes University Business School and Education Department (Nomsenge, 2019:8). Over the years, using the ABCD approach, RUCE alongside some academic departments have strengthened the non-government structures that act as points of access to the larger Makhanda community (Nomsenge, 2019:8). This participatory network has created various developmental and educational initiatives that have worked to alleviate the challenges that the Makhanda community faces. Therefore, an analysis of the use of the ABCD

approach is warranted to explore how it has been implemented and how it has been experienced by the Makhanda community.

1.3 Research Justification and Objectives

Even though ABCD is a well-established community development approach, some scholars argue that the ABCD approach tends to be vague in practice (Ennis and West, 2010; Maclure, 2023) and, therefore, recommend that more research be conducted in specific settings to ascertain the implementation and experiences of ABCD. This study looks at the experiences of both the community engagement facilitators and the local community partners in the process of their partnership to get a better understanding of the practical application of ABCD in the Makhanda context. Fundamentally, this study seeks to gain an in-depth comprehension of ABCD practice by analysing the work of Rhodes University Community Engagement and, in particular, the Siyakhana@Makhanda programme in order to advance the field of participatory development. This is with the intent of improving community development approaches such as ABCD. By understanding ABCD from the inside out, full awareness of the necessary conditions to improve community development can be acquired by researchers, facilitators, and community partners. Overall, an analysis of the Siyakhana@Makhanda programme will contribute to the literature on the practical implementation and experiences of ABCD in various community engagement programmes at universities.

In this manner, this study sets out to investigate the implementation of the ABCD approach by the Siyakhana@Makhanda programme. This study is intended to contribute to studies analysing the implementation and effectiveness of the ABCD approach in the community engagement field at universities. Therefore, the objective of this study is to analyse the Rhodes University community engagement stakeholders' experiences of the ABCD approach in the Makhanda context. The study will explore whether the implementation of the ABCD approach by the Siyakhana@Makhanda programme has produced a 'bottom-up' community-led process of community development or has reproduced a 'top-down' university-led process in this context.

To get to this end, the study will analyse stakeholders' experiences of the ABCD approach in the Makhanda context with the following objectives in mind:

- Assess the implementation strategies of ABCD in this context.
- Assess the effectiveness of ABCD in this context.
- Assess the challenges that ABCD encounters in this context.

1.4 Research Methodology

Research Design: The research design used for this study is a qualitative study and, more specifically, a phenomenological study. Phenomenological studies look into lived experiences through the lens of those engaged in those experiences (Donalek, 2004:516). This approach accentuates the significance of personal perspective (Qutoshi, 2018:217). As a result, "it focuses on 'seeking realities not pursuing truth' in the form of manifestation of phenomena as it is in the form of life made of interconnected, lived experiences subjectively" (Qutoshi, 2018:217). Information gathered using a phenomenological study allowed me to dissect all the opinions and analyse their wisdom. This enabled me to have as much information as necessary about the experiences of all the stakeholders who took part in this study.

Sampling: A non-probability sampling method is used as the sampling method. Non-probability sampling, also known as purposive sampling, allows the researcher to choose a specified number or quota of participants that fit the research project (Etikan and Bala, 2017:215). Some of the features that make quota sampling preferable is that they are inexpensive because there is usually no need for follow ups (Anieting and Mosugu, 2017:33). Moreover, they require less admin as the burden of the sample is at the hands of the researcher (Anieting and Mosugu, 2017:33). Quota sampling is also time-saving and conducive (Yang and Banamah, 2014:2). I selected participants who have been involved with RUCE, whether as staff members, student facilitators or as the community partners of the programme. Participants were informed about the details of the study and had to sign a consent form before participating in the study (see Appendices A and B).

Data Collection: Semi-structured interviews were selected as the data collection method for this study. Semi-structured interviews are distinctive from traditional interviews in that the interviewer has a short list of questions that act as a guide for the subject matter (Harrell and Bradley, 2009:57). From there, the interview may wander off and cover other aspects of the subject matter that are not on the list (Harrell and Bradley, 2009:57). Semi-structured interviews are unique because of their flexibility and applicability to a phenomenon while

continuing to be reactive to the participant (McIntosh and Morse, 2015:2). I had a few questions which acted as a guideline for the subject matter of the study; however, the interviews were free-flowing (see Appendix C).

Observation was also used as the data collection method for this study. According to Satapathy (2019), observation is used by the researcher for collecting live data by using their senses of observation in a controlled or naturalistic environment where the events are happening. Therefore, observation is regarded as one of the most suitable methods that a researcher can utilise in the process of collecting data (Baker, 2006). Proponents of this method (Baker, 2006; Satapathy, 2019; Ciesielska et al., 2018) argue that observation as a data collecting tool provides more reliable and valid data as there are a lot of things that can be ascertained in the behaviour and environment of the study participants by the researcher through observation. Observation in this study was used to collect data during the presentation phase of the project process of the Siyakhana@Makhanda programme.

Data Analysis: To analyse the data, a thematic data analysis method was used. Thematic analysis selectively identifies, assembles, and clarifies the meanings of themes from the data collected (Clarke and Braun, 2017:297). Thematic analysis focuses on commonalities of how the topic is engaged and then seeks to understand those commonalities (Clarke and Braun, 2017:297). Thematic analysis is a fluid method that permits for numerous ways of analysing data (Joffe, 2012:209). As a result of its design, thematic analysis allows for a broad set of questions and topics (Joffe, 2012:209). Moreover, thematic analysis allows for the analysis of entire data sets or specific features of the phenomenon being studied (Joffe, 2012:209).

1.5 Research Structure

This study is divided into six chapters, that are structured as follows:

Chapter One: This chapter introduces the research topic. It provides the research context, research justification and objectives, and the research methodology. An overview of the structure of the research study is also provided in this chapter.

Chapter Two: This chapter maps the terrain of the relevant literature in relation to the research topic. The chapter provides a background discussion of participatory development, discusses

the principles of participatory development, the shortcomings of participatory development, and some of the prominent approaches to participatory development.

Chapter Three: This chapter discusses the theoretical framework that underpins this study, which is Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD). The chapter provides a background and discusses the practical implementation of the ABCD approach. The chapter also discusses the principles and the shortcomings of ABCD.

Chapter Four: This chapter presents the case study for this research study, namely Rhodes University Community Engagement's (RUCE) Siyakhana@Makhanda programme. The chapter provides the vision and mission statement of RUCE and an overview of the programmes at RUCE. The chapter also provides the Siyakhana@Makhanda programme's vision and mission statement and its project cycle process phases.

Chapter Five: This chapter presents and describes the findings from the interviews conducted with study participants involved in the Siyakhana@Makhanda programme. The chapter presents and describes the main themes which are separated into implementation strategies, effectiveness, and challenges that the programme encounters. These main themes have various subthemes under them which describe in detail the experiences of the research participants.

Chapter Six: This chapter provides a summary of the findings in line with the objectives of the study. The chapter also discusses the limitations of the study and provides recommendations for future studies related to this topic. Lastly, the chapter concludes the study by sharing some concluding remarks.

Chapter Two

Literature Review: Participatory Development Discourse

2.1 Introduction

Dissatisfaction with top-down approaches of development led to an interest in participatory development and propelled participatory practices in developing countries - making participatory development a prominent alternative approach to development (Keough, 1998; Jennings, 2000; Kanyamuna and Zulu, 2022). Proponents contend that while participatory development is usually facilitated by development agencies (such as NGOs and institutional development initiatives), the approach is based on a principle of equal partnership between associates of development programmes and projects (Tandon, 1991; Kesby, 2005). Conversely, some critics accuse the practice of participatory development of a lack of organic participation claiming that some participatory programmes are characterised by donor-impelled participation (Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Hu, 2022).

Within this literature, various crucial debates prevail. There is debate on how inclusive participatory development is, with some criticising it for being exclusionary when it comes to gender (Oakley, 1991; Cornwall, 2003); there is debate on whether participatory development is really empowering, with some alleging that it is complicit in top-down practices that reproduce marginalisation (Prokopy and Castelloe, 1999; Kapoor, 2005); there is debate on participatory development's ability to build capacity, with some critics claiming it lacks sustainability (Chaumba and Van Geene, 2003; Van Schalkwyk, 2015); and there is debate on whether participatory development strengthens citizenship skills, with some accusing it of being tyrannical in its operations (Connell, 1997; Cooke and Kothari, 2001). Cutting through these debates is a lively literature concerned with the active collaboration between community members in the decision-making processes regarding development projects in their communities.

This chapter will provide a background, an overview of the principles, and consider the drawbacks of participatory development. The chapter will then discuss some of the prominent approaches of participatory development. This chapter intends to map the terrain of literature on participatory development in preparation for the discussion of ABCD in Chapter Three.

ABCD is a participatory approach; hence, it is important to discuss how participatory interventions are implemented, how effective they are, and the challenges they encounter.

2.2 Origins of Participatory Development

Participatory development's humble beginnings can be traced back to the colonialist development efforts and the anti-colonial movements of the 1950s and 1960s (Prokopy and Castelloe, 1999:214). However, it was in the 1980s when it became clear that the then mainstream top-down approaches of development were not yielding any substantial results (Cooke and Kothari, 2001:5). As a result, some major development organisations and their donors abandoned top-down approaches of development in favour of bottom-up (participatory) approaches of development (Cooke and Kothari, 2001:5). Participatory development is generally presented as an alternative to top-down approaches of development (Cooke and Kothari, 2001:5).

A very influential proponent of participatory development, Robert Chambers (1994a; 1994b; 2005), advocated for participatory development and championed participatory rural development by advancing the Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) approach (discussed later) (Cooke and Kothari, 2001:5). At its inception, the overarching goal of participatory development was to move beneficiaries of development from the backseat, with limited to no say in their development, to the forefront and offer a platform that provides them a say in their development (Cooke and Kothari, 2001:5). This acknowledgement and involvement of socially and economically marginalised local people in the process of their development by building on their knowledge and capacity and promoting their skills has created an alternative to the top-down forms of development that are exterior-led and heavily donor-influenced (Cooke and Kothari, 2001:5). It is argued then, by proponents of participatory development, that participatory approaches are inclusive, empowering, effective, and sustainable (Dearden and Rizvi, 2008; Mela and Bello, 2023).

Initial interest in participatory development in the 1980s was concentrated inside the NGO community (Williams, 2004: 557). However, during the 1990s, there was a change that saw participatory development discourses become a part of the official development agenda of governments and international agencies (Williams, 2004: 557). An example of this was when the World Bank's World Development Report of 2000 featured a project titled "Voices of the

Poor" which had the intention of showcasing the opinions of the poor (Williams, 2004: 557). The incorporation of participatory development discourses into official development documents like this cemented its position as a mainstream alternative to top-down approaches to development (Mulu and Pineteh, 2016; Ndlovu and Msimanga, 2023).

2.3 Principles Underpinning Participatory Development

The relevant literature on participatory development focuses on four prominent principles in the practice, namely: inclusiveness in decision-making (Oakley, 1991; Connell, 1997; Kyamusugulwa, 2013), empowerment through knowledge sharing (Prokopy and Castelloe, 1999; Mohan and Stokke, 2000; Williams, 2004), capacity building (Chaumba and Van Geene, 2003; Duraiappah et al., 2005; Morgan, 2016), and active citizenship (Hoskins and Mascherini, 2009; Davies and Simon, 2012; Holma and Kontinen, 2020). This section is not intended to exhaust the principles, themes, trends, and categories of participatory development, rather to focus on the principles of participatory development that are frequently advocated for by the literature and are susceptible to tests of their validity.

2.3.1 Inclusiveness in Decision-Making

It can be a difficult task to define the term participation because of its various meanings in different parts of the world. As a concept, participation has a very vast extent and has a use that is wide-ranging which makes it impractical to contain into one categorical term (Oakley, 1991:115). Nonetheless, the leading theme in the literature, core to the framework of participation in development, however vast and wide-ranging its scope and interpretation, is inclusiveness – which is focused on the inclusion of marginalised local people in the decision-making process of the intervention (Agarwal, 2001:1623). This framework also goes beyond the involvement of individual people and includes a collective such as an entire village community (Agarwal, 2001: 1623).

The concept of participation has now been a part of the development field for over 80 years. This milestone represents the inclusion of individuals and collectives as participating in the decision-making processes (Kyamusugulwa, 2013:1267). In this manner, participation takes the form of 'community participation' which can range from the type and level of people's involvement to the consultation, information, and decision-making (Kyamusugulwa,

2013:1267). Through community participation, it is said that “the more people are involved in the decision-making process for a project, the more the community is driving the project” (Kyamusugulwa, 2013:1267). Kapoor (2005:1203) adds that, when implemented correctly, participatory development entails abandoning mainstream forms of development which may be characterised by neocolonial tendencies, Western-centric values, and centralised decision-making processes, and alternatively, incorporating a more inclusive and bottom-up approach which aims at promoting local community empowerment and having civil society involvement in policy development and agenda setting decision-making.

Connell (1997:251) takes us through the process of inclusivity in decision-making. He elucidates that the process begins with the recognition and explanation of issues, needs, opportunities, and interventions (Connell, 1997:251). For the process to be carried out efficiently, there must be a grasp of context whether local, regional, or even global (Connell, 1997:251). Participatory development further entails the inclusion of ordinary people or collectives in the conception, planning, and implementation of interventions (Connell, 1997:251). This includes monitoring and evaluation which warrants the teaching of certain skills to grassroots communities so they can possess the necessary skills to monitor and evaluate their progress (Connell, 1997:251). Bell and Reed (2022:600) concur and add that inclusivity in decision-making provides the foundation for the project to learn from its interventions and be better at applying them. Thus, the process of participation is an ongoing effort of mobilisation and self-organisation that changes communities (Bell and Reed, 2022:600).

For scholars, such as Oakley (1991), Parfitt (2004), and Mohan (2024), the process of inclusivity in decision-making can be divided in two - participation as a means and participation as an end. On the one hand, using participation as a means signifies having a preconceived objective and then using participation to realise that objective (Oakley, 1991:116; Parfitt, 2004:538; Mohan, 2024:10). In this manner, the purpose of participation is to utilise the social, physical, and economic resources of local people for the realisation of the goals of development projects (Oakley, 1991:116; Parfitt, 2004:538; Mohan, 2024:10). In other words, when participation is regarded as a means, the realisation of preconceived objectives is more important than the act of participation itself (Oakley, 1991:116; Parfitt, 2004:538; Mohan, 2024:10). In these circumstances, participation is often used as a short-term means whereby

the local people are mobilised, directly included in the project, but the participation ends with the project when the project concludes (Oakley, 1991:116; Parfitt, 2004:538; Mohan, 2024:10).

On the other hand, using participation as an end signifies a process that is realised over time and puts emphasis on the act of participation to build the capabilities of local people so they can be directly involved in development projects (Oakley, 1991:116; Parfitt, 2004:538; Mohan, 2024:10). Unlike with participation as a means, for participation as an end, it is not necessary for the project to have a preconceived objective, but based on the resources and capabilities of the local people, an objective only takes shape during the participatory process (Oakley, 1991:116; Parfitt, 2004:538; Mohan, 2024:10). In this manner, "participation should be a permanent feature of any development project" throughout the life of the project (Oakley, 1991:116).

2.3.2 Empowerment through Knowledge Sharing

Participatory development can be regarded as a 'jack of all trades' because of its ability to assume various roles, which vary from participation as a form of voluntary contribution by locals, to participation as empowerment of the community (Prokopy and Castelloe, 1999:215). According to Prokopy and Castelloe (1999:215), participatory development is defined in line with the latter role: participation as empowerment. In this role of empowering, participatory development starts by prioritising the experiences of locals who have been sidelined by mainstream development practices (Prokopy and Castelloe, 1999:215). From there, knowledge is shared between the locals and practitioners so that the marginalised locals can recognise that they have mutual concerns and must work as a collective to tackle these concerns (Prokopy and Castelloe, 1999:215). Through the process of knowledge sharing, reflection, and analysis, individuals gain awareness of how beneficial it can be to undertake collective action to transform their communities (Prokopy and Castelloe, 1999:215).

Kyamusugulwa (2013:1271) provides two key typologies of advantages of participatory development and its approaches. The first underscores the move from top-down to bottom-up approaches of development - which was discussed earlier (Kyamusugulwa, 2013:1271). The second typology entails advocating (sharing knowledge in the process) for inclusiveness and equity through participatory development's ability to tackle concerns such as inequity, marginalisation, and poverty through a process of empowerment (Kyamusugulwa, 2013:1271).

Pettit (2012:2) shares similar sentiments that participatory development, recognised as a tool of empowerment through knowledge sharing, is a multidimensional, qualitative process leading to changes that allow marginalised locals to participate consciously in forming their futures.

Thus, participation has transformed from a research approach to being a means of empowerment (Williams, 2004:559). This points to an alteration in the affiliation between development practitioners and the local people (Williams, 2004:559). This alteration is characterised by a more fluid and open power structure that is based on a series of personal, professional, and institutional changes (Williams, 2004:560). Chambers (1997:220) explains these changes by stating that personal change is linked to the changes in behaviour and attitude by the development practitioners, professional change is linked to using participatory methods, and institutional change is linked to cultivating a culture of knowledge sharing and partnerships. Put together, these changes make up the principle of participation as empowerment.

The framework concerning the nature of participation and the role knowledge sharing plays have an extensive background in philosophy, political, and development studies. For Mohan and Stokke (2000:252), participatory development and the knowledge it shares play a role of agency where the local people consciously take over their own development. Influenced by Freire's (1972; 1974) concept of 'conscientization', Mohan and Stokke (2000:252) argue that "whichever point on the participatory spectrum one takes, the common ground is that codifying local knowledge is a necessary first step towards beneficial social change". The process of conscientization is focused on unlearning, relearning, and utilising resources (Mohan and Stokke, 2000:252). To stimulate the consciousness and agency of the practitioners and the locals, both must place themselves back at the start of the development process and share the authorial voice equally among themselves, because it is only through genuine collaboration that they can really change things (Mohan and Stokke, 2000:253). Advancing consciousness and agency can empower locals and promote knowledge sharing (Mohan and Stokke, 2000:253).

To illustrate this, Prokopy and Castelloe (1999:227) show how practitioners from an organisation in Thailand facilitate peer learning. When a village had successfully initiated several development interventions, word about the interventions would travel to other villages

(Prokopy and Castelloe, 1999:227). Neighbouring villages would enquire about the success of the interventions (Prokopy and Castelloe, 1999:227). When this happened, the organisation would send a group of villagers implementing the interventions to the enquiring village to explain the interventions, discuss their priorities and plan of action, and eventually implement interventions according to their needs (Prokopy and Castelloe, 1999:227). This way, it is the villagers themselves, with their indigenous and experiential knowledge that end up being practitioners for other village communities that are creating new development interventions (Prokopy and Castelloe, 1999:227). For example, a Thai village community wanted to create a rice bank as their initial development project with the Organisation for Rural Development (ORD), a nonprofit organisation (Prokopy and Castelloe, 1999:227). To start the project, practitioners from ORD steered exchange visits between villages so they could learn from the experiences of other villages that had already created successful rice banks (Prokopy and Castelloe, 1999:227). Through this process, community members are empowered and come to value their indigenous and experiential knowledge as a foundation for participatory development (Prokopy and Castelloe, 1999:227).

2.3.3 Capacity Building

Capacity building is a catchphrase that is popular in the NGO community. In participatory development practice, it is mostly associated with training and staff development, however it embodies much more, as will be shown in this sub-section. Firstly, it is important to understand that capacity is the power of something - whether it is a person, system, or organisation - to perform and produce efficiently, effectively, and sustainably (Chaumba and Van Geene, 2003:69). Secondly, it is equally important to comprehend capacity in its context (Chaumba and Van Geene, 2003:69). This means knowing what the capacity is needed for (Chaumba and Van Geene, 2003:69). It may be needed to reach a set of goals, to solve an issue, or to finish and maintain a task (Chaumba and Van Geene, 2003:69). Summed up, capacity is needed to accomplish goals, fulfil purposes, and to make an impact (Chaumba and Van Geene, 2003:69).

It is widely recognised that lack of capacity hampers sustainability in participatory development (Chaumba and Van Geene, 2003:69). This issue is caused by various things, which include but are not limited to excessive dependency, a limited sense of local ownership, and weak integration of interventions (Chaumba and Van Geene, 2003:69). To tackle the issue of insufficient capacity, most organisations tend to request outside expertise, resources, and

assistance (Chaumba & Van Geene, 2003:69). As a result, capacity building frequently ends up being externally driven whereby external experts provide external interventions (Chaumba and Van Geene, 2003:69). Consequentially, capacity building tactics are likely to be unsuccessful because of the lack of ownership and limited internal understanding of the issues (Chaumba and Van Geene, 2003:69). In contrast, the Participatory Capacity Building (PCB) process designed by Jouwert Van Geene (2003), counteracts this practice by carrying out three processes: participatory capacity assessment, strategic capacity planning, and operational planning (Van Geene, 2003:4). Capacity is assessed internally, strategies to boost capacity may include externally facilitated workshops in addition to internal strategies, and operational planning is strictly done internally by the organisation and its partners, but may collaborate with other organisations to exchange ideas (Van Geene, 2003:4). This process maintains agency, builds capacity, and promotes local knowledge sharing.

Furthermore, capacity building is also understood in relation to increasing human and social capital which makes people agentic actors who can bring about sustainable change in their lives (Morgan, 2016:176). This is related to the Capability Approach (CA). The Capability Approach developed by Amartya Sen (2008), is an economic development approach that includes freedom, participation, and human well-being as tenets of development. According to Duraiappah et al. (2005:2), the capability approach considers people as facilitators of development. It also brings awareness of capability disparities that exist between communities (Duraiappah et al., 2005:2). As the basis of the approach, participation is considered as a central feature of development (Duraiappah et al., 2005:2). Regarding participation, Duraiappah et al. (2005:2) notes that for effective involvement in their own development, “people require a clear understanding of the requirements for effective participation, and the potential limitations of this process” (Duraiappah et al., 2005:2).

2.3.4 Active Citizenship

One of the prominent principles of participatory development is its ability to promote active citizenship. However, contemporarily, the most popular perception of citizenship is associated with a legal connection between citizens and the state (Brander et al., 2023:444). By virtue of being a legal citizen in one or more nation-states, most people are entitled to certain rights and privileges (Brander et al., 2023:444). Then again possessing rights and privileges comes with certain responsibilities that the nation-state expects from its citizens (Brander et al., 2023:444).

Hence, the relationship between the state and citizens is based on the fulfilment of certain responsibilities to their state and, in return, the state protects the rights and interests of the citizens (Brander et al., 2023:444). However, citizenship is a concept that is not limited to the legal connection between citizens and the state (Brander et al., 2023:444). Citizenship can also be related, inter alia, to a sense of belonging to a group or community that the citizen can directly influence and shape (Brander et al., 2023:444).

Citizenship has become a prominent development research area and the furtherance of active citizenship has garnered support in participatory development discourse. Many scholars see citizen participation as a significant and beneficial component of participatory development (Irvin and Stansbury, 2003; Christens and Speer, 2006; Khan and Anjum, 2013). Maloba and Auriacombe (2019:163) regard citizen participation as "the most important element of a democratic developmental state". Hoskins and Mascherini (2008) state that 'community life' is a form of active citizenship in which people participate in activities designed to develop their community, such as participating in social and cultural organisations. Holma and Kontinen (2020:4) affirm that principles such as empowerment, citizen engagement, social accountability, and civic-driven change emphasise the significance of "citizen's agency in taking an active role in changing their living conditions". Zandbergen and Jaffe (2014:7) consider citizen participation as a vital source of knowledge and action. Altogether, enterprises, legislators, and NGOs promote citizen participation as a technique for attaining democratic empowerment. The promotion of learning about one's rights and practices of mobilising are important strategies to support active citizenship in development interventions.

Moreover, inspired by Tocqueville's (1835) view that voluntary and informal citizen participation is educational and leads to citizens participating fully in democratic processes and structures, Davies and Simon (2012:18) argue that participatory citizenship has the benefit of strengthening future prospects for public participation. The belief that participation can encourage and advance democratic participation in the long run is evident in a study investigating the democratic potential in the participatory field. The study by Cornwall and Coelho (2007) found that participatory development structures can transform citizenship by helping citizens understand alternative conceptualisations of citizenship so that they can directly influence and shape their communities. This is illustrated in a case study that showed Brazilian citizens who had engaged in protest action were likely to participate in more structured participatory policy councils (Cornwall and Coelho, 2007:2). Another example from

South Africa showed that people who were active campaigners and advocates in anti-apartheid movements were using their campaigning and advocacy skills for equal access to HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment services in the Treatment Action Campaign's fight against the HIV/AIDS epidemic (Cornwall and Coelho, 2007:21). This shows that participation can promote active citizenship which can have positive implications for the future of communities. As said by Davies and Simon (2012) "the benefits of citizen action accrue, such that enhancing skills in one arena can strengthen the possibilities of success in others".

2.4 Shortcomings of Participatory Development

When considering the shortcomings of participatory development, the literature exposes some exclusions and contradictions that are entrenched in participatory development practices (Agarwal, 2001; Cooke and Kothari, 2001, Kapoor, 2005; Morgan, 2016). Critics lambast participatory development for being based on a paradox as practitioners expect the empowerment of the community, although the empowerment efforts are often done in a top-down manner whereby the practitioners, who are the powerholders, impel community members to rebel against the powerholders (Mansuri and Rao, 2013:31). Therefore, such programmes, according to Mansuri and Rao (2013:31), fail to promote accountability and organic civic participation. Similarly, Menocal and Sharma (2008:16) argue that participatory programmes are based on an ignorant and flawed premise: that the empowerment of community members will lead to positive outcomes, when in actuality, they argue that such programmes produce negative results when it comes to poverty alleviation. Furthermore, they also highlight the oversight and negligence that is rampant in the practice (Menocal and Sharma, 2008:51).

The literature particularly focuses on four major criticisms. The first being 'gender prejudice' whereby participatory initiatives are accused of being driven by sexist objectives that lead to the marginalisation of women in participatory programmes (Cornwall, 2003:1325). The second being 'complicity' whereby participatory development is seen as being complicit in the top-down practices of traditional development approaches (Kapoor, 2005). The third being 'assumed sustainability' whereby scholars note that in many instances there is an assumption of sustainability within participatory programmes, but little evidence to back that assumption (Cleaver, 1999). Lastly, the critique of the power dynamics, quality, validity and ethics of participatory initiatives has led to some scholars making a case of 'participation as tyranny' (Cooke and Kothari, 2001). McGee and Gaventa (2011:28) emphasise the "rethinking of

participatory development to a better practice", exposing the flaws in an otherwise championed practice.

2.4.1 Gender Prejudice

The main reason for the focus on gender prejudice in participatory development is because there is insufficient discussion on gender in the participatory development literature. Participatory development scholars and practitioners have long recognised the shortage of gender representation in the literature and warned that this scarcity may lead to dire consequences for community development interventions (Chambers, 1994a; Weekles-Vagliani, 1994). It is gradually being acknowledged that women's involvement is crucial for the success of community development interventions (Agarwal, 2001; Cornwall, 2003). Calling for *Gender Perspectives* back in 1992, Apelqvist (in Weekles-Vagliani, 1994:11) observed that assessments of values and practices regarding women and men's distinct experiences is necessary. Assessments can signify which practical actions need to be taken to bridge the gap between men and women and increase the prominence of women in participatory development interventions (Weekles-Vagliani, 1994:11). According to Weekles-Vagliani (1994:12) "such assessments are necessary for the credibility and life force of participatory development" (Weekles-Vagliani, 1994:12).

The history of 'othering' women in literature and research is well-known. In the past, women have been shown to face obstacles in their participation (Mayoux, 1995; Kanji, 2004). According to Mayoux (1995:246), women have directly or indirectly been prejudiced in participatory programmes due to the membership criteria and requirements being commonly unfavourable to most women. Kanji (2004:54) concurs and states that participatory programmes can be biased in that they can operate according to (male serving) rules and norms, which marginalise women. Participatory programmes' membership criteria and requirements are often centred around owning or being able to pool resources (assets), which can directly disregard poor or married women in certain contexts (Mayoux, 1995:246). This means that "women's participation and direct access to a range of resources outside the household is often limited, with negative implications for their own and household well-being" (Kanji, 2004:54). For a long time, men have dominated the field of participatory development and gatekept decision-making and implementation which has made their perspectives and objectives fixed in the organisations (Kanji, 2004:54). For example, even in cases where women are not directly

prejudiced, the work in many participatory development programmes requires basic education and mobility to learn and facilitate respectively, which in many societies women do not possess (Mayoux, 1995:247).

The broader literature shows that most women, even though there are cross-cultural and inter-cultural differences, are exceedingly marginalised in comparison to men (Akerkar, 2001; Patnaik, 2021). Moreover, Mayoux (1995:247) shows that the intersection of class and poverty with gender leads to women in the lower class who are poorer being even more marginalised than other women. The literature also shows that most times women work more than men in the same household (Mayoux, 1995:248). While a lot of men may receive assistance from women, that is not necessarily the case for most women (Mayoux, 1995:248). Therefore, solving the issue of gender prejudice within participatory development means incorporating gender awareness into practice (Guijt and Shah, 1998:18). Guijt and Shah (1998:18) assert that participatory development does not unconsciously become inclusive towards disadvantaged people. "Participatory development is only as inclusive as those who are driving the process (men) choose it to be, or as those involved (women) demand it to be" (Guijt and Shah, 1998:18). This means that everyone needs to actively work towards incorporating gender awareness into participatory development.

Nonetheless, there needs to be careful thought when locating gender in participatory development. As evident above, some literature (mis)represents the relationships between men and women through a power lens in which, on the one hand, women are 'damsels in distress', and on the other hand, men are the 'big bad wolves' that need to be thwarted. According to Cornwall (2000:9), this narrative is from a variant of western feminism that has been dumped into participatory development practice. Regarded as the dominion of women, gender equity in participatory development has a tendency of being strictly associated with women's interests (Cornwall, 2000:9). It is noted that both men and women are needed to make feasible ground towards gender awareness, however, only women's interests are attended to regarding gender work (Cornwall, 2000:10). By isolating and comparing men and women work as if they exist in a vacuum outside of social interactions, these narratives create a distorted version of what happens on the ground in various societies (Cornwall, 2000:10). The dangerous effect of this is that it conceals crucial aspects of the relationships between men and women (Cornwall, 2000:10).

2.4.2 Complicity

Kapoor (2005:1206) alleges that there is complicity in participatory development practice and "it manifests itself in the assumptions, values, and goals of participatory development". Through the use of satirical mimicry, Kapoor (2005:1206) argues that participatory development is a two-faced practice that externally portrays itself as benevolent with an objective of empowering disadvantaged locals, while internally, participatory development is rife with "narcissistic Samaritans". Kapoor (2005:1207) likens participatory development to religion in which the elite act like Christian priests and exorcise destitution from locals through development. Additionally, participatory development has been likened to 'poverty tourism' in which tourists visit impoverished and marginalised places that they would not normally visit (Monroe and Bishop, 2016:2). Those who tour these places claim to be visiting with an objective of helping alleviate poverty, but critics argue that it is nothing more than voyeuristic classism in which the consequences outweigh the benefits (Monroe and Bishop, 2016:2). Research into poverty tourism shows that the majority of the profits generated from poverty tours do not go to the disadvantaged locals (Monroe and Bishop, 2016:6). Also, poorly run tours can enhance social stereotypes and worsen the ostracism of the local people (Monroe and Bishop, 2016:6). In sum, Kapoor (2005) and Monroe and Bishop (2016) paint a picture of participatory development practitioners as using development to boost their egos instead of actually developing communities and empowering residents.

Even though in the past three decades 'top-down' approaches have been mostly quelled, there has been a rising trend of focusing on imminent instead of immanent processes of development. Mohan (2007:785) criticises these trends as blurring the structural politics of development. This focus on the imminent process, which is concerned with the development policy and action, and neglect of the immanent process, which is concerned with the underlying processes of development, is widespread in mainstream participatory development (Mohan, 2007:785). It was shown earlier how participation can reproduce the prejudicing of women because participatory approaches often ignore the intrinsic inequities ingrained in the practice. Participatory development's concentration on interpersonal politics hinders accountability by overlooking actual institutional processes (Mohan, 2007:785). Participatory development presupposes that consensus will lead to elites and professionals being transparent, responsive, and accountable (Mohan, 2007:785). However, such perspectives are naïve given that most elites and professionals have wider political and economic interests that make it difficult for

them to really hand over power to the disadvantaged locals (Mohan, 2007:785). Despite being praised for being impartial, participatory development is often practised in informal spaces, such as rural and urban settings, which makes it difficult for elites and professionals to be held accountable for unsatisfactory performances (Mohan, 2007:785). In addition, these informal spaces can easily be hijacked by local elites who use their power and resources in the community to further their own agenda which entrench local inequities (Mohan, 2007:785).

2.4.3 Assumed Sustainability

The puzzle of providing sustainable development interventions may be thought to be easily worked out through the inclusion of community development partners in the decision-making process. However, according to some critics (Cleaver, 1999; Van Schalkwyk, 2015), there is insufficient evidence that proves this claim. In the past, the evidence supporting participatory development as a sustainable practice was rejected for being partial, inadequate, and not reliable to make bold heroic claims about participatory development (Cleaver, 1999:597). Cleaver (1999:597) observes that participation has therefore been a practice of faith in sustainability, something practitioners believe in, rarely see, and never question. Several issues appear when the version of sustainability that is based on faith is critically analysed. Firstly, it becomes clear that sustainability is based on a supposition that participatory development is an inherently effective practice which leads to sustainability (Cleaver, 1999:598). Secondly, it is based on the notion that if the approach is right, then the success of the intervention is guaranteed (Cleaver, 1999:598). Lastly, the responsibilities that come with having agency that is evoked by participatory development are commonly not addressed (Cleaver, 1999:598). Therefore, the mechanisms of sustainability in participatory development are often based on assumptions and not empirical data. The outcomes pertaining to sustainability in participatory development studies are hardly explored – leading to baseless claims about participatory development being a sustainable practice (Cleaver, 1999:598).

Apart from a lack of evidence and basing sustainability on faith, maladministration and inadequate implementation of approaches are liable for the conundrum that jeopardises the development of sustainable communities. Basing them on the South African context, Van Schalkwyk (2015) identifies the maladministration and implementation challenges that threaten participation in South Africa. Van Schalkwyk (2015:76) highlights social integration as an integral part of developing sustainable communities; however, often times, the efforts of

practitioners to ensure denser, mixed-income, and environmentally friendly communities are inadequate (Van Schalkwyk, 2015:76). Thus, implementation and administration of social integration efforts need attention. Furthermore, participatory development programmes usually have projects that are geographically limited to a specific area which means that their influence rarely goes beyond the geographical bounds of that area (Van Schalkwyk, 2015:77). In contrast, in certain cases, the scale of the project may be too large which leads to projects not being able to handle the number of recipients they have to work with (Van Schalkwyk, 2015:77). The project ends up being poorly implemented and unsustainable due to its large scale (Van Schalkwyk, 2015:77). Lastly, according to Van Schalkwyk (2015:77), maladministration and inadequate implementation is often a result of Western approaches to participatory development. Western approaches function well when the basic infrastructure and services for participatory development have already been established (Van Schalkwyk, 2015:77). Without them, implementation usually fails because of the inadequate foundation to build on (Van Schalkwyk, 2015:77). Therefore, "Western approaches need to be adapted and tailored to fit the needs of the particular context they are being implemented in and build upon local knowledge and assets in order to be sustainable" (Van Schalkwyk, 2015:77).

2.4.4 Participation as Tyranny

The literature questioning and criticising the competence of participatory development as an appropriate practice for community development reached a new level with a collection of scholars and practitioners overtly asking whether participation had become 'the new tyranny' (Cooke and Kothari, 2001). According to Williams (2004:559), Cooke and Kothari (2001) acknowledge that there are two levels of criticising participatory development, with the first being an internal critique that is focused on the technical limitations of participation as a practice (discussed above). The second is a fundamental critique that is focused on the effects of power in participatory discourse (Williams, 2004:559), to which we now turn. In the first chapter of their edited book, Cooke and Kothari (2001) classify three types of tyranny: the tyranny of decision-making and control, the tyranny of the group, and the tyranny of method.

The tyranny of decision-making and control addresses the issue of controlled decision-making by agencies and funders (Christens and Speer, 2006:3). As discussed earlier, theoretically, the control of decision-making in participatory development programmes is equally shared among associates of the programmes. *The New Tyranny* (2001) argues that in practice the participation

of the locals is usually just a way of giving credibility to decisions that were already made by agencies and elites (Christens and Speer, 2006:3). The promotion of participatory development by elites and corporations is because the practice serves their interests "since participation itself has become a commodity that these organisations use to advance their multinational image" (Christens and Speer, 2006:3). Moreover, the unchecked acceptance of local knowledge as an integral part of participatory development processes has raised critical eyebrows (Adu-Ampong, 2014:8). One of those eyebrows is raised by Mosse (2001:23) who states that local knowledge is used to hide the true manner of knowledge production in participatory development, which is produced by outsiders. Similarly Christens and Speer (2006:3) remark that local knowledge cannot transform the bureaucratic nature of 'top-down' approaches as local knowledge only reflects limited local power.

Group consensus is another principle of participatory development that is closely related to inclusivity. Cooke and Kothari (2001) argue that group consensus ends up becoming a form of tyranny due to the bypassing of certain participatory processes to attain group consensus, such as disregarding the roles and motivations of outside facilitators. Also disregarding the role of outside facilitation may be as problematic as the role of the elites who take over (both can stand in the way of important dialogue and ideas) (Adu-Ampong, 2014:10). Therefore, by overlooking certain voices to gain consensus, consensus is not attained as there is a 'reverse-marginalisation' of outsider voices. Also, valorising local knowledge at the expense of the wider context is problematic as participatory approaches are a part of the wider context (Buhler, 2002:2). In this manner, "programmes designed to bring the excluded in often result in forms of control that are more difficult to challenge" (Buhler, 2002:2).

Cleaver (1999:608) highlights the way participatory development has been altered into a series of professional practices that are taken from manuals of approaches, taming its radical nature. Mosse (2001:386) concurs and adds that over time, participatory objectives become replaced with operational demands such as timely implementation and standardised evaluations of projects. This is because the manuals of approaches are created by consultants and passed down by donor agencies (Adu-Ampong, 2014:11). This means that participation comes with a framework that locals have to adhere to (Adu-Ampong, 2014:11). This has led to a standardised and inadaptable participatory development practice (Adu-Ampong, 2014:11). Thus, instead of continuously adapting in the field, there is a manual of approaches to follow when participating (Adu-Ampong, 2014:11). According to Cooke and Kothari (2001) (in Adu-Ampong, 2014:12),

this tyranny of methods has created a situation where traditional and alternative approaches are fused together and labelled participatory approaches. Overall, the standardisation of participatory development into manuals created by consultants exposes that participation is a means to conceal the reality that development continues to be a 'top-down' practice (Adu-Ampong, 2014:12).

2.4.5 Responses to Criticism

Some commentators (Botes and Van Rensburg, 2000; Parfitt, 2004) provided responses to the criticisms levelled against participatory development above. Botes and Van Rensburg (2000:54) argue that a reorientation of the way development practitioners think is necessary to address the shortcomings of participatory development. In this reorientation, Botes and Van Rensburg (2000:54) posit that implementing agents must transform into facilitators who are driven by the principle of minimum intervention and respect for the indigenous knowledge of the local people. According to Botes and Van Rensburg (2000:55), when development agents adopt a facilitating role they need to understand that to promote participatory development they need to be in tune with the community's challenges and then assist them in finding solutions. In assisting the communities, facilitators should never provide ready-made solutions, they should rather be a support system that encourages local people to find solutions using their own knowledge and capabilities (Botes and Van Rensburg, 2000:55). Moreover, the facilitator's role is to also encourage reflection and self-assessment among local people by promoting independence (Botes and Van Rensburg, 2000:55).

Parfitt (2004) concurs and adds that facilitators also need to reflect and be self-critical. However, Parfitt (2004:549) notes that training on its own will not fully address the shortcomings of participatory development and suggests that development agencies move away from a tightly defined and output-driven form of participatory development. Instead, Parfitt (2004:549) further suggests that development agencies should move towards focusing more on the participatory process and building capacity. Therefore, instead of focusing on physical outputs, such as health centres and schools, they should rather concentrate on the process of enhancing capacities so that local people can undertake and participate in their own development (Parfitt, 2004:549).

2.5 Participatory Development Approaches

Participatory development has several approaches whose purpose is to stimulate development in underdeveloped countries and marginalised communities (Dinbabo, 2003; Riswan, 2021). Participatory development approaches tend to work with local people in attempts to involve the communities in the process of their development (Riswan, 2021:138). Participatory development approaches develop local skills and abilities and incite local people to initially play a part in and ultimately take over the process of developing their community (Dinbabo, 2003:8). Prominent participatory development approaches include Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA), Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), and Participatory Action Learning and Action Research (PALAR). These approaches are forerunners of the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach, therefore their discussion is in preparation of the upcoming discussion of ABCD in Chapter Three.

This section is not intended to exhaust the approaches of participatory development, rather to focus on the approaches of participatory development that are historically prominent and which pave the way for the contemporarily emerging approaches.

2.5.1 Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA)

Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) gained popularity in the late 1970s. RRA is regarded as a result of three reasons: The first was dissatisfaction with the biases, especially the anti-poverty biases, which result from what Chambers (1994a:956) calls “rural development tourism” by which he means when an urban-based professional briefly visits a rural area. The second was disgruntlement with the processes of questionnaire surveys and the results they produced (Chambers, 1994a:956). This was after the experience of large-scale surveys had been shown to be a nightmare to administer, process, and write up (Chambers, 1994a:956). The third focused on seeking more cost-effective methods of learning (Chambers, 1994a:956). According to Chambers (1994a:956), this was aided by “the growing recognition by development professionals of the obvious fact that rural people were themselves knowledgeable on many subjects that touched their lives”.

In the 1980s, in some places, the situation discussed above was changed and RRA began to gain increasing popularity (Chambers, 1994a:956). RRA started to be accepted as possessing

its own principles and rigour (Chambers, 1994a:956). According to Chambers (1994a:956), "in many contexts and for many purposes, RRA, when done well, showed itself to not be second best but the best".

2.5.2 Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA)

In the 1980s, the term "participatory" was added to the RRA vocabulary (Chambers, 1994a:957). The purpose of participation was regarded as a stimulator of community awareness (Chambers, 1994a:957). Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) methods were first implemented by the National Academy of Administration in India which introduced PRA for the fieldwork of its students (Chambers, 1994a:957). PRA then spread internationally with much of the spread being South-South through the sharing of training and experiences (Chambers, 1994a:957). Chambers and others (Campbell, 2002; Bar-On and Prinsen, 1999; Chandra, 2010) contend that the essential shift from RRA to PRA represents an epistemological change which was triggered by the conflict between outside facilitators and local people. Therefore, proponents of PRA see it as a paradigm shift that takes into account multiple realities and local diversity through empiricism, the study of diversity, improvisation, and personal responsibility (Campbell, 2002:22).

In a nutshell, RRA and PRA are notable for their efforts in development intervention (Bar-On and Prinsen, 1999: 280). On the one hand, RRA intervenes by identifying the quality of the information necessary for external planning (Bar-On and Prinsen, 1999: 280). On the other hand, PRA takes a political stance which claims that the underprivileged are not only needy when it comes to services and amenities, but are also stripped of power (Bar-On and Prinsen, 1999: 280). Hence, PRA is more inclined with active participation as a viable method (Bar-On and Prinsen, 1999: 280). For the intervention to be effective, practitioners of PRA have to abide by some basic principles (Chambers, 1994b:1254). Some principles are shared between RRA and PRA and some are strictly for PRA (Chambers, 1994b:1254). The principles of PRA encourage practitioners to voluntarily apply the methods of PRA instead of imposing them on the locals (Chambers, 1994b:1254). This has been done by introducing multiple practices, testing what works and what does not work, and then seeking answers as to why (Chambers, 1994b:1254).

Cornwall and Pratt (2011:267) reflect on some issues within PRA and showcase a range of issues highlighted by practitioners. These issues range from the deterministic use of methods in development institutions to the lack of consistency between theory and practice (Cornwall and Pratt, 2011:267). PRA is often implemented for various uses which creates difficulty in judging the quality of the approach (Cornwall and Pratt, 2011:270). Cornwall and Pratt (2011:270) note that "different dilemmas for assessing good quality practice arise when it is used to generate data for decision-making by development project managers, to raise the consciousness of marginalised people leading them to take action, to create research outputs, or to live one's life in a way that improves their relationships with other people". In this manner, a one size fits all approach for quality assurance does little to help in a space where one set of criteria may directly contradict others (Cornwall and Pratt, 2011:267).

2.5.3 Participatory Action Learning and Action Research (PALAR)

There are numerous origins for the usage of Participatory Action Learning and Action Research (PALAR). Firstly, PALAR stems from the concept 'action research' which pertains to "investigations of strategies or principles that can explain or improve a situation" (Danley and Ellison, 1999:1). The roots of action research can be traced to the scholarship of Kurt Lewin (1944), who presented the concept action research as an approach to investigating social systems while also enacting change at the same time (MacDonald, 2012:37). Secondly, PALAR is also linked to the concept 'participatory research' which underscores that research participants must be included in the research process (Danley and Ellison, 1999:1). The roots of participatory research can be traced to the scholarship of Paulo Freire (1974), who clarified that participatory research is interested in empowering marginalised locals about their community using literacy, analysis, and reform (MacDonald, 2012:37). Drawing from these origins, Zuber-Skerritt (2011) fused these concepts to form the PALAR approach which is defined as a teaching and research method that is focused on organisational self-assessment whereby the participants of the research are directly involved in all levels of the study from the design to the execution and dissemination (Wood, 2019:2). Ultimately, PALAR is applied in the field of community engagement to inspire social change through a set of actions as the ideal goal (Wood, 2019:2).

The PALAR paradigm is based on establishing settings where the researchers and the participants can simultaneously investigate how social, economic, political, and personal issues

influence their communities (Taba and Bagra, 2024:264). In this manner, PALAR is a stepping stone in the path of local communities actively shaping their own communities (Taba and Bagra, 2024:264). Therefore, PALAR accentuates the significance of locals having shared control over research solutions to assure empowerment and sustainability (Taba and Bagra, 2024:264). Overall, PALAR is concerned with collecting knowledge in order to describe and solve issues mutually (Taba and Bagra, 2024:264). Moreover, PALAR is distinct from traditional research approaches as it appreciates the local communities for the knowledge they have through the lived experiences of the locals (Taba and Bagra, 2024:264). It also transforms the traditional researcher-participant hierarchy into a collaborative relationship that values participants experiences (Taba and Bagra, 2024:264).

PALAR is practised using eight steps that guide the researcher and the participants. A step-by-step guide through a PALAR journey from the eyes and ears of the researchers and community members is paramount for setting out reflections on the process and practical considerations (Lloyd-Evans et al., 2023; Burns, 2012). The first step is doing a background check which means getting to know people in the community and what they do in order to build trust (Lloyd-Evans et al., 2023:9). This first step is what researchers call ‘the entry point’ which leads to them making connections, building trust, and cultivating understanding (Lloyd-Evans et al., 2023:9). The second step is reaching an agreement with those who decide to join the research programme and participate (Lloyd-Evans et al., 2023:10). This is a decision-making step that shows that the research process will be based on mutual understanding and an agreed direction between the researchers and participants (Lloyd-Evans et al., 2023:10). The third step is choosing the research questions by following the community’s lead as the community knows the issues they are facing that need researching (Lloyd-Evans et al., 2023:10). In this step, researchers and participants analyse and conceptualise together what needs to be explored and investigated (Lloyd-Evans et al., 2023:10). The fourth step is finding the best way to reach out to people and collect data (Lloyd-Evans et al., 2023:11). The research methodology and data collection needs to be co-created by both the researcher and the participants (Lloyd-Evans et al., 2023:11). The fifth step is analysing the data by collecting all the responses and summarising the community position (Lloyd-Evans et al., 2023:12). The sixth step is writing up the key findings in a clear and concise manner (Lloyd-Evans et al., 2023:13). The key findings should sum up the issues that people are facing and what steps can be taken to solve these issues (Lloyd-Evans et al., 2023:13). In the seventh step, the findings are presented to all the participants, and then after that the researcher and the participants discuss measures that

will follow next (Lloyd-Evans et al., 2023:14). The last step is taking action based on the findings of the research (Lloyd-Evans et al., 2023:15). Using the connections and experiences from the research process, the cycle of engagement is expanded (Lloyd-Evans et al., 2023:15). These steps make up the practical aspect of PALAR.

2.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has mapped the literature on participatory development. Within the literature on participatory development, there are various crucial debates that have been discussed. Some of these debates include how inclusive participatory development is, with some criticising it for being exclusionary when it comes to gender; debate on whether participatory development is really empowering, with some alleging that it is complicit in top-down practices that reproduce marginalisation; debate on participatory development's ability to build capacity, with some critics claiming it lacks sustainability; and there is also debate on whether participatory development strengthens citizenship skills, with some accusing it of being tyrannical in its operations.

This review also consulted literature on the principles underpinning participatory development. The relevant literature showed that there are four main principles underpinning participatory development, namely: inclusiveness in decision-making, empowerment through knowledge sharing, capacity building, and active citizenship. The review then considered the shortcomings of participatory development. The literature exposed some gender prejudice, complicity, assumed sustainability, and tyranny in the practice of participatory development. Lastly, the chapter reviewed some of the prominent participatory development approaches. More specifically, the chapter discussed the practical implementation of the Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA), Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), and the Participatory Action Learning and Action Research (PALAR) approaches.

The various debates in the literature on participatory development have therefore highlighted that participatory development initiatives and practitioners value inclusiveness, empowerment, and sustainability. However, they still have a long way to go to full embody these principles as they struggle with gender prejudice, sustainability issues, and are complicit in top-down forms of community development. Therefore, this literature review shows the complex nature of

participatory development which provides an overview of the foundation upon which the ABCD approach was built on.

Chapter Three

Theoretical Framework: Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD)

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter mapped the terrain of literature on participatory development. It provided a background, an overview of the principles, and considered the drawbacks of participatory development. Participatory development was discussed in the previous chapter in preparation for this chapter as ABCD is a form of participatory development. Therefore, this chapter discusses the theoretical framework that underpins this study, which is the highly participatory Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach. The chapter will provide a background, an overview of the principles, practical implementation of ABCD, and consider the shortcomings of the ABCD approach. This chapter intends to cover the theoretical framework with the objective of showing how the ABCD approach is implemented, how effective proponents and practitioners deem it to be, and the limitations it has.

According to Wilke (2006:5), the asset-based community development approach is a system of identifying and compiling all the assets available in a community. Mathie and Cunningham (2005:177) concur and elaborate by stating that the ABCD approach works under the notion that communities can drive the development process themselves by identifying and compiling existing but generally unused assets, thereby responding to and creating local opportunities for positive changes. These unrecognised assets are not limited to personal skills and attributes, but also include the bond among community members that builds informal associations and localised networks (Wilke, 2006:5).

Some studies, which include those by Omodan (2023), Myende (2015) and Ssewamala (2010), found evidence that shows that community engagement, as a result of ABCD project processes, has led to increased community empowerment. Some examples of this can be seen in the transformation of some rural schools in South Africa (Omodan, 2023), the Gedam Sefer Community Partnership in Ethiopia (Yeneabat and Butterfield, 2012), and university-school partnerships in South Africa (Myende and Chikoko, 2014).

3.2 Origins of ABCD

ABCD is a participatory project process approach to community development. The approach became popular in the 1970s in the United States of America (USA) because of the decreasing number of industrial jobs in urban communities and city centres (Stoltenberg-Bruursema, 2015:92). This economic decline led to low-paying service jobs which left the poor with few opportunities to escape the poverty cycle (Stoltenberg-Bruursema, 2015:92). As the economic situation got worse for low-income communities, there was a call for new approaches for tackling poverty, health, education, and criminal justice in these communities (Stoltenberg-Bruursema, 2015:92). Kretzmann and McKnight, from the Northwestern University's Institute for Policy Research, responded by encouraging an asset-based community development approach to help address the issues that low-income communities face (Stoltenberg-Bruursema, 2015:92). According to Kretzmann and McKnight (1993), this approach would nurture existing community assets which in turn would build the capacities of the community. This approach directly challenges the traditional needs-based approach by focusing on existing assets in communities and seeking to build community capacities instead of making the community dependent on an external community development agency (Stoltenberg-Bruursema, 2015:92).

Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) saw that, though well-intentioned, in the needs-based approach, the work of external agencies, universities, and governments focused on the problems and needs of the community and sought to provide solutions to those problems and needs by themselves. In turn, this has backfired and led to inefficiencies that resulted in exclusiveness, disempowerment, and lack of sustainability of community development projects (Mathie and Cunningham, 2003:476). Against the backdrop of a worsening socio-economic situation in the urban communities of the USA, Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) cautioned that if they continued to only use the needs-based approach, the effects would be devastating to the communities. According to Mathie and Cunningham (2003:476) some of the effects envisioned by Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) included community development being seen through the lens of how much the external agencies, universities, or governments have done for the community, not how much the community has done for itself. This belittling of the community breeds another consequence, which is the erosion of agency and capacity of the members of the communities (Mathie and Cunningham, 2003:476). Hence, Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) put forward the alternative asset-based community development approach,

which is aware that the associations and capacities of community members is what develops sustainable communities.

3.3 Principles Underpinning ABCD

The relevant literature on the ABCD approach focuses on four main principles of the approach, namely: associations (Mathie and Cunningham, 2003; Garcia, 2020; Mengesha et al., 2015), local economy (Garcia, 2020; Mathie and Cunningham, 2003; McKnight and Russel, 2018), distribution of power (Mathie and Cunningham, 2003; Garcia, 2020; Mengesha et al., 2015), and constructing shared meaning (Garcia, 2020; Mathie and Cunningham, 2003; Mengesha et al., 2015). This section will discuss these four main principles of the ABCD approach.

3.3.1 Associations

At the heart of ABCD is its concentration on social relationships (Mathie and Cunningham, 2003:479). These associations of individuals are a crucial measure in efforts to provide solutions to the issues that communities are facing (Garcia, 2020:70). For the ABCD approach, associations are seen as a group of people that come together in an organic manner to form solutions to the problems that exist in their communities (Garcia, 2020:70). Decision-making in these associations is based on group consensus (Garcia, 2020:70). Garcia (2020:70) argues that there is a wealth of power in associations that is often overlooked. Associations can be an amplifier of gifts, creativity, and can also be effective when taking action towards community development (Garcia, 2020:70). The ABCD approach regards formal and informal associations which include networks and extended families as assets and tools to rally other assets that are part of a community (Mathie and Cunningham, 2003:479). Therefore, by regarding relationships as assets, ABCD is the practice of the concept of social capital (Mathie and Cunningham, 2003:479).

Mangesha et al. (2015:167) refer to social capital as the potential for associations to change the community. For Green and Haines (2015) social capital is the result of associations which include networks with families, friends, and organisations whose members work collaboratively to take action. Similar to other forms of capital, social capital can be raised and depleted (Mathie and Cunningham, 2003:479). According to Mangesha et al. (2015:167), social capital can be bonding, bridging, or linking. For it to be bonding, there have to be

exclusive ties within homogenous groups (Mangesha et al., 2015:167). For it to be bridging, it has to connect groups of individuals that may otherwise never interact, thereby subjecting people to diverse experiences which may increase their social capital and develop their identities (Mangesha et al., 2015:167). For it to be linking, there has to be a hierarchical chain process which links disadvantaged social groups with powerful social groups (Mangesha et al., 2015:167). As Stoltenberg-Bruursema (2015:92) says, "like an invisible bank account that builds compound interests, social capital includes time, skills, energy, and vision". Therefore, powerful groups help empower the disadvantaged groups so they can gain access to opportunities, resources, and power (Mangesha et al., 2015:167). As Ennis and West (2010:408) note, "the incorporation of a stronger and more theoretical focus on the concept of social capital has the potential to address some of the key challenges facing ABCD".

3.3.2 Local Economy

The local economy, which can be conceptualised as a form of exchange, focuses on how assets flow through a community. According to McKnight and Russel (2018:4), in the non-monetary world, there are three forms of exchange which contribute to the local economy, namely: the exchange of intangibles, the exchange of tangibles, and the use of alternative currencies. There is also a fourth form of exchange which lends itself in a monetary manner (McKnight and Russel, 2018:4).

McKnight and Russel (2018:4) state that throughout human history there have been exchanges of intangibles within and outside of communities. These exchanges are rooted in a culture of giving and receiving (McKnight and Russel, 2018:4). This is why a lot of communities still have or seek to nurture a culture of giving and receiving (McKnight and Russel, 2018:4). These exchanges are not transactional but rather relational in nature (McKnight and Russel, 2018:4). There is also a history of tangible exchanges which are based on the bartering of assets (McKnight and Russel, 2018:4). Moreover, there have also been times in history when communities have introduced their own local currencies as an alternative to their national currency (McKnight and Russel, 2018:4). This is usually to enable local choice and control (McKnight and Russel, 2018:4). These three kinds of exchanges strengthen the communal space as they "increase gift exchanges, deepen associational life, and encourage hospitality" (McKnight and Russel, 2018:4). The fourth form of exchange, which is monetary-based, is considered by ABCD practitioners as the least effective of the four exchanges in providing

collective wellbeing as it operates on a basis of scarcity rather than abundance (McKnight and Russel, 2018:4). Nonetheless, monetary exchanges can have a powerful role in producing collective wellbeing when kept local (McKnight and Russel, 2018:4). This asset can be used to foster interdependence within communities which leads to an abundance of local choice and control (McKnight and Russel, 2018:4).

Garcia (2020:72) explains that, through exchanges, economic development is being advanced as a way to boost the development of communities as a whole. Through exchanges, the development process is based on the ABCD approach which evaluates the skills and capabilities prevalent in a community (Garcia, 2020:72). It is therefore imperative to keep the monetary exchanges of a community within its borders so that the local economy can increase (Garcia, 2020:72). This is because large corporations usually take the profits of the community and invest them outside of the community and in that way money ends up profiting outsiders and not residents of the community (Garcia, 2020:72). As mentioned above, exchanges can also occur without money (Garcia, 2020:72). For example, a community garden where residents exchange produce can be an effective way of providing collective wellbeing in the community (Garcia, 2020:72).

3.3.3 Distribution of Power

At the core of ABCD is the distribution of power that has been hoarded by agencies external to the communities. Mathie and Cunningham (2003:482) point out that power has been the subject of research and practice of the participatory development field for more than two decades. According to Mathie and Cunningham (2003:483), “where ABCD and the legacy of participatory development intersect is by enhancing the capacities of people who previously have been excluded from participating in decision-making processes and enjoying the rights of their citizenship”. In short, they create the institutional mechanisms for the voices of the marginalised communities to be heard (Mathie and Cunningham, 2003:483).

External agencies that practice the ABCD approach distribute power through leading by stepping back, strengthening the social relationships necessary for collective action, and encouraging their agencies to be means by which communities can engage on their own terms (Mathie and Cunningham, 2003:483). According to Mathie and Cunningham (2003:483) this provides a means to sustain community development. Mengesha et al. (2015:168) relate power

distribution to participation as participation deals with ownership and control over resource distribution within and outside of communities. This leads to a community-driven process that values the assets of all community members regardless of power imbalances (Mengesha et al., 2015:168). Community members must be in tune with the issues they face and use their local knowledge and assets to solve them (Mengesha et al., 2015:168).

3.3.4 Constructing Shared Meaning

This principle was conceptualised a while after the ABCD blueprint was published by Kretzmann and McKnight (1993). By listening to various stories of effective community development over the years, it became clear that stories in themselves are assets (Garcia, 2020:72). It was evident that community members were knowledgeable as they told stories about how they assembled their assets – which showed that they possessed agency (Garcia, 2020:72). These stories highlight the social meanings people place on different things (Mengesha et al., 2015:166). This then leads to the construction of shared meaning which has a crucial role in the realisation of social cohesion (Mengesha et al., 2015:166). The construction of shared meaning often leads to a shared vision of a community's future which is an important aspect of internal resource utilisation (Mengesha et al., 2015:166).

According to Mathie and Cunningham (2003:478), having shared meaning is vital for the initial phases of an ABCD project as the mobilisation of assets has much in common with appreciative inquiry. Appreciative inquiry is a process that focuses on positive community development experiences of the past (Mathie and Cunningham, 2003:478). This process relies heavily on culture and storytelling that is based on positive memories (Mathie and Cunningham, 2003:478). A collective analysis of the positive memories leads to positive experiences of community development (Mathie and Cunningham, 2003:478). These memories become the reference points for further positive community development (Mathie and Cunningham, 2003:478). This shared meaning is an anchor for ABCD especially in the initial phases of community action (Mathie and Cunningham, 2003:478).

3.4 Practical Implementation of ABCD

Stoltenberg-Bruursema (2015:93) states that when implementing the ABCD approach, the first step for facilitators is to assess the community's assets by performing a search for the

community's capacities. This is done through the process of mapping the community's assets. Stoltenberg-Bruursema (2015:93) contends that "by fostering a dialogue with community members, we may discover skills and experiences that can potentially enrich the community".

Mathie and Cunningham (2003) add to this by stating that ABCD is facilitated through a process of organised change through self-mobilisation. The process can occur spontaneously, however in most cases an external agency such as an NGO establishes the process with careful consideration not to create dependency (Mathie and Cunningham, 2003). There are some key features on how to get the process going, but these should not be considered a blue-print as the process varies in different contexts (Mathie and Cunningham, 2003). Therefore, Mathie and Cunningham (2003) refer to them as guidelines instead of set features or methods for attaining community-driven development.

Various donor agencies, universities, and governments have developed a number of ABCD toolkits for the facilitation of the approach in project process cycles. Most of these toolkits provide tools that are used in a process that has five steps: an introduction to ABCD, setting the tone through appreciative interviewing, mapping existing assets, integrated community action planning, and regular participatory monitoring and evaluation (Fuchs et al., 2020; Ikhala Trust, 2022; Duncan, 2016; Congress Working Party, 2003).

The first step is introducing ABCD to community partners. ABCD has to be explained as an approach that recognises and builds on assets which include the strengths, gifts, talents, and resources of individuals and communities, in order to create strong social communities and enhance economic development (Ikhala Trust, 2022; Congress Working Party, 2003). ABCD proponents emphasise that instead of seeking help from external sources to address their problems and needs, ABCD empowers communities to create inclusive and sustainable communities by themselves (Ikhala Trust, 2022; Congress Working Party, 2003).

The second step is guiding story-telling through appreciative interviewing to construct shared meaning. Appreciative interviewing allows both the story-tellers and the listeners to be vulnerable and tell their truth without being judged (Fuchs et al., 2020; Duncan, 2016). ABCD proponents contend that this process helps uncover the strengths, gifts, talents, and resources within the community (Fuchs et al., 2020; Duncan, 2016). The process is also argued to provide ABCD facilitators an entry point to building meaningful relationships with the communities

based on their lived experiences (Fuchs et al., 2020; Duncan, 2016). This all leads to discovering what people care about and brings out their urge to act on those things (Fuchs et al., 2020; Duncan, 2016).

The third step is mapping existing assets. Mapping existing assets is regarded to be central to the ABCD approach. ABCD proponents emphasise that it is crucial for the communities to have ownership of the process and that they conduct the mapping of assets themselves (Ikhala Trust, 2022; Congress Working Party, 2003). Assets that can be mapped are human assets, which include mapping individual skills; social assets, which include mapping relationships between individuals and organisations; physical assets, which include mapping natural resources; and economic assets, which include assessing financial flows (Ikhala Trust, 2022; Congress Working Party, 2003).

The fourth step is having integrated community action planning. According to ABCD proponents, this is the most important step of facilitating the ABCD project process as it helps turn community assets into action that enhances community development (Fuchs et al., 2020; Duncan, 2016). In the process of community action planning, communities recount the stories they shared during the appreciative interviewing and return to their asset maps they made earlier (Fuchs et al., 2020; Duncan, 2016). Taking from these, they come up with action plans on future changes they want for their communities and take feasible steps towards achieving them (Fuchs et al., 2020; Duncan, 2016). ABCD proponents argue that this process leads to holistic community development (Fuchs et al., 2020; Duncan, 2016).

The fifth and final step is participatory monitoring and evaluation. Through such monitoring and evaluation, stakeholders assess their progress and analyse the significance of their actions (Ikhala Trust, 2022; Congress Working Party, 2003). This process allows for growth through learning and unlearning as certain factors of the project process cannot be anticipated and planned for (Ikhala Trust, 2022; Congress Working Party, 2003). Growth from monitoring and evaluation requires that all stakeholders monitor and evaluate the significance of their actions (Ikhala Trust, 2022; Congress Working Party, 2003). According to ABCD proponents, this informs a sense of purpose in a community (Ikhala Trust, 2022; Congress Working Party, 2003).

3.5 Shortcomings of ABCD

Most of the literature reviewed above makes a case for the ABCD approach. Scholars such as Mathie and Cunningham (2003), Mengesha et al. (2015), and Garcia (2020) all endorse the ABCD approach as an effective alternative approach to the traditional needs-based approach to community development. They contend that the approach promotes positive change by identifying and amplifying assets and strengths of a community. However, these scholars and others reveal that the ABCD approach has some shortcomings that warrant some consideration.

When considering the shortcomings of ABCD, the literature exposes a dark side of ABCD. The literature particularly focuses on two major criticisms. The first being the neglect of external power structures (Maclure, 2023; Ennis and West, 2010). The second being a lack of an evidence base (Ennis and West, 2010; Mathie and Cunningham, 2003).

3.5.1 Neglect of External Power Structures

Maclure (2003:7) criticises ABCD for having a "hyper-local" focus whereby local assets and personal capabilities of community members are regarded as forces that can autonomously drive the communities' development. Maclure (2003:7) cautions that this sole focus on communities' local assets and personal capabilities exaggerates the communities' capabilities and neglects external power structures such as the neoliberal political system. Consequently, when external power structures are neglected, ABCD projects tend to replicate these power structures (Maclure, 2023:7). Therefore, neoliberal power structures are perpetuated, while local assets and capacities become exploited by external agencies (Maclure, 2023:7).

Ennis and West (2010:407) concur and state that "the ABCD approach is being criticised because it tends to ignore the non-local origins of many of the challenges facing disadvantaged communities, such as capitalism and globalization". Issues at the macro-level, such as racism and sexism, which are often experienced at the local-level, are neglected in much ABCD literature (Ennis and West, 2010:407). The literature explored in this study seldom mentioned these issues that are often experienced at the community level. Therefore, it could be said that "ABCD does not directly confront issues that are related to power and oppression" (Ennis and West, 2010:407).

3.5.2 Lack of an Evidence Base

Ennis and West (2010:407) reveal that a search they did of social science academic journals found that there is a lack of an evidence base on the effectiveness of the ABCD approach. Mathie and Cunningham (2003:479) have also alluded to this apparent lack of an evidence base for ABCD when they stated that "the approach is sometimes flawed and far from conclusive, generally suffering from small subject populations, poor descriptions of the independent variable, and varied dependent measures".

Ennis and West (2010:407) make it clear that the available research is valuable in describing the practical aspect of the ABCD approach. However, it fails to provide in-depth analysis of the effectiveness of the approach (Ennis and West, 2010:407). The survey of social science academic journals by Ennis and West (2010:407) also revealed that the reports they found on ABCD were mainly written by the external agencies that were carrying out the community development projects. Because of this, Ennis and West (2010:407) advise that there be more quantitative and qualitative research and other measures that will strengthen the understanding of the effectiveness of the ABCD approach.

3.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, based on the literature on the ABCD approach, there is consensus among proponents and practitioners of the approach that it is a system of identifying and compiling all the assets available in a community, and it works under the notion that communities can drive the development process themselves by identifying and compiling existing but generally unused assets, thereby responding to, and creating local opportunity for positive changes.

There is also consensus among proponents and practitioners that the ABCD approach is underpinned by four principles, namely associations, local economy, distribution of power, and the construction of shared meaning. When considering the shortcomings of the ABCD approach, the literature points out that there is often neglect of external power structures by the approach. The approach also has a lack of an evidence base. Lastly, the literature showed that when implementing the approach, there has to be a project cycle process which has five phases that include introducing the approach, conducting appreciative interviews, mapping existing assets, taking collaborative action, and monitoring and evaluating the process.

Therefore, the ABCD approach recognises community strengths and values relationships. However, it has been criticised for focusing too much on community assets and forgetting that there are also strengths from external structures. The approach also presents its case with insufficient evidence to prove its effectiveness. This study seeks to contribute to knowledge by providing evidence from the Makhanda context regarding the (in)effectiveness of the approach.

Chapter Four

Case Study: Rhodes University Community Engagement's Siyakhana@Makhanda Programme

4.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the case study, which is the Rhodes University Community Engagement's (RUCE) Siyakhana@Makhanda programme. Through the analysis of documents, reports, and interviews on the case study, the chapter describes the RUCE division and its programmes with a focus on the Siyakhana@Makhanda programme. The chapter opens with a brief background on the establishment of RUCE. It then describes its vision and mission statement, purpose and principles, and administration and monitoring. The chapter also briefly discusses the programmes offered by RUCE. Thereafter it provides a richer discussion of the Siyakhana@Makhanda programme by describing its vision and mission statement and closes with the project cycle process phases of the programme.

4.2 Establishment of Rhodes University Community Engagement

In 2010, the Rhodes University Community Engagement (RUCE) division was established to develop, coordinate, and enhance the visibility of community initiatives at the university (Rhodes University Community Engagement, 2024). According to the community engagement policy (2021), the function of the division stretches further to formulating, driving, and facilitating strategies that combine the university's community engagement initiatives with community partners projects, which include NGOs, CBOs, state institutions, and the private sector. The policy (2021) also states that RUCE must be the access point for community partners to ascertain in what different ways the university can utilize its assets to enhance their work. RUCE (2024) claims that they do this by liaising with departments and institutes regarding community needs and how best the university can meet them to ensure coordination between the various initiatives.

4.2.1 Vision and Mission

According to the Rhodes University vision and mission statement (2024), the university currently has a vision of being an exceptional, internationally esteemed academic institution

that is dedicated to following democratic principles and proudly upholding its African identity. The vision and mission statement (2024) further states that in pursuit of their mission, the university seeks to cultivate remarkable internationally recognised graduates with a life-long passion of learning through teaching, research, and community engagement. Rhodes University (2024) claims that this is with the intention of contributing to the development of Makhanda, the Eastern Cape, and Southern Africa as a whole.

4.2.2 Purpose and Principles

According to RUCE (2024), community engagement at the institution serves a transformational purpose by using teaching and learning to remove the limitations between higher education institutions and the communities they are rooted in and making them more allied to these communities. Furthermore, RUCE (2024) clarifies that the university's practical strategy of community engagement is based on practising community engagement in a twofold manner whereby it is practised informally through unstructured activities and formally through structured programmes addressed at community needs. The structured programmes are based on acknowledging the skills and capacity of the community and empowering them to invest in what they have (RUCE, 2024). In an interview conducted for this study, the RUCE director explains that the purpose of community engagement at Rhodes University is to create spaces for students to apply what they learn, saying:

> The purpose of community engagement is to open spaces where students get their lectures and then they go apply the knowledge they've learned, and they rework it and they come back in the classroom for a much richer discussion, because they've engaged in the real world.

RUCE (2024) explains that this entails working from an asset-based approach to community development, which recognises that all people have skills, knowledge, and capabilities. Within this strategic model of engagement, mutually beneficial partnerships, benefiting both community partners and students, are realised (RUCE, 2024). Through this kind of engagement, RUCE (2024) says that they hope to create a vibrant partnership between them and the community, culminating in mutual development.

4.2.3 Administration and Monitoring

When addressing the question of administration and monitoring, RUCE (2024) states that they administer and monitor community engagement through the maintenance of an up-to-date database of community engagement initiatives. The division also maintains a database of Rhodes staff and students who volunteer and participate in community engagement and outreach (RUCE, 2024). RUCE (2024) states that this is done to encourage a spirit of volunteerism among Rhodes staff and students. According to RUCE (2024), they continuously recruit by surveying Rhodes staff and students interested in community engagement. The division then promotes community engagement initiatives through ongoing communication within the institution (RUCE, 2024). RUCE (2024) affirms that their volunteers are trained in line with good development practice to ensure quality contribution to the community. The division also contends that community partners are trained on how to get the most benefit out of the volunteers (RUCE, 2024).

4.3 Rhodes University Community Engagement Programmes

RUCE has various community engagement programmes for students and staff to engage in. These programmes include: Engaged Citizenry, Service Learning, Engaged Research, and the Social Innovation Hub.

4.3.1 Engaged Citizenry

RUCE (2024) describes the Engaged Citizenry initiative as a progressive model that goes beyond traditional volunteerism to cultivate a deeper, more impactful form of community involvement. RUCE (2024) states that Engaged Citizenry engages both the residents of Makhanda who actively participate in community engagement activities, as well as student volunteers who work alongside community partner sites to enact change. According to RUCE (2024), volunteerism is about more than giving back, it is a vital learning experience. This evolution in community-university engagement is vividly illustrated by the paradigm shift RUCE has embraced whereby RUCE moved from the concept of volunteerism to engaged citizenship. For the division, this change, while seemingly subtle, marks a significant transformation to the university’s approach towards community engagement, underscoring a holistic and inclusive vision for societal growth and educational excellence (RUCE, 2024).

Furthermore, RUCE (2024) claims that the transition from being a volunteer to becoming an engaged citizen signifies a profound change in the way communities are perceived and engaged with. RUCE (2024) argues that traditionally, volunteerism has been viewed through the lens of individual sacrifice or as a means to bolster one's experience. However, the notion of 'engaged citizenship' elevates this concept to emphasise mutually beneficial relationships, community partnerships, and transformative education (RUCE, 2024). RUCE (2024) acknowledges that they draw inspiration from Freire's (1979) idea of critical consciousness, which encourages recognising and acting against the oppressive structures within society. As a result, engaged citizenship at RUCE strives to embody this spirit, positioning individuals not just as contributors but as critical thinkers and catalysts for change (RUCE, 2024). As stated by RUCE (2024), "this perspective nurtures reciprocal relationships, empowering the university and its students to collectively tackle social challenges and forge stronger, equitable communities".

Engaged Citizenry acts as an umbrella programme for several programmes that are grouped under it. Some of the programmes under the Engaged Citizenry programme include: High School Tutoring and Mentoring, Nine Tenths Mentoring, Makhanda Literacy Collective, BuddingQ, Vulindlela, and Siyakhana@Makhanda. This research project will not go into detail on the other programmes that are under the Engaged Citizenry group, instead it will focus only on the chosen case study programme it has chosen that is under Engaged Citizenry, which is Siyakhana@Makhanda (discussed in detail later).

4.3.2 Service Learning

Service learning is defined as an extension of community engagement whereby academic learning is merged with serving the community (Bobo and Akhurst, 2019:90). The RUCE division seeks to distance themselves from forms of service learning in which students simply do service for disadvantaged communities, favouring more critical approaches to service learning that aim toward social justice (Bobo and Akhurst, 2019:90). RUCE classifies three aspects of these critical approaches which include redistributing power among community partners, developing authentic relationships that change the roles from recipients to community partners, and working towards conscientising students to the impact of inequalities so they can aim for social change (Bobo and Akhurst, 2019:90).

Furthermore, RUCE (2024) argues that service learning should be promoted as an approach to engaged teaching. RUCE (2024) explains that while the approach to service learning may differ slightly in varying contexts, it is an educational approach that challenges the traditional 'banking' model of education, critiqued by Freire (1979). Rhodes University offers support for service learning projects through a short course, a community of practice, funding for projects, and connecting academics to potential community partners (RUCE, 2024). Furthermore, RUCE (2024) claims to approach service learning in this manner so that instead of passively depositing knowledge into students, service learning facilitates an active learning process that merges theory with practical application. The division asserts that this approach enriches the academic and civic development of students (RUCE, 2024). They also emphasise that it fosters a meaningful reconnection between Rhodes University and its Makhanda communities through reciprocal relationships and shared visions for the future (RUCE, 2024).

As explained above, service learning at Rhodes University is intended to promote practical learning experiences that benefit both students and the community at large. Consequently, RUCE is involved in service learning activities through its various programmes (RUCE, 2024). Notably, the Vulindlela programme, which aims to increase access to higher education for the children of Rhodes University support staff, partners with Journalism and Media Studies postgraduate diploma students who work with participants in the programme to create stories about experiences in the programme (RUCE, 2024). Another service learning component is a partnership with the Management Department on Financial Literacy for community partners (RUCE, 2024). Another RUCE programme, BuddingQ blends the learning outcomes for Community Psychology with the service of improving fine motor skills for grade R learners (RUCE, 2024). RUCE (2024) also promotes service learning through its Community of Practice. RUCE (2024) describes the Service Learning Community of Practice as a collective of engaged teaching practitioners across the town who organise and participate in discussions around the experiences, successes and challenges of engaged teaching. As part of their operation, the RUCE division also offers "to help academics identify suitable community partner organisations for service learning activities, orientation workshops to prepare students for their service activities, and provide ethics workshops for staff and students who are going to work in community spaces" (RUCE, 2024). To fund these initiatives, RUCE (2024) has established a Service Learning Fund, which is a fund for engaged teaching projects.

4.3.3 Engaged Research

The RUCE (2024) approach to academic research is that “it should not exist in isolation, it should actively contribute to the betterment of society”. Through Engaged Research, RUCE (2024) sees university researchers, community members, and stakeholders collaboratively tackling real-world challenges through co-creation of knowledge and mutual respect. RUCE (2024) says they recognise that knowledge generation and dissemination should not be confined to the ‘ivory tower’ but should be powerful tools for positive social change. Therefore, through Engaged Research, they aim to bridge the gap between theoretical insights and practical solutions, addressing the pressing challenges faced by the Makhanda society through collaborative engagement and co-creation of knowledge by all stakeholders (RUCE, 2024).

The Community Engagement Symposium (CES) and the African Journal of Higher Education Community Engagement (AJHECE) adds to the engagement. According to RUCE (2024), these platforms provide spaces for dialogue, knowledge dissemination and establishing a Global South body of knowledge on community engagement. Moreover, RUCE (2024) also says that the Engaged Research programme is based on and embedded in theoretical frameworks, each contributing to its holistic and community-centric approach. This includes ecosystems theory which serves as a foundational lens, emphasising the interconnectedness and interdependence of individuals and their environments (RUCE, 2024). Critical theory, rooted in critical pedagogy and feminist perspectives, also shapes the programme’s philosophy (RUCE, 2024). In addition, the Humanism and *Ubuntu* philosophies are intended to embed the programme with a profound sense of empathy, emphasising the intrinsic value of every individual and the communal nature of knowledge creation (RUCE, 2024). RUCE (2024) states that this diverse theoretical foundation not only informs but actively shapes the Engaged Research programme, ensuring a nuanced and responsive engagement with communities that goes beyond traditional academic boundaries.

4.3.4 Social Innovation Hub

RUCE (2024) explains that the Social Innovation Hub seeks to create spaces where individuals can connect, share knowledge, and cultivate a sense of belonging within their communities. According to RUCE (2024), the programme’s mission is to foster these connections and provide a platform for collaborative growth and mutual understanding. RUCE (2024) claims

to do this by embracing the transformative potential of technology, through enhancing the innovativeness and entrepreneurial capacity of community members, especially in addressing the grand challenges they currently face. This is because, according to RUCE (2024), when people feel connected to their community, they are more likely to be engaged and involved in activities which contribute to a sense of purpose and fulfilment. Kim (2020:207) concurs and states that communities that are cohesive and well-connected offer individuals a support system that can help to foster a sense of safety, trust, and mutual understanding. This cohesion can help to facilitate the sharing of resources, knowledge, and skills, enabling individuals to benefit from the collective strengths and assets of their community (Kim, 2020:207). This can be particularly important for individuals or groups who may face significant social, economic, or political challenges (Kim, 2020:207).

The Social Innovation Hub therefore aims to harness the transformative potential of technology in improving innovativeness and entrepreneurial capacity to address social challenges (RUCE, 2024). RUCE (2024) says that by leveraging digital tools and platforms, the programme facilitates communication, knowledge-sharing, and collaboration among community members, and promotes the development of innovative solutions to local problems. RUCE (2024) focuses on levels of digital access so that all community members can participate in the process of social innovation, regardless of their background or resources. The Social Innovation Hub seeks to create a more connected, inclusive, and empowered community that is better equipped to address the complex challenges of the digital age by using both digital innovation and social innovation, to address usage, skills, motivation and material access (RUCE, 2024).

4.4 The Siyakhana@Makhanda Programme

The programme pronounced as Siyakhana at Makhanda but written as Siyakhana@Makhanda and also Siyakhana eMakhanda (though the first usage is more common) serves as the case study for this research project. According to the Siyakhana@Makhanda handbook (2024), “the programme is a project planning process bringing together community-based organisations and student organisations with the purpose of supporting student organisations (societies, residences and sports clubs) so they can better understand community development processes and the role of volunteers in supporting community-based organisations”. The handbook (2024) further states that the programme seeks to support students who want to build meaningful relationships with community organisations while working towards a shared co-

created project. The programme collaborates with a few groups of dedicated student organisations, community organisations and independent student teams (Siyakhana@Makhanda handbook, 2024). Siyakhana@Makhanda groups use their shared goals and interests to co-create annual projects (Siyakhana@Makhanda handbook, 2024). The programme handbook (2024:4) explains that student volunteers and their community partners "embark on an exciting, creative, and challenging learning experience, participants in the programme work closely together for 19 weeks".

4.4.1 Vision and Mission

The Siyakhana@Makhanda handbook (2024) states that the vision and mission of the programme is to ensure that students gain a more thorough understanding of relationship building and project management. RUCE (2024) says that they hope that by introducing this process, student organisations will gain a more robust understanding of community engagement, which will enrich their understanding of social justice and community development, as well as support the building of meaningful relationships with community-based organisations. In an interview for this study, the programme's coordinator defined the programme as focusing on relationships and community assets, saying:

> Siyakhana@Makhanda is one of the programmes that RUCE has. It works with the students that live in the university residences and Oppidans [students who do not live in university residences] as well, and we're working with community partners that are basically in the early childhood sector [early childhood development centres]. The programme is about building relationships with our community and also identifying what kind of assets we all have that we can, I suppose, support our community to excel with.

When it comes to the planning process of the programme, the handbook (2024) states that the 19 week process sees student organisations engaging in focused training and a series of support meetings that assists them in project planning with the community-based organisation they are partnered with. Students and partners jointly present their project proposals to a committee for feedback (Siyakhana@Makhanda handbook, 2024). Once this is done, they have 10 weeks to implement the projects they proposed with the community-based organisations they work with (Siyakhana@Makhanda handbook, 2024). During the 10 weeks, the student organisations meet for three monitoring and evaluation meetings (Siyakhana@Makhanda handbook, 2024).

4.5 The Siyakhana@Makhanda Project Cycle Phases

According to the Siyakhana@Makhanda handbook (2024), the community groups that students are paired with are already working on their own community development process. They have identified their goals for the year and the students' role is to select one goal and work alongside their partner to achieve the desired outcome (Siyakhana@Makhanda handbook, 2024). The project cycle has several phases that are influenced by the ABCD implementation toolkit discussed earlier in Chapter Three. The project cycle phases include community assets mapping, presentation, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation (Siyakhana@Makhanda handbook, 2024).

4.5.1 Community Assets Mapping

The first phase of the project cycle process is mapping community assets. According to the handbook (2024), mapping, on the one hand, is a means to better understand the context within which the community partner works. Depending on the size and scope of the project, students may wish to map the neighbourhood or the town (Siyakhana@Makhanda handbook, 2024). For the purpose of the project, the students might consider mapping key areas in the wards their community partners are situated in (Siyakhana@Makhanda handbook, 2024). While assets, on the other hand, refer to resources such as natural and human resources (Siyakhana@Makhanda handbook, 2024). For example, diversity is a great asset to a team as it allows a wide range of perspectives and life experiences (Siyakhana@Makhanda handbook, 2024).

The handbook (2024) states that for their projects, asset mapping takes place before a project has started so that project objectives can be handled in terms of available resources. The handbook (2024) contends that asset mapping encourages the student facilitators and their community partner to pay attention to their objectives and, by doing so, lays the foundation for a community development project. The handbook (2024) also asserts that it is crucial to recognise assets within a community and within a team before seeking out external resources to use towards advancing the project. "If people recognise their assets, they can begin to use their agency" (Siyakhana@Makhanda handbook, 2024:20). Taking inspiration from ABCD projects in other contexts, RUCE (2024) states that they have seen that when people invest their assets, there is more buy in and the project becomes more sustainable.

The handbook (2024) also claims that the knowledge of local people is taken as a starting point and students working on a project learn from them by using many different locally adopted methods. Their ultimate goal is to identify possible concrete actions, based on a shared understanding of the situation at hand (Siyakhana@Makhanda handbook, 2024). Moreover, the Siyakhana@Makhanda handbook (2024) states that the attitude of members of a project determines the participation of local community members. Lecturing or conducting extensive extractive interviews may block the building of rapport (Siyakhana@Makhanda handbook, 2024). Therefore, mapping allows the students to understand the context and to have a 'feel' of the community around the organisations they work with (Siyakhana@Makhanda handbook, 2024).

4.5.2 Presentations

The second phase of the project cycle process are presentations. Regarding presentations, the handbook (2024) states that all teams are asked to offer a 15 to 20 minutes presentation on their journey as a team and the project they will be implementing for the next 10 weeks. The handbook (2024) also explains that presenting a project proposal for Siyakhana@Makhanda entails: A detailed plan of the proposed project, having a proposal that is professionally presented and agreed upon by all parties involved in the process, and gaining feedback and insights to improve the plan of action.

4.5.3 Project Implementation, Monitoring, and Evaluation

After the presentations and feedback, the next phase of project cycle process is implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. The handbook (2024) clarifies that the project has to be implemented, monitored in the process, and after implementation the project is evaluated. The project is reassessed in terms of achievement of objectives it sets out (Siyakhana@Makhanda handbook, 2024). Team members set up an evaluation based on the purposes and objectives and activities of the project (Siyakhana@Makhanda handbook, 2024). Community partners conduct an assessment of the student facilitators and the students also conduct an assessment of the community partners (Siyakhana@Makhanda handbook, 2024).

According to the handbook (2024), when exiting a community partner site, there has to be a sustainable maintenance of the work the student facilitators did with their community partner. The handbook (2024) further elaborates that to sustain something means to enable it to continue for a long time. Student facilitators may not be part of the whole development process of community organisations they work with, but their interventions ought to uphold the long term sustainability of a community organisation's work (Siyakhana@Makhanda handbook, 2024). Sustainability does not only speak to enduring partnerships, but how a facilitator exits the project they started with their community partner (Siyakhana@Makhanda handbook, 2024). Given the shifting student body, very few student organisations programmes can continue forever, hence the handbook (2024) encourages clear and careful communication based on openness and honesty between the student facilitators and their community partners to ensure sustainability before they exit the project.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a detailed introduction of the case study. This was in the form of the vison and mission statements, purpose and principles, and monitoring and administration of the RUCE division. The chapter also provided an overview of the programmes offered by RUCE. Lastly, the chapter provided a thorough discussion of the Siyakhana@Makhanda programme which this study focuses on. The vision and mission statement together with the project implementation process phases are detailed in this chapter.

Chapter Five

Findings: Stakeholders' Experiences of ABCD in the Makhanda Context

"If you have come here to help me you are wasting your time, but if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together." – Lilla Watson

5.1 Introduction

The above quote by Lilla Watson captures the essence of stakeholders' experiences of the ABCD approach in the Makhanda context which will be shown throughout this chapter. The chapter describes and analyses the findings from the interviews conducted with study participants involved in the Siyakhana@Makhanda programme (case study). The description of the findings is divided into three themes which touch on the implementation strategies, effectiveness, and challenges faced in relation to the ABCD approach used by the programme. The first theme focuses on the experiences of the programme coordinators together with the student facilitators and describes how the ABCD approach is implemented with the strategy of cultivating mutually beneficial partnerships by the programme. The second theme focuses on the experiences of the community partners together with the student facilitators and describes the tools utilised for the effective implementation of the ABCD approach by the programme which include inclusive partnerships, empowerment of both the community partners and the student facilitators, and making progress towards sustainable community development. The third and final theme focuses on the experiences of all the study participants and describes the challenges that have been encountered by programme coordinators, student facilitators, and community partners in the process of implementing the ABCD approach in this context.

The three main themes have various subthemes under them which separate the diverse experiences of the research participants. In each subtheme, the participants' experiences are described in detail, which include their experiences of the implementation phase of the projects, whether they found the projects effective, and the challenges they met. The themes revealed in the participants' experiences are then analysed and related to the principles and limitations of participatory development and the ABCD approach as per the literature review and theoretical framework.

5.2 Details of Study Participants

Fifteen participants were interviewed for this study. The study participants include: the director of the Rhodes University Community Engagement (RUCE) division, two programme coordinators, nine student community engagement facilitators, and three community partners. The table below shows the roles and occupational details of the study participants. In accordance with ethical considerations, ethical approval was obtained from the Rhodes University Human Research Ethics Committee (see Appendix D). Participation in this study was voluntary and the names of the student facilitators and the community partners have been anonymised. The names of the director of RUCE, the coordinator of the Siyakhana@Makhanda programme, and the coordinator of the Engaged Citizenry programme have also been anonymised. However, the director of RUCE, the coordinator of the Siyakhana@Makhanda programme, and the coordinator of the Engaged Citizenry programme gave permission for the study to reveal their actual roles and occupations as their positions make it impossible to fully anonymise them.

ROLES	OCCUPATION
1. Programme Director	Director: RUCE
2. Programme Coordinator 1	Coordinator: Siyakhana@Makhanda
3. Programme Coordinator 2	Coordinator: Engaged Citizenry
4. Student Facilitator 1	Student Residence Community Engagement Representative
5. Student Facilitator 2	Student Residence Community Engagement Representative
6. Student Facilitator 3	Incumbent SRC Community Engagement Councillor
7. Student Facilitator 4	Student Residence Community Engagement Representative
8. Student Facilitator 5	Student Residence Community Engagement Representative
9. Student Facilitator 6	Student Residence Community Engagement Representative
10. Student Facilitator 7	Student Residence Community Engagement Representative
11. Student Facilitator 8	Student Residence Community Engagement Representative
12. Student Facilitator 9	Former SRC Community Engagement Councillor
13. Community Partner 1	Early Childhood Development Centre Staff Member
14. Community Partner 2	Early Childhood Development Centre Staff Member
15. Community Partner 3	Early Childhood Development Centre Staff Member

Table 1: Details of Study Participants

5.3 Implementation Strategies: Cultivating Mutually Beneficial Partnerships

To understand how the ABCD approach is implemented by the Siyakhana@Makhanda programme, relevant vision and mission statements documents and reports related to the programme were examined and several questions regarding the understanding and implementation of the ABCD approach were posed to the RUCE director, programme coordinators, and student facilitators. Programme presentations were also attended to observe the student facilitators and the community partners present their projects. The main implementation strategy (theme) that emerged was that ABCD in the programme is understood and implemented with the purpose of cultivating mutually beneficial partnerships.

Moreover, there are subsidiary implementation strategies (subthemes) that emerged from the main implementation strategy (main theme) of cultivating mutually beneficial partnerships. According to the respondents in this study, the cultivation of mutually beneficial partnerships is realised when ABCD is implemented with a purpose of forming collaborative alliances. Collaboration is crucial for ABCD implementation because it advances associations which is a core principle of the approach. The cultivation of mutually beneficial partnerships is also realised when ABCD is implemented through facilitation instead of expertise. This way of implementation empowers community partners to own the community development process which is also a core principle of the ABCD approach. The community partners cease to see themselves as helpless victims and start regarding themselves as equal partners who possess valuable assets that are not only beneficial to themselves and the community, but also to the programme and the student facilitators. Through this realisation, the programme and the community partners nurture their reciprocal relationship to sustain their partnership and the community's development. The following paragraphs present and describe these implementation strategies (subthemes), which include forming collaborative alliances, a mindset of being facilitators instead of experts, and nurturing reciprocal relationships.

5.3.1 Forming Collaborative Alliances

As established earlier in Chapter Two and Chapter Three, participatory development practitioners' frustration with needs-based approaches of community development that are based on a one-sided, exclusive, and unsustainable process of community development led to

a rise in the implementation of asset-based interventions by community development organisations (Keough, 1998; Jennings, 2000; Kanyamuna and Zulu, 2021). The Siyakhana@Makhanda programme utilises the highly participatory ABCD approach to curb the exclusive process of needs-based approaches by fostering associations through collaborative alliances with their community partners. Findings from this study suggest that the programme coordinators and student facilitators in the programme understand and implement the ABCD approach as a collaborative effort that advances associations between them and the community partners.

The two programme coordinators interviewed for this study affirm the view that ABCD is a collaborative approach. The programme coordinators, who are part of the Rhodes University Community Engagement (RUCE) division, emphasise the importance of collaboration in their engagement with the community partners. This can be seen in the comments from the coordinator for the Siyakhana@Makhanda programme. When explaining RUCE's method of implementing the ABCD approach, she says:

> I've always approached community engagement in such a way of thinking that I have to bring change to people, but now I know that I have to create spaces for dialogue and engagement concerning how we can work together to address community challenges (Programme Coordinator 1, 2024).

The same coordinator elaborates further, highlighting the importance RUCE places on collaboration when implementing the ABCD approach:

> …people always have this idea that communities that we're working in don't really have any sort of assets or resources. But through the journey of working with students, it's made them realise that it's not only them that have something, but everyone around us has something to offer in the world, and it's made them realise that when you're working with people, you have to build relationships with them. You have to understand them first before you work with them and you're not working for them, you're working with the people. So, I think it has really shifted people's minds a lot to not thinking that they have to save the world but to participate in the development of our communities (Programme Coordinator 1, 2024).

Another coordinator, who coordinates the Engaged Citizenry programme, which Siyakhana@Makhanda forms part of, shares similar sentiments, saying:

> I think generally it's about partnerships. You need to form a partnership where you build values like respecting one another, trust in one another and then once you have a sort of relationship then you're able to say "let's look amongst what you have" because it's a reality that we can't run away from that sometimes people can't see what's within themselves when it's too close, sometimes we do tend to not see it in times of difficulty when your eyes aren't open to the things around like the opportunities around you. So, forming a relationship means that you're able to see things like that and then you create a partnership (Programme Coordinator 2, 2024).

The two coordinators' experiences with the implementation of the ABCD approach suggest that community engagement in this context is not seen as a university-led process in which the programme and its student facilitators work by themselves to develop socioeconomically disadvantaged communities for the sole benefit of the communities, but is rather seen as a collaborative process in which the programme and its student facilitators work together with community partners for the mutual benefit of the community, the programme, and the student facilitators.

Similarly, student facilitators interviewed for this study confirm that the Siyakhana@Makhanda programme implements ABCD through a collaborative process that is determined by both the student facilitators and the community partners. This is captured in one of the student facilitator's remarks when describing the strategy they use for implementing the ABCD approach:

> For this programme, we are placed with a community partner which is chosen by RUCE and within this [partnership] we are able to develop strategic collaborative community development (Student Facilitator 4, 2024).

The same student facilitator also went on to explain that community development is very different from what he had perceived it to be, to what (through his experience) he has found it to truly be, saying:

> …when I arrived at university, I wanted to join community engagement, but I found out very soon after I joined that it is not that we go out into the community and provide aid or assistance or give things, but actually with Siyakhana@Makhanda, you work collaboratively with the community or with the community partner that you have been placed with. So, for example,

> communication-wise, you would ask, "what do you think we should do?" [So that] you don't go to the community partner or to the community and infringe and say, "I'm going to do this". You need to evaluate the environment that the partner is in and on the ABCD [approach], which is the asset-based community development [approach] and work together…. I place strong emphasis on working together or collaboratively through this initiative (Student Facilitator 4, 2024).

This student facilitator's experience taught him that, contrary to what he initially thought, the programme is not an aid agency, and that community development is not a charity process. Instead, to develop the community, community engagement must be a collaborative effort based on the assets that the community has.

Likewise, another student facilitator who was interviewed echoed similar sentiments which suggested that their experience has taught her that community development is not all about them and what they want. To develop the community, they had to reach a common goal and have consensus on what everyone wanted. The student facilitator gave more details about her experience with their community partner, which is an Early Childhood Development Centre (ECDC) in Makhanda-East (a low-income area), in the following statement:

> …so, one of the plans that we've actually written down or [are] working on currently is that we wanted to create some sort of playground for the kids, you know, so it's something that before we planned we went and asked our partner what is it that she thinks can be done in terms of the environment [the kids play in] and then in [response to] that we say "okay, this is what we will do" [the playground]. Then she [the community partner] gave us her inputs (Student Facilitator 5, 2024).

This student facilitator's experience with her student organisation's community partner demonstrates the programme's strategy of implementing the ABCD approach during the project cycle process. Initially, the student facilitators decide that they want to do something with their community partner. Following that, they ask the community partner about what can be done based on the assets they have. After that, they create whatever it is that they agreed on with their community partner; in this case, it was a playground for kids. This shows sufficient comprehension and implementation of one of the core principles of the ABCD approach – collaboration (which falls under associations).

In contrast, one of the student facilitators in the programme did not have the same comprehension of the ABCD approach as others, as shown in the following comments:

> …I'm not quite sure what asset-based community engagement is (Student Facilitator 2, 2024).

The student facilitator, in this case, does not seem well acquainted with the ABCD model to confidently state what the model entails. However, as the interview continued, it was clear that the student is aware of what the implementation strategy of the programme requires, which is collaboration, it is just that the student facilitator is not certain if the implementation strategy is derived from or a part of the ABCD model as the student facilitator is not familiar with the principles of the ABCD model. The following comments show the student facilitator's comprehension of the implementation strategy of the programme:

> It's basically a partnership thing. We had a feedback session just this week. We've decided that we're going to meet with the lady [community partner] over there and then I think she's going to help. She's going to bring up a few volunteers on her side and then we're also going to bring up a few on our side (Student Facilitator 2, 2024).

The experience of this student facilitator indicates the comprehension of a fundamental principle of the ABCD approach which is the importance of associations through the implementation strategy of forming collaborative alliances - even though the student is not fully aware that their implementation strategy is derived from a core principle of the ABCD approach.

The findings suggest that most of the student facilitators have adequate comprehension of the importance of associations and know that to maintain them they must form collaborative alliances with their community partners for their project process to be holistic. However, the findings also suggest that there might be some student facilitators who do not have a clear understanding of the theoretical framework (ABCD) that underpins their engagement with the community partners. Nonetheless, the student facilitators in this study attest that for the most part the project process is a collaborative process between them and their community partners.

These findings are coherent with other studies on the ABCD approach such as Mathie and Cunningham's (2003:479) study which states that "focusing on strengths and capacities is one

way in which communities can outgrow a problem or redefine its solution as a product of renewed collaborative action". Also, Green and Haines (2008) and Mengesha et al. (2015) state that social capital is inherent in associations where members work together in collaborative action. Therefore, collaboration in community development initiatives is encouraged by ABCD proponents (also see Garcia, 2020; Stolternberg-Bruursema, 2015; Ennis and West, 2010).

5.3.2 A Mindset of Being Facilitators Instead of Experts

Earlier in Chapter Two, the literature revealed that top-down approaches of community development are characterised by an 'experts' and 'recipients' relationship between development organisations and community organisations (Haines, 2014; Stoltenberg-Bruursema, 2015). Various scholars throughout the years have criticised this relationship for prioritising immediate needs and overlooking foundational issues (Keough, 1998; Jennings, 2000; Bergdall, 2012; Kanyamuna and Zulu, 2021). Instead of inscribing authority over the process, Chapter Three argued that the ABCD approach distributes power by facilitating the community development process and basing it on a mindset of equal partnerships that are mutually beneficial between facilitators and community partners (Botes and Van Rensburg, 2000; Mathie and Cunningham, 2003; Mengesha et al., 2015). In relation to the distribution of power, which is one of the core principles of the ABCD approach, the implementation strategy of ABCD by the programme encourages student facilitators to adopt a mindset of being facilitators of community development (not experts) who are equally knowledgeable as their community partners.

The Siyakhana@Makhanda programme coordinator revealed that RUCE implements the ABCD approach with the objective of shifting mindsets towards thinking in a way that perceives socioeconomically disadvantaged communities as communities that are not only equal to the coordinators and student facilitators but that are as capable as the coordinators and the student facilitators. The coordinator explains this objective by using herself as an example of how having this mindset can change the way people engage with the community when she states that:

> …it [ABCD] has made me think that I'm not above anyone's thinking, but we sort of need to be in the same context of understanding regarding what the assets are and how we can address a challenge (Programme Coordinator 1, 2024).

The experience of this coordinator has humbled her and has also unlocked a mentality that recognises a sustainable way (by distributing power) of tackling the issues that the marginalised communities they work with face.

The student facilitators interviewed for this study also exhibited this mindset of not seeing themselves as experts but as facilitators who are equally knowledgeable as their community partners. One of the student facilitators explains this mindset as follows:

> It's very important that when we engage with the community, we understand that both parties involved are assets to whatever goal that you're trying to achieve. So, it's very important that students understand that they are an asset, and the community [is] also an asset, so to eliminate the charity perspective, you know. So basically, it's very important that when students go to community partners, they understand that community partners also have resources within them that could be used to achieve that goal. When the goal is to do a garden to provide food for the community partner, the student volunteers and the community partner would come together and assess their resources. For instance, the community partner has land readily available with them and then they also maybe have knowledge and experience on how to plant, and when it comes to the students, they have the time, and they also have the transport to take them to community partners. They also do a fundraising type of thing, whereby they fundraise together with the community partner, and they get seeds for the garden. They go to their community site and with those resources that they've identified with their community partner, they come together, they do a garden and then at the end of the day, the community partner benefits, because at the end of the day they get their vegetables. On the other side, the students got the experience, they learned how to be empathetic leaders, and they also learned how to be engaged citizens, you know, so it's very important that we as students go beyond just our academic transcript, but we get involved in such initiatives. So that's how the mutual[ly] beneficial aspect comes into play and circling it back to the asset-based approach. It's very important to look at the resources from both sides and how we could collaboratively use them to achieve the goal (Student Facilitator 3, 2024).

Another student facilitator echoes these sentiments in the following comments:

> …so, with our community partner and the goals that we have with her, I can say that when the ABCD model comes in, we look at what assets that the community partner that we are partnered with has. That those are assets we can utilise to achieve the goals that we set for ourselves, so

> it is not always us who are partnered with those people who must come up with everything and be like we must get this and that so that we can do that for them. We must meet each other halfway (Student Facilitator 5, 2024).

The two student facilitators above emphasise the significance of having the 'facilitator' mindset instead of the 'expert' mindset towards community engagement, which is to eradicate the viewpoint of seeing community partners as powerless and dependent.

Student facilitators also had to be fully aware that both stakeholders (facilitators and community partners) possess different kinds of knowledge and skills that are valuable. Fittingly, another one of the student facilitator's remarks exuded this attitude:

> I'm tired of people looking at humanitarian work as we give and others receive, I'm really tired of that because it's not a charity case. They aren't helpless, they are just curious and hungry-minded people who are so intrigued and fascinated by so much of knowledge and skills and I can say that with the outreaching we have done. So, I just hope that people know that (Student Facilitator 1, 2024).

This student facilitator was frustrated with the condescending attitude towards socioeconomically disadvantaged communities, which is prevalent in top-down approaches to community development. The student facilitator's frustration is warranted because, according to ABCD proponents (Kretzmann and McKnight, 1993; Mathie and Cunningham, 2003), top-down approaches often belittle local knowledge and skills which leads to disconnected community development projects that lack partnerships.

These findings indicate the comprehension of another fundamental principle of the ABCD approach which is the distribution of power through the implementation strategy of having a facilitative mindset instead of an authoritative one. The findings suggest that most of the student facilitators had adequate comprehension of their facilitative role and knew that to maintain it they had to play a role of facilitating the project process instead of inscribing authority over it. The student facilitators in this study engaged the community partners with an attitude of regarding them as equal partners who also have assets.

These findings are in line with Hedlund's (2009:188) study which found that staff at the Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA) in Kenya "regarded themselves and their work only as catalysts for community mobilisation by 'facilitating' a process toward equal opportunities and social and economic well-being". Also, in another study of ICA in Kenya, Bergdall (2012:1) states that "ICA's participatory approach has been applied within an overall contextual framework that has since become widely known as 'Asset-Based Community Development' (ABCD)". This facilitative outlook by ABCD practitioners and community partners is also encouraged by other ABCD proponents (see Mathie and Cunningham, 2003; Harrison et al., 2019).

5.3.3 Nurturing Reciprocal Relationships

Kapoor's (2005) criticism of participatory development, which is discussed in Chapter Two, likens it to religion in which the elite act like Christian priests and exorcise destitution from helpless locals through development. Similarly, Monroe and Bishop (2016) equate it to 'poverty tourism' in which tourists visit impoverished and marginalised places that they would not normally visit to boost their egos instead of actually developing communities. These critiques indicate that participatory development interventions can be implemented with a saviour mentality in which the 'experts' save the poor community and its members who are regarded as helpless and in distress. However, in contrast, due to their understanding that the community partners have valuable assets, the student facilitators in the Siyakhana@Makhanda programme implement the ABCD approach with a strategy of nurturing reciprocal relationships that allow them to benefit from the knowledge and skills that the community partners possess.

In an interview with the programme director at RUCE, she verifies that RUCE's goal is to promote reciprocal relationships between the programme and the community partners. This is stressed in one of the director's remarks when explaining their strategy for implementing the ABCD approach when she says:

> Here at RUCE, we just do the development work and try and work with the principles of building relationships, mutually beneficial and reciprocal partnerships, and sustainable ideas (Programme Director, 2024).

The director went on and gave more details regarding RUCE's implementation of the ABCD approach when she stated that:

> For us, the principle of community engagement is to build relationships with people. You never get to know people if you never bridge the divide and if you don't get to know the individuals. So, we set up the Siyakhana@Makhanda project, which means let's build Makhanda together (Programme Director, 2024).

In the interviews with the student facilitators, the notion that ABCD partnerships are built on reciprocal relationships whose end goal is mutually beneficial community development is corroborated. Hence, the student facilitators argue that it is necessary for ABCD to be implemented with the purpose of being mutually beneficial to all stakeholders involved. This is portrayed in one of the student facilitator's statements when she is explaining the prominence reciprocal relationships with community partners have in the programme:

> The objective of the programme is reciprocity, so like meeting one another halfway and collaborating (Student Facilitator 1, 2024).

The same student facilitator elaborates and speaks more about the prominence they place on reciprocal relationships with the community partners. In her words:

> We are a communal space here in Makhanda, we're very big on meeting one another halfway. We believe in the spirit of reciprocity and collaboration. We don't believe in charity work. We don't believe in "oh shame we have so much and we're willing to give". We [rather] believe in "we are fully equipped with the knowledge we have and the skills and the adaptation of change, so why don't we share and distribute that to the youth who are so eager and interested in being insightful with what's going on in our programmes?" (Student Facilitator 1, 2024).

Another student facilitator shares similar sentiments as evident in the following comments:

> …[needs-based approaches] are an issue to the idea of community engagement itself and its principles. [Community engagement] is not one to be directed [at needs]. It is based on a mutually-based approach, so using a needs-based [approach] would be disregarding the principles of community engagement that we know and live by (Student Facilitator 9, 2024).

The experiences of these two student facilitators highlight how much they reject the needs-based approach to community development and instead prefer reciprocity as the strategy for the implementation of ABCD. It also portrays how much significance this principle has in the mindsets of some the student facilitators which has determined how they engage with their community partners.

When speaking on the significance of reciprocal relationships with their community partners, another student facilitator adds that the ABCD approach for the programme is also implemented as an expression of *Ubuntu* and active citizenship:

> When you now apply the ABCD approach, you are able to embody the principle of *Ubuntu*, you know, it brings you down to humanity, and you're able to be an active citizen in a democracy. Also, if now you're coming together to partner with the community partner and you partner together, whether you are there or not, I think it [the project] can still be sustainable. It can go forward. For instance, students come and go at Rhodes university. What happens to the community partner? So, if the community partner and the students have an equitable relationship but can also bridge in the element of sustainability, that means the community partners, since they are located in Makhanda and from Makhanda, they'll be able to sustain whatever that they are doing with their student volunteers. Hence, I advocate for the ABCD approach for sustainability reasons and also to promote the element of democracy, because we all have to be engaged citizens in order to make this democracy a success. It's not a one-way street and it's very important to notice and also to acknowledge that in that [project] process the resources that all parties are bringing in, there is something that both parties are gaining at the end of the day (Student Facilitator 3, 2024).

This student facilitator's experience shows the extent of the rejection of the needs-based approach by some of the student facilitators. It shows how some of the student facilitators have become a living embodiment of the ABCD approach by relating participation to their citizenship and life philosophy. As mentioned earlier in Chapter Two, many scholars see citizen participation as a significant and beneficial component of participatory development interventions (Irvin and Stansbury, 2003; Christens and Speer, 2006; Khan and Anjum, 2013). Also, as noted by Pretorius and Nel (2012:10), social capital is rooted in the philanthropy of the community, which is based on "the horizontal relations among people who practice the principles of 'Ubuntu'".

However, not all the student facilitators reject the needs-based approach. One of the student facilitators advocates for the implementation of the needs-based approach in certain situations. The student facilitator argued that, on the one hand, the strength of the needs-based approach is that it is simple to implement and speeds up the process of community development but has a weakness of being one-sided (it does not build relationships). On the other hand, the asset-based approach has the strength of nurturing reciprocal relationships but has the weakness of being challenging to implement and is also time-consuming. In her words:

> I feel like certain situations call for that [needs-based approach] like especially this year if someone could just give her [the community partner] some of the stuff, it would have made everything much easier, but with this asset-based [approach], it's like you're able to repurpose what you have and take it into account more better than if you were just given it. So, I feel like it is better in some senses depending on what you're looking at. So, if you're looking at time, sometimes just give the person what they need. But if you're trying to create a relationship, if you're trying to be sustainable, if you want them to use what they have and actually see the value in what they have to offer then [ABCD] it's the better option (Student Facilitator 8, 2024).

The above excerpt suggests that there are mixed feelings and experiences of ABCD among some student facilitators. All the student facilitators in this study support the ABCD approach; however, it seems some of the student facilitators, like the one who gave the statement above, would like for the needs-based approach to also be implemented in certain situations, such as time-sensitive situations.

Moreover, the director of RUCE, also seems to have a similar outlook of combining the asset-based and the needs-based approach as the student facilitator above. The director expresses her full support for the ABCD approach but cautions not to have tunnel vision when it comes to how community development is approached. She advises that there should be openness towards also considering the challenges of communities, not just their assets. In her words:

> …I think the ABCD approach does its job of shifting people away from the old deficit ways of thinking to something much more positive, but we have to be really cautious with the language we use when we work in this space because the asset-based approach and words like social capital came from development aid organisations into this country. So, we are a bit cautious of writing about asset-based and we'd rather write about participatory development because we don't only see the assets of communities, we also see their challenges and their weaknesses.

> Because when you're involved in any human development process together, you learn from each other and you have to know what the challenges or weaknesses you're working with, as well as the strengths, so to be real in the space, you've got to recognise that and situate yourself in the community when you work with them. You're not working on them or for them, you're working with them. And as it's evolved, the process of helping them shift from one position to a better place. You are growing in sync with them. So yeah, I just caution, you know, about that [ABCD approach] because it came in with development aid agencies and I think what we're developing now is a far more original, authentic partnership that recognises strengths and challenges on both sides and that feels inextricably connected to each other. Knowing your future is my future. My future is your future (Programme Director, 2024).

The director elaborates further, emphasising the significance of not isolating a community from its challenges by only focusing on its assets. She asserts that to develop a community, both its assets and challenges should be considered:

> You see that [only focusing on assets] is changing in our narrative because when we talk about our partnership, and we want an equal partnership, and we want reciprocity. Then you've got to talk about the assets and the challenges of both parties. Because it's not only the growth of one party now. Talking about transforming this university, if we're going to transform and reposition this university, we have to understand that it can't exist in isolation of its community, it's inextricably bound to the community, its liberation is dependent on the communities, and vice versa. Then we have to talk about the challenges here. What are the structural challenges? The cultural challenges? You know, what are the things that inhibit this kind of partnership from blossoming? So, we no longer can just talk of assets of one particular group and see it, you know, as one group, lifting another group, no, it can't work like that. So yeah, so within us, you know, we use assets, we still talk about assets, but we understand very, very well that we're talking about our assets and our weaknesses in that process together as well (Programme Director, 2024).

These findings suggest that the Siyakhana@Makhanda programme implements the ABCD approach with the recognition of the significance of having reciprocal relationships. The programme recognises that community members are valuable partners who possess knowledge, skills, and experiences that are essential to community development. Therefore, student facilitators understand that community partners are active participants in their development and that their relationship is not only equal but should also be reciprocal.

These findings are consistent with Harrison et al.'s (2019) findings which suggest that nurturing reciprocal relationships is a crucial feature of the ABCD approach that disrupts the dependence that comes with the needs-based approach and improves the quality of life. However, the findings in this study also suggested that some student facilitators do not reject the needs-based approach, but rather believe that the needs-based approach can be convenient for certain situations, especially time-sensitive situations. These findings are similar to the findings in Nel et al.'s (2023) study which found that student facilitators combined the ABCD approach with other approaches, including the needs-based approach, depending on the situation.

5.4 Effectiveness: Inclusive, Empowering, and Sustainable Engagement

To understand the effectiveness of the implementation of the ABCD approach by the Siyakhana@Makhanda programme, several questions were posed regarding the effectiveness of the programme. The main theme that emerged was that the programme utilises inclusiveness, empowerment, and sustainability as features that determine the effectiveness of their implementation of the ABCD approach with their community partners. Based on the literature reviewed earlier in Chapter Two, inclusiveness, empowerment, and sustainability are integral features that determine effectiveness in participatory development interventions (Agarwal, 2001; Williams, 2004; Morgan, 2016) such as the ABCD approach (Mathie and Cunningham, 2003; Wilke, 2006). The findings in this study suggest that the implementation of the ABCD approach by the programme is effective in that there is inclusiveness in the project decision-making process, there is revitalisation of consciousness (empowerment) and improved capacity, and implemented goals are sustained through continuous maintenance after the project cycle concludes.

Moreover, there are subthemes that emerged from the main theme of inclusive, empowering, and sustainable engagement. According to the respondents in this study, the implementation of the ABCD approach is effective in this context because there is shared ownership of the project cycle processes. The project cycle process in its entirety has stimulated the agency of both student facilitators and community partners. ABCD training has empowered both the facilitators and community partners by building their capacity to develop their communities. Sustainable maintenance of implemented goals by the student facilitators and community partners has ensured continuity of the various goals that are implemented. The following

paragraphs present these subthemes, which include shared ownership of the project cycle process, stimulating agency and building capacity, and the continuous maintenance of implemented goals.

5.4.1 Inclusiveness: Shared Ownership of the Project Cycle Process

One of the overarching principles of participatory development is inclusiveness. This pertains to the inclusion of community partners in the decision-making processes of community development interventions (Agarwal, 2001). Participatory development entails adopting a more inclusive and bottom-up approach which aims at promoting local community inclusion and having civil society involvement in policy development and agenda setting decision-making (Kapoor, 2005). As best said by Kyamusugulwa (2013:1267), "the more people are involved in the decision-making process for a project, the more the community is driving the project".

Given this expectation of participatory development interventions, this study sought to understand how inclusive the decision-making processes have been in the implementation of the highly participatory ABCD approach by the Siyakhana@Makhanda programme. The findings suggest that the respondents experience the project cycle process as inclusive, and that ownership of the project cycle process was shared. However, lack of communication and time management issues between the student facilitators and the community partners restrict the project cycle process from being inclusive to its full potential.

The community partners interviewed for this study gave positive reviews when asked about the inclusiveness of their projects. The community partners describe their experience of the project cycle process as shared and generally inclusive and collaborative. These are some of the comments that capture one of the community partner's experiences when asked if there was inclusiveness in the decision-making process of their project:

> Absolutely, from the beginning and they listen [the student facilitators]. I think that's one of their biggest strengths. They really listen like this team was like "so, what are your challenges?" And we had a conversation. We actually sat here in this class in a circle, and we were just exploring ideas. We were like, "okay, this is not really something practical that we can work on, but this is". It was really a joint effort, joint effort [for emphasis]. So, even though I was the

> one that was liaising mostly with the students, my colleagues were fully involved as well. So, whenever something was decided on, like here with the students, I would take it back to my team and I would find out from them if they're on board. If they have any suggestions or with practical implementation, and you know, on the day, like all hands-on deck, everyone was involved, and it was really good to see. We sometimes even got parents involved, like with the gardening day. So yeah, I think it was really like all stakeholders going together (Community Partner 1, 2024).

The experience of this community partner is positive as their project cycle process was inclusive and shared throughout. All stakeholders' voices are heard, starting from student facilitators to the community partner, and even the parents of the young learners at the ECDC.

However, unlike the above community partner, not all the community partners feel like they are fully involved in their projects. One of the community partners feels like she could have done more in the project and blamed communication issues between herself and the student facilitators for the project process not being fully shared. Here are some of the comments that the community partner makes regarding this:

> The issue was that communication was difficult, which made it hard to find time. For example, in the book corner [project goal], they were the ones who brought the materials - I didn't bring anything at all. The only thing I brought was a pair of scissors, and we just used them to cut things. I just brought what I had. I didn't do anything; I also didn't collect any books - I didn't know what else to do. I didn't know how to do this, and I didn't even know how it was supposed to be like, you see. So, it was something like that. Sometimes, like me, you're unsure about what to bring. But if we had the time to sit down and talk, maybe if they [the student facilitators] suggested they will collect books, so if I can find the books, I can bring them as well. The books that were here belong to this place. I didn't go out to ask for books, you see. It was them who went and brought books. If I had known I needed to ask for books, I would have gone myself to inquire and see what I could get (Community Partner 2, 2024).

This community partner's experience taught her that the project has to be planned and communicated better so that everyone can be involved in the process. This community partner does not shy away from taking accountability and does not put all the blame for the lack of communication and planning on the student facilitators but is conscious of recognising that both parties should have planned the project a bit better so that she can be involved more.

The same community partner went on to express gratitude for the dedication shown by the student facilitators regardless of the challenges they faced in their project:

> What I liked is that our partners really made an effort to cooperate with us, even when they were not always available. Despite the challenges, they worked hard to meet with us, and in the end, we succeeded. Our efforts continued, and we achieved one goal. What I've seen that I need to change in myself, I'm not sure if I'll be able to, but I've realised that I must foster cooperation. The cooperation I offered was making time. I didn't overlook anything - just as they tried, I tried too. That is what I will change. If I work with them again next year, I'll aim to do something similar to what they're doing. That's a change I can make (Community Partner 2, 2024).

The student facilitators also describe their experiences regarding the effectiveness of the programme. Similarly, they describe their relationships with the community partners as inclusive, but time management and communication issues were experienced as an obstruction to the realisation of the full potential of the projects. Nonetheless, the student facilitators emphasise that the positives outweighed the negatives. Regarding this, one of the student facilitators states that he felt involved and well-adjusted in the programme and the division as a whole. In his words:

> I heavily appreciate the inclusivity. Inclusivity in the sense that when you are very unsure of something. You can approach RUCE. The staff is very welcoming as well, and that is something I appreciate because there are a lot of programmes. Imagine as the person on the ground, as the CE Rep [community engagement representative for a student residence], that you are not supported by the people above you. That will not work out. So, in regard of inclusivity. You can literally go there anytime, send a WhatsApp or e-mail and that is what I heavily appreciate about this community of inclusivity (Student Facilitator 4, 2024).

This student facilitator's experience highlights the inclusive organisational support that RUCE provides. This suggests that the student's engagement with the community is well-guided by the organisation.

Another student facilitator shares similar sentiments but speaks specifically to the support the programme provides when he explains that:

> …Siyakhana@Makhanda basically means “we are building” so the idea behind it is that it’s not an individualistic kind of approach. The programme looks at who is building, whether everyone in the programme is involved - that is students, the university, and the larger community coming together to tackle issues that they think are problems in the society (Student Facilitator 9, 2024).

The Siyakhana@Makhanda coordinator emphasises the importance of including all stakeholders in community projects and makes an example of a project in Makhanda-East that failed because of its exclusiveness. In her words:

> …for example, what is happening in Extension 10 [a community in Makhanda-East] where they [the state] were building a school, but the community was not involved and now you see there was vandalism because there’s no ownership in that community, they don’t even know what’s happening. But if they [the state] had called a meeting and communicated with the people and told them the vision they [the community] would have advised differently and there’s more opportunities of sustaining that [the project] (Programme Coordinator 1, 2024).

These findings suggest that the practice of ABCD in Makhanda has led to inclusive partnerships between the Siyakhana@Makhanda programme and the community partners. The findings are reminiscent of Mathie and Cunningham’s (2003:483) argument that when you join ABCD with the principles of participatory development, they enhance “the capacities of people who previously have been excluded from participating in decision-making and from enjoying the rights of their citizenship”.

Inclusiveness is also advocated for in Dwyer-Voss and Bishop’s (2019:2) study which states that “ABCD invests heavily in building relationships among those traditionally excluded from decision-making and power structures, therefore, the approach values each traditionally excluded person, inviting and welcoming them into decision-making roles”. However, the community partners and the student facilitators also encountered some communication issues which disrupted the inclusiveness of the projects and led to the project cycle process not being fully shared between the community partners and the student facilitators which suggests that the project cycle process can be flawed and not fully inclusive. These challenges are discussed in length later.

5.4.2 Empowerment: Stimulating Agency and Building Capacity

Participatory development interventions are often defined in line with the role of empowering. For example, Mohan and Stokke (2000) state that participatory development interventions should empower by stimulating the agency of community members to consciously take over their own development. Therefore, stimulating agency fortifies the local as a site of empowerment and knowledge (Mohan and Stokke, 2000). To stimulate the consciousness and agency of student facilitators and community partners, community development initiatives are expected to build the capacity of their community partners by sharing and co-creating knowledge with them. This way they empower their community partners to be self-reliant.

Given this expectation of empowerment by participatory development interventions and with the Siyakhana@Makhanda programme utilising ABCD which is a highly participatory approach, this study sought to find out if the community partners and student facilitators see themselves as agents who were empowered to consciously take over their own development. The findings suggest that the respondents in this study feel psychologically empowered to consciously take charge of their own development.

When being interviewed for this study, the community partners commend the programme for being empowering. One of the community partners shares how the energy in their school had been sluggish and that the student facilitators empowered their energy towards doing more to develop their school and not wait for support from other people. The community partner is an ECDC that is on the Rhodes University campus and caters for the children of staff members. The following comments capture the community partner's experience regarding the stimulation of their agency and taking their development into their own hands:

> There are times when it feels like things can be stagnant, like especially at Rhodes [University]. Well, I guess it feels like sometimes there's not a lot of support and there's not a lot of people that follow through. So, you put in a request for something to be done with [the university's] maintenance [division], [but it] never gets done or you wait for months before seeing action. The students [facilitators] gave us new energy, it really helped us to see there is actually potential at our school. I think everyone is driven to sort of just do more because we felt a little stagnant at the school. It felt like there was not a lot of progress in development because we weren't getting the support that we needed like in terms of the Rhodes [University] structures.

> But that's definitely changed now because we've got so many people involved and people can see what's happening around the school. So, like you step in and it's brighter and the energy is more positive, I won't say it's only because of the students, but I would definitely say they've contributed a lot to that vibrant energy and just the desire to do more, to see development (Community Partner 1, 2024).

The community partner's prior experience had taught them that they should always wait to be supported by other people to develop their school. Through the implementation of the ABCD approach by the programme, she came to see that they have the assets, resources, and the capability to develop their ECDC themselves. The community partner also expresses how the energy that came out of realising that they do not only have the assets but the capacity to develop themselves with little to no support is liberating and makes them desire, dream, and aspire to do more.

Despite mentioning some communication and time management issues that disrupted the inclusivity of the projects earlier, another community partner states that nevertheless they felt empowered by the project:

> We appreciate the fact that, even though there was no money for us or our partners, we were able to achieve our goal by using what we had. There was no money, but we took what we had and made it work. What happened was, they collected the books, you see. To someone else, that book, which was no longer being used by the previous person, has been passed on to someone who hasn't used it before. Now, it will be received and put to good use by another person. I like the idea that, even if you don't have money, you can still find a way to make things work (Community Partner 2, 2024).

The agency of this community partner was stimulated such that they became conscious of the assets around them that would develop their school. In their case, they saw that they did not need money to create a library corner for their learners. They did everything using materials that were second hand and did not spend any money. These findings embody the local economy principle of the ABCD approach which is based on having non-monetary forms of exchange that contribute to the local economy (Russel and McKnight, 2018).

The experiences of student facilitators interviewed in this study confirm the above comments made by the community partner. One of the student facilitators reflects how crucial empowerment is for their project in the remarks below:

> What I appreciate about the programme is the autonomy, you know, being entrusted as CE reps [community engagement representatives]. The autonomy that CE reps [community engagement representatives] have with their community partners to go out there and learn for themselves. It just teaches them how to be conscious, you know, how to be conscious leaders, it just shapes their leadership skills and also shapes their project management skills. Because project management requires you to plan with the plenary and the execution phase. So basically, plenary, implementation, and execution impose the project management skills and that's what we see in our CE reps [community engagement representatives] that they are able to achieve that. They are also able to be empathetic. Basically, the programme does shape you to become an engaged, conscious citizen, you are able to relate with your own surrounding, and you're also being able to apply some skills that you learned maybe from your academics into those initiatives (Student Facilitator 3, 2024).

Another student facilitator shares similar sentiments, saying:

> I thought it was just a thing of giving but then now I'm so conscious of the fact I can build a relationship with the person that I'm helping. I can also, like, receive in the relationship. So, it's just like [the project] changed my perspective in that way. Also, it's like these people do have something to offer, but the assumption is that I'm giving; however, if you look at it from the perspective that they [the programme] had us go through, it was like "oh, you know, I'm actually getting something from this interaction" (Student Facilitator 8, 2024).

The experiences of these student facilitators opened their minds and made them conscious of the benefits they can receive from the community partners instead of just thinking that they are there just to give. The student facilitators saw that community development in this space is based on a ying and yang philosophy in which both parties give and receive from each other.

The Siyakhana@Makhanda coordinator, who has been in the field of community engagement for more than ten years, says that one of the biggest successes that they have had with the community is stimulating their agency and watching them take over the community development space:

> I think our community partners ways of thinking have also changed, because before the programme we used to have students that go to preschools and that just read to the kids and leave. But now, because there's so much engagement, there's so much ownership on their side, there's so much learning. We're learning together when we have trainings, they come, they participate. When there's a workshop, they also grow. I think it's more than 10 years now that I've been here, but since that time I've seen the level of maturity within our preschools and the ways of thinking and how they're engaging with our students because they used to be very passive people and not very active. But now when students come, they're engaging with them. They're asking them questions, you know, they're very hands on. I think I really enjoy seeing that tradition, like that growth. Now when we're having our reflection meetings, people [are] interrogating things, [asking] why not? Why are we doing this? Why are we not doing that? So, I've seen the level of engagement and participation, active participation from our partners. And holding our students [facilitators] accountable when they don't commit because they find that students would commit to something, but they don't keep the momentum going [so you have] our community partners calling them out that if we had promised to do this, we have to do so. I've seen how they are now engaging and participating, and the active participation is quite something remarkable to watch (Programme Coordinator 1, 2024).

The director of RUCE, also shared similar sentiments stating that one of the joys of her life is seeing the communities of Makhanda move from being passive receivers to taking over their own development. In her words:

> We taught the community that all parts of Makhanda are rich in assets. Everybody has something to give, and everybody has something to receive. So, I think that idea of I can only give, or I can only receive was dealt a big blow and we were able to move to say we can share, we've each got something to share. So that was another important strategy we use to shift the mindsets of people in our university and our community partner organisations as well to start seeing their strengths in a different light. From this side for our Rhodes [University] community, to start seeing the amazing strengths our community has got and the potential of working with them as equal partners (Programme Director, 2024).

When it comes to building capacity, capacity is regarded as an important principle of participatory development interventions. Having capacity is understood as gaining skills necessary to accomplish goals, fulfil purposes, and to make an impact (Chaumba and Van Geene, 2003:69). Capacity building is also understood in relation to increasing human and

social capital which makes community members agentic actors who can bring about sustainable change in their lives (Morgan, 2016:176).

Given the significance of this principle of building capacity, this study sought to find out if the community partners and student facilitators feel that their capacity is improving during the course of the project cycle process. The findings suggest that the respondents' capacity is improving during the course of their projects.

The community partners interviewed for this study applaud the Siyakhana@Makhanda programme for building their capacity by training them on the ABCD approach. Consider these comments from one of the community partners which confirm the improvement of their capacity:

> …we had quite a lot of training and a lot of contact and communication with each other throughout, which has obviously strengthened our relationship and it's also clarified a lot of things. For me, it's helped me to understand how to approach the community engagement and how to work a little better with our resources and to use what we have in the best way possible (Community Partner 1, 2024).

This community partner's capacity improved when they learned how to better handle their resources and how to use their assets efficiently.

The Siyakhana@Makhanda programme coordinator explained how building capacity builds the relationships that are necessary for the effective implementation of the ABCD approach:

> …we go through a cycle where students are being trained, being introduced to their community partners and after that they have to build relationship (Programme Coordinator 1, 2024).

The student facilitators also gave admiration and praise to the programme. One of the student facilitators added that the training they received made her shed the burden put on her shoulders when she initially thought the project process would consist of them giving to the community partners:

> I think it's a very good programme, you know, because we did attend the training about the ABCD, you know, some of us come into the university, like I stated, not knowing what

> community engagement is about, but then having attended that training, you get to learn deeper things, you know, you get to acquire insights as to what exactly community engagement is and it kind of removes the burden of having to think it's my burden to help the person (Student Facilitator 5, 2024).

These findings suggest that the Siyakhana@Makhanda programme effectively empowers through sharing knowledge about ABCD to the community partners and student facilitators. Through the programme's ABCD training and the student's facilitation during the implementation of the ABCD approach, community partners are able to see their hidden assets and access their untapped capacity. Students are also empowered to be conscious of the importance of recognising the potential of community partners and the knowledge they can gain from them.

These findings are similar to those of Kamelia et al. (2023) whose study found that the ABCD approach facilitates the development of communities by empowering individuals and groups to take initiative and develop solutions to their problems. In this case, the Village Community Empowerment Programme implemented the ABCD approach to empower the Cigugurgirang Village in Thailand to use their assets to develop their community into an agricultural development village (Kamelia et al., 2023:103). Mathie and Cunningham (2003) also state that external agencies that practice the ABCD approach distribute power through leading by stepping back, strengthening the social relationships necessary for collective action, and encouraging their agencies to be means by which communities can engage on their own terms. This is something that can be seen in how the Siyakhana@Makhanda programme engages with their community partners.

5.4.3 Sustainability: Continuous Maintenance of Implemented Goals

As Cleaver (1999) stated, it is important not to make bold, heroic claims about participatory development without providing evidence. Cleaver (1999) said this with the criticisms levelled against participatory development in mind - that there has been assumed sustainability of participatory development interventions with little empirical evidence. Therefore, participatory development is being criticised as a practice of faith in sustainability, something practitioners believe in, rarely see, and never question.

However, in contrast, the findings from this study suggest that the implementation of ABCD by the Siyakhana@Makhanda programme ensures that when exiting a project, community partners and student facilitators take the necessary measures to guarantee the sustainable maintenance of implemented goals. For example, a preschool garden is left with the necessary tools to keep it alive and young kids are taught the importance of maintaining and how to maintain it every day to ensure it stays alive. Therefore, by not assuming but enacting measures for the sustainability of implemented goals after the project has concluded, ensures the sustainability of the goal.

In the interviews conducted, the community partners affirmed the view that ABCD promotes sustainability. Here are some comments by one of the community partners affirming this:

> We have spoken about it, so waiting, the gardening issue came up. I told them that we had a garden before and it's now nonexistent. I said our main issue is maintenance and sustainability we can't start something if it's not going to be successful. Like if we don't have a plan to keep it going. So that was one of the main issues that came up. So, we brainstormed ideas for that. One of them said that he's going to be involved moving forward with the garden because he felt very connected to the project and he asked if he could oversee things when he's able to. So that will happen. They also helped us to learn a bit more about how to maintain it (Community Partner 1, 2024).

One of the student facilitators also attested to how the ABCD approach allows for sustainability through the cultivation of mutually beneficial relationships:

> …and one thing also that's sustainable are relationships, the social cohesion, and those engagements, they don't just end with a certificate for students that engaged in the initiative, but there are relationships that are established between the community partners and the students, which goes beyond that. There's more growth and yeah, that's how I see the programme as sustainable, and I also see students going back home and try to implement these kinds of initiatives in their own communities. Because they saw that this model [ABCD] is working for Makhanda and thought now let me take it back to my community and that is where the sustainability comes and it comes in terms of building rapport relationships, the continuity of the initiatives, and also borrowing from this model and taking it back to their own communities (Student Facilitator 3, 2024).

The programme coordinator for Engaged Citizenry highlighted how the self-reliance promoted by the ABCD approach also encourages sustainability:

> …the successes have been the community being able to continue and be self-reliant and how it's being sustainable over the years (Programme Coordinator 2, 2024).

These findings suggest that the Siyakhana@Makhanda programme takes measures to ensure sustainability of their projects. This has led to the self-reliance of the community partners with them being able to continue with the implemented goals after the project has concluded.

These findings provide empirical evidence of the sustainability of the ABCD approach and are in line with the Collaborative for Neighbourhood Transformation's (2024) description of ABCD which states that it is a "strategy for sustainable community-driven development".

5.5 Challenges: Participation Apathy and Implementation Hurdles

Despite the many positive experiences of ABCD highlighted above, there were some challenges that disrupted the implementation and effectiveness of the ABCD approach in this context. To understand the challenges that the ABCD approach encounters in Makhanda, various questions regarding the challenges the ABCD approach faces in this context were posed. Observation of the presentations during the project cycle process also provided some answers to the questions related to the challenges that the ABCD approach encounters in this context. The first challenge that emerged is that there is participation apathy among students at Rhodes University. The second challenge is that there are some implementation hurdles that student facilitators and community partners face.

Moreover, there are subthemes that emerged from the challenges of participation apathy and implementation hurdles. According to the respondents in this study, the implementation of the ABCD approach is disrupted in this context by apathy in relation to student participation. A lack of communication and poor time-management between student facilitators and community partners also disrupts the implementation and effectiveness of the ABCD approach in this context. The following paragraphs present these subthemes, which include apathy in student participation, and a lack of communication and poor time-management between student facilitators and community partners.

5.5.1 Apathy in Student Participation

When observing the presentations that are part of the project cycle process, some of the student facilitators mentioned that they struggled to meet some of their goals because of a lack of volunteering from their fellow students. This led to them not having enough hands to implement some of their goals and had to sacrifice some of their goals because of not having enough help from their fellow students. This suggests that there is participation apathy in the student body at Rhodes University.

During the presentations, one of the student facilitators that was presenting stated that their intention was to increase the participation numbers of community engagement participation among the students in their dining hall (where, usually, students from four or more surrounding residences eat). Consider the following comments:

> …so, one of our primary goals as community engagement representatives was to significantly increase our [dining] hall presence and involvement in community engagement activities. If you guys know our [dining] hall, you would know that [students from] our [dining] hall generally do not participate in anything. So, we really wanted to change that and just create a positive attitude towards participation (Presenting Student Facilitator 1, 2024).

In the questions and answers sessions after the presentations, one of the student facilitators also raised a similar issue of not getting enough help from the students in their dining hall and that this leads to them struggling to implement some of their goals:

> …the biggest challenge that we face is that people [students] from the [dining] hall were not participating at all. So, to try and fix that, we would post on our [WhatsApp] statuses to invite people from outside, so a lot of people responded and said “hey, I’m interested in this”. So, that challenge, we fixed it by opening up to more people [students] and not just strictly making it for our [dining] hall (Presenting Student Facilitator 2).

This student facilitator and her group managed to get ahead of the lack of participation challenge by also inviting students outside of their dining hall to increase the number of student volunteers to help with implementing their project goals with their community partner.

The challenge of participation apathy in the student body is also mentioned in the interviews conducted with the student facilitators. One of the student facilitators talked about how they still need a lot more students taking part in community engagement in the university as can be seen in the following comments:

> …I think we need to put a lot of people involved in community engagement. There's a low level of student engagement in that. Therefore, I think if we can all come together and have a general understanding of what community engagement is, what asset-based community model entails, how we can contribute together [it would make a big difference] (Student Facilitator 9, 2024).

However, in contrast, some of the student facilitators did not face this challenge as they cited high turnouts of volunteers from their residences and dining halls who were eager to participate. Consider the following comments:

> We didn't face any challenges as we thought we would because our people were more engaging. We had volunteers from our houses [university residences] who were willing to participate (Presenting Student Facilitator 3, 2024).

Therefore, these findings suggest that apathy in student participation is a common issue which disrupts the implementation of some project goals that the student facilitators and community partners have. However, there were a few student facilitators who did not experience this issue as they were lucky enough to be surrounded by students who were willing to volunteer and participate in this community engagement initiative.

5.5.2 Lack of Communication and Poor Time Management

Van Schalkwyk (2015) highlights that there are often implementation challenges that disrupt participatory initiatives in South Africa. Hence, implementation of community development approaches needs careful attention in this context (Van Schalkwyk, 2015). Regarding this, there are implementation hurdles that disrupt the project cycle process in the Siyakhana@Makhanda programme. As briefly mentioned earlier in this chapter, one of the major hurdles for the implementation of ABCD in this programme is a lack of communication and poor time

management between student facilitators and community partners during their project cycle process which leads to the erosion of trust and unattained goals.

One of the community partners commented that their current partnership with the student facilitators has been a failure this year as they were not able to effectively implement their project goals because of a lack of communication and poor time management between them and the student facilitators. The community partner shares their experience in the following comments:

> They were not prepared [student facilitators]. Even the activities that were done came with us because they didn't have enough time to prepare everything properly. Even now, we've taken over the activities. We were [all] supposed to assist the children, but they were distracted, trying to contact others on their phones to figure out where they were. As a result, they struggled to focus on what we were doing. They are busy searching for each other while we're here. Even when we had to go for the presentation, there was no communication that they were going to be late. I'm sitting here waiting, and I don't understand why they don't communicate with us on time. Firstly, they never announced that they were coming to the school. They just showed up. Even worse, I was the one traveling with them, and we didn't even know each other's names. I only know one of the students' names, I don't know the others because we never spoke, and they were not interested. They didn't seem to care about what they were doing. It seems like they were forced to come because even when they interacted with the children, there was no enthusiasm. I was forced to be the one to tell them what to do because when they arrived, they just stood there (Community Partner 3, 2024).

The community partner elaborated further and shared more of their challenging partnership with the student facilitators:

> They don't show interest or ask how they can help. In the past [previous annual partnerships], some students would call before they come, someone would call. They would normally make sure that we meet and have a meeting with them, the first time at the beginning of the year, where we would come, introduce ourselves, and explain who we are, then share the goals of our centre. Then, what we did was to create a WhatsApp group for everyone to communicate in. We set up the WhatsApp group to communicate about things like, "*hayike*, ma'am on a certain day, we're planning to come at a specific time", you see. It's like if there are changes in plans, they would communicate and say, "sorry, ma'am, we won't be able to come on the planned day. Instead, we'll come on another day". [Previous student facilitators] understood

> this. They would also let us know what they were planning to do, what the theme would be, and if they needed to be prepared for anything. We would tell them that our theme currently is focusing on animals. So, maybe what you can bring with you, if you have anything related to animals, is something you can make by hand and share with us. If you have a story prepared, bring it along. If you have an animal poster, bring that too. So, they would come prepared, you see, because they asked us what we're doing and how they can help or assist us. This year, they've really disappointed us. We tried as much as we could to engage, but it didn't work out (Community Partner 3, 2024).

During observation of the presentations, the student facilitators responded to this by taking responsibility and explaining the reasons behind the communication and time-management challenges they faced with their community partners. Here are some of the responses explaining this issue:

> So, the first challenge was execution of initiatives that we have planned that failed because we couldn't execute our planned Spring Day event [project goal] because of poor communication. Another challenge we faced was to manage time. So, Semester 2 was quite hectic for all of us as CE reps [residence community engagement representatives]. So, it had been challenging to put time into community engagement for this semester [because of academic pressure] and our schedules were clashing (Presenting Student Facilitator 4, 2024).

Furthermore, in the interviews conducted, one of the student facilitators explained that it is hard to juggle their academics with community engagement and other extracurricular activities they participate in:

> It's out of my control, time is of the essence. So as someone who's juggling my academic, personal life, and other curricular activities, because I don't just do [community engagement] as my curricular activities. I just wish in some way, like a miracle, everything could just fall into place, you know, like everything. Like a 25/25/25/25. So, out of 100, everything dissected into 25. But if I'm going to be realistic, there are degrees to this. So, firstly, academics comes first. Secondly, I come first. Thirdly, it's then my other curricular activities, such as, RUCE and the garden and other societies that I partake in. So, I think, it's just time management that I wish could be that sense of alteration in what we as community engagement representatives have been doing for this year (Student Facilitator 1, 2024).

These findings suggest that lack of communication and poor time-management between the student facilitators and the community partners were one of the significant challenges that disrupted the implementation and effectiveness of the ABCD approach in this context. Also, the students are not sure how this issue can be overcome because they will always put their academics first and that will always interfere with the implementation of the project goals with their community partners.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has described and analysed the findings from the interviews conducted with study participants involved in the Siyakhana@Makhanda programme. When analysing the findings using the principles of participatory development and the ABCD approach, it was revealed that the programme uses implementation strategies that target social cohesion between the student facilitators and the community partners. It was also revealed that the programme is effective because it uses inclusive, empowering, and sustainable engagement with the communities it is involved in. Lastly, the findings revealed that there is apathy in student participation, and there are communication and poor time-management challenges that the programme encounters in this context.

These findings contribute to the dialogue surrounding the implementation, effectiveness, and challenges of ABCD as a community engagement approach at universities. The findings highlighted the implementation strategies the programme utilises, how effective the programme is, and the challenges that disrupt the implementation strategies and effectiveness of ABCD by the programme which were in line with the principles of participatory development and the ABCD approach. Therefore, it would be helpful for community engagement programmes at other universities to apply the implementation strategies, the engagement method, and also consider the challenges prevalent in this context.

Chapter Six

Conclusion: Lessons from Makhanda

6.1 Introduction

This chapter recaps the findings of this study and concludes the study. More specifically, the chapter provides a summary of the findings in relation to the objectives of the study, the overall conclusion of the study, and the limitations of the study with future study recommendations. This study has three objectives, namely to assess the implementation strategies, effectiveness, and challenges of the ABCD approach in the Makhanda context. After analysing stakeholders' experiences and assessing the implementation strategies, effectiveness, and challenges of the ABCD approach, the study found that the implementation strategies led to effective implementation of the ABCD approach in this context. However, the study also found that there are some challenges which disrupt the effective implementation of the ABCD approach in this context.

The strategies utilised by the Siyakhana@Makhanda programme involve implementing the ABCD approach with the purpose of cultivating mutually beneficial partnerships through collaboration, facilitation (equal partnerships), and reciprocal relationships. The effectiveness of the implementation strategies depends on the maintenance of inclusive, empowering, and sustainable engagement with community partners by basing the implementation of the ABCD approach on shared ownership of the project cycle process, empowerment of all stakeholders (programme coordinators, student facilitators, and community partners) through improving capacity by sharing knowledge, resources, and skills, and developing continuity through sustainable implementation of project goals. There are also challenges that disrupt the effectiveness of the implementation strategies of the ABCD approach by the programme. These challenges include participation apathy, lack of communication, and poor time management. The challenges have potential to hinder the efficacy of the implementation of ABCD by community engagement programmes at universities.

6.2 Summary of Findings

The findings below are presented in line with the objectives of the study to show how each objective was met.

6.2.1 The First Objective: To Assess Implementation Strategies

The findings in this study suggest that the Siyakhana@Makhanda programme uses strategies which implement the ABCD approach with a purpose of cultivating mutually beneficial partnerships. Accordingly, analysis of the implementation strategies of the ABCD approach in Makhanda suggests that by cultivating mutually beneficial partnerships, engaging the community through forming collaborative alliances, having equal partnerships (through facilitation), and being reciprocal in their relationships with their community partners, community engagement programmes at universities can foster social cohesion. As found in the programme, this leads to community engagement programmes at universities actively contributing to a local economy that is built on assets and social connectedness. This is possible through collaboration, equal partnerships, and reciprocity with community partners.

Also, as found in the programme, cultivating a mindset of students being facilitators instead of experts of community development suggests that implementing ABCD by facilitating the project process and creating mutually beneficial partnerships, instead of inscribing authority over the process, can stimulate the agency of all stakeholders. Therefore, those deployed to communities must be seen as facilitators instead of experts. Programme coordinators and student facilitators must concentrate on creating reciprocal relationships that promote collaboration between all stakeholders. They can do this by working together with the community partners to find 'hidden' assets in the communities and also presenting their own assets. Analysis of the programme indicates that community engagement programmes at universities should prioritise cultivating mutually beneficial partnerships as a strategy of implementing the ABCD approach.

6.2.2 The Second Objective: To Assess Effectiveness

Analysis of the effectiveness of the ABCD approach in this context suggests that ABCD can be implemented effectively by community engagement programmes at universities. For it to be effective, the implementation of ABCD by community engagement programmes at universities should be based on inclusive, empowering, and sustainable engagement with all stakeholders.

Firstly, the importance placed on inclusiveness by the Siyakhana@Makhanda programme is a significant contributor to their effectiveness. In a context that still structurally resembles racial segregation (apartheid) and is still ravaged by poverty, unemployment, and despair, being included, and sharing ownership of a project cycle process puts a glimmer of confidence and optimism in the communities of Makhanda. Therefore, community engagement programmes at universities should have an inclusive strategy of community engagement that seeks to ensure that community members are valued as active partners, rather than passive participants. In their strategy, community engagement programmes should involve consistent dialogue, trust-building, and shared ownership in decision-making processes. By prioritising the work required to develop authentic relationships with communities, an inclusive strategy by community engagement programmes at universities may lead to powerful outcomes.

Secondly, in a context that has been failed by its local government in the deliverance of basic services, empowering Makhanda communities to take over their own development is also an important factor in the effective implementation of ABCD by the programme. Empowerment is often seen through the lens of organisations empowering the community partners; however, even though the community partners in this study did express feelings and experiences of being empowered, the findings also show that the reciprocal relationships made by community partners also allow for the programme coordinators and student facilitators to also benefit from the wisdom of community-based expertise and knowledge. Therefore, the programme is able to create meaningful ongoing relationships through contribution and co-creation and utilising the wisdom of community knowledge. This approach is empowering and has become valuable for the programme and has the potential to become valuable in other university-based community engagement programmes.

Thirdly, sustainability instils hope and courage that with the continuation of their current and future projects, student facilitators and community partners can desire, dream, and aspire to achieve more goals that lead to the development of their community. As this study shows, this is also essential for the effective implementation of the ABCD approach by the programme. Therefore, my analysis demonstrates that, in their implementation of the ABCD approach, community engagement programmes at universities should also prioritise the desires, dreams, and aspirations of the community partners. This illustrates, for community engagement programmes at universities, that sustainable community development goes beyond merely involving community partners in the project cycle process to actually creating meaningful,

ongoing relationships where community partners are encouraged to aim for the moon and shoot for the stars.

6.2.3 The Third Objective: To Assess Challenges

The first challenge is the lack of participation from the Rhodes University student body. Some student facilitators complained that their fellow students do not participate much in community engagement initiatives. This leads to the disruption of the implementation and effectiveness of the ABCD approach in this context. The findings suggest that apathy in student participation is a prevalent issue for RUCE. However, there were some student facilitators who did not experience participation apathy with their fellow students. Some residence dining halls experienced good turnouts with student volunteers who were eager to participate.

The second challenge is that there are some implementation hurdles in this context that may disrupt the implementation strategies and effectiveness of the ABCD approach. Lack of communication and poor time management show that the project cycle process can become complicated when working with students who have academic commitments and community partners who have work obligations. The findings indicate that lack of communication and poor time management can create a standstill in the project which can lead to certain, or all project goals not being achieved. This presents a challenge to the effective implementation of the ABCD approach. This challenge calls for community engagement programmes at universities to create clear communication channels and timetables that are cognisant of the schedules of the student facilitators and community partners.

Furthermore, in the Siyakhana@Makhanda programme, the position of a community engagement facilitator utilises students who are, despite their training, often inexperienced in the implementation of community development approaches on the ground. Speaking about service learning, Preece (2016:108) states that “university service learning often works with young students who do not have much experience with the implementation of community development approaches and have limited time to engage with the community”. This can also be said about university-community engagement as seen with the student facilitators in this study. Therefore, the effectiveness of community development projects that draw on student facilitators may be limited.

6.3 Limitations and Recommendations

This study is limited to fifteen study participants who are involved in the Siyakhana@Makhanda programme. This makes the sample size quite small and, as a result, restricts the generalisability of the findings. Nonetheless, the study's findings are significant enough to contribute to studies analysing the implementation and effectiveness of the ABCD approach in the community engagement field at universities.

Based on the study's findings, it is recommended that future studies explore the combination of the asset-based approach with other approaches such as the needs-based approach and the promotion of the desires, dreams, and aspirations of the community partners. It is also recommended that future studies further explore the challenges prevalent in relation to the implementation of the ABCD approach by community engagement programmes at universities.

6.4 Concluding Remarks

Despite being based on and established for the Makhanda context, the effective implementation of ABCD in this context by the Siyakhana@Makhanda programme demonstrates the generalisability of the ABCD approach among community engagement programmes at universities. Specifically, the programme provides insight into some of the necessary implementation strategies for effective implementation of ABCD by university-community engagement programmes in marginalised communities. The findings in this study suggest that the programme is utilising implementation strategies (cultivating mutually beneficial partnerships and basing their engagement with the community on inclusive, empowering, and sustainable principles) that allow them to effectively implement the ABCD approach in this context. Because of the implementation strategies, the programme can identify and cultivate assets while also creating meaningful ongoing relationships that recognise community challenges and, as a result, support community desires, dreams, and aspirations. Based on my analysis, this is something that community engagement programmes at universities should seek to encompass in their programmes. A shift towards combining the asset-based approach with other community development approaches that focus on both cultivating assets and supporting community desires is necessary if community engagement programmes at universities are to be inclusive, empowering, and sustainable (effective). Therefore, it is suggested that

community engagement programmes base their community engagement on an asset-based approach and begin to explicitly address and report on the assets of the community partners in conjunction with their desires, dreams, and aspirations.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Information Letter

Individual participant letter

Rhodes University

Drosty Road,

Grahamstown,

6139

[Date] [Name]

Dear Sir or Madam

Re: Invitation to participate in research study

You are invited to participate in a research study entitled **"Stakeholders' Experiences of the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) Approach in Makhanda, South Africa: An Analysis of the Siyakhana@Makhanda Programme"**. The main the objective of this study is to analyse the Rhodes University community engagement stakeholders' experiences of the implementation of the ABCD approach in the Makhanda context.

Your participation is important so that the results of the research are accurately portrayed. The research will be undertaken by conducting interviews and the data to be collected from this research will be recorded and transcribed. Your identity will be treated with complete confidentiality, unless you indicate to the contrary. The collection of this data will require about one hour of your time to complete.

We will provide you with all the necessary information to assist you to understand the study and explain what would be expected of you (the participant). These guidelines would include the risks, benefits, and your rights as a study subject. Furthermore, it is important that you are aware that this study has been approved by a Research Ethics Committee of the university.

Participation in this research is completely voluntary and this letter of invitation does not obligate you to take part in this research study. To participate, you will be required to provide

written consent that will include your signature, date and initials to verify that you understand and agree to the conditions. Please note that you have the right to withdraw at any given time during the study without penalty.

Thank you for your time and I hope that you will find our request favourable. Yours sincerely,

Simphiwe Gongqa (researcher)

Professor Sally Matthews (supervisor)

Rhodes University, Research Office, Ethics
Ethics Coordinator: ethics-commitee@ru.ac.za
t: +27 (0) 46 603 7727 f: +27 (0) 86 616 7707
Room 220, Main Admin Building, Drostdy Road, Grahamstown, 6139

Appendix B: Consent Declaration

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PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT DECLARATION

(To be signed by research participant/s)

Project Title: ***Stakeholders' Experiences of the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) Approach in Makhanda, South Africa: An analysis of the Siyakhana@Makhanda programme.***

Simphiwe Gongqa from the Department of Political and International Studies, Rhodes University has requested my permission to participate in the above-mentioned research project.

The nature and the purpose of the research project and of this informed consent declaration have been explained to me in a language that I understand.

I am aware that:

1. The purpose of the research project is to investigate asset-based community development as a holistic and sustainable approach to community development.
2. Rhodes University has given ethical clearance to this research project ***(Ethics Approval Number)*** and I have seen/may request to see the clearance certificate by contacting the Ethics Coordinator (ethics-committee@ru.ac.za)
3. By participating in this research project, I will be contributing towards the creation of knowledge and the supplementation of data on community development.
4. I will participate in the project by answering questions and making comments in interviews.
5. My participation is entirely voluntary and should I at any stage wish to withdraw from participating further, I may do so without any negative consequences.
6. I will not be compensated for participating in the research, but my out-of-pocket expenses will be reimbursed.
7. The following risks are associated with my participation: alienation from the community programme.
8. The Researcher intends to publish the research results in the form of a Masters research paper. However, confidentiality and anonymity of records will be maintained, and my name and identity will not be revealed to anyone who has not been involved in the conducting of the research, ***unless I indicate to the contrary/recognize that as a public figure my identity will inevitably be/become known, in which case I agree to accept the loss of anonymity.***

Rhodes University, Research Office, Ethical Review
Ethics Coordinator: ethics-commitee@ru.ac.za
t: +27 (0) 46 603 7727 f: +27 (0) 86 616 7707
Room 204, Main Admin Building, Drostdy Road, Grahamstown, 6139

RHODES UNIVERSITY
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9. In terms of the Protection of Personal Information Act (No. 4 of 2013) it remains my right to request the Researcher to provide me with a detailed explanation of exactly how confidentiality and anonymity of the data I provide will be achieved. I may also request to know exactly how my personal information will be stored securely, for how long it will be stored.
10. If any data collected from me for this research project is to be used by the Researcher for any further study, I am to be informed in writing and my written consent requested again. I need not give consent for the new research if it is incompatible with the initial purpose of the present study (POPIA, s15(3)). Equally, I can simply reject the request. In such cases, a formal request needs to be made to me by the researcher via the Ethics Coordinator (ethics-committee@ru.ac.za).
11. In terms of the POPI Act, I possess the right to receive feedback about this research. This will take the form of telephonic communication and email, unless ***I elect not to receive this feedback.***
12. Any further questions that I might have regarding the nature of the research and/or my participation in it will be answered by Simphiwe Gongqa (16g1975@campus.ru.ac.za)
13. By signing this informed consent declaration, I am not waiving any legal claims, rights, or remedies. A copy of this informed consent declaration will be given to me, and the original will be kept on record by the Researcher.
14. I ***agree/disagree*** (delete inapplicable) to the Researcher's request to take photographs, or videoing me as part of this research project, recognizing that agreement here is likely to raise the risk of compromising my anonymity and that steps will be taken to ensure this will not happen it my consent is given.
15. I ***agree/disagree*** (delete inapplicable) to the Researcher's use of voice recording of my comments and opinions during interviews, the purpose of which is to ensure the accurate recording of my views/responses. Furthermore, I have the right to request a copy of the interview transcriptions to confirm that my opinions are accurately recorded

I, ..., have read the above information / confirm that the above information has been explained to me in a language that I understand and I am aware of this document's contents. I have asked all questions that I wished to ask, and these have been answered to my satisfaction. I fully understand what is expected of me during the research.

I have not been pressurised in any way and I voluntarily agree to participate in the above-mentioned project.

Rhodes University, Research Office, Ethical Review
Ethics Coordinator: ethics-commitee@ru.ac.za
t: +27 (0) 46 603 7727 f: +27 (0) 86 616 7707
Room 204, Main Admin Building, Drostdy Road, Grahamstown, 6139

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....

Participants signature Witness

Date

Appendix C: Interview Questions

Interview Questions for Student Facilitators and Staff Members

1. Can you describe what the Siyakhana programme does and your involvement in it?

2. What are your thoughts and feelings about the Siyakhana programme?

3. Can you describe your understanding of Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD)?

4. What are your thoughts and feelings about the ABCD approach?

5. Can you describe your experiences related to Siyakhana and their use of the ABCD approach?

6. How has ABCD influenced your life or work?

7. Has your perspective on community development changed over time?

8. What challenges did you face when utilising the ABCD approach?

9. What were the objectives of the Siyakhana programme and what were your personal objectives being a part of the programme?

10. Do you believe that the Siyakhana programme, with its implementation of the ABCD approach, fulfilled its objectives?

11. How do you define success in the context of community development?

12. What are some of the things you appreciated that the programme did and what are some that you would like to change?

13. How do you see the ABCD approach evolving in the future?

Interview Questions for Community Partners

1. Please describe what the preschool does and your involvement in it

2. Please describe the process of working with the community engagement representatives. How did it start and what was the goal?

3. Did you feel included in the decision-making process and implementation of the project with the CE reps?

4. Do you think that the project was empowering for you and the preschool?

5. How will the project be sustained after it ends?

5.5 How will you ensure participation to keep the project sustainable?

6. What have been the challenges you have encountered and what solutions do you think are best for those challenges?

7. What are the things you appreciated about how the project was done?

8. Please describe the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach?

9. What are your thoughts and feelings about ABCD?

Appendix D: Ethics Approval

Rhodes University Human Research Ethics Committee
PO Box 94, Makhanda, 6140, South Africa
t: +27 (0) 46 603 7727
f: +27 (0) 46 603 8822
e: ethics-committee@ru.ac.za
NHREC Registration number: RC-241114-045
https://www.ru.ac.za/researchgateway/ethics/

8 March 2024

Mr Simphiwe Gongqa

Email:g16g1975@campus.ru.ac.za simphiwegongqa@gmail.com

Review Reference: 2023-5935-7607

Dear Mr Simphiwe Gongqa

Title: Stakeholders' Experiences of Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) Approach in Makhanda, South Africa: An analysis of the Siyakhana@Makhanda programme.

Researcher: Mr Simphiwe Gongqa

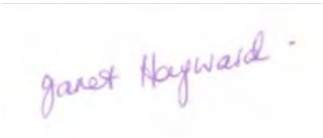
Supervisor(s): Professor Sally Matthews

This letter confirms that the above research proposal has been reviewed and **APPROVED** by the Rhodes University Human Research Ethics Committee (RU-HREC). Your Approval number is: 2023-5935-7607

Approval has been granted for 1 year. An annual progress report will be required in order to renew approval for an additional period. You will receive an email notifying you when the annual report is due.

Please ensure that the ethical standards committee is notified should any substantive change(s) be made, for whatever reason, during the research process. This includes changes in investigators. Please also ensure that a brief report is submitted to the ethics committee on the completion of the research. The purpose of this report is to indicate whether the research was conducted successfully, if any aspects could not be completed, or if any problems arose that the ethical standards committee should be aware of. If a thesis or dissertation arising from this research is submitted to the library's electronic theses and dissertations (ETD) repository, please notify the committee of the date of submission and/or any reference or cataloguing number allocated.

Sincerely,



Dr Janet Hayward

Chair: Rhodes University Human Research Ethics Committee, RU-HREC