REFLECTIONS ON USING COMMUNITY-BASED ACTION RESEARCH WITH A GROUP OF WOMEN/YOUTH TO EXPLORE THE SOCIO-EMOTIONAL FACTORS THAT ENHANCE OR INHIBIT PARTICIPATION IN SUSTAINABLE POVERTY ALLEVIATION INITIATIVES

by

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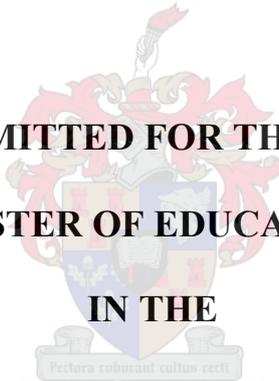
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i

ABSTRACT

Youth unemployment is a serious problem in South Africa, particularly so among women. The exacerbating rates of unemployment leave many young women in the undesirable position of being unable to provide for themselves or their families, and often developing feelings of hopelessness and depression. Moreover, their unemployed status often leaves them vulnerable to being exploited and lacking the self-esteem to break out of the trap of poverty. With women and youth constituting a major portion of the world's population, the empowerment of women has become a worldwide priority in addressing poverty reduction. This study explored the experiences of six young women who engaged in one such an initiative which was aimed at alleviating the challenge of poverty and unemployment in their community.

A social constructivist research paradigm underpinned this exploratory study which generated qualitative data through the use of semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews with six women, participant-generated artefacts, as well as a semi-structured interview with a social development officer from local government structures. A multi-theoretical lens, including aspects from Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model, Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) and Social Interdependence Theory (SIT) were used to analyse and interpret the data generated in this study. Triangulation of theories created opportunity to explore the data from various vantage points and to produce new perspectives. This added to the rigour of the study.

Thematic analysis revealed that women's trajectories into unemployment are complex and multifaceted, encompassing aspects of personal, contextual, structural, economic and socio-emotional nature. The findings indicated that women often have to navigate many challenges in these areas, to the extent that many of them reported that their self-esteem and self-efficacy had been eroded by these adverse conditions and experiences. This lack of confidence and insecurity caused them to struggle to access the job market. The impact that their participation in a social justice initiative had on them in terms of identity formation, however, built their resilience and enabled them to exercise their agency to actively and intentionally seek opportunities to access the job market. The Global University of Lifelong Learning (GULL) initiative enabled them to develop strategies that they employed to move themselves from impoverished self-perception to taking both personal and collective responsibility to collaborate and intentionally work towards becoming self-sustainable, with the added vision of extending their own learnings to empower other community members. Building developmental

relationships where care and acceptance were expressed and a sense of belonging was experienced, strengthened their engagement in this initiative, enhanced their self-efficacy and sharpened their insights into aspects of starting and managing their own businesses. The results of this study highlighted a number of socio-emotional factors, such as engaging in regular self-reflection, critical decision-making and committing to shared goals, as crucial aspects to include for poverty alleviation initiatives to be truly successful and sustainable. Women economic empowerment has thus been revealed as extending beyond personal and professional empowerment to include fundamental shifts in how economic, social and mental well-being of women are perceived and enabled.

OPSOMMING

Jeugwerkloosheid is 'n ernstige probleem in Suid-Afrika, veral by vroue. Die verergering van die werkloosheidskoers laat baie jong vroue in die ongewenste posisie om nie vir hulself of hul gesinne te kan sorg nie, en dat hulle dikwels gevoelens van hopeloosheid en depressie ontwikkel. Boonop laat hul werklose status hulle dikwels kwesbaar vir uitbuiting deur ander en 'n gebrekkige selfbeeld wat dit moeilik maak om uit die strik van armoede te ontsnap. Met vroue en jeugdiges wat 'n groot deel van die wêreldbevolking uitmaak, het die bemagtiging van vroue 'n wêreldwye prioriteit geword om die vermindering van armoede aan te spreek. Hierdie studie ondersoek die ervarings van ses jong vroue wat aan so 'n inisiatief deelgeneem het om die uitdaging van armoede en werkloosheid in hul gemeenskap te verlig.

'n Sosiaal-konstruktivistiese navorsingsparadigma was die grondslag vir hierdie verkennende studie wat kwalitatiewe data gegenereer het deur die gebruik van semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude en fokusgroeponderhoude met ses vroue, visuele artefakte deur die deelenemers gegenereer, sowel as 'n semi-gestruktureerde onderhoud met 'n maatskaplike ontwikkelingsbeampte van die plaaslike regeringstruktuur. 'n Multi-teoretiese lens, insluitend aspekte uit Bronfenbrenner se bioekologiese model, Kultureel-Historiese Aktiwiteitsteorie (*CHAT*) en Sosiale Interafhanklikheidsteorie (SIT), is gebruik om die data wat in hierdie studie gegenereer is, te ontleed en te interpreteer. Die gebruik van verskeie teoretiese lense het die moontlikheid geskep om die data vanuit verskillende invalshoeke te ondersoek en nuwe perspektiewe te ontdek. Hierdie benadering het bygedra tot die kwaliteit van die studie.

Tematiese analise het aan die lig gebring dat vroue se trajekte na werkloosheid kompleks en veelsydig is en aspekte van persoonlike, kontekstuele, strukturele, ekonomiese en sosio-emosionele aard insluit. Die bevindinge het aangedui dat vroue dikwels baie uitdagings in hierdie areas moet navigeer, tot so 'n mate dat baie van hulle gerapporteer het dat hul selfbeeld en selfdoeltreffendheid deur hierdie ongunstige toestande en ervarings afgebreek is. Hierdie gebrek aan selfvertroue en gepaardgaande onsekerheid het veroorsaak dat hulle moeilik toegang tot die arbeidsmark kon verkry. Die impak van hul deelname aan 'n sosiale geregtigheidsinisiatief op hul identiteitsvorming, het egter hul veerkragtigheid opgebou en hulle in staat gestel om hul agentskap uit te oefen om aktief en doelbewus geleenthede te soek om toegang tot die arbeidsmark te verkry. Die Global University of Lifelong Learning (GULL) -inisiatief het hulle in staat gestel om strategieë te ontwikkel wat hulle kon aanwend het om van

verarmde selfpersepsies te beweeg tot die aanvaarding van persoonlike sowel as kollektiewe verantwoordelikheid om doelbewustelik daaraan te werk om selfonderhoudend te word, met die addisionele visie om hul eie leer uit te brei deur ander lede van die gemeenskap te bemagtig. Die bou van ontwikkelingsverhoudinge waar sorg en aanvaarding uitgespreek is en waar hulle kon voel dat hulle aan die groep behoort, het hul betrokkenheid by hierdie inisiatief versterk, hul selfdoeltreffendheid verbeter en hul insigte verskerp in aspekte ten opsigte van die begin en bestuur van hul eie ondernemings. Die resultate van hierdie studie het 'n aantal sosio-emosionele faktore beklemtoon as belangrike aspekte om in te sluit ten einde armoedeverligtings-inisiatiewe werklik suksesvol en volhoubaar te maak, soos byvoorbeeld gereelde selfrefleksie, kritiese besluitneming en toewyding aan gedeelde doelwitte. Die studie het dus aan die lig gebring dat die ekonomiese bemagtiging van vroue baie meer as net persoonlike en professionele bemagtiging insluit. Dit vra ook vir fundamentele denkverskuiwings in hoe die ekonomiese, sosiale en geestelike welstand van vroue gesien en ondersteun word.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CBPAR	Community-based Participatory Action Research
CHAT	Cultural Historical Activity Theory
GULL	Global University of Lifelong Learning
SI	Social Impact
SIT	Social Interdependence Theory

CHAPTER 1

CONTEXT AND RATIONALE OF STUDY

"Unemployment remains the biggest thief of hope amongst young people"
(Ramphele, 2002, p. 12).

1.1   INTRODUCTION

Youth unemployment is a serious problem in South Africa. The unemployment rate for youth between the ages of 15 and 34 years grew from 25% at the end of 2010 to 38.2% at the end of the first quarter of 2018 (STATS SA, 2018). Such high unemployment rates can have a detrimental effect on the individual as it could impair their capacity to live a productive life (Graham & Mlatsheni, 2015). Developmental theorists generally consider adolescence as the developmental phase during which the individual undergoes a number of physical, cognitive and social changes that influence the development of an adult identity (Crocetti, 2017). Significant tasks of this developmental phase include increasingly establishing and maintaining independence and self-reliance. However, it is important to note that for some adolescents this transition period from childhood to adulthood may be characterised by socio-economic variables that influence their ability to navigate the physical, cognitive, social and economic transitions that young people have to navigate during this phase (Cooper, 2004).

1.2   BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The influence of unemployment and potential poverty inhibit the ability of young people to become financially independent or to gain access to institutions that may afford them the opportunity to become more employable. The lack of post-school or labour market-related qualifications and relevant skills poses a significant challenge for youth's transitioning into the labour market, consequently increasing their risk of remaining in a state of unemployment and poverty for long periods of time (Graham & Mlatsheni, 2015). In this study, the term 'unemployed' is understood as those who are available for work and are seeking employment but cannot find paid work. The focus is thus not on voluntary unemployment, but rather on "involuntary unemployment" (Cloete, 2015, p. 513).

Research has found that not being able to consistently take financial care of oneself because of being unemployed or employed in zero-hour or short-term contract work could lead to feelings of hopelessness and depression, which in turn, could lead a person to engage in destructive behaviour such as drug abuse and crime (Fine, Stoudt, Fox & Santos, 2010; Cloete, 2015). This makes it clear that high levels of youth unemployment do not only affect the individual but potentially also the broader society. It would therefore be to the benefit of society at large if the challenges of youth unemployment and poverty could be alleviated through intervention. Institutions such as the Global University for Lifelong Learning (GULL) can play a significant role in enabling such interventions.

The Global University for Lifelong Learning (GULL) is an institution that aims to provide opportunities for disadvantaged and marginalised communities to engage in self-directed learning opportunities and in so doing develop human capital at grassroots level (GULL, 2018). The GULL approach is based on enabling lifelong learning prospects in collaboration with marginalised groups in communities. The argument is that seeking to create a system of recognising and certifying lifelong learning may enable people to empower themselves to make a meaningful contribution to society (GULL, 2018). This will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2.

It has also become evident that unemployment can be linked to mental health issues such as depression and lack of self-esteem, which may impede young people's access to and participation in interventions that seek to connect them to the world of work (De Witte, Rothmann & Jackson, 2012; Huegaerts, Spruyt & Vanroelen, 2018; Bartelink, Zay Ya, Guldbrandsson & Bremberg, 2020). According to Graham and Mlatsheni (2015) more research is required to explore this link in South Africa. This particular study was aimed at exploring how a particular group of women perceived and experienced the transition from youth to adulthood, how their life experiences had propelled them along a trajectory of unemployment, and how this trajectory may be interrupted through appropriate support.

1.3   MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY

In my experiences as a member of a historically disadvantaged community in the Western Cape province, South Africa, I have been sensitised to the increasing number of disenfranchised young people who are not engaged in post-school studies or formal forms of employment at a time when, according to general trajectories from school into adulthood, they would be

expected to be engaged in either of these activities. The statistics for 2018, which places the youth unemployment rate in the Western Cape at 20.7%, reflects this dire situation (STATS SA, 2018). From these and other statistics, it appears that youth unemployment poses a serious issue not only at the national level, but at the provincial level as well.

Bar-On (2003), Breda (2017) and Agampodi, Agampodi, Glozier, Chithrani, Warnasekara and Siribaddana (2019) argue that efforts directed at the development of emotional and social intelligence in youth may be useful in addressing these issues as they will assist relevant role-players in developing well-thought through and contextually relevant interventions, which enable the youth to make constructive life choices. Bar-On (2003) describes social and emotional intelligence as the "ability to effectively understand and express yourself, to understand and relate well to others, and to successfully cope with daily demands and pressures" (p. 4). This definition is based on an *ability* model and therefore implies that socio-emotional intelligence is a competence that can be taught through training (Kohn, 2007, p. 28). Educating young people to be more emotionally and socially intelligent could yield benefits in terms of empowering them to become independent, self-sustaining adults. The literature suggests that there is a need to explore how the development of emotional and social intelligence among youth could enhance their resilience and self-efficacy (Bar-On, 2007; Theron & Theron, 2010; Breda, 2017).

In my work with communities, I have found that people are often exposed to opportunities and good ideas, but that there appears to be intrinsic and extrinsic variables that interfere with their engaging in these opportunities in sustainable ways. In agreement with Bar-on (2007) and Breda's (2017) arguments, I therefore anticipated that an exploration of the experiences and decision-making processes of unemployed young people could provide greater insight into what these barriers are, why they are there and what influences the ways in which these young people navigate the barriers. Such improved insights could reveal opportunities to provide better support to youth who find themselves in similar situations, in order for them to develop greater self-efficacy in their journey towards enhancing their future prospects of becoming more independent and self-supporting. In addition, it was hoped that the insights gleaned and the lessons learnt about doing community-based action research would contribute to the body of literature related to doing research within the South African context.

1.4   THE RESEARCH FOCUS AND QUESTION

As youth unemployment rates in South Africa continue to rise (STATS SA, 2018), there is increasing pressure on the socio-economic resources of the country. A reflection on the current global economic trends and the South African economy has shown the need to shift the focus from traditional job-seeking behaviour to encouraging more creative entrepreneurial endeavours (Mayer, Gordhan, Manxeba, Hughes & Maroc, 2011). While job creation remains crucial to the economy and to the well-being of society at large, it has become apparent that more attention needs to be paid to developing a mindset that takes cognisance of the challenges within the contexts of young people who have limited or no access to further training or formal employment (Mlatsheni & Rospabé, 2002; Pellowski Wiges, Chapman, Baxter & DeJaeghere, 2015). This, according to Mayer et al. (2011), could create hope and motivate young people to engage in social and economic activities which could afford them opportunities to enhance their quality of life and contribute economically to society.

However, in order for such efforts to be effective and sustainable, it would be imperative to develop the human capital of these young people (Marock, 2008). This could be done through efforts such as explicitly teaching personal development and entrepreneurial skills and ensuring that young people know and understand their own skills and talents and how they can use them to contribute to their own lives as well as to the economic well-being of society (Marock, 2008). Addressing the needs of unemployed youth, therefore, does not only call for creating economic, academic and structural support, but it also requires a conscious focus on the development of the self. An approach such as action leaning provides opportunity to study how real people reflect on their experiences of unemployment and how they learn to take action to solve their own problems in this regard.

Action learning, which constitutes the core learning process employed in the GULL approach, suggests that people are best able to develop themselves when they work together with others, create their own resources, and come up with their own solutions to their problems (Revans, 2017). To achieve this, pathways can be created for people within their natural, everyday life situations. GULL's focus on the 'human spirit' places the person (or the 'self') at the heart of the project (GULL, 2018). The individual is engaged as a holistic person on intellectual, personal and social level in finding solutions and and is required to immerse himself or herself in collaboratively working towards alleviating the problem of unemployment. This approach to

developing human capital thus requires some attention to psychological aspects such as social and emotional competencies as well.

This study explored the experiences of a group of young women in a peri-urban area in the Western Cape, who engaged in a social impact (SI) partnership initiative that was aimed at empowering women and youth to address the challenge of poverty and unemployment in the area. The aim of the study was to explore, understand and describe the challenges and benefits of a collaborative, action research approach towards addressing youth and women empowerment in pursuit of sustainable alleviation of poverty in a peri-urban community.

It was anticipated that the aforementioned aim would be attained through the following objectives:

- To explore the challenges and benefits that these women may experience while participating in this initiative;

- To illuminate these women's decision-making processes when they engage in activities in their daily quest for survival;

- To inquire into how the GULL philosophy could contribute to developing competencies to prepare these women to establish self-sustainable enterprises as a way of addressing the issue of unemployment and poverty;

- To develop a better understanding of how collaborative entrepreneurship endeavours could be facilitated and sustained in order to address social challenges within a community.

It was anticipated that by exploring the above objectives, this study might deepen insight into how their experiences within empowerment initiatives such as GULL may contribute to the socio-emotional development of youth and women, and how this development may influence the life choices they make. Furthermore, it was also envisaged that greater understanding of unemployed women's experiences would generate opportunities to enhance approaches of support provided to these women through relevant initiatives, which would further enhance their social and emotional intelligence in order to become more self-sustaining. The study was therefore guided by the key research question:

How can a collaborative action research approach be used to gain a better understanding of the socio-emotional factors that enhance or inhibit the participation of young women in sustainable poverty alleviation initiatives?

5

The following supplementary questions assisted in exploring the key research question:

- What life experiences, according to the women, have propelled them on a trajectory to unemployment?
- How did these women engage in the activities of the GULL initiative and why did they engage in the ways that they did?
- What experiences within this collaborative endeavour did the women acknowledge as helping them to grow personally and in terms of entrepreneurial skills?
- What were the challenges or hindrances that these women experienced in terms of participating in such a collaborative endeavour?
- What suggestions would these women make to strengthen the effect of this initiative on their own development and the sustainability of the outcomes of the initiative?

1.5 SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH

This research project was conducted in a peri-urban community in the Western Cape province of South Africa. The empirical part of the study was limited to a group of six women between the ages of 20 and 34 at the time of the study, as one would generally expect this age group to be active in the job market should they not be enrolled as students at institutions of higher education. The use of such a small sample allowed for an in-depth study through which the complexities of people's lived experiences within particular situations could be revealed in ways that it would not otherwise become noticeable (Denscombe, 1998; Yin, 2003).

1.6 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

1.6.1 Paradigm

The focus on gaining deeper insight into the trajectories of unemployed women and youth from school into adulthood places this study within an interpretivist or constructivist knowledge tradition, where "the aim of the human sciences is defined as understanding (not explaining) people and phenomena" (Babbie & Mouton, 2009, p. 28). The interpretive approach recognises that meaning is made through interactions and that it is embedded in context. Hence, meaning may vary from place to place or person to person. This resonates with the Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) framework which purports that it is within and through interactions with particular entities and people in their everyday lives that people learn (Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2006). One's learning and development is therefore mediated by the cultural artefacts (which

6

could include anything from physical objects to language, signs and even fellow human beings) that people have available in their various life systems or contexts (Vygotsky, 1982, p. 166, in Daniels, Cole & Wertsch, 2007).

It therefore emphasises the importance of viewing meaning within context; hence it is important to find out how people understand and make meaning of their worlds by interpreting, creating and giving new meaning to things in order to describe and justify their actions (O'Donoghue, 2006; Denscombe, 2014). In line with the view that a person's development is influenced by the interactions between the person as a "bio-psychological human organism" and their social contexts (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000, p. 117), in this study I purposefully aimed to follow a holistic approach in exploring how adults make sense of the complexities of life experiences that influence their trajectories into adulthood and the world of work. The intricate nature of women's economic empowerment also allowed for a focus on some of the principles of Social Interdependence Theory (SIT). Social interdependence exists where groups have to work together in order to achieve shared goals (Johnson & Johnson, 2009; Cockerill, Craig & Thurston, 2018).

The study was situated within a social constructivist research paradigm as the participants would be the carriers of the knowledge upon which meaning is made about the phenomenon under investigation (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). Learning is viewed as a meaning-making process as people engage with the world around them. Within the constructivist paradigm, it is recognised that there are multiple interpretations of reality that can help one to gain insight into human behaviour. The research process therefore required systematic engagement with purposefully selected participants in order to delve into their lived experiences and worldviews as they relate to the topic under investigation (Denscombe, 2014). Constructivism links to the community-based participatory action research (CBPAR) approach as well as the CHAT framework in that it also subscribes to the notion that people or practitioners construct their own knowledge and realities based on their interactions and critical reflection on their experiences of such interactions (Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2006; Zuber-Skerritt, 2015).

A qualitative research design underpinned this study as it offered the opportunity to generate rich data from which patterns of meaning can be inferred as one interprets the data (Cresswell, 2014). This inductive process helps inquirers to gain insight into the phenomenon under study and the realities that underpin it (Denscombe, 2014). Following a qualitative data collection approach creates the opportunity to generate huge data sets as people construct stories and

narratives to give account of how they make sense of their life experiences and contexts. Ponterotto, (2006) refers to this as "thick descriptions" (p. 539). Qualitative data helps one to gain insight into and understanding of people's life-worlds (Mouton, 2017). Knowledge is therefore constructed by the research participants, a notion that concurs with the CBPAR approach. The CBPAR approach is described in further detail in the following section.

1.6.2 Research methodology

As mentioned above, CBPAR was chosen as the research methodology for this study. CBPAR is considered to be an approach that is appropriate and effective for engaging communities in solving their own problems or challenges (Zuber-Skerritt, Kearney & Fletcher, 2015). It contends that knowledge is not just seated in academia alone, but that all people are able to create knowledge and contribute to knowledge building, even illiterate and marginalised people (Zuber-Skerritt, 2015). Hence, the people who are themselves affected by societal issues are engaged to explore their own problems, come up with possible solutions and consequently make certain decisions. Collaborating with participants to generate new knowledge and understandings lie at the heart of CBPAR (Feuerherm, 2019).

1.6.3 Sampling

Six women, between the ages of 20 and 34, from a peri-urban village in the Western Cape, South Africa, who participated in the social justice initiative were sampled for this study. These women completed Pathway 1 of the GULL process, which is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2. The sampling approach can thus be described as a "non-probability selection approach" (Mouton, 2017, p. 151) with a purposive sample of participants selected according to the aims and objectives of the study as outlined in Sections 1.4 and 1.5 above. A purposive sample is particularly useful in exploratory research where the aim is to gain insight into a phenomenon (Denscombe, 2014).

A professional community development officer from the City of Cape Town was one of the partners in this initiative. A representative from Stellenbosch University was included as a partner at the request of members of the community and the local government. The community development officer worked in the particular community at the time of the research and had participated in other SI initiatives as well. She also served as a key informant in order to provide information and insight into the state of affairs in communities and how these situations related to the broader social context in the area (Marshall & Rossman, 2014).

8

1.6.4   Recruitment

In the initial project, a community youth worker distributed an open invitation to a community meeting to discuss the issue of unemployment in the community and to find possible ways of addressing the issue. A number of non-governmental organisations that worked with youth in the community, as well as a representative from the local government attended this initial meeting. Approximately 30 youth of the community attended this first meeting. A series of meetings followed, with six women eventually remaining committed to the process. These women completed the first phase of the GULL process, which focuses on personal development and empowerment. Consequently, these six women were purposively approached to participate in this study. A presentation was delivered to the women to outline the aims and objectives of this study. They were asked to indicate their interest in participating in this study by completing a sign-up sheet and providing their contact details in order to arrange for individual interviews. The women were also asked to indicate their willingness to participate in a focus group as well as to have their participant-generated artefacts and their portfolio of evidence reviewed individually with them. It was emphasised that their continued participation in the SI project would not be influenced by their willingness to participate in this study.

1.6.5   Data collection

An inductive approach to data generation and interpretation allowed for gaining insight into the interactions between the various role-players, contexts and elements in this study. The empirical part of this research project was conducted over a three-month period and included data-generating methods such as semi-structured individual interviews, focus group interviews and projective techniques such as the use of drawings and collages created by the participants.

In qualitative research, interviews are one of the most commonly used techniques to generate data (Taylor, 2005). When studying complex phenomena, interviews afford researchers opportunity to gather information that may illuminate the topic under study (Denscombe, 2010). Using well-developed, rigorous semi-structured interview guides adds to the trustworthiness and credibility of the research (Kallio, Pietilä, Johnson & Kangasniemi, 2016). It further enhances the possibility to draw links between the research outcomes and existing knowledge, as the interview questions would generally relate to certain topics pertaining to the phenomenon under investigation (Shenton, 2004).

Using projective techniques such as drawings and collages as another source of data generation often reveals additional information to what participants may be willing or able to share verbally. Arts-based methods are particularly useful in generating data about sensitive or complex topics (Gameiro, De Guevara, El Refaie & Payson, 2018). Drawings and visual formats such as collages, for example, are deemed to be effective methods by which to explore personal views and experiences, especially in cases where participants may face linguistic barriers to expressing themselves. Projective techniques therefore open up innovative avenues for participants from all walks of life to construct, make meaning of and share their own experiences and views on the topic under investigation. Further details of how particular methods were used are discussed in Chapter 3.

1.6.6   Data analysis

Qualitative data in this study were collected in various formats, including individual interviews, focus group interviews, visual sources ('river of life' maps) and participants' generated artefacts throughout the research process (Mouton, 2017; Sligo, Tilley, Murray, & Comrie, 2019). An inductive coding process was engaged to organise and summarise the data according to emerging categories or themes (Lapadat, 2010) and in line with the research questions included in the interview schedules (Saldaña, 2013). Visual data elicited from the 'river of life' maps and collages were also thematically analysed to unearth significant themes and trends emerging from the data. The researcher's field notes were also scrutinised by way of thematic analysis. In addition, based on links to the CHAT and SI frameworks as described in Section 1.6.1, purposeful attention was paid to identifying links to these frameworks as part of the data analysis process.

1.7   ENSURING TRUSTWORTHINESS

The reliability and validity of data in research projects always carry a high premium (Denscombe, 2010). Due to the variety of methodologies available to studies that generate qualitative data, ensuring the reliability and credibility of data poses a major challenge (Shenton, 2004). Qualitative researchers therefore prefer to use the term 'trustworthiness' of data instead of 'reliability' and 'validity' (Given, 2008, p. 753).

1.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Whenever one engages in professional practice, ethical issues are bound to arise. Hence, it is important to give consideration to how one would ensure that one's conduct in professional practice is ethically sound (Baines & Taylor, 2011). Ethics is a moral philosophy that honours the idea of conducting oneself and one's practice in virtuous and principled ways, in other words, doing what is just (Fraser, 2018). When engaging in community-based research, it is inevitable that there will be power differences between the various role-players which could fuel ethical challenges (Wilson, Kenny & Dickson-Swift, 2018). Careful attention was paid to regarding the participation of all role-players as of equal importance and value (Campano, Ghiso & Welch, 2015), and ensuring that all were treated with the dignity and respect that they deserved (Fraser, 2018). The main ethical issues related to this study are elaborated on in Chapter 3.

1.9 CONCLUSION

South Africa continues to face high unemployment rates among youth in particular. This denies many young people the ability to gain financial independence; a situation which may infuse societal problems such as crime, drug abuse and even mental illnesses (Fine et al., 2010). Though there may be many causes for these high unemployment rates, it has been established that it is important to pay attention to the challenging contexts within which young people with little or no access to resources or employment may find themselves (Pellowski Wiges et al., 2015). Engaging these young people in productive initiatives where they also receive some form of recognition may inculcate hope within them and put them on a new and more positive trajectory of their lives (Breda, 2017). Community-based action research provide such opportunities to engage young people in solving their own problems or challenges (Zuber-Skerritt, Kearney & Fletcher, 2015). In this study the aim was to empower the participants to envision and move towards building productive futures for themselves through sustainable enterprises and jobs.

1.10 KEY TERMS USED IN THE STUDY

The title of this study captures several main concepts, such as 'community-based action research' which encompasses the notion of 'action learning', 'socio-emotional intelligence' and 'youth'. Brief explanations are provided here as working definitions. More elaborate

explanations are provided in Chapter 2. The concepts of 'self-efficacy' and 'resilience' are also defined in relation to the study and are discussed further in Chapter 2.

1.10.1 Community-based action research

Community-based action research is a partnership approach to research which involves various role-players such as community members, researchers and organisational representatives as equal partners in the research process. All role-players are regarded as experts and participate in the decision-making processes (Esau, 2015; Wood, 2017).

1.10.2 Emotional and social intelligence

Bar-On (2003) describes emotional and social intelligence as relating to two levels. At an in**tra**personal level, emotional and social intelligence refers to the "ability to be aware of ourselves, to understand our strengths and weaknesses, and to express our thoughts and feelings non-destructively" (Bar-On, 2003, p. 4). At an in**ter**personal level, the concept refers to the "ability to effectively understand and express yourself, to understand and relate well to others, and to successfully cope with daily demands and pressures" (Bar-On, 2003, p. 4). Describing this construct as an ability implies that it is a competency that can be developed or taught through training. In this study, the concepts 'emotional and social intelligence', 'socio-emotional competence' and 'emotional intelligence' are used interchangeably.

1.10.3 Action learning

Although there is no single definition of 'action learning', there is an agreed understanding of the nature thereof. Revans (2017) describes action learning as experiential learning in which participants learn by doing and then reflecting on what they have done. This builds on Zuber-Skerritt (2002) and Mezirow's (2018) understanding that action learning refers to learning that happens from concrete experiences and reflecting on those experiences. Action learning happens "when people learn from each other, create their own resources, identify their own problems and form their own solutions" (Zuber-Skerritt, 2009, p. 181). It can happen through trial and error, discovery, having group discussions about certain topics, as well as learning from and with others. Both Zuber-Skerritt (2001) and Herr and Anderson (2015) emphasise the importance of learning ethically in order for the learning to be sustainable in a global world.

1.10.4 Youth

The definition of 'youth' remains contested (Ansell, 2005). On the UNESCO website youth is defined as persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years old, while other definitions extend the age range to 35. The United Nations' universal definition, as cited by Bersaglio, Enns and Kepe (2015) extends beyond age ranges to focus also on the issue of employment, as it defines youth as "the stage between when a person may leave compulsory education and the age when he/she finds his/her first employment" (p. 59). In this study I chose to use a combined definition of the term, including persons between the ages of 15 and 35 together with the qualification of these persons being in the stage of still finding their first permanent employment.

1.10.5 Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy refers to people's beliefs in their own capabilities and thus also links to people's motivation to persevere in difficult circumstances (Bandura, 2006). Studies by Baron and Markman (2003) and Hassan and Omar (2016) pointed to the link between self-efficacy and people's motivation to embark on entrepreneurial endeavours, an aspect which was deemed to hold particular importance to this study.

1.10.6 Resilience

Resilience generally refers to the capacity to adapt to challenges, difficult circumstances and traumatic events in viable and functional ways (Masten, 2014). The person or system is thus able to respond in adaptive and transformative ways when faced with risky or adverse situations (Benard, 1995). Such responses help the person or system to develop and learn how to manage failure or disappointments in ways that inform future responses or practices (Bandura, 2012).

1.11 STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

Chapter 1 provides an orientation to the study. In Chapter 2 the theoretical perspectives underpinning the notion of community-based action research are discussed. Its potential for empowering individuals and alleviating social issues such as unemployment and poverty is discussed and conceptualised in relation to the topic of this study. The research methodology followed is explained in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 presents the data according to the themes as it emerged from the data, while Chapter 5 presents the findings and concludes the thesis by

drawing some inferences based on the findings and showing the implications of the study for future community-based action research initiatives.

CHAPTER 2

SOCIO-EMOTIONAL FACTORS THAT ENHANCE OR INHIBIT PARTICIPATION IN SUSTAINABLE POVERTY ALLEVIATION INITIATIVES

"[W]omen not only bear the brunt of poverty, but their empowerment is key to its reduction" (Khosla, 2009, p. 7).

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Neoliberal economic structures place major emphasis on people taking up the responsibility for rescuing themselves from the yoke of poverty. This economic approach encourages the private sector to take more control over the economy and increase public ownership. Participation in the labour market through privately owned and managed enterprises is therefore viewed as an opportunity for citizens to create their own wealth and live economically sustainable lives (Prügl, 2015).

Globally, the empowerment of women has increasingly become a priority in addressing poverty reduction (Madzivhandila & Dlamini, 2015; Chant, 2016a) as part of the World Bank's initial sustainable development goals (World Bank, 1994). With economies increasingly under pressure over time, there has been greater investment in the development and upskilling of women. This, according to the literature, is because women make up the largest percentage of the global population and have been earmarked as key role-players in sustainable localised poverty alleviation (Cornwall & Edwards, 2015; Chant, 2016a; Davies & Sweetman, 2018).

The World Bank (1994) has been central to this initiative through its focus on enhancing women's participation in economic development. This initiative encourages the empowerment of women to enable them to participate fully in the global economy. Zuckerman (2018) concurs with the World Bank's view and contends that the equal participation of women in the economy remains an area that requires ongoing and innovative interventions that are often context specific.

However, some researchers point to the notion that women are often regarded as altruistic and less likely to engage in economic risk taking. This, according to the literature, counteracts the women's economic empowerment agenda and often results in women working for development

15

instead of development serving to enhance women's interests. This dichotomy could restrain the women's empowerment agenda and deserves further exploration (Roberts, 2015; Chant, 2016b).

Entrepreneurship is viewed as a means to engender economic empowerment at both micro-economic and macro-economic levels. While there has been a noted increase in the number of women entrepreneurs, a limited body of research exists on why more women are not following this path as a means to sustainable poverty alleviation. Existing research about women's entrepreneurship as a vehicle to poverty alleviation is often narrowly focused and does not include the voices of women in "reflect[ing] on the challenges they face in growing their ventures" (Brush, De Bruin & Welter, 2009, p. 4), how they network, accrue resources and navigate markets and economies (Doern & Goss, 2014; Anderson, Warren & Bensemann, 2019). This points to a need for greater effort from the research community to reflect critically on how women's entrepreneurship and empowerment is viewed and what is needed to use this as a vehicle to improve overall quality of life and poverty alleviation (Cornwall, 2016).

2.2   WOMEN AND YOUTH AS MARGINALISED GROUPS WITHIN SOCIETY

Women across the globe have faced, and are still facing, an uphill battle when it comes to equal recognition in various spheres of life, and within the labour market in particular. Research in this field has indicated that women make up 70% of the world's poor (Chant, 2016b). In addition, women are said to have been made increasingly vulnerable through various economic, political and social policies and practices that serve to undermine women's and girls' fundamental human rights, including rights to health, owning assets and making autonomous decisions (Agyei-Mensah, Owusu & Wrigley-Asante, 2015; Chant, 2016b).

A study by Bajpai (2014) found that only 8.9% of business entrepreneurial endeavours in developing countries are occupied by women. The limited participation of women in small and medium enterprises is ascribed to the fact that patriarchal societies tend to ignore the development of women and often limit their participation in economic activity (Schenck, Nel & Louw, 2010). Research into how this imbalance can be addressed suggests a focus on entrepreneurship education, personal development and skills development. The focus in such training and expansion of knowledge could enable women to cultivate skills such as innovative thinking, leadership qualities, strategic risk taking, flexibility, adaptability and networking (Marvel, Davis & Sproul, 2016; Scales, Boat & Pekel, 2020). Many researchers argue that since

women constitute the largest proportion of marginalised groups, investment in their development could benefit society at large (Brush & Greene, 2016; Dzomonda, Tirivangasi & Masocha, 2016; Rieckmann, 2018; Anderson et al., 2019).

The aforementioned views also reflect the challenges experienced by many women in South Africa. According to Tirivangasi (2017), although South Africa has one of the most progressive constitutions, gender equity in accessing socio-economic opportunities continues to be a significant challenge. Many human rights activists and researchers argue that women's participation in the various economies should be considered a fundamental human right and a substantive enabler for participatory citizenship for women. However, to date, empowering activities to encourage and enable sustainable economic participation for marginalised women remains minimal (Poggesi, Mari & De Vita, 2016; Tirivangasi, 2017)

The South African economy is experiencing numerous challenges with reports citing very little economic growth and a national unemployment rate that had increased to 29.1% in the third quarter of 2019 (STATS SA, 2019). According to the literature, the current state of the economy may further complicate youth and women's participation in the economy. Researchers share the view that despite increased opportunities for access to education and skills training, many persons from these groups of the population still find themselves in the unenviable position of not being able to transition into adulthood successfully because they are unable to access employment opportunities. In addition, a lack of suitable qualifications and work experience as well as financial difficulties further fuel high unemployment rates among youth (Herrington, Kew & Kew, 2010; Panday, Ranchod, Ngcaweni & Seedat, 2013; Ramukumba, 2014; De Lannoy, Graham & Patel, 2018).

In an attempt to address the high levels of unemployment, government and the private sector have invested considerable effort and resources to encourage a shift to a more entrepreneurial mindset. However, research into the success of these endeavours has indicated low levels of success and sustainability in youth-initiated entrepreneurial activity (Poggesi et al 2016; Tirivangasi, 2017). In addition, researchers have found that where entrepreneurial activity does exist, it is mostly survivalist in nature and geared towards satisfying the immediate needs of the owners or participants. Moreover, in light of global economic trends, it would appear that government and the private sector will no longer be able to create the number of jobs needed to address the unemployment crisis. This calamitous situation and the entrepreneurial landscape would then call for innovative approaches to address the need for sustainable financial

independence for the populace (Mayer et al., 2011; Bosma, Schøtt, Terjesen & Kew, 2016; Anderson et al., 2019).

One of the key suggestions has been to identify the small-scale, self-reliant efforts that often provide communities with opportunities to build capacity and empower themselves to address their local and personal needs (Schenck et al., 2010; Mazibuko, 2017). Considering the challenges experienced with the sustainability of entrepreneurial activities one would have to consider how this can be done in ways that build on existing practices, but that also seek to identify and address challenges. In the past the identification of these challenges tended to focus primarily on building the skills of individuals. I align with the school of thought that suggests if one wants to see meaningful socio-economic transformation, it will be necessary to look beyond traditional approaches. One will have to work with indigenous knowledge systems and ways of being and consider working in more collaborative efforts. The research indicates that just like the more formal economy, it is important that capacity building move beyond skills and limited infrastructural support to include but not be limited to individual and collective personal development, organisational development and financial literacy that encourages the growth of enterprises (Katua, 2014; Haque & Zulfiqar, 2016; Hunt & Samman, 2016).

Small-scale enterprises are often the only source of income for poor and low-income households in socio-economically marginalised communities. Therefore, interventions may range from projects with small groups of individuals who work towards a common goal, to more inclusive community-wide activities where broader community issues such as health or water safety are addressed. These are then not only deemed to be important contributors to the local economy but also address the broader social knock-on effects of high unemployment rates and improve the employability of community members (Ngek, 2014; Ramukumba, 2014; Graham & Mlatsheni, 2015; Hunt & Samman, 2016).

To this end, the South African government has put concerted effort into boosting small and medium enterprises as an envisaged solution to the unemployment crisis (Ramukumba, 2014). Since the mid-1990s, the South African government has prioritised entrepreneurial development on its economic and political agenda (Herrington et al., 2010; Mamabolo, Kerrin & Kele, 2017). This push has contributed to a marginal increase in entrepreneurial endeavours between 2004 and 2014. However, according to Garg and Letsolo (2016), there has been a significant decline in the development and sustainability of entrepreneurial endeavours since

2014. Bosma et al. (2016) attribute this in part to a lack of business efficiency in these enterprises.

Another key variable in the growth of this sector has been the limited participation of women as initiators or owners of entrepreneurship ventures. Some researchers ascribe this state of affairs to a number of variables such as cultural and gender beliefs which are perceived to influence access to opportunities. Some of the more contentious views shared in the literature are that women may be less likely to engage in ventures which include some amount of financial risk-taking, that they tend to be less trusting of negotiating with men and that limitations which their ethnic culture may place on women and the type of entrepreneurial endeavours that will be tolerated continue to marginalise women as participants in the economy (Mungai & Ogot, 2012; Kelly, Brush, Greene, Herrington & Ali, 2015; Zeffane, 2015).

Goss and Sadler-Smith (2018) suggest that individual agency, which they refer to as the emotional energy directed towards a goal-oriented activity, is another factor that would enable or constrain the individual from taking on opportunities when presented to them. A theory that is important to personal, professional and organisational development that takes place in collaborative spaces is SIT. Where a group has to work together toward shared goals set for the group, it can enhance motivation and positive attitudes among individual group members to interact in ways that would support the achievement of the set goals (Cockerill et al., 2018). In the presence of positive interdependence, group members interact from the vantage point that they will reach the set goals if they all work together. Members therefore take on personal responsibility for the success and effectiveness of the group. A visual depiction of this process is presented in Figure 2.1.
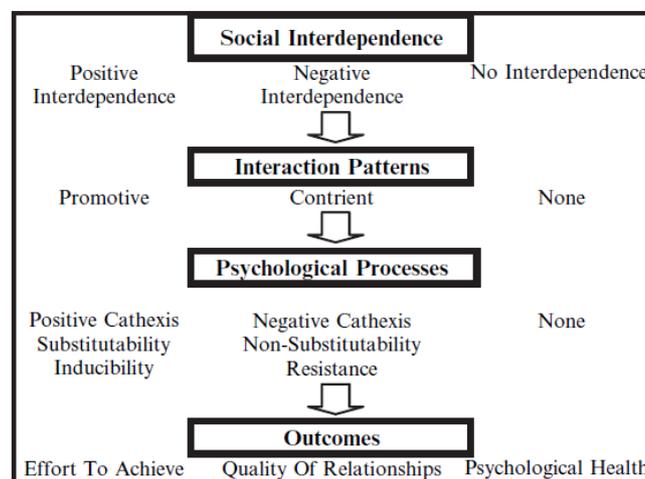
Figure 2.1: Overview of social interdependence theory (Source: Johnson & Johnson, 2008, p. 11)

Other principles of SIT that were of significance to this study are promotive interactions, social skills and group processing. Promotive interactions involve face-to-face meetings where members can encourage and support each other's efforts to achieve the group's goals. Social skills, such as active listening, effective communication and problem-solving skills enable group members to manage the challenges and tensions which often arise during group interactions. Group processing in the form of continuously reflecting on how effectively the group and individual members are achieving the set goals can enable the group to make decisions about which actions need to be changed or maintained to ensure the efficacy of the group in reaching its goals. Where these principles are followed, positive interdependence is enhanced (Van Mechelen, Zaman, Laenen & Abeele, 2015; Cockerill et al., 2018; Agampodi et al., 2019).

Moreover, positive affect and sense of belonging may also positively influence opportunity recognition and how women might navigate responses to such opportunities (Delgado Garcia, De Quevedo Puente & Blanco Mazagatos, 2015; McGowan, Cooper, Durkin & O'Kane, 2015; Stead, 2017). Cornwall (2016) and Zuber-Skerritt, Wood and Kearney (2020) argue that initiatives aimed at the economic empowerment of women should invest in developing women's perceptions of themselves as human beings, their own agency and their capabilities. Such approaches could help women to become more conscious of the power they carry within themselves to become agents of change in their own their lives as well as in their societies if they work together with other women as change agents. Engaging these women to think differently about themselves and their circumstances could thus play an emancipatory role, and propel them into taking up their power and grasping opportunities to create sustainable lives for themselves and participating efficiently in the economy and their communities.

2.3   WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT AS A KEY TO POVERTY REDUCTION

Women and youth constitute a major portion of the world's population (Women, 2018). Their economic empowerment could thus make a meaningful contribution to addressing the issue of global poverty alleviation. Furthermore, income earned by women generally contributes more significantly to familial health and well-being as women tend to distribute their finances more equitably within their families (Brickell & Chant, 2010; Chant, 2016a). This view is supported by other researchers who concur that socio-economic interventions that promote the equal participation of women in the economy have the potential to address the needs of society at

large and enhance the well-being of often vulnerable and marginalised communities (Klasen, Lechtenfeld & Povel, 2015; Prügl, 2015).

Research has also suggested that, if one hopes to ensure sustainable investment in the economic development of women, interventions should extend beyond financial allocations to include the enhancement of women's efficacy in the world of business by affording them opportunities to develop their ability to exercise effective business decision-making and skills related to growing their enterprise beyond the notion of making a living (Butt, Jamil & Nawaz, 2015; Chant, 2016b; Hassan and Omar, 2016; St-Jean & Tremblay, 2020). Over time, the focus needed in order to achieve this has varied. More recently, since the start of the 21st century, there has been a shift in focus from interventions that narrowly concentrated on injecting financial investments into women's empowerment initiatives to an approach that continued to emphasise the empowerment of women, but starting this process earlier through investing in the education of the girl-child and young women. The argument made for this approach was that it was an attempt to be proactive. The champions of this view continue to argue that if one invests in the education and training of the girl-child and young women, one prevents them from falling into poverty in the first place (Cobbett, 2014; Chant, 2016b).

Calkin (2015) supports this view and states that since an estimated 250 million young women are living in poverty across the globe, girls are the greatest untapped source for alleviating poverty. Investing in girls and their education has the potential to make a significant impact in the pursuit to find sustainable ways to alleviate poverty across the world. Koffman and Gill (2014) argue that empowering the girl-child would not only affect the individual but because of the way in which they are socialised, it has the potential to enable them to positively affect their families, communities and even their countries. Chant (2016a), who concurs with this view, contends that there is a significantly higher return on investing in women from a very young age. Like the women in this study, many women continue to find themselves in the paradoxical situation of being marginalised on the social, political and economic front while at the same they are considered to be a tremendous source of potential for addressing the worldwide issue of poverty alleviation and social reformation (Koffman & Gill, 2014; Shahvisi, 2019).

While it remains important to capacitate women, the research cautions against feminising the poverty alleviation agenda or regarding it as a panacea to solving the issue of poverty. The women in this study shared views that concur with the caution that one remains mindful that

interventions and poverty alleviation strategies that focus on the empowerment of women do not have the opposite effect of creating increased dependence on support and financial investments. These interventions by government, civil society and the private sector then have the potential to erode the self-efficacy of the participants who, instead of becoming self-reliant and self-sufficient, become increasingly dependent on these sources for their socio-economic well-being (Koffman & Gill, 2014; Cornwall, 2014; Koffman, Orgad & Gill, 2015). Often, these interventions place the responsibility on the women to lift themselves out of poverty "by their own bootstraps" (Koffman & Gill, 2014, p. 90). This then also has the potential to have too narrow a focus on the project or intervention outcomes and may often take the attention away from the need to address the broader issues of structural violence which may serve to undermine women's efficacy and keep them in socio-economically marginalised positions (Shahvisi, 2019). The insights gained in this study support a more holistic, biopsychosocial approach that goes beyond the piecemeal provision of education, skills training or financial injections in socio-economic empowerment efforts. Such holistic approaches ought to consider various systems (see Figure 2.2 below) and issues such as gender inequality, skewed power relations, women's representation in leadership positions and better understanding of the conditions under which women would be able to flourish within their daily living contexts (Cornwall & Edwards, 2015; Marvel et al., 2016; Scales et al., 2020).
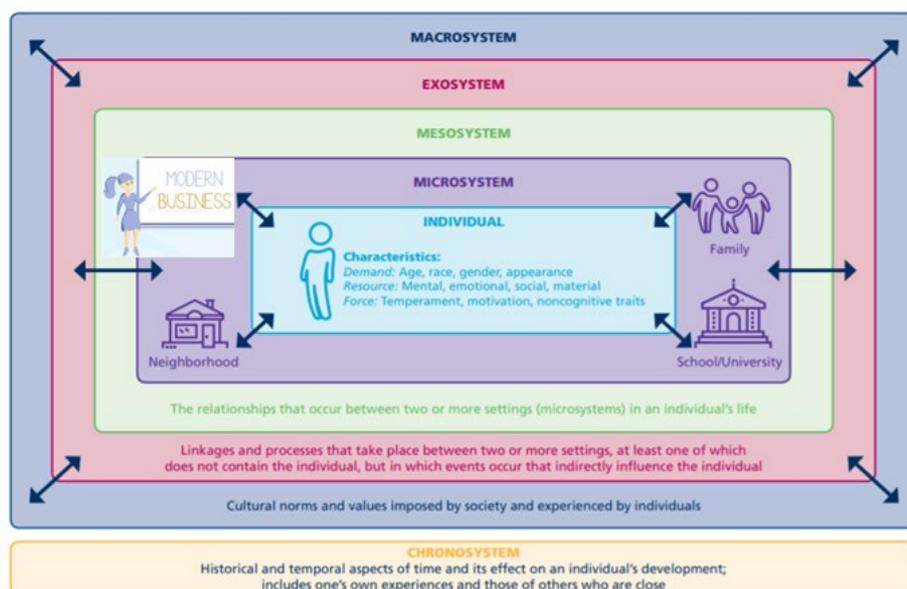
Figure 2.2: The bioecological model (Source: Lundqvist & Sandström, 2019)

The bioecological model introduced by Bronfenbrenner (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Tabane, 2014; Brush, Ali, Kelley & Greene, 2017; Lundqvist & Sandström, 2019) suggests that

human development is influenced by people's interactions across various contexts and systems that are connected to the individual's livelihood. These interactions may result in physical, biological, psychological, social and cultural growth and development (Lee & Broom, 2017; Lundqvist & Sandström, 2019). In this case, it can therefore be argued that the development of the women participating in this study was influenced by their interactions within their social contexts across their lifespan. These social contexts or systems include:

  i. the individual's direct interactions with family, peers, teachers or caregivers (microsystem);

 ii. interactions that are secondary in nature where, for example, their parents would interact with their schools (mesosystem);

iii. indirect interactions where the women are/were not directly involved but which influenced their development and well-being, for example their parents' employment or financial histories and the environments in which they grew up (exosystem);

 iv. on a more distal level, the influence exerted by social, political and economic structures such as ideologies, beliefs and values which could play a significant role in how these women would interact within and across their various life systems (macrosystem); and

  v. the chronosystem which includes the environmental events and transitions that occur over an individual's lifespan (Swart & Pettipher, 2016; Lundqvist & Sandström, 2019).

People's interactions in their daily lives as they navigate within and across their different contexts are reciprocal and include risk factors that could cause barriers to their development, as well as protective factors or resources that could serve as enablers to their development. Hence, interventions focusing on their development ought to take cognisance of this inter-relationality and should thus include a holistic and systemic consideration of the individual's context as well as the contexts of the interacting social systems. If an effective integration can be found between risk factors and protective factors, it can foster resilience (Theron & Donald, 2013; Theron, 2016; Ebersöhn, 2017).

Another critical aspect of this socio-economic empowerment process is the ability to make choices and take decisions which could influence one's life positively. Research has shown that feeling trapped in a cycle of poverty can undermine one's sense of self and self-efficacy (Read, Olivola & Hardisty, 2017; Sheehy-Skeffington & Rea, 2017). The women's experiences in this study align with the view in the literature that in order to enable individuals to pursue

sustainable change, one has to understand the personal and contextual variables that may influence their decision-making and resultant actions (Cornwall & Edwards 2015; Cornwall, 2016). For this reason, the role of context in empowerment endeavours cannot be ignored.

2.4 CONTEXTUALISING THE ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

Context refers to the "circumstances, conditions, situations or environments" in which individuals live and these are considered to have either an empowering or a restrictive effect on people's behaviour and actions (Welter, 2011, p. 167). Historical trends and changes over time, institutional cultures and socio-economic structures can either create or limit opportunities for individuals to participate in certain activities, endeavours or decision-making processes. Sannino and Engeström (2018) argue that history (or historicity, as referred to within cultural historical activity theory) is an inextricable part of human activity and therefore the challenges and potential of human practices cannot be fully understood without considering their histories or backgrounds. However, it is also important to note that the potential influence exerted by the geo-spatial and socio-political context is complex and cannot be seen in isolation from the inter- and intra-personal variables that influence a person's life. From a bio-ecosystemic viewpoint, this implies that context may be experienced and responded to in different ways by individuals or even by groups (Rose, 2016). For example, ideologies at a macro-systemic level, such as democracy or social justice, may produce increased opportunities for women to participate in the economic sphere (Opotow, 2018). The lack of such opportunities could, however, also serve to inspire some women to pioneer innovative pathways through such adversities (Raniga, 2018). While certain macro-level ideologies may thus support the attainment of desired behaviours and outcomes, adverse conditions may have similar effects. Context may therefore be advantageous for some in certain conditions, while for others, it may severely curtail their perception and experience of what is possible (Rose, 2016; Zuckermann, 2018; Lundqvist & Sandström, 2019).

The perceived low success or participation rates of women in entrepreneurship as a means to sustainable poverty alleviation is often better explained by taking cognisance of the socio-economic contexts within which these business endeavours are conducted (Poggesi et al., 2016). It is not only a lack of access to finances that can constrain women from successfully engaging in entrepreneurship ventures. Contextual factors such as cultural norms can often prohibit women from participating in labour activities outside the home, whereas political and

economic factors may also have a constraining influence on women's entrepreneurial participation.

Poggesi et al.'s (2016) systematic literature review shows that socio-cultural context can either exacerbate or reduce challenges for female entrepreneurs and can either limit or create new opportunities. Therefore, aspects such as local traditions, gendered power relationships and who are being regarded as legitimate participants within the entrepreneurial market space cannot be ignored. The individual's own abilities or capacity is not the only factor that could determine their success as an entrepreneur. In addition to individual capacity, socio-cultural practices, political ideologies, economic factors and even familial or household circumstances – particularly pertinent in the case of female entrepreneurs – can play a role (Zuckermann, 2018; Shahvisi, 2019).

Hence, when exploring female entrepreneurship, it is important to keep an open mindset and not be limited by restrictive theoretical frameworks. Zahra, Wright and Abdelgawad (2014) argue that research and debates in this regard should remain open to fresh and new insights into both the known and the unknown. Thus, remaining cognisant of the diversity of contexts that may bare influence on female entrepreneurship will serve to develop better understandings of the subtleties and intricacies thereof (Zahra et al., 2014). This may inspire simple, yet innovative entrepreneurial activities that might incrementally grow into financially successful and sustainable ventures in the long run.

It is therefore important for researchers to acknowledge that entrepreneurship is highly contextualised and that research into this phenomenon also takes place in specific contexts and communities (Welter, Baker, Audretsch & Gartner, 2017). Honouring the contextual nature of entrepreneurship includes more than recognising the complexity and diversity of the phenomenon and its contexts in terms of theorising and applying methodologies for exploring this field, but it is also about listening to the different voices involved and opening up the debates to include contributions from those who are not traditionally regarded as the expert voices according to general scientific standards (Brush, Edelman, Manolova & Welter, 2019). As a result, when research is done about the economic empowerment of women, women ought to be included as experts about their own experiences as participants in the entrepreneurship market.

The discussions above afforded me the opportunity to incorporate principles from the CHAT framework into this study as an additional lens to analyse and interpret the data generated. The importance of context resonates with CHAT which holds that humans are shaped by their social contexts (Sannino & Engeström, 2018) and can therefore only be understood through interrogating how they interact with the world around them within the context of their daily lives (Roth, Hwang, Goulart & Lee, 2016). People thus construct worldviews and meaning as they actively engage with other people or socio-cultural artefacts (which can include physical objects, signs and language) in their daily practices. Figure 2.3 presents a visual portrayal of the CHAT framework.
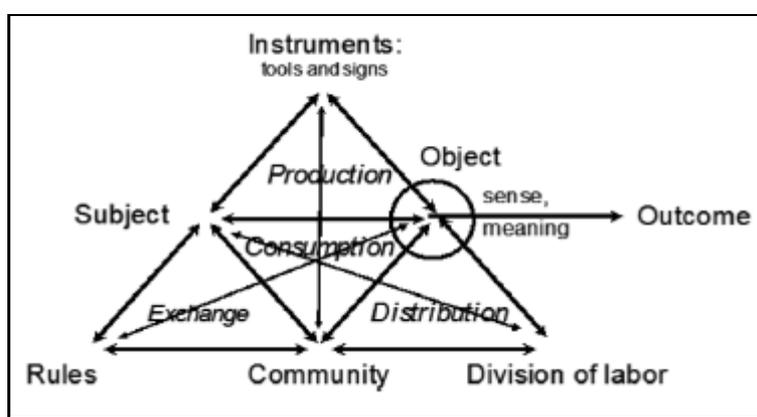
Figure 2.3: The basic structure of human activity (Source: Sannino & Engeström, 2018, p. 45)

CHAT further puts forward the notion of 'multi-voicedness' in arguing that the different positions that people occupy in their societies and workplaces lead to different voices speaking in people's daily lives (Engeström, 2001, p. 135; Engeström, 2018). People also bring in their own histories from the social positions they take up in their daily lives. CHAT describes these different roles and responsibilities as "division of labour" (Engeström, 2001, p. 135). Division of labour creates different positions for people within these systems of engagement, while one person may simultaneously hold a variety of positions and responsibilities.

Individuals would have to make meaning of these various roles and voices and decide how they will respond to them or how they will shape them in terms of their own roles. These different voices could potentially create contradictions or tension as people attempt to make sense of these voices, yet such contradictions could also provide opportunities for innovation and growth. This implies that people's responses and their daily activities could change over time as new voices and perspectives may emerge within their contexts, making the consideration of people's histories (or historicity, as it is referred to in CHAT theory; see Engeström, 2001, p.

136) another important element to be considered (Engeström, 2018). As people navigate ways around such voices and possible contradictions, they may develop new ways of responding and acting, leading to personal growth and expansive transformation of themselves and their circumstances (Hölscher, Wittmayer & Loorbach, 2018).

2.5   FACTORS INFLUENCING WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The aforementioned discussions elucidated how various factors could shape women's involvement in entrepreneurship. As referred to earlier, these could include structural, cultural, economic and political factors. In addition, Mortan, Ripoll, Carvalho and Bernal (2014) and Hunt and Samman (2016) argue that personal attributes are also key factors in the entrepreneurial successes or failures of women. Personal attributes (such as education, freedom of work, desire for higher income and social status), family affairs and other external environmental factors (such as access to credit, to entrepreneurship training and to business information, and government policy support) all show a close connection to women's engagement in entrepreneurship ventures and their related development (Poggesi et al., 2016).

Factors such as financial management skills, adequate cash flow, marketing skills and discrimination against women also play an important role in the development and potential success of women's entrepreneurship (Khan, 2015). A lack of entrepreneurial skills, start-up finance, management skills, access to business support and information, and low self-confidence and challenges in finding the right contacts for one's business venture are all challenges to women entrepreneurs' development (Parvin, Rahman & Jia, 2012; Lindsay, McDougall, Sanford, Menna-Dack, Kingsnorth & Adams, 2015).

Entrepreneurship makes an important contribution to the world economy, including developing countries. However, the extent of participation in entrepreneurship varies significantly between women and men, due to disparities in access to various forms of capital (social, economic, political, financial and family) (Brush & Cooper, 2012; Poggesi et al., 2016). Women may also have different reasons for entering into the entrepreneurship market space, as well as different experiences of operating in this field. Women in developing countries, for example, are more likely to start small enterprises out of necessity than opportunity or motivation (Brush & Cooper, 2012).

Moreover, Brush, De Bruin and Welter (2014) contend that there is a gendered difference between how women make business decisions and how men go about the decision-making process. Institutional and structural frameworks and practices may cause women to have different, often negative, entrepreneurial experiences in comparison to men. Women also conceive of, interpret and experience the notion of success differently to how men do. Qualitative or interpretivist studies focusing on exploring women's motivations, expectations and experiences of entrepreneurship could therefore unearth practices of entrepreneurship as well as emotional approaches and responses that may be distinctive to how women participate in this sphere (Brush et al., 2014).

2.6 WHY EMOTIONS MATTER IN THE ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

Emotional intelligence plays a significant role in decision-making when one operates in the real world from day to day (Zaki, Abd-Elrhaman & Ghoneimy, 2018; Yildirim, Trout & Hartzell, 2019). Brackett, Mayer and Warner (2004) describe emotional intelligence as the ability to "perceive emotions and to use emotion to facilitate thought" (p. 1387). Much of one's thoughts, actions and decisions are linked to one's emotional intelligence. The concept of emotional intelligence has been researched since the early 1990s and has been defined by many as a competency or skill used to interpret one's emotions and to adapt or enhance this process of interpretation in order to manage one's emotions and behaviours (Brackett et al., 2004; Dhani, 2017).

According to Doern and Goss (2014), Lindsay et al. (2015) and Savickas (2019), in addition to static obstacles such as access to financial support, many of the challenges that entrepreneurs face are related to socio-emotional processes. Aspects such as differential power relations, discrimination, self-consciousness and shame may significantly deflate entrepreneurs' motivation and actions (Cornwall, 2016; Stead, 2017). When exploring barriers to successful entrepreneurial engagement, the focus should not only be on static obstacles that challenge or constrain entrepreneurial participation. Internal exclusionary processes, structures or cultures should also be interrogated as potential constraints to entrepreneurship engagement and the economic empowerment of women (Poggesi et al., 2016). Gaining a better understanding of these processes could inform more effective initiatives towards reducing the socio-emotional obstacles or barriers that constrain entrepreneurial actions (Doern & Goss, 2014; Thompson, Van Gelderen & Keppler, 2020).

2.6.1   A perspective on barriers to entrepreneurship and economic empowerment

Barriers to entrepreneurship and economic empowerment are commonly defined as factors, conditions or experiences that exert negative influence on entrepreneurs' actions and decision-making processes (Hunt & Samman, 2016). These barriers can be either internal in nature, for example the characteristics of the entrepreneur or their perceptions of certain phenomena; or they can be external, that is, structural or environmental (Henley, 2020). Internal and external barriers are not necessarily mutually exclusive (Rose, 2016). The perception of not being able to access funding, for example, could be based on the actual depletion of existing funding or on receiving negative responses to funding applications. Barriers to entrepreneurship, whether internal or external in nature, could deter the potential entrepreneur from starting a business or it could demotivate active entrepreneurs from being innovative and growing their businesses (Hunt & Samman, 2016; Henley, 2020).

2.6.2   Socio-emotional processes as barriers to economic empowerment

The influence of social context on entrepreneurial endeavours deserves close attention. Inequalities in power relationships between entrepreneurs and government officials, as well as between novice entrepreneurs and seasoned businessmen or -women, can foster significant positive or negative emotional experiences (Goss, 2010). Those who dominate these power relations tend to gain more emotional energy from these interactions, while those who are in the subordinate position may lose energy and subsequently also motivation (Goss, 2008; Cornwall, 2016).

Unequal power relationships can cultivate social emotions of shame, embarrassment, rejection and failure, which may further confine the entrepreneur to a subordinate position. Interactions where the entrepreneur is being regarded as the subservient party could limit entrepreneurial agency, causing stagnation, a lack of innovation and growth, and sometimes even decisions to abort the venture (Doern & Goss, 2014; Treffers, Welpe, Spörrle & Picot, 2017). Social practices that cause women to feel excluded, marginalised or lacking a sense of belonging, may debilitate women's development of entrepreneurial identity. Conversely, individual agency may enable women to position themselves to take up and engage in entrepreneurial spaces actively and strategically (Stead, 2017).

Stead's (2017) argument reinforces the notion that barriers to entrepreneurial action can include more than just objective or subjective obstacles – dynamic socio-emotional processes also come

into play. Therefore, such barriers would also include intra-personal practices and rituals that could constrain entrepreneurial action, growth and empowerment, as well as how the interaction between structures and agency could play an enabling or constraining role in women's entrepreneurial empowerment (Poggesi et al., 2016; Stead, 2017; Thompson, Van Gelderen & Keppler, 2020). Embracing this view of entrepreneurial barriers creates the opportunity to explore women's entrepreneurship and economic empowerment from a more dynamic perspective. It also opens possibilities for exploring women's entrepreneurship as an agentic (intra-relational) and inter-relational phenomenon that can be enhanced through suitable interventions and structures.

2.7   THE PSYCHO-SOCIAL IMPACTS OF POVERTY

Poverty and unemployment do not only have financial or material implications that could be distressful to the individual; these issues hold profound socio-emotional implications as well (Jo, 2013). External social forces and processes, such as repeated shaming of people living in poverty through biased social media, political or institutional discourses, can impose significantly distressing experiences of humiliation and a lack of dignity on those trapped in a cycle of poverty. Over and above the experiences of material deprivation, these persons are also burdened with considerable emotional distress due to the stigma attached to poverty. At a psycho-social level, poverty is thus often characterised by aspects such as shame, a lack of self-esteem and dignity, and feeling disrespected, and perceptions of having no voice or agency. The notion of poverty should thus be conceptualised at both a material and a socio-emotional level, and at individual as well as collective level, as its impact could present differently within diverse contexts and diversely unique individuals (Jo, 2013; Ruiz-Pérez, Bermúdez-Tamayo & Rodríguez-Barranco, 2017).

It is not only structural or political factors that may influence whether and how a person may transition into sustainable livelihoods, but also their own intentionality, inner drive and motivation (Schoon & Lyons-Amos, 2017). Hitlin and Johnson (2015) refer to this as "agency" (p. 4). Within a socio-ecological perspective on agency, the focus is on how socio-economic conditions may influence how a person thinks, feels and behaves, and how this might shape their transition through life. This makes it possible to explore people's capability of navigating the course of their lives and shaping their own niche areas where they can experience competence and satisfaction with their lives (Child & Breyer, 2017; Hölscher et al., 2018).

Bandura (2012), Hitlin and Johnson (2015) and Mezirow (2018) suggest that this kind of self-efficacy, thus the ability to self-reflect and believe in one's capabilities, has the power to motivate a person to produce certain outcomes for themselves and to persevere in adverse circumstances. This implies that people are not defencelessly constrained by their socio-cultural and economic conditions, but they can exercise their own power to make constructive decisions in response to adverse socio-economic conditions. People can therefore use their own resilience to respond to challenging situations in transformative and functional ways in order to overcome such adverse situations (Hitlin & Johnson, 2015; Schoon, 2015; Schoon & Lyons-Amos, 2017). In the case of this study, it implies that these women have the potential to rise above the challenges they face as unemployed or partially employed women by responding in constructive and innovative ways to address the issue of unemployment and sustainable poverty alleviation.

2.8 DEVELOPING SOCIO-EMOTIONAL COMPETENCIES AMONG MARGINALISED YOUTH AND WOMEN

Raffaelli, Lazarevic, Koller, Nsamenang and Sharma (2013) describe a successful adult as someone who is able to support him/herself and contribute to supporting a family. However, in communities plagued by poverty, it is more of a challenge for youths to transition successfully into adulthood. High levels of unemployment may be prevalent in these communities and those who do not succeed at transitioning into secure employment may end up becoming involved in destructive activities such as crime and substance abuse (Mackie, 2013; Kheswa & Tikimana, 2015). Dominant discourse suggests that the general perception of such youth is that they pose a risk or threat to society. However, Zuber-Skerritt and Teare (2013) argue that all young people have innate strengths that can be developed and with the appropriate support they can acquire the skills necessary to solve their problems.

In the current South African economic climate, more people and particularly young people are confronted with high levels of unemployment and the stark reality of evasive financial independence. This situation is presently exacerbated by the implications of the worldwide spread of the Covid-19 virus and the ensuing personal but also economic lockdown that has already had a catastrophic effect on the global economy (Ataguba, 2020; Fernandes, 2020). A further significant surge in already high unemployment rates may thus be expected. Zuber-Skerritt and Teare's (2013) argument suggests that collaborative processes could support marginalised youths to develop competencies that would help them to find sustainable ways of

31

solving their own challenges around financial security. The work of Bar-On (2007), Scorza, Araya, Wuermli and Betancourt (2016) and Rieckmann (2018) promotes the view that supporting people to develop socio-emotional competencies will enable them to become more effective at decision-making and problem-solving. The development of socio-emotional competences may also empower youth to make life choices that enable them to transition into the labour market or entrepreneurial ventures that will make it possible to generate and maintain sustainable sources of financial income.

2.8.1 Addressing the unemployment crisis through the development of human capital

In the wake of high unemployment rates, many young people are denied access to further education and training opportunities. Youth then often get trapped in a cycle where the lack of specialised skills makes it significantly more difficult for them to access the formal employment market (Graham & Mlatsheni, 2015). Research has found that the current state of the South African economy makes it unlikely that the formal job market will be able to accommodate the growing number of jobseekers. It has therefore become increasingly important for individuals, government and industry to consider innovative ways in which more people, and in particular women, can engage in entrepreneurial endeavours towards financial independence (Mayer et al., 2011; Fatoki, 2014; Tawiah, 2017).

This study dealt with the experiences of a group of women on a trajectory to social entrepreneurship through their participation in a community-based collaborative programme based on the GULL principles. GULL is an organisation that embraces the notion of human capital development as a means to sustainable poverty alleviation. Through collaboration with communities at local level, it seeks to create opportunities for marginalised people and communities to explore ways that align with their own needs and contexts (Zuber-Skerritt & Teare, 2013; Teare, 2019a). The GULL programme is explained in further detail in the following section.

2.8.2 Global University of Life-Long Learning (GULL)

Although GULL awards recognised certificates or qualifications, it is not a university in the traditional academic sense of the concept. It does not subscribe to the education of people by academics who serve as both teachers and researchers. Instead, it foregrounds the importance of practicality and authenticity of the learning process (Teare, 2019a). The GULL qualifications framework allows participants to advance through their learning in incremental steps, but with

the aim of bringing about change in their own lives and their societies (Child & Breyer, 2017). GULL thus focuses on active, holistic learning which has tangible benefits for both the learner and the society. A practical and flexible approach to community-based learning and development is followed.

GULL is an international initiative that works with local communities in ways that encourages participants to determine what they need to learn in order to improve the quality of their own lives and that of their communities. The participants are then afforded an opportunity to work towards this in a process that recognises each level of learning through the attainment professional certificates. GULL provides a "practical, professional development system to communities that would not otherwise have access to further and higher education" (Zuber-Skerritt & Teare, 2013, p. 6). It is argued that the provision of such opportunities to those who have been marginalised by society, may enable young people to change their life course and lead prosperous and financially self-sustaining lives. It is however important to note that while GULL is not formally accredited in South Africa, a number of universities have used its principles in collaborating with local communities.

The participants in this and other initiatives understand that although GULL awards certificates or qualifications, it is not a university in the traditional academic sense of the word. The participants in these programs shared that they valued GULL's focus on the importance of practicality and authenticity of the learning process (Teare, 2019a). The GULL qualifications framework allows participants to advance through their learning in augmented steps, thus following a step-by-step process through which change in their own lives and that of their community can ultimately be brought about. GULL focuses on active, holistic learning which has tangible benefits for both the learner and the society. A practical and flexible approach to community-based learning and development is followed. Through processes of reflection and ongoing personal and professional development, the GULL approach encourages integration between roles at work and in community. This is done through a series of learning pathways that will be discussed next.

2.8.3   The GULL pathways to lifelong learning

GULL proposes three pathways for facilitating ongoing learning and development, each consisting of five steps or certification points (Teare, 2019b). These are professional Bachelor's, Master's and Doctoral pathways. The Bachelor's pathway is aimed at younger

adults between the ages of 17 and 25, as well as older adults who have limited literacy skills. The target group for the Master's degree pathway is adults between the ages of 26 and 35 and who hold senior positions at work or in the community. Experience and seniority are essential criteria for entry into this pathway. The Doctoral pathway is ideally open to adults in their forties and fifties and who hold leadership roles in the workplace or in the community. The participants in this study were focused on the Bachelor's pathway, in particular Foundation levels 1 and 2 within this pathway. These levels provide opportunities for entry and certification to youth and young adults who have had little opportunity to advance their schooling. Attention is mostly directed towards personal and professional development with the aim of enabling the individual to make a difference in his or her own life, in their work and their communities.

During Foundation levels 1 and 2, which traditionally run over seven weeks, participants are required to reflect continuously and critically on their current situations, what they need to learn in order to address their own challenges, and how they can learn from work or practical activities, and to track the progress they are making. Exploration of these questions should then help participants to write personal learning statements which reflect their considerations of their current position and the activities they are engaged in, as well as future possibilities in terms of where they see themselves in 12 months, what skills they need to develop to attain their goals and what new work experiences they envisage for themselves. It is the responsibility of each participant to capture their own evidence of learning in an appropriate way. If the evidence gathered by the participant is deemed to be incomplete, the person does not 'fail' but rather gets an opportunity to continue the process until there is sufficient evidence to merit award of a certificate. After certification the participant may move on to level 3. It is also important to note that the length of time depends on the participants and the goals and intentions they set for themselves. The participants in this study had been engaged in a lengthier period and the findings suggest that the eroding of self-efficacy brought about by feeling trapped in a cycle of poverty sometimes requires intensive focus, patience and development.

2.8.4 Illuminating GULL Foundation levels 1 and 2

GULL level 1 is focused on supporting participants' entry into the GULL lifelong learning process (Teare, 2019b). This is important as these participants had often lacked opportunities to adequate schooling. Consequently, they may exhibit difficulties with reading and writing and may require support in these areas. Mediation is therefore an important part of the GULL learning process (McGowan et al., 2015). The CHAT framework refers to this mediation

process as the "zone of proximal development" which argues that people are able to enhance their learning and performance levels when they are assisted by knowledgeable peers (or other forms of knowledge produced through cultural tools and artefacts) than they would if they function on their own (Sannino & Engeström, 2018, p. 52). Participants are encouraged and supported by a dedicated learning coach or mentor to complete a personal learning statement during week 1 of level 1. They are also guided through activities to continuously reflect on their experiences over weeks 2 to 7 by writing these down in diary format. During week 7 they are required to complete a 'return on outputs' form where they reflect on the benefits that they have gained from their learning experiences over the seven weeks. These activities are aimed at enabling the participants to identify their own learning needs, gain insight into the process of action learning and learn to work collaboratively with others in their groups as well as with their learning coach in their process of developing their personal learning plans.

At level 2, participants continue with a second diary format reflection cycle. Learning within the GULL process is thus self-directed and provides participants with the opportunity to gain confidence and competence in using the action learning process to facilitate and support their own learning as well as to support their fellow participants in the process. The narrative feedback that is generated through the reflection cycles is used formatively by the facilitators to guide and support participants to gain insight into their learning. It is an important part of the process for participants to gain such understandings as the general expectation is that those participants who have successfully completed levels 1 and 2 should mentor new entrants at level 1. It is an important tenet of this initiative that participants at higher levels pay forward what they have gained through the GULL process by sharing their skills and experience of action learning with new entrants at level 1.

The personal learning statement that each participant develops constitutes a crucial element in the GULL process as these statements reflect each participant's unique learning journey. Participants are required to take a critical view of their current situation by exploring both the positive and the challenging aspects, while considering how they could improve those aspects that are viewed as not satisfactory. Moreover, they do not just reflect on how they may enhance their own learning or capabilities, but also on what they may be able to accomplish to the benefit of their teams or organisations.

In addition, they also explore future possibilities. At this point it is important for each participant to question where they see themselves in the near future and what they would need

35

to learn in order to realise this vision. To this end participants explore a second round of diary format reflections, challenging themselves to apply their learnings to work or community-based tasks or activities. They select a few daily tasks or activities that they would like to improve or contribute to more effectively. They continuously reflect on and document progress on these tasks or activities, which are shared with the other participants in their groups. By doing this, it becomes a collaborative, active learning process where each of the participants also learns from the others.

Following this approach, the intention with levels 1 and 2 is that participants take the responsibility to direct their own learning but that they also extend the GULL learnings to others. Through their continuous reflections on activities participants gain insight into their own learning processes and growth, as well as to how they can support the learning of others. It enables them to use their learnings in pursuit of their personal development, but also as professional development opportunities. What they learn is applied both within their own lives and within their roles and contributions to their community or their work environments. Thus, the process of empowerment is not limited to the individual alone but also extends to others to create an interlinked web between the individual and their families, friends and colleagues. The learning always happens in collaboration with the individual's learning coach, as well as with other participants in the GULL process, and is integrated with the work and community networks of the individual. The whole process therefore yields outcomes at personal, community, societal and work levels.

2.9   CONCLUSION

From this and other studies, it is evident that, although the economic empowerment of women is being regarded as a key strategy to alleviating poverty in families and societies, women's participation in entrepreneurship activities has still not risen to the envisaged levels. Despite the number of and increased investment in empowerment initiatives, an array of other factors appears to impede the growth of women entrepreneurship. Failure to recognise how these factors impact their trajectory to economic independence will continue to hamper sustainable poverty alleviation.

This state of affairs makes women's participation in entrepreneurship a much more complex phenomenon than may be evident on the surface. Its complexity lies in the often-subtle interplay between financial inputs, educational training, mentoring, socio-cultural variables and the need

to enhance the socio-emotional intelligence necessary for women to develop efficacy as entrepreneurs (McGowan et al., 2015; Poggesi et al., 2016; Stead, 2017; St-Jean & Tremblay, 2020).

The complex web of internal and external factors that influence women's participation in entrepreneurship requires any exploration of this topic to use a research methodology that would allow the researcher to delve into the relationships between these factors and the phenomenon under scrutiny. Moreover, the inclusion of the voices of women who aspire to become or who are already active entrepreneurs adds to the legitimacy of the findings and deeper insights that will be shared through this study. The participatory action research approach that allowed this exploration is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

"Knowing what you want to find out leads inexorably to the question of how you will get that information" (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 42).

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study was to explore the experiences of a group of young women who participated in an SI partnership initiative to address the challenge of poverty and unemployment in their area. The women took part in a collaborative project between Stellenbosch University, the Global University for Lifelong Learning and the Social Development Branch of their local government. The focus of this initiative was personal development as a precursor to the development of professional entrepreneurship skills in order for the women to create and sustain employment opportunities for themselves.

In order to ensure quality research that honours the lived experiences of the participants the researcher has to be vigilant about how her thoughts, beliefs, philosophical approach and methodology may influence the outcomes of the research. It is therefore important that the researcher be mindful in selecting a research framework and methodology that will ensure the scientific rigour of the research study. Hence, the researcher's theoretical ideas ought to link appropriately to the strategies and procedures that guide the study in a logical and systematic way to address the research question (Silverman, 2016; Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Mohajan, 2018). Crotty (1998, in Wener & Woodgate, 2013) suggests that the scholarly standard of the research outcome is strengthened by a research framework that clearly defines the study's (i) philosophical stance, (ii) research approach, (iii) research methodology and (iv) research methods. How these elements link to each other within this particular study, is visually represented in Figure 3.1 below and elucidated in the rest of the chapter (p. 3).
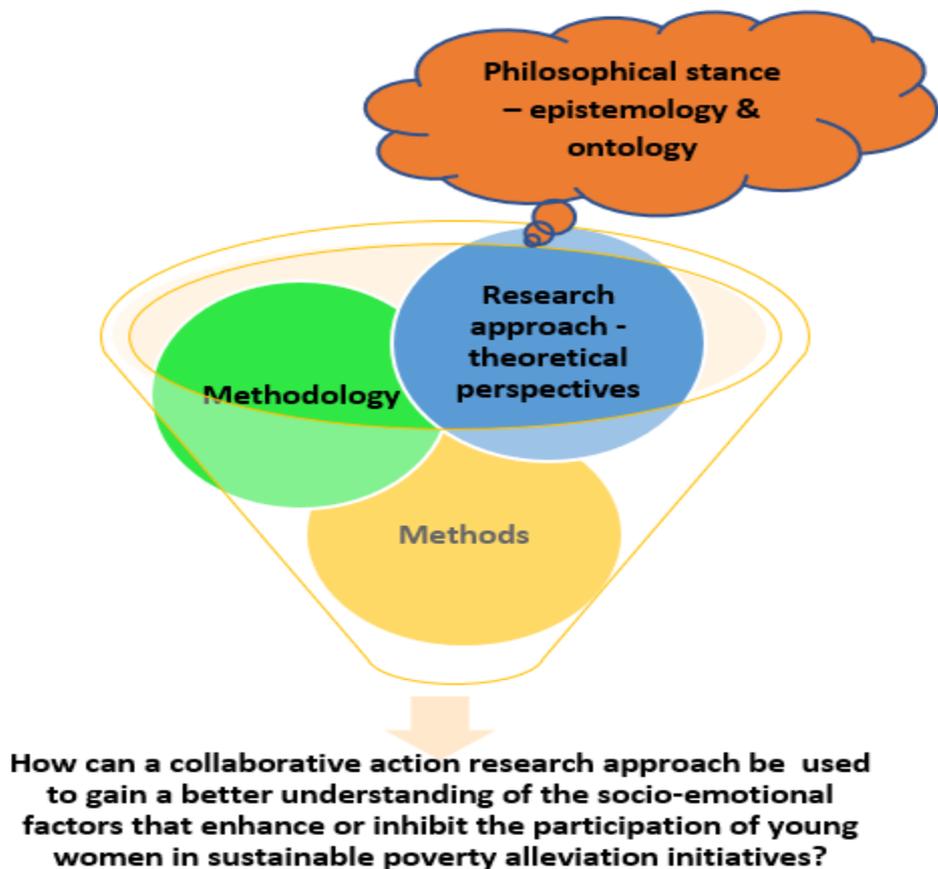
Figure 3.1: The research framework (Source: Author)

3.2 POSITIONING THE STUDY

Youth unemployment is a rapidly growing challenge in South Africa. A recent business analysis commentary cited South Africa as having one of the highest *unemployment rates* among youth between the ages of 15 and 24. Unemployment rates for this group was estimated at 55% during the first quarter of 2019. The unemployment rate for young people aged between 25 and 34 years old during that same quarter was estimated at 34% (Lindwa, 2019). According to official national statistics, women make up a large percentage of these unemployed youth (STATS SA, 2019).

From the aforementioned statistics, it is apparent that youth unemployment constitutes a significant social and economic crisis for the country. This phenomenon represents a series of challenges at various levels, and traverse economic, social and even psychological dimensions. According to Fourie (2011), unemployment has a particularly direct correlation with poverty, with the lack of income having negative implications for people's ability to be self-sufficient

and independent. Being unemployed and poor is often compounded by issues related to stigmatisation, a lack of confidence and decreased sense of self-value or human dignity (De Witte, Rothman & Jackson, 2012). Ramphele (2002) describes unemployment as being "the biggest thief of hope amongst young people" (p. 12). The implications of this is that young people may become increasingly disheartened and demotivated. I therefore align with others who highlight the importance of exploring the possible socio-economic and psychological effects that unemployment can have on young people and how these may influence their ability to exercise self-efficacy.

In addition, this study reinforces the stance taken by the researchers and community activists who emphasise the importance of restoring hope in individuals within communities. This is also particularly important in light of current global and South African economic realities that point to increasing limitations of the state and the private sector to provide sufficient job opportunities to address the crisis of unemployment (Panday, Ranchod, Ngcaweni & Seedat, 2013). While there are a number of quantitative and qualitative research studies that have been conducted on this complex phenomenon, I concur with the school of thought that it requires increased social research that collaborates with this cohort. Doing research in this manner will afford greater insight into potential perceptions of the structural, economic and psycho-social variables that may influence the motivation of young people to create their own opportunities to generate a sustainable income (Savickas, 2019).

The above-mentioned provided the impetus for a study like this, which focused on exploring the socio-emotional factors that played a role in the participants' views of how people participate in poverty alleviation initiatives and the factors that influence the sustainability of such socio-economic initiatives.

3.3   RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research design refers to the overall strategy or plan that guides the study and ensures that the different components of the study, for example the methods used for data collection and analysis, are logically and coherently integrated so as to answer the research question(s) or problem(s) effectively (Tracy, 2019). The research design therefore also guides the type of questions that would be appropriate to investigate the topic under research. With the aim of this study in mind, namely the desire to gain deeper insight into the experiences of unemployed or partially employed women and youth who participated in a community-based empowerment

initiative, the research questions were developed in such a way that participants would be afforded the opportunity to be able to construct meanings from the experiences and perceptions they shared (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Giving people a voice as partners and co-creators of knowledge within the research process required careful attention to the research questions that guided the process in order to ensure that the research remained relevant to the people and the phenomenon under study (Cornish & Dunn, 2009; Zuber-Skerritt, 2017). Therefore, the questions were developed to be open-ended and exploratory in nature. I hoped that this would encourage the participants to explore and express their views and experiences that were still relatively unknown or unclear (Creswell, 2007; Schwab & Syed, 2015).

Exploratory questions most often seek to investigate "a particular relationship between two facets of social life" (Schwab & Syed, 2015, p. 392). In this study, I set out to explore the relationship between the participation of the then partially employed or unemployed women in a collaborative community poverty alleviation initiative and how socio-emotional factors may have influenced their participation in such types of endeavours. The following "grand tour" (Creswell, 2007, p. 108) or key research question was established in order to suitably guide the study towards attaining the aims that were set:

How can a collaborative action research approach be used to gain a better understanding of the socio-emotional factors that enhance or inhibit the participation of young women in sustainable poverty alleviation initiatives?

The following subsidiary questions were aimed at unearthing some of the major complexities related to community-based, participatory social justice initiatives and to provide information to describe the phenomenon, were identified to respond to the key research question:

- What life experiences, according to the women, have propelled them on a trajectory to unemployment?
- How did these women engage in the activities of this initiative and why did they engage in the ways that they did?
- What experiences within this collaborative endeavour did the women acknowledge as helping them to grow personally and in terms of entrepreneurial skills?
- What were the challenges or hindrances that these women experienced in terms of participating in such a collaborative endeavour?

- What suggestions would the women make to strengthen the effect of this initiative on their own development and the sustainability of the outcomes of the initiative?

From the above description, it is evident that the research questions were developed with the aim and purpose of the study in mind.

3.4 PHILOSOPHICAL STANCE OR RESEARCH PARADIGM

A paradigm can be described as a set of beliefs or a framework that guides the "intent, motivation and expectations" for any research that a researcher embarks on (MacKenzie & Knipe, 2006, p. 2). It informs the researcher's thoughts about what is regarded as being legitimate knowledge within the field of study or what is considered to be reality (ontology) and how one comes to know this knowledge or reality (epistemology) (Babbie & Mouton, 2011; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Dammak, 2015). Hence, the researcher adopts a particular viewpoint about the nature of knowledge and how it is constructed. A positivist stance, for example, would regard knowledge building as an objective activity in which the researcher should avoid exerting any influence on the research findings. On the other hand, within an interpretivist or constructivist stance, our ways of knowing about the world is built on our own interpretations and meaning-making of the world around us. This includes our lived experiences but also how we reflect on these lived experiences (Al-Saadi, 2014; Creswell, 2014; Ormston, Spencer, Barnard, & Snape, 2014; Bryman, 2016). The latter were aligned with this study's aim of exploring the lived experiences of the participants who were part of a community-based intervention.

Interpretivism or constructivism thus attempts to understand phenomena through investigating the complexities related to those phenomena in various contexts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A constructivist stance to scholarly inquiry encourages the researcher to view the context and the "qualities instead of the quantities of the phenomenon" (Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit, 2004, p. 3). Studies using an constructivist paradigm therefore endeavour to gain insight into the complexities that most often are entangled in the contexts within which phenomena exist or operate. To unravel these complexities, the 'insider' perspective, which focuses on social phenomena from the views of the participants, is crucial. The epistemological and ontological view that researchers take will direct their decisions about matters such as which research methodology or research design to follow, which questions to ask and what would be appropriate techniques for data generation and analysis in order to answer our questions. The

methodology therefore informed not only the research methods I used but also how I applied those methods in the field (Patton, 2005; Silverman, 2013; Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Since the emphasis of the study was on forefronting the women's critical reflection on their experiences as participants in the collaborative poverty alleviation initiative, the knowledge base for this study was grounded in the women's own inputs, perspectives and reflections. As the women are the carriers of the knowledge that will help us to better understand their experiences as marginalised women and how they navigated themselves within this SI initiative, this study is deemed to be positioned within a social constructivist paradigm (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). Each of the woman's experiences was unique and as I had anticipated, they shared multiple and often diverse interpretations of their experiences in the programme. It was very interesting to note the various ways in which the women made sense of their experiences in the initial collaboration and during the research process (Ormston et al., 2014). The importance of recognising people's own voices in constructing their realities (through their personal reflections) resonates well with the CBPAR approach, which is discussed in greater detail in Section 3.5.

3.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was underpinned by an inductive, qualitative research approach. The inductive approach enables the researcher to develop patterns of meaning as it emerges from the data (Creswell, 2014). Meaning thus evolves as the researcher interprets the data (see Figure 3.2). The essential purpose of qualitative research is to enhance understanding and illuminate new perspectives regarding particular phenomena (Vasilachis de Gialdino, 2009). The researcher does not start off with a hypothesis which he or she seeks to prove or refute, but rather allows for the data to speak and inform the meanings and understandings regarding the topic under research. Hence, an inductive, qualitative research approach is embedded in a theoretical perspective that values the perceptions and viewpoints of individuals as legitimate knowledge regarding their own experiences and contexts (Babbie & Mouton, 2011; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). It argues that reality is not objective nor divorced from the mind of the individual, but rather it is socially constructed as people engage in their daily activities. People thus make meaning of reality as they interact with their environments and other people in their daily practices (Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2006; Mouton, 2017).

Figure 3.2: The inductive research approach (Source: Author)

Inductive research is often associated with qualitative data generation in order to gain a better understanding of certain realities or contexts (Carminati, 2018). This is in line with the exploratory aim of this study which was to gain insight into how community-based participatory action research (CBPAR) could provide insights into what is needed to enhance the efficacy of community development and social justice initiatives. A qualitative data collection approach opens up avenues for people to tell their own stories or narratives about how they make sense of their life experiences and contexts, which Ponterotto (2006) calls "thick descriptions" (p. 539) that help us understand how people experience and make sense of their life-worlds (Mouton, 2017). This notion of meaning as evolving or emergent from people's narratives echoes the participatory action research stance that people construct their own meanings of their life-world based on how they reflect upon it (Zuber-Skerritt, 2015). It also resonates with the CHAT viewpoint that people make meaning of their lived experiences through their interactions in their daily lives and the social artefacts to their availability in their various contexts (Vygotsky, 1982; Sannino & Engeström, 2018). It is therefore suitable to use this framework when seeking to understand and analyse the relationship between what people think and feel and how they act or what they do based on these thoughts and feelings (Daniels, Edwards, Engeström, Gallagher & Ludvigsen, 2010).

3.5.1 Community-based Participatory action research (CBPAR)

Kolb (1984, as cited in Zuber-Skerritt, 2017) describes action research as the process through which people "learn and create new knowledge through iterative cycles on the basis of their experiences, through observing and reflecting on these experiences, by forming abstract concepts and evaluating or testing them in new situations" (p. 7). McTaggart, Nixon and Kemmis (2017) concur with this view and emphasise the importance of action research having both "a transformational and an educative purpose" (p. 23). It challenges academia's

domination of knowledge production, while seeking to alter social standards, structures and constitutions in order to address the ongoing inequalities (Wood, McAteer & Whitehead, 2019).

The purpose of CBPAR as one type of action research is therefore not only to generate academic knowledge or scholarship but has as a central tenet the empowerment of the person, professional, organisation or community involved in the process. According to Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls and Ormston (2013):

> PAR is valued for social, political and methodological purposes –to empower individuals and the population concerned, to ensure the research is framed in their terms, to enhance its value to the community being researched, to provide development opportunities within a marginalised population, and to ensure that the study reflects the lived experience and expertise of those in the community it attempts to explore (p. 69).

The action learning that is central to the research process is therefore a politically loaded concept because of its quest to address inequalities (McTaggart et al., 2017).

In addition, CBPAR differs from traditional research in that those who are conventionally seen as the research subjects (those under study) become partners in the research process (Herr & Anderson, 2015). Research is therefore a collaborative process **with** the participants. As the purpose of this study was not just to generate knowledge, but to also enable action, it engaged in cyclical continuous reflection processes (Baum, MacDougall & Smith, 2006; Mezirow, 2018; Johnson, 2020). Figure 3.3 is a visual presentation of our experience of a participatory action research process.
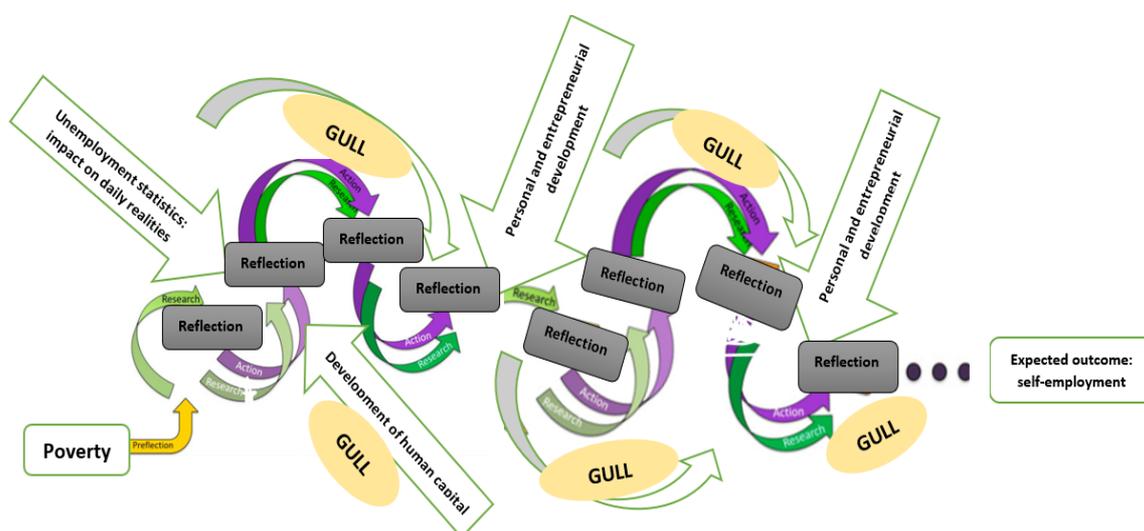
Figure 3.3: Community-based participatory action research (Source: Author)

Through this process, I came to appreciate the participants as co-researchers and co-constructors of the knowledge that was relevant to their context (Baldwin, 2012; Wood, 2017). Within such a community-based participatory action research approach the research process remains close to the real context, addresses issues that are oriented to the lived realities of the participants and affords community members the opportunity to come up with their own solutions to issues they regard as important to their learning and development (Baum et al., 2006; Esau, 2015; Wood, 2017). Furthermore, I came to understand that people's activities within their daily life-worlds are oriented towards achieving certain goals for themselves and often also for their communities (Engeström, 2001). In this case, the shared goal for these women was to empower themselves so that they would be able to start their own small business enterprises to generate a sustainable flow of income and in doing so, become financially independent and self-reliant. In addition, the endeavours they envisioned sought to create development opportunities for the broader community. Esau (2015) points out that CBPAR is considered to be "an important collaborative methodology for addressing local concerns" (p. 68).

CBPAR was deemed to be a suitable methodology for this study, as it is driven predominantly by a desire for positive change (Baldwin, 2012; Zuber-Skerritt, 2015). One of the aims of this study was to use the research process as a vehicle to explore and enhance emotional and social intelligence in these female participants. CBPAR conceives of knowledge as being socially created and suggests that knowledge is co-constructed as people engage in the world and with one another to co-create their realities from their particular worldview (Reason, 1994; Baldwin, 2012). In addition, this study sought to forefront the often-marginalised voices of participants (Chowns, 2008; Zuber-Skerritt, 2015). I was, however, mindful that while one seeks to encourage the voice of the participants in collaborative ways, one needs to remain aware of real and perceived power differentials that may encroach on the research process.

Researchers working in the field of community-based participatory action research across disciplines have noted a number of factors that assist in meaningful collaborative engagement. These include spending time, effort and resources in establishing, growing and maintaining the relationship (this includes being mindful of the formal and informal relationships, networks and ways of relating that already exist and which may influence relating within the research project); access to the research setting or community and an awareness of the infra-structural, socio-political and other dynamics at play within the community; an openness and flexibility

around timeframes and processes to accommodate or be responsive to situations in the community; a clear understanding of the roles and expectations of the researcher and the participants; and a clear demarcation of the roles and responsibilities of the researcher and the participants (Mackenzie, Tan, Hoverman & Baldwin, 2012; Bradwell & Marr, 2017; Staniszewska, Brett, Simera, Seers, Mockford, Goodlad, Altman, Moher, Barber, Denegri & Entwistle, 2017). All of the aforementioned were very important in this study as the participants had had a previous relationship with an academic from my institution and had developed a way of working and being with that person. In order to accommodate for this, I regularly spoke with my supervisor; reflected in my field notes and did regular member checks with the participants of their experience around our process in this study.

I was also mindful that while research afforded me an opportunity to gain insight into the experiences of the participants it also created an opportunity for the participants to reflect on these experiences and how they influenced their lived realities. While this reflection had the potential to serve as a catalyst for transformation and emancipation by affording participants an opportunity to move from impoverished self-perception to awareness of their own resilience and self-efficacy, it also had the potential to cause distress as it could unearth extreme anxiety, sorrow or pain related the previous life experiences. With this possibility in mind, I created an opportunity for the participants to consult a mental health professional (see Addendum F) should they require. I was aware that providing the participants with this resource created the potential for them to exercise efficacy in protecting themselves as they journeyed through the process of defining and interrogating their world. Finally, the acknowledgement of the right of the knowledgeable voices of the researched to be heard from the onset of the study had the potential to encourage shared ownership of the findings and strengthen the possibility of this CBPAR study to empower the participants to change social conditions in their community (Zuber-Skerritt & Teare, 2013; Mouton, 2017).

3.6   RESEARCH DESIGN

Research methods used by constructivists are hermeneutical and dialectical in nature (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Their purpose is to uncover and understand the meaning of people's experiences and life-worlds and thus the focus is on logical discussion of ideas and opinions. Constructivists generally select methods that would afford opportunities to gain deeper understanding of social phenomena (Silverman, 2013). Since this study was a participatory research initiative valuing the opinions and thoughts of the people involved, methods suitable

to affording opportunities for the participants to express their voices were employed in order to generate qualitative data. Although this research was embarked on according to the design and questions described in Section 3.3, these were not static aspects which remained rigid from the beginning to the end of the research project. Rather it was an "iterative process" during which the plan or design was further refined as the research project progressed (Maxwell, 2012, p. 76). These methods are described in greater detail in the sections that follow.

3.6.1 Sampling

The aim of this study was to gain deeper insight into women's experiences of being part of a collaborative initiative directed at alleviating the unemployment crisis in their community. In light of the exploratory nature of this endeavour women, were selected who met the criteria of being unemployed or partially employed and who took part in this collaborative community development initiative. A purposive sampling technique was used to identify six women between the ages of 20 and 34 years, who had participated in the GULL community-based initiative. According to the literature, purposive sampling is widely used in qualitative research to identify and select participants that are thought of as being able to contribute rich and deep insight into or about the phenomenon of interest (Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan, & Hoagwood, 2015). These women were selected as I anticipated that, based on their backgrounds and experience with the initiative, they would be participants from whom much could be learned about the research topic (Babbie & Mouton, 2011; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The participants in this study were recruited with the support of the representative of the SI project at Stellenbosch University and the social development official who was the representative of the project within the Department of Social Development in the Cape Winelands Overberg Regional Office. The Stellenbosch University representative and the government official were identified as key informants who were able to establish contact with the participants. The key informants assisted me in facilitating a meeting with the group at the community library's conference centre. This mini-conference centre was well known to the potential participants, was easily accessible and was the space the participants used during their participation in the GULL community initiative. In addition, this facility is available and generally used for a wide range of community activities by various organisations. The general use of this mini-conference centre for community activities did not compromise the potential participants' anonymity in this study. As a further means of protecting the potential participants' anonymity, only the principal investigator met with them at this venue.

At the first meeting, the potential participants discussed the aims and objectives of this study with me. We also negotiated what would be expected of everyone who would eventually agree to participate in the study. It was also required by the participants to clearly indicate that their participation or refusal in this study would not influence their continued involvement in the other project. I also gave the women an opportunity to ask questions in order to enhance their own understanding about the project and their role in it. At this stage the women were already experienced in the GULL project, but they had a number of questions about the intended outcome of this research project, what their involvement would entail in terms of time that would be required and whether they would have to speak in more formal language or whether they would be able to use their own colloquial dialogue. The significance of this focus on language became apparent to me as the study progressed. I include it in my presentation of the data (Chapter 4, Section 4.4.1.6.3) and my discussion of the findings in Chapter 5 (Section 5.2.4)

This initial session evolved into an open dialogue session and was essentially guided by the women's questions. Negotiating timelines was important for the women and I assured them that the meetings would be scheduled at their convenience and that the scheduled times could be altered if unforeseen circumstances emerged. As the research process unfolded, the time of the scheduled appointments often had to be changed because the participants were quite involved in their community. In other instances, they would sometimes be called upon to mediate community challenges or for contract work at short notice. Pre-arranged appointments then had to be shifted to new dates and sometimes it meant that we would need to use venues other than their local community library. The participants would usually identify these venues. In one instance, I had to meet one of the participants in another local community which was more convenient for her at the time due to work commitments, while in another case I had to meet a participant in a quiet coffee shop. In both these instances, we ensured that we were sitting in secluded areas where our conversations could still remain private and confidential.

I encouraged the women to use language that they felt most comfortable with. Since all the women were fluent in both English and Afrikaans, I could easily follow their conversations. On the occasions where they used words or language in ways that were unfamiliar to me, I would ask them to clarify. This was important as I wanted to ensure that I understood the women in the way they intended me to. These experiences affirmed in me the notion of authenticity as a central tenet of PAR. I developed a deeper understanding that if my aim was to respect the

women's voices, I also needed to respect their needs and circumstances and not allow the 'untidiness' that sometimes emerged within the CBPAR process to cloud my judgment in navigating such unforeseen changes in time and structure (Smith, 2017).

The women were also informed that they would be asked to share biographical information such as their level of schooling or academic qualifications and employment history during the research process. I explained that this was necessary in order to contextualise the study. At the end of the presentation, I handed out a flyer in which I outlined the aims and objectives of the study and their role in it should they be interested in participating. I thought it may be important to create space for the women to privately make sense of my presentation and what their participation in it would entail. Attached to the information flyer was a tear-off sheet in which I asked the women to record their contact details and I informed them that I would follow this session up with the call to establish whether or not they were interested in participating in the study (see Addendum J). Much of the communication in terms of the women's agreement to participate and making the arrangements for the meetings eventually took place mostly through one particular participant to whom the group had assigned the role of key contact between them and me.

Throughout the research process, the participants were reminded that they had the right to respond only to questions or requests with which they felt comfortable.

3.6.2   The participants

In this subsection a short description is given of the women who eventually agreed to participate in this research project, including the social development officer.

Brenda is a young, single mother in her early twenties. She became pregnant shortly after completing Grade 12 and was unemployed at the time the GULL project was introduced. She shared that although she applied for various jobs, she was unsuccessful in securing employment. This had undermined her confidence in herself and she saw GULL as way to regain her identity and self-esteem. At the time of the study she was employed in a permanent position.

Esther is in her late twenties and she is a single mother of two. She became pregnant as a teen and thus did not complete her high school career. She described herself as being in a state of depression at the time she heard about the GULL initiative. She, however, has a strong personality and she decided to engage in this initiative in order to develop herself. She has since

evolved into a well-known and respected leader in her community, who often initiated empowerment projects with vulnerable young girls and boys in her community. She has established a good reputation as a hardworking and dedicated person, and she has now become one of the preferred candidates when social justice initiatives are launched in the community. She is also often contracted into such initiatives.

Ayesha is in her early thirties and is divorced, with two children. She is very dedicated to her children and her elderly mother. When her children were smaller, she preferred to have more control over the time she would have available to raise them, therefore she chose to do volunteer work where she could negotiate her working hours. She is very dedicated to contributing to the empowerment and upliftment of her community and shared that she would like to build a legacy that would attest to her contribution in this regard.

Trudy, a single mother of two in her late twenties, lives with her mother and other family members. She was desperate to find work when the GULL initiative was introduced. Her unemployed status made her feel despondent. She indicated that she gained skills during the GULL initiative which enhanced her confidence. She was employed in a year-long contract position at time of the research, with the prospect of it being lengthened.

Dianne is a single mother of two, also living with her family. She started studies in nursing after she finished high school. When her mother fell terminally ill, she stopped her studies to take care of her mother. When her mother passed away, she struggled to cope with the loss and fell into a depression. She had no confidence and avoided contact with other people. A friend of hers convinced her to attend the introductory GULL meeting. She experienced this as an opportunity to get involved in something that would keep her busy and help her to overcome her grief. She indicated that she aspires to help other women in her community to regain their confidence and realise their own value.

Linda, a mother of one in her mid-thirties, is a soft-spoken but determined woman. She used to be engaged mostly in contract positions in her earlier years and was unemployed at the time GULL was introduced. From starting out as a waitress, at the time of the study she was employed at a well-known engineering company where she worked in the human resources department. She described herself as someone who likes to take responsibility for things to work out according to plan.

Sharlene is married, with two children. She has gone through many personal trials but managed to overcome the misfortunes and come out stronger. She is very dedicated to community development initiatives, especially when women and youth are the focus. She was in permanent employment at the time of the study.

I decided to introduce the participants at this point, because the knowledge influenced the way in which I positioned myself as a researcher. The researcher plays a central role in qualitative research and I knew that if I wanted to establish an authentic bi-directional relationship with the women, I would have to share with them part of my story and who I was (Babbie & Mouton, 2011; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). They found it interesting that I was Dr Melanie but was doing this master's level study under the supervision of Dr L. My prior research experience helped me to share significant but related information about myself. It was also a point of interest for the participants that I was changing career paths at this stage in my life.

After meeting the prospective participants, I knew that they would also influence the way in which the data generation tools would be used.

3.6.3   Methods of data generation

Various methods of data generation were employed in the course of this study. The primary data were generated through semi-structured individual interviews, focus group interviews, participant-generated artefacts and my fieldnotes. The literature suggests the use of a variety of data generation methods when exploring complex phenomena (Creswell, 2014; Herr & Anderson, 2015).

3.6.3.1   *Semi-structured interviews*

In this study, interviews were a valuable method for establishing an initial connection with the individual participants and to gather their unique views on the phenomenon under study (Schwab & Syed, 2015; Denscombe, 2010). I made use of semi-structured interviews as a means to focus our conversation. Semi-structured interviews gave structure to the process and allowed me an opportunity to cover certain themes and topics while at the same time creating a space to clarify information shared by the women (Schwab & Syed, 2015). While I planned an interview schedule (see Addendum A) to guide the conversation, the order in which these themes or topics were covered did not necessarily follow a rigid structure or wording. The literature cautions the researcher to be flexible and responsive as the interview unfolds (Denzin

& Lincoln, 2011). In addition, I understood that while we had agreed to meeting at the library conference centre, the setting varied for two interviews where the participants were not able to meet me at the library. I negotiated with the participants to have at least 90 minutes available for our interview and that the alternative spaces would still assure privacy.

Since I was mindful of the various barriers to communication that could potentially exist between the participants and me I utilised the transactional communication model to which I had previously been exposed (see Figure 3.4 for an infographic of what this process involves). As I sought to access the participants' perceptions of the phenomenon under study, I was mindful that how they experienced it would be influenced by how they made sense of the world and that perception is "the active process of creating meaning by selecting, organizing, and interpreting people, objects, events, situations, and other phenomena" (Wood, 2013, as cited in Nursekey, 2017, p. 1).

The transactional model is a widely used communication approach. This model reminds us that while people may share similar viewpoints, there will always be differences related to their unique experiences. Nursekey (2017) identified the following important elements of the transactional model:

- **Context** – time, place and relationship are important aspects of context, and can affect the success of the message;

- Sender/receiver – source and destination;

- Message – the information being conveyed;

- **Code** – the system used to convey the information, words, graphs and non-verbal communication;

- Channel – the way the code is conveyed, for example it may be easier to present complex information in a graph rather than by using the written word:

- **Noise** – communication barrier (pp. 1-2).
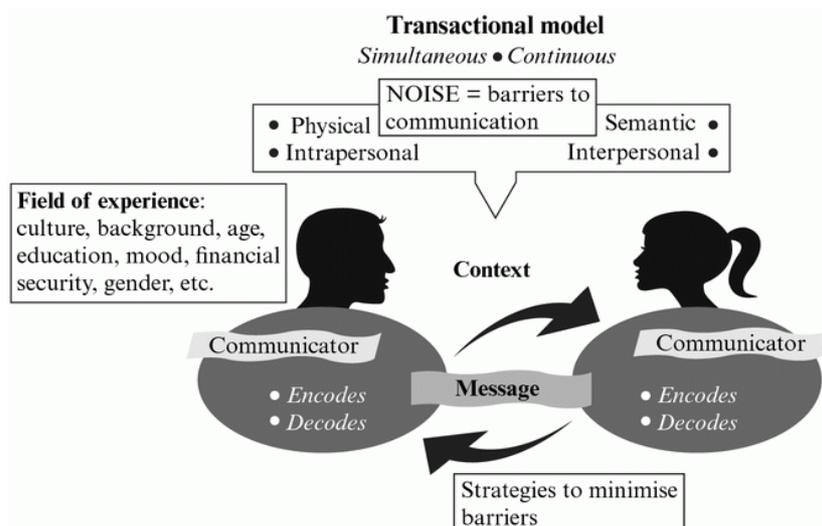
Figure 3.4: The Transactional communication model (Source: Nursekey, 2017)

The individual semi-structured interviews with participants focused on their experiences in the GULL initiative and what it meant to them; how they understood them; how they could be used to address the challenges they and other young people may experience with unemployment or partial employment; and the enablers and challenges that need to be strengthened or addressed in order to ensure sustainable personal development and economic independence. I was, however, mindful that the participants had been part of a process that may have influenced their sense of self and how they related to the world. I therefore set out to start my individual interviews with open-ended questions and while I was guided by the semi-structured interview schedule (see Addendum A), I did not limit the conversation to it (Wood, 2013; Nursekey, 2017).

3.6.3.2   *Focus group interviews*

Focus group interviews are also a popular data generation method when conducting qualitative research. This method holds the benefit of using the dynamics between participants in the focus group to uncover various perspectives and thus generate rich sets of data (Carey & Asbury, 2016; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). In addition, focus group participants often feel the need to explain themselves or to query others' viewpoints or inputs, which provides additional information that adds to the richness of the data set (Doyle, 2004). I thought this method would be useful because it would afford me the opportunity to explore common and differing views related to their previous inputs and to clarify the meanings of their inputs rather than making my own inferences. The focus group sessions, which were guided by an open question (see Addendum B), also allowed me to observe the interaction between members of the focus group

(Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The focus groups had particular value in this study as they provided multiple opportunities to delve deeper into participants' responses, compare participants' responses and how they related to each other while still being engaged in the interview process. This verbal and non-verbal communication during the focus groups also became a rich source of data.

Focus groups, however, also hold the potential for certain challenges. Though the interaction between participants may uncover valuable data, it could also lead to distress and conflict among participants which would have to be carefully navigated by the researcher (Creswell, 2014; Bryman, 2016). This did not appear to be a major challenge in this study. During the GULL initiative a strong bond was formed among the women and they were very supportive of each during the research process. The one challenge was to get all six women together in one focus group session. Due to the women's various personal responsibilities, this could not happen during the time of data collection. Therefore, the focus group interviews were conducted as the participants were available.

3.6.3.3　*Participant-generated artefacts*

The various interview techniques included activities that generated artefacts. The following techniques were used in this study:

- Participants were asked to engage in a 'river of life' activity in which they used words and drawings to reflect on significant events or turning points in their lives. I used this because from my exposure to this research method I had learnt that people often express their experiences in the form of visual images which have the potential to help the research to uncover data that may be far richer than what could be communicated with words alone. Therefore, these visual representations hold the prospect of revealing socially significant practices in non-verbal ways (Sligo & Tilley, 2011; Sligo, Tilley, Murray, & Comrie, 2019). Participants' awareness of such events and how they navigated challenges in the past may thus have the potential to inform their approach to addressing future challenges (see Addendum C as an example of this).

- As part of the focus group sessions, each of the participants was also asked to share the collages that they had created during the GULL community poverty alleviation initiative. In this activity they had used magazine pictures to depict the main challenges that they believed had contributed to their current socio-economic circumstances and current

(un)employment status. Vacchelli (2018) describes collage-making as "a technique which draws on embodiment, reflexivity and active participation of the research participants in the research process" (p. 174) and offers the opportunity for participants to generate their own narratives and life stories in a visual manner. They were invited to share their collages and collectively generate a narrative around what they viewed as their main communal and individual challenges and then to generate a narrative to explain each of these challenges as they presented in their context.

- During the focus group sessions, the women were also asked to share and discuss the parts of their portfolios of evidence and their visual artefacts that they felt comfortable to share with the researcher and fellow participants. This was done to provide deeper insights into their experiences as well as their personal and professional growth within the community poverty alleviation initiative (see Addendum D as an example of this). Therefore the items contained in the portfolio served to indicate how the women had experienced their participation in this initiative and how it had influenced their personal and professional growth.

- To facilitate the process of exploring visual artefacts, a short question schedule was used to guide the process. It was limited to the following requests or questions:

  - Please share what the activity was about.
  - How did you experience the activity?
  - How did it influence your personal growth?
  - How did it influence your professional growth as a potential or already active entrepreneur?

3.6.3.4   *Interview with key informant*

An individual semi-structured interview was conducted with the government official as the key informant to further contextualise the data generated by the participants. Key informants generally fulfil important social or professional roles in their communities and as such carry certain knowledge of and insights into what the crucial issues are and what would work best in their communities (McKenna & Main, 2013). A semi-structured interview schedule was also designed for the interview with the social development government official. It is included as Addendum I.

3.6.3.5   *Field notes*

As the researcher, I also generated **field notes** during the research process. These field notes served as an additional source of data to help reveal particular meanings and develop further insight into the issue under scrutiny (Meriam & Tisdell, 2016). These field notes enabled me, the researcher, to document valuable information that enriched my reflection processes and added to the contextualisation of the study. Excerpts from these field notes are presented in Chapter 4.

3.7   DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Qualitative data were generated in this study through semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews that were conducted with the six participants. These interviews were voice-recorded with the permission of the women. In addition, the visual artefacts that were created by the participants were verbally explored to add to the narrative data. This was done by using the explorative questions mentioned previously under Section 3.3. The participants shared only what they felt comfortable sharing and their responses were voice-recorded. An iterative data analysis process afforded me the opportunity to do regular member checks with the participants in order to ensure that I had understood what they had shared in the way they intended. All voice recordings were transcribed verbatim. These transcripts were then analysed using an iterative process of coding which allowed me to move between relevant theoretical perspectives (abstract concepts) and concrete data continuously; refining the meaning-making process by manoeuvring between description and interpretation as the analysis process unfolded (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

A first level of analysis, based on inductive coding, was done as issues emerged from the data produced through the transcriptions of the various interview formats (Lapadat, 2013). Coding was done by hand. At this level of inductive coding, data were prepared, summarised and organised into suitable categories (Azungah, 2018). These categories emerged as I read and re-read the various transcripts of the voice recordings. During this initial reading process, I identified segments of texts that related to existing literature and highlighted them in various colours. A priori codes were assigned to some of these categories, depending on their relevance to the research focus, existing literature and theoretical perspectives, while others were coded according to themes as they emerged from data (thus inductive coding) (Saldaña, 2015; Deterding & Waters, 2018) (see Addendum H as an example).

The next phase of coding is referred to as structural coding of the narrative data. This involves the classification and indexing of portions of the data as they link to the research questions that were used in the interview schedules (Saldaña, 2015). According to Namey, Guest, Thairu and Johnson (2008), structural coding helps to develop a "grand tour" overview of the data (p. 141). In addition, it makes it easier for the researcher to access data that may relate to the research question. Engaging in this coding process helped me to identify codes, categories and quotes as they related to the topic under research. While many researchers discuss this process or analysis, I applied a model suggested by Creswell (2005) to help me in the initial phases of inductive qualitative content analysis in this study. How I envisioned it is portrayed in Figure 3.5 below.

Initially read through text data	Divide the text into segments of information	Label the segments of information with codes	Reduce overlap and redundancy of codes	Collapse codes into themes
Many pages of text	Many segments of text	30-40 codes	Codes reduced to 20	Codes reduced to 5-7 themes
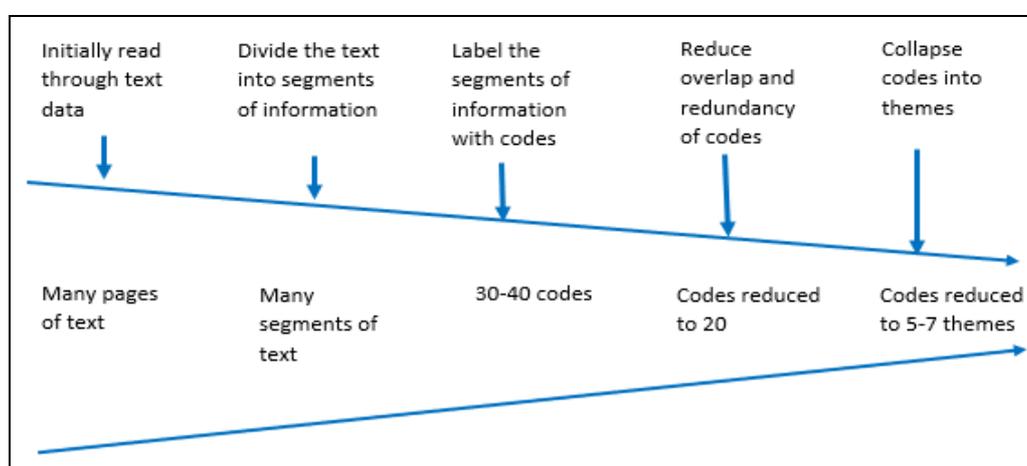
Figure 3.5: The coding process in qualitative research (Source: Creswell, 2005, p. 238)

The second level of analysis focused on re-organising and aggregating the data. Qualitative research, and interviews in particular, can generate huge data sets as participants have the opportunity to elaborate on their contexts, experiences and perceptions (Ponterotto, 2006; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). It is not always possible to make use of all of the data that are generated, as parts of these 'rich descriptions' may not relate directly to the key research question or the topic under research. Within qualitative research, one often has to select only the sections of the data that are useful to illuminate the topic of one's research (Miles & Huberman, 1994). To facilitate this process of selection and refinement, data are organised into smaller, more exclusive categories or themes that link to the conceptual framework and research questions of the study (Saldaña, 2013). These themes and categories are presented in Table 4.3 in Section 4.4.2 of Chapter 4. This process of eclectic coding aligns the analysis process to the aims of the study, and ensures that the data analysis addresses the

research questions or concerns (see Addendum E for an example of how this was done in this study).

3.8 DATA VERIFICATION STRATEGIES TO ENSURE TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE DATA

The goal of this research was not to achieve objectivity or to make universal generalisations. Instead it was to gain deeper insight into the phenomenon under study and generate new ideas about collaborative community–university partnerships and community-based participatory action research. Instead of seeking to generalise the findings to universal populations or contexts, the aim was rather to show linkages between the findings of this study and existing theory (Babbie & Mouton, 2011; Graneheim, Lindgren, & Lundman, 2017).

Ensuring the trustworthiness of the data adds to the credibility of the research study and findings. Bless, Higson-Smith and Sithole (2013) define trustworthy qualitative research as research that is congruent to reality and that adheres to the criteria of "credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability" (p. 236) (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1: Ensuring trustworthiness of qualitative research
(Source: Bless et al., 2013, p. 236)

Criterion	Strategy employed
Credibility	- Prolonged engagement - Peer briefing - Triangulation - Member checks
Transferability	- Providing thick description - Purposive sampling
Dependability	- Create an audit trail - Triangulation
Confirmability	- Triangulation - Practise reflexivity

In this study, trustworthiness was ensured through the following processes:

- **Ecological validity**: the methods, materials and setting of the study remained closely aligned to the real-world context that was scrutinised in order for the findings to be relatable to similar projects within similar contexts (Andrade, 2018). Moreover, as the researcher, I

took particular care not to influence the research participants or contrive the research process by my presence (Plowright, 2011; Esau, 2015; Wood, 2017).

- **Member checking:** During the individual and focus group interviews, I made use of probing in order to give participants the opportunity to either clarify, verify or elaborate on their responses. Probes are questions or comments that follow on responses given by participants and provide a helpful method to solicit more information from participants (Meriam & Tisdell, 2016). Participants were also asked to validate the accuracy of the transcriptions of their interviews.

- **Reflexivity:** In qualitative research, the role of the researcher is crucial in generating new knowledge (Berger, 2015). Qualitative researchers constantly need to be aware of how they may contribute to the construction of meaning and of lived experiences throughout the research process (Palaganas, Sanchez, Molintas, & Caricativo, 2017). The identity of the researcher thus needed to be foregrounded right from the start of the project. From the onset, I sought to be upfront about my role as a research partner in this study. I also shared with the participants that I was doing this study as a requirement for completing my Master's degree and that the information they shared with me would be used as data in writing up this study (Williams, 2009; Palaganas et al., 2017). Throughout the project I continued to be mindful of my thoughts and research decisions and ensured that I remained conscious of how my research focus, design and relationships worked to illuminate the phenomenon under study. I reflected on my process and decisions with my supervisor and where appropriate, with the participants. This form of reflexivity was an important element within this study as it helped to deepen and enhance my own thinking about the research process and to remain attentive to honouring the lived experience of the participants as they shared it with me throughout the various phases of the study. I was mindful to think with my participants in my journey with them as I sought to protect the authenticity of the research process; the participants' voices and my own during the study and in terms of the future presentation and publication of the findings of this study. While this type of research creates a space for close relationship building, I remained mindful of Creswell's (2014) caution that the principal investigator should seek to protect the scientific integrity of the study by guarding against becoming too personally involved and causing bias in the generation, analysis and interpretation of the data.

- Furthermore, I remained mindful that not all people are equally articulate. In an effort to compensate for this challenge, I applied multiple sources of data generation, rather than depending on a single source of information: I used interviews, participant-generated artefacts, participants' portfolios of evidence and my field notes (Creswell, 2014, p. 185).

- **Information dissemination** is another key challenge in PAR. In academic research, the genre of language used is "formal, non-conversational" and most often in written format (Bigelow, Cushing-Leubner, Adam, Hang, Ortega, Pergament, Shanafelt & Allen, 2019, p. 193). These formats were largely unfamiliar to this community and therefore had the potential to marginalise the community during the formal information dissemination which was part of the formal requirements for presenting my dissertation. In this study, participants were granted the opportunity to provide advice about how and in which formats information could be disseminated more effectively for the research to become useful to the community. When I met the women, I was mindful to engage with them as a fellow participant in the research project, and not as the one taking the lead. Hence, I often spoke about 'us' and 'we' instead of 'I' and 'you'. I regularly encouraged the women to foreground their opinions and to table their own suggestions and thoughts when we were discussing certain topics. The women also took me on a guided tour on foot through the various parts of their community and I experienced this as playing a significant role in building relationship between us. I became aware of their concerns for their community as I witnessed the extreme poverty in which many people lived, as well as their pride when showing me examples of how some community members attempted to improve conditions. Furthermore, it appeared that having conversations while sharing a cup of coffee created a relaxed, inviting atmosphere which stimulated conversation in a natural way and put the women at ease to share their ideas on how information pertaining to this research project as well as the social justice initiative could eventually be disseminated in ways that would make it accessible to the wider community. This is elaborated on in Chapters 4 and 5.

- **Triangulation:** Triangulation refers to the use of multiple sources of information in order to help minimise bias in the data or the research process (Creswell, 2014). In this study, data were collected through individual and focus group interviews, visual sources ('river of life' maps and collages as portrayed in Addenda C and D) as well as field notes. Using various data sources helped to compensate for the researcher's presence which could potentially influence how participants engaged and responded during the research process.

- **Outcome validity:** In action research, it is particularly important to ensure that the research actions taken lead to finding solutions to the problem(s) that initiated the study (Herr & Anderson, 2015). The findings of this study, as discussed in Chapter 4, generated deeper understandings which could help to improve the effectiveness of community-based initiatives towards attaining the project objectives for both the community and the individuals involved.

- **Process validity:** The problems under investigation were framed in a way that made an iterative and continuous processes of learning possible. This entailed continuous cycles of critical scrutiny of assumptions underpinning the problem definition, reflection and adaptation if necessary (Newton & Burgess, 2016; Mezirow, 2018). This iterative process, however, raises the issue of validity of evidence to support certain claims. In this instance, triangulation was helpful. Using multiple sources of data and continuous reflection provided a stronger evidence base to support arguments founded on the data sources (Herr & Anderson, 2015).

- **Dialogic validity:** Peer review of one's research is a normal part of the traditional research process. In action research, researchers often talk with peers to ensure that "methods, evidence, and findings resonate with a community of practice" (Herr & Anderson, 2015:70). I spoke often with a critical friend who is an expert on action research as well as with my supervisor. I believe that this approach helped to enhance the dialogic validity of this study. The participants as members of the community were also important in terms of ratifying the interpretation of data and the findings that were made based on these interpretations. This strengthened the voices of the participants as collaborators in this project and enhanced their roles as equal research partners (Bigelow et al., 2019).

The ethical considerations pertaining to this project also needed to be foregrounded. This aspect of the process is discussed in further detail in Section 3.9.

3.9   ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The trustworthiness of qualitative research rests heavily on the level of ethical practice employed and embodied by the researcher (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). This aspect was crucial as the research involved vulnerable groups such as unemployed women and youth who are often marginalised in society (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). Qualitative research with

vulnerable communities or individuals is fertile ground for presenting challenges to the researcher. The main ethical issues included the identification and voluntary participation of young unemployed women as participants in this study, the need to obtain written or verbal informed consent, protecting the confidentiality of the participants' details and the provision of professional psychological services if needed. These considerations were dealt with in a variety of ways:

- **Informed consent**

Attaining consent was seen as a process that is continuously negotiated during the research process, instead of as a once-off act (Ebrahim, 2010). The subjective nature of qualitative research opens up opportunities for constant evolvement and surfacing of new aspects or issues at any given time (Denzin, 2017). This implied that consent was foregrounded in every meeting, discussion, interview or activity as the research project progressed. I ensured that the participants could interact with me in ways that sought to ensure a clear understanding of what the research was about and what their role in it constituted. Providing explanations to the participants of the aims and purposes of the research and why their participation was important, was a focal point of this study.

Participants were informed about possible risk factors that could be involved in this research project, such as possible social and psychological discomfort that participating in the various activities might trigger. Consequently, I solicited the services of a psychologist and informed the participants of their ability to access these services if necessary. The therapist agreement is included as Addendum F. In addition, I reminded the participants that their participation remained voluntary throughout the project and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty (Silverman, 2013). I made sure that the consent form was written in language that was accessible to the participants and that the form was made available in both English and Afrikaans. Participants could thus engage in the language in which they felt most comfortable. I carefully worked through the form with the participants and explained it in general, as well as the parts that they did not understand (see Addendum G).

- **Anonymity**

Protecting the identity of research participants as well as the anonymity of data is one of the cornerstones of sound and ethical research (Patton, 2015). Confidentiality and anonymity were assured as follows:

- o Pseudonyms or code names were used in the place of real names. The participants were given the opportunity to decide which pseudonym they would like to use. The participants will therefore be referred to under the pseudonyms of Brenda, Esther, Ayesha, Trudy, Dianne, Linda and Sharlene.

- o Demographic information in aggregates was provided so that identifiers such as age, family background or duration of unemployment could not be interpreted to such a degree that it would make some individuals recognisable. Caution was also taken not to consistently associate certain identifiers with the same participant.

- o Access to the data was restricted by protecting it with a secret password (in the case of electronically stored data) or with code-protected locks in the case of hard-copy data.

- **Non-maleficence**

Non-maleficence is the ethical principle of avoiding harm or minimising the risk of harm to others (Allan, 2016). Since constructs such as social and emotional intelligence were explored in this study, it was likely that participants could experience some distress during the research process. For this reason, the provision of professional psychological services according to participants' needs was an important aspect. The services of a qualified counselling psychologist, Mr HR Matthews (PS 0077151), was available if the participants would develop a need for such a service (see Addendum F). The availability of psychological support would help to alleviate any distress that participants could experience due to their participation in this project. Eventually, none of the participants requested this service as an open and trusting relationship had been established between the women themselves as well as with the researcher. This relationship enabled a safe space where the women could share difficult emotions without fear and with receipt of support from their fellow participants and the researcher. This appeared to have negated the need for further counselling. It is, however, important to note that I was mindful of not overstepping the boundaries of the researcher–researched relationship necessary in ensuring scientifically viable data. I monitored this aspect through reflections in my field notes, as well as through conversations with my critical friend and my supervisor.

- **Awareness of potential power relationships**

The participatory approach also calls for sensitivity regarding power relationships between the various role-players in the research project. Therefore, it was crucial to pay attention to aspects

such as reciprocity, collaboration, communication and "redistributed intellectual authority" (Campano et al., 2015, p. 30). Other ethical challenges included possible difficulty of staying within the boundaries of particular roles (Horn, McCracken, Dino, & Braybot, 2008); defining who the 'community' is; deciding who may represent the community or how to unravel the complexities embedded in controversial societal issues (Quigley, 2006; Zuber-Skerritt, Wood & Kearney, 2020); and avoiding potential conflicting expectations and assumptions between the various role-players (Richman, Alexander, & True, 2012). Furthermore, the close relationship between the academic researcher and the community participants could potentially raise issues regarding intrusion and confidentiality (Dodson, Piatelli, & Schmalzbauer, 2007). Ethical neglect would thus challenge the protection of participants and communities. Wood and Zuber-Skerritt (2013) and Bigelow et al. (2019) recommend communication, critical reflection, collaboration, commitment, coaching, competence, and compromise which are operationalised through relationship, reflection, and recognition to enhance the equal participation of all role-players involved. Reflexivity was thus an important element within this study (see discussion under point 3.8.3). Chapter 4 also provides examples of how reflexivity served this study.

- **Beneficence**

An important aim of community-based participatory action research is to address societal issues (Banks, Armstrong, Carter, Graham, Hayward, Henry, Holland, Holmes, Lee & McNulty, 2013). The research should thus be of benefit to the individual participants as well as the broader society. Hence, measuring the effectiveness of such interventions is a crucial element. Although progress has been made over the years to develop indicators and benchmarking systems for assessing social impact, the rigorous and comprehensive inclusion of feedback and perspectives from the community are still lacking (Olowu, 2012). Olowu (2012) suggests that aspects such as "attendance and feedback, external appraisal, articulation of public value, capacity development with higher education institutions or the community and how the activity has contributed to the public's or the community members' understanding of societal issues and the research process" (p. 95) could be included in the assessment of community-based participatory action research initiatives (also see Wagaman, 2015; Wood, 2017).

3.10 CONCLUSION

A community-based participatory action research design was used in this study to explore the experiences of unemployed or partially employed women in a collaborative community poverty

alleviation initiative. In this chapter, a description and rationalisations were provided for the methodology that was employed and the research decisions taken to guide the study. The research design and the specific data generation methods were explained to provide insight to the reader why certain research decisions were taken. The core issues of ensuring the trustworthiness of the data and findings, as well as ethical considerations in relation to this study, were illuminated. In the following chapter, the findings of this study are presented.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

"The connection is an important part of projects like this" (Participant).

4.1   INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study was to explore the social issue of unemployment and poverty among women and youth in a peri-urban community in the Western Cape, with particular attention to how socio-emotional factors could either stimulate or inhibit their participation in collaborative community-based empowerment initiatives to address poverty. In chapters 1 and 3 I contend that seeking to gain greater insight into understanding the way in which socio-emotional factors may influence women and youth's participation in development opportunities has the potential to enhance the effectiveness of such initiatives. Many of these initiatives seek to address poverty alleviation as a means to addressing broader socio-economic and structural challenges.

Initiatives such as the one that the women in this study participated in seek to explore ways to enhance the personal development of the participants and to encourage the establishment of sustainable entrepreneurial endeavours. These endeavours were envisaged as avenues to create employment opportunities for the participants, other members of the community and address some of the social challenges associated with unemployment and poverty. The critical rise in unemployment in South Africa and the subsequent negative social implications thereof, warrant rigorous exploration of the phenomena that form the focus of the community-based intervention and this study. This thesis was therefore guided by the key research question: How can a collaborative action research approach be used to gain a better understanding of the socio-emotional factors that enhance or inhibit the participation of young women in sustainable poverty alleviation initiatives?

Participatory action research (PAR) was used as a theoretical framework to generate qualitative data with the aim of gaining insight into this phenomenon. The following subsidiary questions guided the study towards answering the key research question:

- What life experiences did the women think may have propelled them on a trajectory to unemployment?

- How did these women engage in the activities of this initiative and why did they engage in the ways that they did?

- What experiences within this collaborative endeavour did the women acknowledge as helping them to grow personally and in terms of entrepreneurial skills?

- What were the challenges or hindrances that these women experienced in terms of participating in such a collaborative endeavour?

- What suggestions would the women make to strengthen the effect of this initiative on their own development and the sustainability of the outcomes of the initiative?

Semi-structured individual interviews, as well as focus group interviews and participant-generated artefacts were used to explore these questions with the women. Refer to Section 3.6.3 to see how this was done.

The data generated through the various data collection methods were further refined and organised into smaller themes that were more closely related to the research questions. This is part of the iterative coding process and was done for the purpose of addressing the aim of the study and responding to the research questions. During the first round of inductive analysis, certain categories emerged from which prominent themes could be identified. Organising and summarising the data in this fashion enabled the further classification of segments of data as they related more closely to the research questions (Saldaña, 2013). This chapter presents the findings generated from the process and presents them in a way that seeks to incorporate the voices of the women through weaving direct quotes or examples of the artefacts throughout.

4.2   THE PARTICIPANTS

The women who participated in this study had previously participated in a community-based intervention based on the GULL approach to community-driven sustainable poverty alleviation (also see Sections 1.6.3 and 3.6.1). The participants were purposefully selected because I believed that they would provide rich data and challenge me to engage in reflexive ways. In addition they had to meet the criteria of having been unemployed or partially employed at the time of this research and should have participated in and completed the personal development pathway of the GULL social impact initiative (also see Sections 1.6.3, 2.8.2, 2.8.3, 2.8.4 and 3.6.1). All the participants were women between 20 and 34 years of age at the time of the research.

Since the research was conducted together with such a small group of women who were well known in their community, I will not provide a detailed description of each person's biographical details, as this would increase the risk of compromising the anonymity of the participants and the confidentiality of the data. However, in Table 4.1 I provide a brief overview of who the women were (see Section 3.6.2 for more information about the participants). The participants were given the option of selecting their own pseudonyms to protect their identities. They all agreed and chose to be referred to as Brenda, Esther, Ayesha, Trudy, Dianne, Linda and Sharlene respectively. At the time of the empirical part of this research study, one of the women had found permanent employment, three were engaged in contract work and two were still unemployed.

Table 4.1: Brief summary of who the participants were in this study

PSEUDONYM	AGE	MARITAL STATUS	DEPENDANTS	EDUCATIONAL LEVEL	EMPLOYMENT STATUS	COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT
Brenda	24	Single	1	Grade 12	Contract work	Volunteer work with youth
Esther	31	Single	2	Grade 11	Intermittent, contract work	Empowerment projects with youth
Ayesha	34	Divorced	2	Grade 12	Contract work	Volunteer work in youth and early childhood projects
Trudy	30	Single	2	Grade 12	Unemployed	Volunteer work to assist youth with accessing information about job applications
Dianne	29	Single	2	Grade 12 plus 2 years of post-matric training	Unemployed	Women empowerment projects
Linda	33	Single	1	Grade 12 plus 2 years of post-matric training	Permanent position	Volunteer work with youth and women

4.3   PROCEDURE OF THE STUDY

Individual semi-structured interviews of between 40 and 60 minutes each were conducted with the six women who participated in the GULL initiative. Two focus group sessions were also conducted with them. Each of the focus group sessions was approximately two hours long. The data were collected over a period of three months. Five of the women participated in the focus group interviews which focused on exploring their life histories in relation to significant turning points in their lives. Despite multiple attempts, the sixth participant was unable to attend the two focus group meetings due to work responsibilities. Figure 4.1 provides a visual depiction of aspects involved in this process.
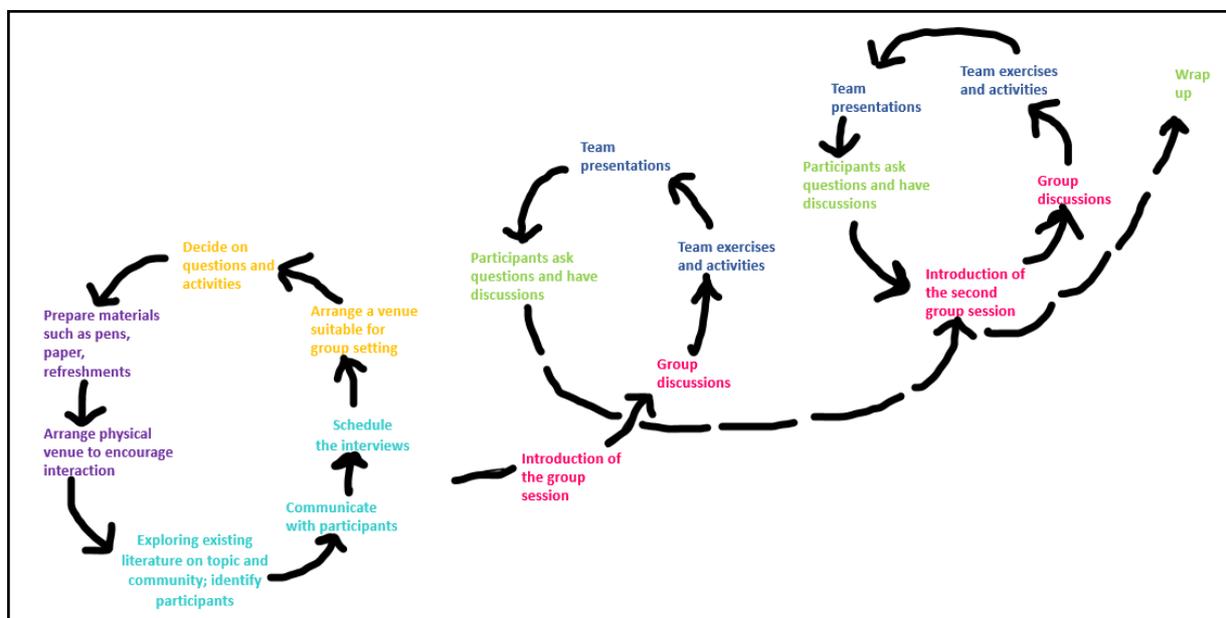
Figure 4.1: Experiencing the focus group process (Source: Author)

From the level of research sophistication shown by all the women it was apparent that they had previously participated in individual and focus group sessions in which stimulus activities were used. In this study, I used a 'river of life' exercise and presentation of their collage activities to guide and stimulate dialogue during the focus group sessions. As mentioned in Chapter 3, much of the communication with the group regarding arranging meetings was channelled through Esther, one of the participants. She played a significant role in negotiating dates and times for setting up the meetings and reserving the community library conference centre as a meeting venue.

The fact that the women had previously been exposed to the activities planned for these sessions enhanced the opportunity to collaborate on which questions would guide the activities. It also appeared to create ease of engagement throughout the sessions. The materials needed for the activities as well as the refreshments were provided by the manager of the library and me. All left-over refreshments were shared equally among the women at the end of the sessions. This happened in a very seamless and natural way, indicating to me the close bond that had developed among the women over the course of the project. Even the setting up of the physical arrangement of the venue happened without challenge as the women appeared to understand the notion of creating a space that would create an open and inviting atmosphere.

The introduction of the session also occurred in a smooth and uncomplicated way. The women quickly grasped the purpose of the activities and started engaging with very little hesitation. Only one of the participants was reticent at first and she shared that she was not able to draw and did not have creative skills. However, as soon as she started the process, she seemed to enjoy it. All of the women shared that they enjoyed the non-verbal techniques of sharing and experienced it as empowering as it provided them with ways of communicating when they found it challenging to find the words, they needed to express themselves. I could relate, since when I participated in the same activities as part of the group, I also experienced some anxiety about my own perceived lack of drawing and creative skills. However, witnessing the women engaging in the activities with so much dedication gave me courage to participate wholeheartedly as well. The atmosphere during the focus groups was filled with laughter and fun as we were absorbed in the activities, but there were also moments of meaningful silence during which the women appeared engrossed in the activity and personal reflection processes. The activities and the motivation for using them are discussed in greater detail in Section 3.6.3.

Reflecting on our individual efforts and sharing our individual 'rivers of life' and collages happened in an atmosphere which the women described as open and safe. This safe space enabled us all to express our inner experiences in the form of visual images and it helped us to provide an alternative way of communication when words were difficult to find (Sligo & Tilley, 2011; Sligo et al., 2019). Therefore, these visual representations hold the prospect of revealing socially significant practices in non-verbal ways. Although certain parts of our life histories still evoked pain and tears, the bond among the women served as a support network which gave each one of us the courage to continue, and in some instances helped us to process difficult emotions when they entered the space. I was enriched by the experience of having a supportive

network there as we reflected on challenging life experiences. I could only imagine the value of being part of a group that had journeyed together and that appeared to be willing to step up and support each other when needed. At times, it felt like an informal counselling experience as we all supported each other through the difficult moments. While I often reminded the women of the offer of more professional psychological support, they appeared to have confidence in their ability to support each other through the difficult moments.

The sharing sessions also made for vibrant discussions and dialogue, with the women asking each other questions to clarify when we did not understand what the other was trying to share. The women were very attentive towards each other as they shared their stories. The women also seemed to be listening for points of connection when listening to each other's experiences. This created opportunities to show care and support, as well as to provide guidance or advice about considering things from different angles. In this way, we could all learn from each other and develop new or more helpful ways of thinking about some of our experiences. This was really meaningful for me as the researcher, and I often reflected on the process as it was unfolding. I had engaged in research before, but I could not remember a time when I had felt a part of the research group. This made me question my level of involvement at times, but consultation with my supervisor and critical friend helped me to realise that this was not an unusual occurrence in action research. I was pleased that I had reached out for the debriefing as it reminded me that I had put in place checks and balances for ensuring the scientific rigour of my research. It meant that I could embrace the profound experience I had at the end of the last group session when the women asked us all to hold hands and that I led in prayer. I interpreted this as a sign of having been accepted and trusted by the group. The women also invited me to witness their GULL graduation a few weeks after our research journey had ended.

To further contextualise the data generated by the female participants, a semi-structured interview (see Addendum I) was conducted with the government official who had partnered in this community initiative and who had also participated in the GULL process.

4.4 PRESENTING THE RESEARCH FINDINGS: ORGANISING AND SUMMARISING THE DATA

The transcripts of the individual semi-structured and focus group interviews with the six women, which also contain data about the collage activity (see Addendum D) and 'river of life' exercise (see Addendum C) referred to in Section 3.6.3.3 served as the primary sources of data

in this study. The transcript of the semi-structured interview with the government official served as a secondary source of information.

The qualitative data that were generated during the empirical part of this research project were analysed by engaging in various levels of organising, summarising and aggregating the data in order to support the analysis process. Hence, an iterative data analysis process was used. The first level of analysis focused on carefully reading through these transcripts a number of times and provided the opportunity to identify segments of texts that related to existing literature without being limited to a particular theoretical framework. Scrutinising the data from such a bird's eye view illuminated the perspectives and experiences of the women and ensured that meaning-making was grounded in the voices of those who had personally lived those experiences.

Mindful that qualitative research often generates huge sets of data, I had to ensure that only the segments of texts as they related to the topic under scrutiny were used. These segments of texts, which were allocated a priori codes as themes emerged from the data (Lapadat, 2013), are discussed in the sub-section hereafter. Quotes to support arguments or interpretations are rendered verbatim. In this way, I also sought to forefront the voices of the participants using their own words. The quotes are provided in italics and enclosed in quotation marks. Furthermore, they are coded by the pseudonyms of the participants (see Table 4.1), followed by a letter **I** (if a quote was taken from an individual interview with the participant) or a letter **F** (if a quote was taken from one of the focus group sessions) as well as the line number location of the quote according to the transcripts.

4.4.1 Being part of a group of women collaborating toward a shared goal

Historicity, that is how personal histories and lived experiences shaped these women's life paths and their transitions through different life stages, revealed the intricate relationality between the various life systems they engaged in. It also foregrounded the desire expressed by these women to be a part of something that was perceived as worthwhile and which gave purpose to their lives. A visual presentation of these women's experiences follows in Figure 4.2.

Figure 4.2: The experience of collaboration (Source: Author)

4.4.1.1 *The journey*

All six of the women from the designated community were unemployed at the time when the GULL initiative was introduced to their community. They all shared the need to find employment in order to attain financial security and the ability to provide for themselves and their families. The following quotes from Brenda (I: line 2) and Linda (I: line 11) serve to corroborate this interpretation: *"At that time I was unemployed and I was looking for a job"* and *"Everyone wanted to know if there is going to be work available."* This spurred them on to attend the first introductory meeting.

Though many of their fellow community members who attended this first meeting were not convinced to join the programme, these women made the choice to stay on. Although their most dire need at that stage was to earn an income, they had the foresight to see the future prospects that personal and professional development could hold for them. Trudy (I: line 15) expressed it thus: *"Even though we weren't employed, they equipped us and we were helping other people. So, that was a good experience"*, while Linda (I: line 38) mentioned: *"So, when GULL came, they equipped us. It builds your self-esteem."* In choosing to continue their participation in a programme that would hold greater future value instead of meeting their most immediate basic need at the time, they showed a sense of prudence, agency and resilience. On the grounds of personal reflection, I contend that these hidden characteristics most probably served them well in keeping them motivated to maintain their participation in this SI initiative. In the commentary

74

box that follows, I share an extract from my field notes to illustrate my first-hand experience of the context.

After conducting two individual interviews this afternoon, the women took me on a walking tour through different parts of their community. I was confronted by the stark reality of the level of poverty, lack of public services and social decay that was so evident as we walked through narrow, sandy roads which barely separated informal housing structures from each other. Witnessing the challenging circumstances under which many people from this community have to make a daily living, was a sad yet eye-opening experience for me. Amidst these seemingly hopeless scenarios, I saw a woman teaching spiritual dancing to a group of little girls in her yard. This was such a heart-warming experience for me, and it made me realise that one can always find hope, even in such dire situations. I gained so much respect and admiration for these women who, despite their circumstances, were still inspired to put effort into making a difference in their own lives and that of the community. (Personal reflection, 28 November 2019)

4.4.1.2   The relationships

The women appeared to have established meaningful relationships and used their interaction to help them make sense of their experiences in the world and during the collaboration. The literature and the findings suggest that our learning and growth are mediated through our interactions with the world and other individuals or groups in the world. The role of a more knowledgeable other (mentor) who can share their expertise and experience with their mentees forms an essential part of people's learning and development. The women in this collaborative initiative also signified the value they drew from the collaborative and supportive relationships that were formed within the group as the programme progressed:

> *"We all stand together as a family and eventually it got better. We got stronger, we moved on a little."* (Dianne, F2: line 229);

> *"The connection is an important part of projects like this. Because if we lose that engagement, it might be that I don't feel like going and that could have led me to leave the project."* (Brenda, I: line 56)

These relationships appeared to be developmental in nature and comprised aspects of providing and receiving emotional support, encouraging one another, infusing hope into their existence,

laying the foundations for a safe and trusting space where their confidence could be built, and establishing a renewed sense of purpose for the future.

The commitment and passion of the mentors and the humanitarian way in which they guided and supported the women were also highlighted as being of significant importance in enhancing the success of initiatives like this:

> "*The [mentor] was the reason why I stayed in the project. She has a way of talking to you and how she helps you to understand things to change your own views for the better. They guided us to spread our wings."* (Ayesha, I: line 38);

> "*I learned a lot from my mentor about how to deal with things and how to handle myself. And so, I developed leadership skills.*" (Esther, I: line 64)

Being treated with dignity and being valued as an equal partner within this collaborative initiative appeared to equalise a relationship that could easily have degenerated into a skewed distribution of power: *"We became like a family ... The facilitators were giving us ... like ... that hope that there is a way. That we mustn't give up hope"* (Ayesha, I: line 12). Esther (I: line 38) agreed that "*they didn't treat us like projects, they treated us like their own children*". This sense of unconditional acceptance and belonging increased the women's commitment and motivated their sustained participation in the project. Furthermore, it also opened avenues for them to develop their own voice and agency, as Brenda (I: line 76) expressed*: "... communication skills, yes, they helped us a lot ... I wasn't a very open person or comfortable with everyone. But now I know how to react when someone offends me."*

These relationships, however, were not without challenges. When different voices speak up about the same phenomenon, a diversity of viewpoints may be generated. This creates potential for tension and contradictions when these diverse viewpoints need to converge in order to find acceptable solutions. Esther (I: line 43), for example, mentioned that *"there is a bit of jealousy between us ... this 'I' mentality and then conflict happens."*

In this initiative, the navigation of interpersonal conflict, bringing together diverse viewpoints and prioritising the shared object of the group, at some points presented challenges to the group. The women, however, always managed to negotiate ways around these challenges through engaging in open communication and using collaborative decision-making processes to arrive

at solutions: *"We worked well together. We always tried to meet each other halfway"* (Brenda, I: line 43). Other supporting statements came from Ayesha (I: line 42): *"… we do not always agree … but we could always sort it out quickly. We could deal with each other and talk about stuff"* and Trudy (I: line 70):

> *"But I would say, although we are all strong-willed, we are also mature enough to compromise when necessary, for the sake of the group. If there were differences, afterwards we would arrange a meeting and we would speak about it ... how we should respond to that."*

The regular cycles of reflections appeared to have played an important role in helping the participants to navigate the aforementioned challenges as they enabled these women to self-reflect and draw on their abilities to make constructive decisions that would help the group to achieve their shared goals. As Trudy (I: line 31) stated:

> *"We had to keep our focus on what the aim of GULL was. This motivated us to work together. All of us have different things that we are good at. So, this helped us to know our own strengths and weaknesses and how we could use this in the project and work together with the other ladies."*

Brenda (I: line 100) also concurred as to the value of the regular reflections and gaining self-knowledge: "[I]t starts with becoming yourself first, with knowing what you want for yourself and what you don't want for yourself. You accepted yourself and see yourself as confident."

From the data, it appears that the group dynamics gave the women the opportunity to adopt different roles that appeared related to their different personalities. The roles that became evident from the data are summarised and presented in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Individuals' roles in the group

ROLE	PARTICIPANT	SUPPORTING QUOTE
Listener	Brenda	*"I am a very good listener. I don't talk the whole time. I would listen first and make sure that I clearly understand and then I would have something to say"* (I: line 47).
Mediator	Trudy	*"I am the kind of person that likes peace. So, I would always try to keep the peace. if there were arguments, I wouldn't choose anyone's side. I always tried to bring them together. It was important to me to protect the project"* (I: line 55).
Leader	Esther	*"I learned a lot from ... about how to deal with things and how to handle myself. So, I developed into a leader with leadership skills and suddenly I was the chair and the spokesperson!"* (I: line 64).
Mother or sister	Linda	*"In the project, I felt like I took on kind of like a motherly role to make sure that things would always work out well. You take responsibility for everything to work out well but then sometimes you miss out on yourself"* (I: line 67).
	Sharlene	*"there were times when there were tears and we were crying together ... we grew close as women ... a sisterhood"* (I: line 433).
Supporter	Ayesha	*"It makes me feel good when I can make a difference in someone's life by for example helping them find a job. So I would play more of a supporting role"* (I: line 58).
	Sharlene	*"... just giving my support also for them, because I remember there were times that [others] couldn't make it then, you know, I stood in"* (I: line 411).
The quiet one	Dianne	*"... it was still difficult for me to talk because I was very shy"* (I: line 45).

It appears that the various roles taken on by the women complemented the group cohesion and enhanced their collaborative work towards attaining the goals set for the group. The data suggest that these intra-group dynamics were managed in ways that promoted the optimal functioning of the group at that time.

4.4.1.3   *Identity formation before economic exploration*

The GULL initiative is aimed at providing opportunities to marginalised individuals to empower themselves at both a personal and a professional level. During Foundation levels 1 and 2, in which these women participated in, the focus is therefore on identifying what one needs to learn in order to confront one's own challenges and design one's own solutions. The expected outcome of such a process is to improve one's own life as well as that of one's community.

The participants reported that they mostly experienced personal growth and lesser so professional growth, but they were content with how the process played out. The women appeared to be in agreement that they first needed to develop their identities and get to know themselves first before they focused on their professional development. All the participants felt that participating in this initiative had helped them to unearth their strengths and capabilities, as well as to recognise and work on the areas of their personalities and life choices that might need development. Trudy (I: line 135) encapsulated this notion as follows: *"It is very important to first know yourself so that you can be focused on what you want to do as an entrepreneur, the skills that you already have and also the skills that you still need to acquire. So, know your weaknesses and your strong points."* Linda (I: line 15) also supported the importance of focusing on personal growth and emotional support:

> *"GULL, for us … the process was not so much on the entrepreneur side, it was more emotional. We shared a lot amongst each other as women. We had a lot of teambuilding activities and then we would start talking and sharing what we were going through."*

They all agreed that this enabled them to grow in confidence, find their own voices and exercise their power and agency in helpful ways. This view is reflected in the following quotes by two of the participants. According to Ayesha (I: line 95), *"GULL helped me emotionally and physically. I feel empowered. I am more confident now."* Linda (I: line 136) agreed with this view and shared that they had learnt the importance of taking *"… responsibility and go(ing) the extra mile"*. Some of the women, like Dianne (I: line 48), considered their experience in this initiative as emancipatory. She shared that she had *"… crawl(ed) out of my shell and now know who I am … I can bring out my voice now, I have more power now"*. These developmental experiences appeared to have been incremental over time and incorporated activities that

79

encouraged the scaffolding of the participants' self-esteem. This increasingly positioned them more favourably to rehearse their agency and self-knowledge as they engaged in individual and collective decision-making processes as the initiative progressed. It was interesting to witness how the participants used these skills during the research process.

4.4.1.4 *Reflecting on their own participation*

When asked about how they perceived their own participation during this initiative, the women reflected beyond the content of their participation, for example which activities or roles they engaged in. They also critically reflected on a process level, in other words how they engaged and how their engagement could have been different. Some displayed a measure of dissatisfaction with their own participation in relation to their perceived lack of openness and active engagement: *"Maybe in some instances I could have acted more positively and engaged more verbally to help address issues"* (Ayesha, I: line 64). The issue of trust was also revealed as an aspect that some could have dealt with more effectively: *"Looking back, I would have liked to open up more and to be more trusting because it could have helped me"* (Trudy, I: line 75).

Their reflections also showed that the participants were critical of their own understanding of the process and how this might have influenced their engagement. Although the lengthy timelines of the process seemed to cause frustration at times, they also developed insight into the value of allowing time for the process to run its course:

> *"I don't think it happened so instantly. There is a reason why. At the end of the day, I think you appreciate it more when you know the process that you had to go through to come to where you are. These projects shape you as a person. By the time you get to a point where you are presented with an opportunity, you will be ready to take it on because they have equipped you for that"* (Linda, I: line 71).

This view was supported by Dianne (I: line 134) who shared that *"[t]hings are not always perfect right from the beginning. One has to take things one step at a time."* This level of reflection is significant when the aim of the reflective practice is to learn, grow and transform one's future practice, a notion that is at the heart of the GULL approach.

4.4.1.5   Broadening horizons

Exposure to new activities and experiences expanded the women's worldviews and their perceptions of themselves. All the women reported that these new experiences had awakened new hope in them and the ability to recognise opportunities that they might not have been aware of or anticipated before. Esther (I: line 128) expressed one such an example:

> *"The experience of sitting there together with this group of academics ...*
> *to give your inputs and them write it on the boards under your name. It*
> *gave you a different view, changed your mindset, to have time to view*
> *things differently."*

It is evident that their engagement in this initiative had a transformative impact on them as it expanded their learning in terms of both their personal and their entrepreneurial development. Figure 4.3 depicts the interconnectedness between these new experiences and the women's experience of personal and professional growth.

Figure 4.3: Experiences of expansive learning (Source: Author)

These expansive learnings appear to have been empowering in the following ways:

(i)   It built resilience in terms of the restorative effect it had on their perceptions of themselves and their ability to persevere in adverse circumstances. Ayesha (I: line 81) commented: *"This initiative taught me to be more independent and to stand on my own feet and to be strong against what you have to go through in life"* while Linda (I: line 32) found it had encouraged her to *"just try to build yourself up in various ways"*.

81

(ii)   It inspired their hopes and dreams for the future and infused them with intentionality to work actively toward set goals:

> *"I would like to take steps increasing in levels. Build in more opportunities to progress step by step and learn a new skill every time and becoming more specialised. That will have more impact"* (Ayesha, I: line 90).

Two of the other participants supported this view and Trudy (I: line 133) described her intention thus: *"I will have to be more focused now to be able to sustain that entrepreneurship"*, while Dianne (I: line 136) emphasised that "*the determination MUST be there*".

(iii) It helped the participants to gain new insights and wisdom related to venturing into entrepreneurial endeavours:

> *"I learned that you have to see business opportunities in your communities ... maybe there is a lack of something in our community. A lack of something always gives opportunity for a good business"* (Trudy, I: line 138).

All the women agreed with this view and appeared to have come to the realisation that starting an entrepreneurial venture was complex and that *"things are not always perfect right from the beginning – one has to take things one step at a time. I understand that part now"* as Dianne (I: line 134) indicated.

The participants suggested that they had learnt from the process involved in the initiative with its emphasis on action learning and reflective practice. They described it as an empowering experience that exposed them to new ways of learning and expressing themselves. Some of the participants who had found it difficult to express themselves verbally at first noted this as a significant area of development for them. In the course of the community-based project, the participants had been exposed to various forms of communication and using these had helped them to develop their confidence in their ability to communicate with others. Dianne (I: line 119) commented as follows:

> *"The things that I couldn't say with my mouth, I could paste on the page through the pictures. So, the collage helped me to bring what was inside of me to the outside and express it in a positive way. It was a beautiful way to express my inner feelings without crying all the time.*"

They were also able to apply or transfer these new learnings to other areas or systems in their lives. Ayesha (I: line 121), for example, shared:

> *"If there are situations at work that are not so nice, then I know how to deal with that situation, whereas in the past I would not really know. So now I know how I can avoid things or deal with it better."*

The experience of having had their voices heard and acknowledged assisted them in their personal and professional lives. Linda (I: line 39) shared that she had grown *"from someone who didn't talk much and was very withdrawn, I became more confident and so, when I went for the interview at [name of company], I was very confident and not scared to talk. And I got the job!"* All the women related similar stories of change, as shown in the quotations above which represent a number of other similar ones. Together they suggest enhanced levels of self-efficacy and socio-emotional intelligence.

4.4.1.6   *Gauging the social impact*

Recognising the importance of remaining cognisant of the inter-relatedness of the various bio-psychosocial systems that exert influence on how humans develop and transition through life (Lundqvist & Sandström, 2019), it was also important to gauge the social impact and sustainability of this initiative. In this regard, a number of aspects were raised by the women. Based on data presented in previous sections, the initiative succeeded in augmenting the personal development and empowerment of the women. They concurred that the relationships they built and the interactions they had during their GULL engagement had contributed to their identity formation and their self-efficacy.

4.4.1.6.1   *Specific skills training*

In the area of professional development, the women identified a few areas that could be improved should similar initiatives be implemented in future. One of the most significant areas was a need to provide more specialised trainings that relate more closely to the different types of entrepreneurial endeavours anticipated by the participants. From their responses, it appears that while there was overlap in their anticipation of how their engagement in this initiative would benefit them in terms of developing professional skills, the women also had very specific expectations. Brenda, for example, mentioned the need for customised training which would

more closely relate to the particular skills that would be required for the various types of business ventures that the various women envisaged:

> *"Maybe the trainings, like ... we are different women and we want different things. So, I would want training on what I want to become and training for THAT person for what THEY would like to become. So, I think that, like, that would strengthen it because that would give you more knowledge"* (Brenda, I: line 104).

Linda (I: line 103) shared a similar view and suggested that *"you need to work more closely to people's particular situations so that you can meet people's specific needs"*. Trudy was more specific in sharing her need to be exposed to expertise pertaining to business resources and logistics. She indicated that she would have benefitted from GULL teaching her *"skills specifically related to opening an internet cafe. So, what would the business have to look like, what resources will I need, how many computers I will need and what it will cost, where will I be able to find sponsors, etcetera"* (Trudy, I: line 97).

4.4.1.6.2 Connecting beyond the project

Some women also indicated the need for enhanced networking to further hone their skills as entrepreneurs. It transpired that they would have liked to meet other already successful entrepreneurs and business owners as these people could share first-hand knowledge and lived experiences of being an entrepreneur with them. Some of the participants expressed suggestions of how this could have been done or how it could be done in future projects. Trudy (I: line 100) suggested:

> *"… meeting an actual entrepreneur. Maybe if the project could get a person who is an entrepreneur to come and speak to the community. So, you could ask the person questions and engage with them."*

Dianne (I: line 100) supported this suggestion by stating that "they can get people that are successful, to come speak to us and to motivate the people".

Another theme emerged related to the importance of connecting with others who had participated in similar GULL initiatives: "[W]e would also like to see other GULL people in other communities and learn how they experienced things and what they learnt. Then we could use that information to add to our own learnings as well" (Ayesha, I: line 73). The participants

shared that this kind of engagement could be valuable in further expanding their sense of what was possible, or as Ayesha (I: line 75) expressed it: "If you network with others, you would know more and you can think of other things that you could also do."

4.4.1.6.3   Recruitment

In addition to people from outside the community, all the participants expressed the view that failure to communicate the aim and process of the GULL initiative during the recruitment phase had led to confusion and that it may have influenced the number of community members who signed up. They felt that clearer communication in language that was accessible to the people in the community could have clarified the benefits for them if they participated in the GULL initiative. The challenge with language appears to have remained an issue for some of the women throughout the process. Linda (I: line 102) expressed the desire for the use of less convoluted language: *"They must teach us in simple, down to earth, hands-on ways that we will understand."*

They felt strongly that future projects like this need to take account of the needs of the communities they aspire to engage and that they align their efforts more closely to these needs. Furthermore, they proposed that colloquial language be considered to communicate and market projects like these in order to make the information more accessible. They also felt that future projects should include the initial cohort in the marketing and recruitment process, as Brenda (I: line 123) indicated:

> *"Maybe clearer communication and marketing: using us ladies who have completed the project and started their business to serve as role models and examples."*

Most of the women supported the view that those of them who had successfully completed the programme be used to

> *"... share our stories and share with other women what we have learned in this project and how our lives improved. It would help to get more people involved in these kinds of projects to help themselves"* (Trudy, I: line 108).

They felt that actively involving them in the recruitment process would encourage more community members to become involved and in so doing ensure the sustainability of the initiative. They reported that their willingness to act as role models and advocates for social

85

justice initiatives demonstrated their shifts in agency, self-efficacy and socio-emotional intelligence.

All the women believed that while initiatives such as GULL could bring about positive change, one had to stay mindful of both the benefits and the challenges in order for the change to be real over time. They felt that they were now more confident to turn the challenges into learning opportunities and that they were able to engage researchers and other stakeholders in order to make recommendations for improvements. This inductive analysis of the data revealed important socio-emotional aspects that influenced how these women engaged in this initiative.

4.4.2   A nuanced exploration of personal experiences of the participants' themes

As this study sought to reflect on the personal journeys of the women, in this section I will provide authenticated descriptions through the voices of these women and elaborate on how they relate to addressing the key and subsidiary research questions. The categories, themes and subthemes are summarised in Table 4.3 and a discussion of this analysis follows.

Table 4.3: Categories, themes and subthemes emerging from the various data sources

CATEGORIES	MAIN THEMES THAT EMERGED FROM THESE CATEGORIES	SUBTHEMES THAT EMERGED IN SOME OF THE MAIN THEMES
Trajectories of unemployment	Personal context	Family histories
		Family and other relationships
	Socio-economic context	Poverty
		High unemployment rates
		Community characteristics
Engagement in the collaborative initiative	Social and emotional support	Belonging and acceptance
		Developmental relationships (relationality)
		Mentoring and mediation
	Shared goals	Start own enterprises
		Generate sustainable income
		Become independent
Growth or empowerment	Personal growth	Identity formation
		Self-efficacy (self-esteem)
		Resilience (problem-solving)
	Professional growth	Career development in terms of gaining experience

CATEGORIES	MAIN THEMES THAT EMERGED FROM THESE CATEGORIES	SUBTHEMES THAT EMERGED IN SOME OF THE MAIN THEMES
		Skills: Leadership 　　　　 CV writing 　　　　 Job interview skills 　　　　 Communication 　　　　 Entrepreneurial skills
Challenges	Intra- and interpersonal	Traversing the unknown; Fear of failure?
		Group dynamics
	Structural	Clearer communication of opportunities to community
		Inadequate social services
		Availability of resources
		Strategic business networks
	Business acumen	Registration of businesses
		Business management
		Financial management

4.4.2.1　Trajectories of unemployment

Issues that appeared to be cutting across most of the transcript interviews as well as the participant-generated artefacts alluded to two main categories identified by the participants as reasons for finding themselves on the trajectory of unemployment. These are each one's personal and socio-economic context.

4.4.2.1.1　Personal context

All the women revealed life histories which included some positive aspects as well as a number of adverse circumstances and experiences. Some of the women reported positive family contexts when they were children, with supportive parents and healthy sibling relationships, while others grew up in either turbulent or broken homes. Ayesha (F1: line 504) shared:

> "My childhood was good for me; I had a steady life. I stayed with my parents
> and my two brothers. There was lots of love. My dad was my anchor. He was
> my life support."

Brenda (F1: line 310), on the other hand, revealed unhealthy family relationships when she said: "We didn't have that bond actually. Not that family bond, because I was mostly... the only

person I knew as my family was my grandmother", while Esther shared the demoralising influences of being ridiculed because of your heritage:

> *"I think my confusion was also because my mother and my dad are from different racial groups. So, I could never find who I was as a person. My dad's families on both sides ridiculed and called me names. I didn't fit in in terms of what race I was and how I was supposed to behave"* (Esther, F1: line 23).

Most of the women also narrated experiences of rejection or loss due to the death of a significant other. This appears to have had a significant impact on their sense of self and their future. Esther (F1: line 20) shared: *"My mother and father rejected me. I was alone. I couldn't think positive. It made me lazy ... for myself ... my self-esteem ..."* In addition to rejection because of internal family dynamics, other variables like teenage pregnancy, identity concerns and a lack of self-esteem surfaced as reasons for not being able to access the job market. This is corroborated by (Brenda, F1: line 15): *"I had just given birth to my son at that time and therefore I couldn't work."*

For some, unforeseen personal circumstances brought significant changes in their life and career trajectories, as Dianne (I: line 25) indicated: *"I did have a job before my mom got sick. But when my mom got sick, I stopped it to take care of my mother."*

Some of the participants also shared that they had made the decision to seek partial employment because of family or other responsibilities. Ayesha's assertion in the following quote suggests that her trajectory into partial employment may have been more complex:

"I balanced my time by working only half days so that I could be with my children the other half of the day and do my household tasks. That is why I preferred the volunteer work and I could still make a bit of money by doing a bit of contract work" (Ayesha, I: line 23).

4.4.2.1.2   Socio-economic context

There were also socio-economic factors that complicated these women's access to job opportunities. According to Trudy and Brenda, these factors include a lack of job opportunities and being inadequately equipped with the skills to compete in the job market. So, for example, Trudy (I: line 20) shared that her *"CV at that time wasn't set up in the way it should have been. And I didn't have the interview skills that was necessary to do a good interview and market*

myself.". While Brenda also recognised the importance of how the CV was presented, she added that an additional hindrance was "*when you throw in the CVs, they look for experience. So, you are fresh out of school and you don't have any experience, so that is why I couldn't get work back then*" (Brenda, I: line 15).

From the women's inputs, it became evident that a lack of access to job opportunities and sustainable sources of income bore financial and other social consequences for individuals, their families and the broader community. Sharlene (I: line 288) attested to the devastating effects that unemployment and poverty could have on moral values, social activities and quality of life in societies: *"Unemployment, I believe, is one of the biggest problems … and then lack of facilities. It leads to substance abuse; young girls in relationships with older men, and so on."* Esther also felt strongly that unemployment contributed to the despondency and demotivation of people to pursue their hopes and dreams:

> *"I am sure that there are a lot of people here who have great things inside of*
> *them, but it has been killed by poverty, domestic violence, substance abuse,*
> *and so on. Our people must be saved"* (Esther, I: line 107).

The women's shared experiences suggest that people become trapped in a cycle of poverty marked by despondency, immobility, substance abuse and various forms of interpersonal violence.

4.4.2.1.3   Researcher's reflection on the participants' employment trajectories

I have completed all the individual interviews with the women. During these interviews as well as the focus groups, the women shared personal experiences which, to my mind, had a significant influence on their lives and the decisions they took at certain stages. Their lives were not easy. Some of their family backgrounds are characterised by traumatic events such as deaths and divorces or growing up with a single parent. Reports of physical abuse and even sexual molestation added further turbulence to the lives of some. It seems to me that most of them had to learn to navigate ways of dealing with adverse circumstances from a young age already. This made me wonder about the impact of all these traumatic experiences on how they perceived themselves. It provided some explanation to me as to why they all reported feelings of uncertainty and timidity, and even depression at times. I am also suspecting that these challenging experiences might be why acceptance and belonging to the GULL group was so

important to them. It appeared to compensate for the attachment relationships many of them lacked during their childhood years.

4.4.2.2   *Engagement in the collaborative initiative*

Despite the presence of certain challenges, all the women described their engagement in this collaborative initiative as an experience that changed their lives for the better.

4.4.2.2.1   *Social and emotional support*

All the women narrated their participation in this initiative as a space where they could give and receive social and emotional support. The comments by two of the participants confirm this: *"We supported each other and gave to each other"* (Esther, I: line 33) and *"My experience with them was very beautiful, I would say. I trust them a lot!"* (Brenda, I: line 37). These supportive relationships were clearly quite important to the women's sustained participation in the project. Brenda and Dianne's expressions illustrate how the women experienced the connection during the collaboration in the project:

> *"The connection is an important part of projects like this. Because if we lose that engagement, like whenever we have our next meeting, it might be that I don't feel like going and that could have led me to leave the project"* (Brenda, I: line 57).
> *"…the love and support you got at GULL motivate us to keep on coming"* (Dianne, I: line 110).

These and other views shared by the participants revealed the value they attached to establishing and developing meaningful interpersonal relationships with each other and the mentors or facilitators. The participants all agreed that the way in which the mentors or facilitators had engaged with them had played a significant role in their continued participation in the GULL project. According to them, one of the most significant aspects of the process was that the women felt respected as equal human beings and not just objects under research. Esther (I: line 38) recounted with endearment that "*they didn't treat us like projects, they treated us like their own children*", while Dianne (I: line 31) confirmed how the support from the mentors embodied a familial type of relationship for her: *"[T]he mentors supported me a lot with what I was going through ... we became like sisters and we understood each other."* This relationality appeared to have an empowering effect on the women, and encouraged their participation, according to Ayesha (I: line 38): *"[O]ur main mentors guided us to spread our wings.*"

All the participants confirmed experiences where their mentors could empathise with them as mentees in terms of the challenges they had faced and how the mentors had positively influenced their confidence to embark on new ways of thinking and new endeavours.

4.4.2.2.2 *Shared goals*

A factor that motivated the women to collaborate with each other was the idea of all working toward the shared goals of becoming self-employed and generating sustainable incomes for themselves and their families. During my engagement with these women, I came to know them as very determined women who are dedicated to improving their own lives as well as that of their families and fellow community members. Hence, working towards goals that would enable them to do this inspired them to deal with obstacles that might have arisen and to remain focused and engaged in the project, as Trudy (I: line 28) commented:

> *"We had to learn to accept each other and learn to work together and learn to work with our differences to achieve our goal. We had to keep our focus on what the aim of GULL was. This motivated us to work together."*

Linda (I: line 37) further declared that dealing with group dynamics for the sake of attaining shared goals gave them greater insight into their own abilities and how to navigate around relational and other challenging dynamics when engaging with others: *"[I]t helped us to know our own strengths and weaknesses and how we could use this in the project and work together."*

The women all agreed that their active engagement in this group was motivated by the common goal to empower themselves with skills and competencies which would enable them to start their own businesses and thus create sustainable incomes for themselves. They shared how these goal-oriented activities required substantial emotional energy from them and therefore reciprocal support and encouragement became an important factor in the sustainability of their participation. Sharing a common goal as desired outcome for the group thus served as a cohesive factor that inspired the women to take personal responsibility for their contribution toward reaching the collective goals of starting their own enterprises and becoming independent.

4.4.2.3 *Growth or empowerment*

The focus of the GULL Foundation levels 1 and 2, as it pertains to this particular study, is on the personal and professional development of individuals in order to empower them to make a

difference to their own lives and those of their communities (Teare, 2019b; see also Section 2.8.4). It was therefore anticipated that the participants in this initiative would bear witness to how they had been empowered on both personal and professional levels.

4.4.2.3.1 *Personal growth*

According to most of the women, this initiative contributed significantly more to their personal growth than to their professional growth or their entrepreneurial development, as described by Esther (I: line 150):

> *"The development was more personal. Very little about other skills or things.*
> *For me it was about the identity that I found in the group."*

Figure 4.4 provides a visual representation of the women's perceptions of their personal growth process.
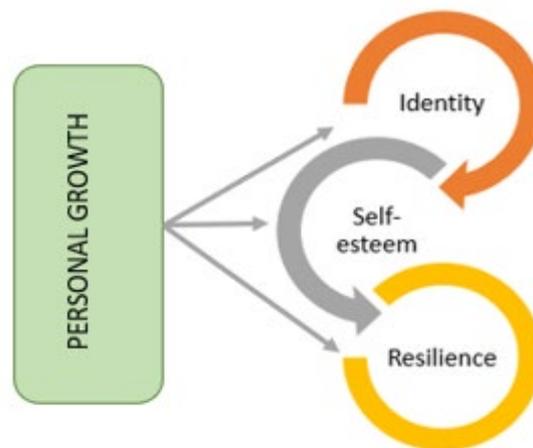
Figure 4.4: Personal growth (Source: Author)

An aspect of personal growth that featured strongly for all of the women centred on the theme of identity formation. Brenda shared that the circumstances within their community often drove them to have impoverished perceptions of their own being and capabilities. She noted how the GULL initiative had changed their perceptions of themselves: "*It helped me gain myself, to see myself differently from everyone else in the location*" (Brenda, I: line 74). This difference in themselves created a sense of excitement about the potential effect of having a healthier view on their quality of life. This encouraged them to become more visionary and ambitious. Dianne (I: line 130) commented: *"It helped me to make my dreams clearer."* But more than just dreaming, it allowed them to consider ways in which they could make those dreams a reality.

The participants repeatedly shared that they had gained confidence in themselves, their self-esteem had been boosted and their resilience enhanced. Linda (I: line 38) felt that the GULL initiative *"equipped [them] and it built [their] self-esteem"*, while Esther (I: line 79) also shared that she did not "*feel so inferior anymore*" and so was more willing to engage in activities she had shied away from in the past.

As mentioned before, some of the women spoke of experiences of being rejected in their past and shared how these had resulted in feelings of insecurity and a lack of self-esteem and self-efficacy. The notion of becoming part of a group where a sense of belonging was experienced therefore appeared to be embraced by most of the women. Ayesha (I: line 45) verbalised this in the following manner:

> *"We became like a family and we even gave our group a name. This initiative taught me to be more independent and to stand on my own feet and to be strong against what you have to go through in life."*

Ayesha's aforementioned input reflects that experiencing a sense of belonging and acceptance contributed to the woman developing a new sense of themselves or how they viewed themselves, building resilience and equipping the women with skills to assert themselves when faced with challenging circumstances. These aspects of personal growth speak to the significance of socio-emotional intelligence in inspiring hope for the future.

Entrepreneurship can be challenging in many areas. The participants also eluded to the need for entrepreneurs to navigate diverse relationships with stakeholders related to their businesses as well as within their personal lives, to understand customer needs and wants, apply business and financial shrewdness and provide leadership to their staff, among others. So, while they would have liked a bigger focus on actual business specific skills training, they understood the need for a stronger focus on personal development as a critical foundation for their sustainable economic empowerment.

4.4.2.3.2   *Professional growth*

As the overarching aim of the initiative was to address the issue of poverty and unemployment, professional growth was mostly directed toward economic empowerment and the development of entrepreneurial skills. Some of the women contended that they had not gained much in terms of professional or entrepreneurial skills: *"I didn't really learn skills*" (Brenda, I:144) and *"...

very little about other skills or things. For me it was about the identity that I found in the group" (Esther, I: line 150).

Over time, the women appeared to understand that this was the first phase of their process – the foundation for future economic development. Although there appeared to be a lesser focus on developing specific entrepreneurial skills, most of the women related that they had developed some entrepreneurial insights. Dianne, for example, stated how she had developed a more realistic perspective about growing a business:

> *"When you start a business, you mustn't think that you are going to make a lot of money right from the start. You will not have a lot of money all in one day. You must understand that entrepreneurship is about ... you will have to persevere"* (Dianne, I: line 137).

Trudy (I: line 138) reported that she had grown her skills in terms of recognising business opportunities that she had not been so attuned to before: *"I learned that you have to see business opportunities in your communities ... maybe there is a lack of something in our community ... always gives opportunity for a good business"*. Dianne (I: line 141) pointed to having more realistic expectations as a novel entrepreneur: *"You must save also. So, you must be more realistic about having a business and about your money."* Trudy (I: line 134) also highlighted the importance of developing characteristics such as commitment and determination if one plans to sustain a successful and financially viable business: *"I will have to be more focused now to be able to sustain that entrepreneurship."*

References were also made to other skills gained that are important to career development. Trudy (I: line 94) referred to growing competencies in writing a suitable curriculum vitae, the ability to conduct professional job interviews and present oneself with confidence, and showing leadership skills: *"We gained a lot of skills, like how to write my CV and how to conduct an interview, how to dress and present yourself, the way you speak."*

The data suggest that the women had used skills acquired in the project in their job-seeking endeavours to various degrees of success.

4.4.2.4   *Challenges*

Challenges arising from diversity can contribute either negatively or positively to group dynamics and cohesion. The women in this study were very positive about the personal

development experiences and empowerment they had gained through their involvement in this initiative, as elaborated on in Sections 4.4.1.2 and 4.5.2.1. They were, however, also forthcoming regarding certain challenges that they experienced during the project.

4.4.2.4.1   Intra- and interpersonal challenges

One of the themes that emerged from some of the women's inputs was the differential power dynamics which would sometimes surface between the women despite the close developmental relationships they built with each other. Ayesha (I: line 41) mentioned that differences in opinion sometimes arose during their meetings or discussions: *"We are a bunch of women together and we do not always agree"*; while Esther (I: line 43) pointed to possible tension that could arise due to interpersonal conflicts: *"There is a bit of jealousy between us ... this 'I' mentality and then conflict happens."*

Trudy (I: line 67) attributed these differences or conflicts to the women's diverse and strong personalities:

> *"We all have our own minds and our own ways of doing things. I think all of us are strong-willed and at times it comes through very strongly. So sometimes we would differ from each other and someone would want something in their own way."*

Nevertheless, it seems that they were able to solve issues through open communication and making compromises toward the greater good of the project: sometimes on their own and sometimes with mediation by the mentors. According to Ayesha and Linda the skills of open communication and problem-solving helped them to resolve their differences in amicable ways:

> *"But we could always sort it out quickly. We could deal with each other and talk about stuff"* (Ayesha, I: line 42).
> *"You do need to put things on the table and talk about it but at the end of the day you need to get a solution for it"* (Linda, I: line 91).

Brenda articulated their success in dealing with such interpersonal challenges in a manner that reflects the notion of positive interdependence: *"We worked well together. We always tried to meet each other halfway"* (Brenda, I: line 43).

Some of the women also alluded to harbouring intra-personal challenges that constrained their participation to some extent, such as shyness or their own lack of trust in the group members, which later appeared to be refuted as they got to know each other better and the relationships grew stronger:

> *"I wasn't a very open person or comfortable with everyone. But now I know how to react when someone offends me"* (Brenda, I: line 73).
>
> *"It was still difficult for me to talk because I was very shy. Looking back, I would have liked to open up more and to be more trusting because it could have helped me"* (Dianne, I: line 45).

4.4.2.4.2   Structural challenges

The structural challenges which emerged from the women's responses in this study were aspects of communication, networking, social structures and access to resources. These themes are depicted in Figure 4.5.
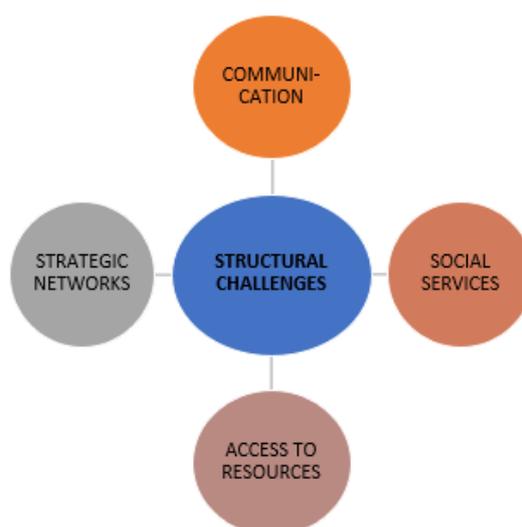
Figure 4.5: Structural challenges (Source: Author)

An important aspect pointed out by the women was their desire for more women and youth from their community to benefit from opportunities such as the GULL initiatives. Inadequate social services presented as a major challenge in addressing the needs of women, youth and the community effectively, as Sharlene (I: line 277) pointed out:

> *"If you have your community meetings, which they don't have in most of the cases, then you would know what is the need, what is the outcry from the*

96

> *community side as to what they want and it shouldn't be only material stuff;*
> *it should be development as well. They've got a second counsellor that took*
> *over from another one who was actually doing nothing there.*"

The lack of resources and access to successful entrepreneurs and other GULL projects with which to network may have hindered their chances of successfully starting up or maintaining their own entrepreneurial endeavours during the first phase of their GULL process. While they understood it to be a scaffolded process, they expressed an impatience with having to move at a slower pace with regard to their entrepreneurial endeavour. The need for this connection was strongly tied to resources. Esther shared her frustration:

> *"I don't have resources. It would be better if I could know that I have regular*
> *donors and how things should happen. It could make a difference in people's*
> *lives. Maybe if I can get a container so that we could have space where we*
> *could meet"* (Esther, I: 103).

Dianne and Ayesha echoed similar concerns:

> *"They can get more people like mentors...people that are successful, to come*
> *speak to us and to motivate the people"* (Dianne, I: line 100).
> *"We would also like to see other GULL people in other communities and learn*
> *how they experienced things and what they learnt. Then we could use that*
> *information to add to our own learnings as well. If you network with others,*
> *you would know more and you can think of other things that you could also*
> *do"* (Ayesha, I: line 73).

The participants repeated the aforementioned concerns frequently. From these and other data, it is clear that while most understood the logic of the initiative in first developing human capital, some of the participants still felt that the processes could run concurrently and should therefore expand to include a variety of resources and support structures, among other physical and financial resources, as well as strategic or profitable networking.

4.4.2.4.3   Business acumen

Women's entrepreneurship has for many years been regarded as a vehicle to move out of unemployment and poverty. The women in this study revealed more than a personal desire to escape from the stronghold of poverty, but also a humanitarian desire to empower their broader

community and infuse hope in situations that may seem hopeless. Ayesha (I: line 29) shared: *"We see in our communities all the problems with young people. So, for me it was about getting involved and doing something to help them and make an impact in that way."* Trudy (I: line 117) had a similar perspective: *"I would go out of my way to help them because I know what the experience is like of being unemployed. GULL taught me to help without expecting to get anything in return."*

The need to develop expertise and insight into effective business management, which is essential for entrepreneurial success, was also indicated by some of the women in this study. Assistance with getting businesses registered, knowing how to manage the business and the financial side of it, were areas of need that emerged from their responses. Ayesha (I: line 88) described her need in this regard as follows: *"At this stage, I would like to learn more about bookkeeping."* Esther (I: line 96) focused on business registration and funding: *"The project could help me get my organisation registered and with applications for funding to start and run this organisation."* In addition, Linda (I: line 108) foregrounded the needs of the umbrella business that they plan to start as a group:

> *"The HR thing. Outside of GULL ... we have this group business that we need to register. We have been stuck because we weren't sure if it should be an NPO or something else. And the support must be focused more on the specific type of business that a participant wants to start."*

Dianne (I: line 144) noted that the impatience with the pace of acquiring business acumen involved the desire for financial independence and social justice to contribute to the empowerment of other women in their communities as well: *"It is good to, as a woman to have your own business to be independent. You need to be independent. You mustn't just rely on someone else."* Although this was mentioned by all the women, Ayesha and Dianne were particularly vocal regarding the importance of contributing to other women's empowerment as well:

> "*It depends on how equipped you are, how you can share what you know to help empower others. So, I would want to share it with others, especially my children and other youth. Otherwise you leave nothing behind. It also helped me with skills to help empower others ... so that I can make a bigger impact*"
> (Ayesha, I: line 66).

> "*We also need to teach women to be able to support themselves, that they can stand on their own feet, that they CAN have their own money. You CAN be independent ... It's also about how one can uplift the women and empower them. To give them the confidence to go out and to talk to people, and to also encourage other women to find their inner beauty as well*" (Dianne, I: line 146).

It is evident from the quotations presented above that, for the women in this collaborative initiative, the concept of business acumen stretches beyond the notion of establishing a source of personal income to sustain their own livelihoods. It also includes conceptions of empowerment beyond the realm of the self as their desire to make positive changes extends to their broader community as well.

4.5   CONCLUSION

This chapter elucidated the categories, themes and subthemes that emerged from analysing the various sources of data generated in this study. The main categories of (i) trajectories of unemployment, (ii) engagement in the collaborative initiative, (iii) growth or empowerment and (iv) challenges provide further insight into socio-emotional factors that enhance or inhibit women's or youth's participation in sustainable poverty alleviation initiatives. The analysis revealed the economic empowerment of women or youth to be a complex and multi-faceted phenomenon that transcends the boundaries of economics and is significantly influenced by aspects related to socio-emotional intelligence. I provide an excerpt from my own reflections as I pondered on how my own understanding has been transformed through this collaborative research project.

> *Reflecting on where I started my collaboration with this group of women, with the aim of generating data for this research project, my own understanding regarding the GULL process as a social justice initiative has evolved. I must admit that I initially was keen to receive ample reports from the women on how they have gained knowledge and skills in terms of starting and building up their businesses. After having conducted and transcribed all the interviews, I needed to take a step back and interrogate my own preconceived ideas about entrepreneurial development and economic empowerment. After careful study of all the transcripts on numerous occasions, together with rigorous reading up and researching the topic, I now realise that this is not simply a matter of training and economics. Indeed, it is a sophisticated process of being and becoming. It is a process of growth, transcending and transformation on various levels.*
>
> *(Personal reflection, 14 March 2020)*

Chapter 5, which follows, provides a synthesis and interpretation of the presentation and discussion of all of the data sources in relation to the applicable literature (as discussed in Chapter 2). This will allow the drawing of a number of conclusions in response to the research questions initially posed for this study.

CHAPTER 5

INTERPRETATION OF THE FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

"From change to transition to transformation" (Author)

5.1   INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study was to explore how marginalised women and youth participate in a poverty alleviation initiative as well as the socio-emotional factors that may enable or constrain their participation in such initiatives. The following aspects were deemed appropriate for exploration in attempting to respond to the key research question "How can a collaborative action research approach be used to gain a better understanding of the socio-emotional factors that enhance or inhibit the participation of young women in sustainable poverty alleviation initiatives":

- The life experiences which the women perceived to have propelled them on a trajectory to unemployment;

- The women's engagement in the activities of the GULL initiative and why they engaged in the ways that they did;

- Experiences within this collaborative endeavour which helped the women to grow personally and in terms of entrepreneurial skills;

- Challenges or hindrances that the women experienced in terms of participating in such a collaborative endeavour; and

- Suggestions made by these women to strengthen the effect of this initiative on their own development and the sustainability of the outcomes of the initiative.

To gain insight into the women's experiences of collaborating in the GULL initiative, an interpretive, participatory action research design was implemented with the aim of constructing meaning in collaboration with the women. A multi-theoretical lens, including aspects from Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model, Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) and Social

101

Interdependence Theory (SIT), was used to analyse and interpret the data generated in this study.

According to the bioecological model, human development is influenced by people's interactions with various systems and spheres of their environment. Individuals' development is said to be influenced by various aspects such as biological, individual, family and peer systems related to their lives, as well as cultural and historical forces. These factors may impact the ways in which people and systems change over time. As these influences often span across various systems with which the individual interacts over time, it is essential to take context into account when exploring human development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

The significance of interaction and context resonates strongly with the CHAT framework, which suggests that people learn and develop through their daily interactions with entities, artefacts or symbols, and other people who form part of their life-worlds (Sannino & Engeström, 2018). Similar to the view held in the bioecological model, CHAT proposes that people interact within and across various systems in their life-worlds. Through these interactions, an individual's being and engagement in the world is shaped, while individuals and groups can also reciprocally shape the systems they engage with over time. Researchers may apply CHAT in order to understand human beings as individuals (marginalised women in this study) as well as social entities (potential entrepreneurs) within their natural everyday life circumstances (Sannino & Engeström, 2018). This objective resonates with the aim of this study, namely to gain a better understanding of the role of socio-emotional factors in women's engagement in sustainable poverty alleviation initiatives by exploring with them the ways in which they participated in one such initiative. The aforementioned supported the usefulness of including some of the principles of CHAT as an additional lens for analysis in this study.

Moreover, the principles of "positive interdependence, individual accountability, promotive interactions, the appropriate use of social skills, and group processing" enshrined in SIT (Johnson & Johnson, 2008, p. 19) were of particular relevance to this collaborative initiative and for this reason, aspects of SIT were engaged as another useful lens for analysis. SIT is based on the premise that the content and quality of people's interactions within groups or systems are mediated by how interdependence is structured. Where positive interdependence is experienced and group members perceive their roles and division of labour as complementary, they are motivated to collaborate toward the group's efficacy in achieving their set goals (Van Mechelen et al., 2015; Cockerill et al., 2018).

The process of responding to the research question commenced with a discussion of the theoretical perspectives which underpin the economic empowerment of women as a vehicle to reduce the plight of poverty (Chapter 2). Exploration of these theoretical perspectives revealed the necessity of engaging multiple lenses of analysis to interpret the data generated in this study. Chapter 3 presented the empirical part of the study, with a focus on the methodological decisions taken and processes employed to execute the study. Analysis of the various data sources followed an inductive approach through which pertinent themes were identified from the data. These themes were presented in Chapter 4. A synthesis and discussion of the findings through the use of the various theoretical lenses, described in Chapter 2, now follows. Recommendations for practice and future research are also made based on the findings.

5.2   DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

This section draws together the data as analysed from the various vantage points as described in Chapters 2 and 3. Interpretations are presented along the lines of the subsidiary research questions that guided the study.

5.2.1   The life experiences which the women perceived to have propelled them on a trajectory to unemployment

As accentuated in the bioecological model as well as in the CHAT framework, the various life systems that form part of people's lives interact and influence each other reciprocally. The women shared various journeys comprising a number of factors that put them on the path of unemployment. Aspects related to personal as well as socio-economic contexts directly influenced their employment or lack of employment histories.

At a personal level, most of the women had endured adverse childhood experiences in their family circumstances and relationships. Some experienced growing up in single-parent homes or their families breaking up due to divorce, which left some of them having to navigate often challenging relationships with step-parents. Others experienced the trauma of losing a parent through death or abandonment while still young. According to all of the participants, the feelings of loss, rejection and worthlessness that stemmed from these negative experiences affected their self-confidence and they felt that this low or no self-confidence played a significant role in their motivation to explore and pursue job opportunities actively. Esther and Dianne shared that they considered it important that due consideration be given to the impact

that the previously mentioned adverse experiences could have on the emotional well-being of a person and their motivation to seek employment. Dianne shared that the loss of her mother resulted in significant mental health issues that continue to present a challenge, as in her words: *"I lost my mother. I fell into a depression. I have been living in a dark corner … and I didn't want to go out and talk to people"* (Dianne, F2: line 234). The theme of loss and its impact on motivation also emerged from Esther's responses: *"My mother and father rejected me. I was alone. I couldn't think positive. It made me lazy ... for myself ... my self-esteem ..."* Esther (F1: line 20). These quotations reflect a common theme of the underlying influence that adverse experiences in early life had on later motivation and life choices.

It is, however, important to note that not all the participants' earlier career decisions were based on adverse early life experiences. For one of the participants in particular her career choice was closely tied to the social role assignment of what it meant to be a mother. Ayesha indicated that personal choices, influenced by socio-cultural expectations of what it meant to be a mother, had contributed to how she chose to navigate her career trajectory. She decided that she would not enter into full-time or permanent employment because she wanted to be a hands-on mother who had the time and energy to raise her children and fulfil her household responsibilities. It is thus apparent that perceptions of the division of labour (the roles and responsibilities that women assume in their household and society) as well as individual agency (the emotional energy directed towards attaining a particular goal), had a great influence on how most of these women trajected into unemployment (Sannino & Engeström, 2018). The views and experiences shared by the women in this study are in line with research that suggests a high correlation between adverse socio-economic circumstances and feelings of hopelessness and depression. This interplay between socio-economic variables and socio-emotional factors in this and other studies suggests a significant relationship between these two factors (Cloete, 2015; Agampodi et al., 2019).

The women's life experiences and insight into their life situations appeared to play an important role in their willingness to participate in a poverty alleviation initiative that envisaged future benefit instead of immediate satisfaction, when first introduced to them. The notion of personal development as the foundation to sustainable income generation appeared to have aligned with their strong visionary focus on attaining a future goal that would be of more benefit to them than immediate rewards. In their sharing, it was apparent that these women were considering a future that went beyond their own financial comfort. Initially, their individual decisions to

venture into the GULL initiative despite knowing that it would not afford them an immediate income appeared to be embedded in a measure of social activism. Trudy's (I: line 15) view that *"[e]ven though we weren't employed, they equipped us and we were helping other people. So, that was a good experience*" bears testimony to this. Some researchers in the field of poverty alleviation have argued for a larger investment in economic and entrepreneurial capacity building of women, because of research-based evidence that women tend to be more altruistically inclined and are inclined to share benefits with others in their community (Roberts, 2015; Chant, 2016b). I am aware that this is a contentious observation; however, the findings in this study support the view that women tend to think of economic empowerment beyond their immediate family or circle of influence.

Another of the significant themes that emerged related to personal factors such as some of the women's lack of work experience beyond short-term or contract work. The participants identified this as a significant challenge as most employers required work experience when they advertised positions. They expressed a great deal of frustration, and noted that this was an obstacle that further undermined their confidence and motivation, because they could not understand how they would ever access the job market if they were not given an opportunity to gain suitable work experience in the first place. This is a conundrum faced by many young people who try to access the job market, as Brenda (I: line 15) indicated: *"[W]hen you throw in the CVs, they look for experience. So, you are fresh out of school and you don't have any experience, so that is why I couldn't get work back then."* Ramukumba (2014) and De Lannoy et al. (2018) indicate a lack of suitable qualifications and work experience as significant contributors to the high rates of unemployment among young people.

Experts such as Savickas (2019) and Lindsay et al. (2015) argue that skills such as writing a curriculum vitae, professional conduct during a job interviews, and presenting oneself as confident and competent are important life skills that youth need to develop in order to increase their chances of accessing the job market. All of the women indicated an initial lack in these areas before they joined the GULL initiative. Trudy and Linda, who both found employment during the course of the GULL initiative, attested to how their development in these areas had assisted them in finding employment:

> *"We gained a lot of skills, like how to write my CV and how to conduct an interview, how to dress and present yourself, the way you speak"* Trudy (I: line 94).

> *"I became more confident and so, when I went for the interview at [name of company. I was very confident and not scared to talk. And I got the job! So, I had to go through many processes but they were all learning curves"*
> (Linda, I: line 39).

Feelings of helplessness emanating from perceptions of being trapped in a cycle of unemployment or partial employment often creates vulnerability for women in their families or intimate relationships. Although none of the women in this study reported personal experiences in this regard, they shared stories of young women becoming involved in risky intimate relationships with older men as these men most probably provide them with finances. The participants agreed with Sharlene (I: line 288) when she shared that this was a serious problem because many young girls in this particular community were *"in relationships with older men"*. Furthermore, it was clear that adverse societal circumstances have a detrimental effect on people's hope and vision for the future, as highlighted by Esther (I: line 107) who argued that many young people's dreams are *"killed by poverty, domestic violence, substance abuse, and so on"*.

Agyei-Mensah et al. (2015) and Chant (2016b) concur that women who are trapped in situations of poverty tend to be more vulnerable to exploitation by others. Socio-economic risk factors therefore did not only hold economic or financial challenges for these women. They had also left deep emotional scars which the women had to deal with during the GULL initiative:

> *"GULL helped me to get over my mother's death and become confident again…to realise that it was good to grieve, that it is okay to cry and that it would not stay like that. GULL helped me to change a lot. I am a new person now"* (Dianne, I: line 5).

This, as well as other similar quotations not provided here for the sake of brevity, confirms the strong link between socio-economic factors and emotional well-being. It further affirms the necessity for including a focus on personal development and enhancement of self-esteem and emotional well-being if economic empowerment endeavours are to have sustainable impact (Yildirim et al., 2019). Hence, the data generated in this study link strongly to evidence in the literature that supports the interrelatedness between unemployment and socio-economic and emotional factors. Cloete (2015), for example, argues that a lack of financial security can lead to hopelessness, depression and even destructive decision-making and behaviour. This helps to

explain why it is not uncommon for communities with high unemployment rates to be characterised by high levels of poverty and social ills such as substance and alcohol abuse, crime, delinquency and high rates of teenage pregnancy (as mentioned by Sharlene and Esther). Social risk factors such as a lack of parental support, or being socially disadvantaged, are often also associated with mental disorders such as depression (Agampodi et al., 2019).

Moreover, the inability to enter the job market due to the lack of suitable work experience (as attested to by Trudy), is a dichotomy that leaves many young people and women in a state of hopelessness and depression, which further dampens their drive to explore the job market actively (De Witte et al., 2012; Graham & Mlatsheni, 2015). Hence, it would be important for initiatives aimed at poverty alleviation to include efforts directed at building self-esteem and enhancing emotional well-being of the participants. This would mean that the length of these interventions would require more time, effort and resources, as it calls for far more than just financial injections and equipping people with technical or vocational skills. As evident in the case of this GULL initiative and the broader GULL ethos (Teare, 2019a), a considerable amount of time would also have to be spent on building developmental relationships that have the power to guide the participants to greater personal development and a greater sense of self-efficacy.

5.2.2 The women's engagement in the activities of the GULL initiative and why they engaged in the ways that they did

Human beings are social entities that draw on proximal relationships with others and who make sense of the world based on interactions with one another (Sannino & Engeström, 2018). All the women highlighted the importance of the relationships that were built during this initiative. The women thrived on the reciprocal social and emotional support that was available in the group's interactions with each other:

> *"We built friendships because we got to know each other better than we initially did. So, it was the safe space that we had, that kept me"* (Linda, I: line 19).

> *"There are a lot of people who need those kinds of people that they can just talk to – not a psychologist … but a friend or sister who you feel comfortable with"* (Dianne, I: line 62).

Both Agampodi et al. (2019) and Zuber-Skerritt et al. (2020) confirm the importance of building supportive or promotive relationships as these are helpful to people in terms of their

development and taking responsibility in identifying their own learning needs and abilities. In the current study, these developmental relationships were structured to create positive interdependence which motivated the women to collaborate with each other in order to realise the goals of the group. The women's embodied experiences link strongly to the CHAT principle that people engage in goal-oriented activities as part of their daily lives in order to make use of opportunities and attain certain outcomes (Engeström, 2018). Sharing a common goal and the division of labour thus served a cohesive purpose as it enhanced the women's accountability towards the group. It also sustained their participation in the group (Van Mechelen, et al., 2015; Goss & Sadler-Smith, 2018). These developmental relationships also provided a space in which the women experienced a sense of belonging that inspired them to revive latent dreams and to build new vision for their future (Cornwall, 2016).

These developmental relationships extended to the women's interactions with their mentors as well, where these were described as essential in their identity formation and building self-esteem, as Esther (I: line 64) stated: *"I learned a lot from my mentor about how to deal with things and how to handle myself. And so, I developed leadership skills."* The mentors' experience and expertise helped to expand these women's learnings and insights into their own identities and capabilities. In CHAT this is referred to as the "zone of proximal development" (Sannino & Engeström, 2018, p. 52), where a learner is able to increase their learning when they receive support from a more knowledgeable other. The CHAT framework describes this process as expansive learning (Sannino & Engeström, 2018). According to the theory of expansive learning people are capable of transforming and expanding the motives that drive their actions within the system and respond to it in increasingly enriched ways.

The literature also describes mentoring support as a fundamental element in projects that focus on human capital development. The women in this project affirmed the notion that mentors who possess advanced knowledge and experience can guide and inspire their mentees both at a professional and personal level. It is within such nurturing spaces where a sense of belonging and acceptance can be experienced, which prepares the mentees for both the personal and professional learning process (McGowan et al., 2015; Stead, 2017). This highlights the importance of sourcing mentors for projects like these who have insight into the challenges that members from these communities may experience and how to build authentic, developmental relationships with community members.

The women also shared some of the challenges they had experienced in their working and interpersonal relationships within the team and how they had learnt, first with the help of the mentors and later on their own, how to use the skills they had learnt. As explained in Section 4.4.1.2, most of the women attested to the significant influence of their mentors in promoting their own confidence and skills to deal with challenges and interpersonal relationships in beneficial ways. Real-life scenarios and experiences were used to establish effective zones of proximal development and promotive interactions where expansive learning happened. This appeared to have created a skill set and engendered personal development that was fundamental to the women's sustained engagement in the collaborative poverty alleviation initiative (Van Mechelen et al., 2015; Sannino & Engeström, 2018; Yildirim et al., 2019).

5.2.3 Experiences within this collaborative endeavour that helped the women to grow personally and in terms of entrepreneurial skills

The expansive contributions of developmental relationships to the learning and development of these women were discussed in Section 5.2.2. It follows that these relationships were significant in the identity formation and self-esteem of the women. Considering that the women's initial engagement in the GULL initiative was spurred on by their need for financial income, their choice to focus on their personal and identity development was an interesting theme that emerged from the data. The women engaged in decision-making based on opportunity cost awareness, which implied a delay in immediate reward but would position them in more favourable emotional, social and economic positions in the near future (Cornwall, 2016; Read et al., 2017). This raises a flag to social justice initiatives aimed at poverty alleviation not to assume a limited focus on financial and economic factors as the panacea to the problem of poverty. A view on human capital development that is limited to economic and financial outcomes only, particularly in relation to the economic empowerment of women, may cast doubt on the outcomes that the women reported in this initiative and may consequently neglect to recognise the significance of their achievements.

In line with the principles of SIT, the GULL initiative, which is based on action learning, subscribes to the notion that reflective practice enables people to learn from their experiences and employ those learnings to attain desired goals (Van Mechelen et al., 2015; Sannino & Engeström, 2018). The women described the iterative cycles of reflection as challenging but expansive learning experiences. Through action learning processes the women learned to work collaboratively within the group and with their mentors, while the regular reflection cycles

enabled them to identify their own learning needs in order to transform their future practice, enhance their self-esteem and efficacy and build resilience (Mezirow, 2018; Teare, 2019b). The action learning approach and the regular reflections empowered the women to find their inner voice and produce more helpful ways of expressing themselves: *"... helped me to bring what was inside of me, to the outside and express it in a positive way"* (Dianne, I: line 120). Hence, regular reflections on one's own engagement and progress is deemed to be an essential aspect in increasing the sustainability of women's participation as well as the impact of the project outcomes.

Referring to the bioecological model, it must be pointed out that interactions between various systems can present either benefits or challenges (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Lundqvist & Sandström, 2019). Interactions across social and academic systems proved to be a hugely beneficial factor in the engagement and development of these women: *"The experience of sitting there together with this group of academics ... It gave you a different view, changed your mindset"* (Esther, I: line 128). These experiences contributed to both their personal and professional growth (as elaborated in Sections 4.4.2.3.1 and 4.4.2.3.2) as they enhanced their emotional intelligence and self-awareness as well as their ability to navigate relationships with people from other spheres of their lives. Emotional intelligence and self-awareness are deemed to be important qualities to predict entrepreneurial success (Mortan et al., 2014; McGowan et al., 2015). Dianne and Trudy, for example, shared how their understandings of venturing into business grew sharper and their vision for their future ventures grew clearer as their exposure across various systems progressed. High levels of self-efficacy and socio-emotional intelligence, especially in the areas of problem-solving, social communication and resilience, would therefore increase entrepreneurs' chances of success (Mortan et al., 2014; Hassan & Omar, 2016; Yildirim et al., 2019). Interactions between various systems can therefore have significant expansive learning and transformative effect and should be a serious consideration in initiatives such as this.

5.2.4 Challenges or hindrances that these women experienced in terms of participating in such a collaborative endeavour

All activity systems within which people interact have the potential to produce challenges or contradictions due to different viewpoints that may arise (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Sannino & Engeström, 2018). Within the CHAT framework this is referred to as 'multi-voicedness', an aspect that creates various forms of dynamics between members of groups.

Such intra-group dynamics may either enable or constrain group cohesiveness and the group's ability to work effectively towards common goals (Van Mechelen et al., 2015; Sannino & Engeström, 2018).

Research reported in Chapter 2 suggest that aspects of emotional intelligence (such as flexibility, adaptability and problem-solving) can be improved through personal and skills development (Rieckmann, 2018; Anderson et al., 2019). The constructive and communicative ways in which the women dealt with challenges during this empowerment initiative affirm this research. Their responses resemble principles of multi-voicedness and expansive learning as advocated within CHAT, as well as the principles of interpersonal and small-group skills associated with SIT (Sannino & Engeström, 2018; Yildirim et al., 2019).

Based on the data generated in this study, a distinction is made between personal challenges (of both intra- and interpersonal nature) and structural challenges. Differential power dynamics between the women as well as the mentors could pose tremendous challenges and potentially derail such initiatives. The notion of shared power is one of the central tenets of participatory action learning and research (Herr & Anderson, 2015). The women indicated that equal relationships and unconditional acceptance created a sense of belonging that served to sustain their participation in the project, despite its lengthy course: *"The [mentor] was the reason why I stayed in the project"* (Ayesha, I: line 38). The relationships and interactions with the mentors also served as expansive learning opportunities and enabled the women to navigate their relationships with each other in beneficial and supportive ways. Hence, ensuring equal partnerships between various stakeholders is vital to the sustainability of social justice initiatives.

Challenges may also arise from structural inequalities or deficiencies, as was the case in this study. The women reported structural challenges related to communication, social services in their community, and access to resources and strategic networks, as elaborated on in Section 4.4.4.2. Based on participants' inputs such as *"clearer communication and marketing"* (Brenda, I: line 123) and *"know what is the need, what is the outcry from the community"* (Sharlene, I: line 277), it can be inferred that the reach and impact of the poverty alleviation initiative might have been more relevant and far-reaching had it been marketed more clearly at the beginning stages, and had the programme included a slightly less generic and sharper focus on the actual needs pertinent to this community and the women involved. A more focused approach could have directly addressed some of the needs in terms of access to resources and

strategic networks. Although the initiative succeeded in building developmental relationships within the group, it could have been extended to building developmental relationships across other systems as well, such as with role models from the entrepreneurship sphere and other GULL projects. Ayesha's comment that one's knowledge and visionary thoughts would be expanded when you network with others resonates with the views of Marvel et al. (2016) and Scales et al. (2020) who argue that autonomy, competence and occupational success are nurtured in the presence of developmental relationships. Creating such a network of resource-rich relationships would have had a greater effect on the development of business and entrepreneurial skills for the women in this initiative.

5.2.5   Suggestions made by these women to strengthen the effect of this initiative on their own development and the sustainability of the outcomes of the initiative

Women's entrepreneurship has for long been perceived as being based on a desire to escape the trap of poverty and to improve the livelihoods of individuals or their families (Madzivhandila & Dlamini, 2015). More recently, however, women have started to indicate their interest in entrepreneurship because of their attraction to business acumen, and the prospect of being autonomous and making a contribution to their societies (Fatoki, 2014). Ayesha and Dianne, for example, referred to the importance of empowering women to become independent and able to provide for themselves (see Section 4.4.2.4.3). This awareness resonates with the purpose of social justice initiatives to address inequities and to distribute opportunities more fairly and equitably between individuals and within society (Opotow, 2018). Assessing the impact of such initiatives is therefore an essential part of such processes. Gauging the women's inputs in this regard revealed that the social impact of this particular GULL initiative was experienced more deeply at a personal than a professional or societal level (see Sections 4.4.2.3.1 and 4.4.2.3.2). Great strides have been made in relation to the women's personal development as described in previous sections. They have even indicated a desire to serve as role models to promote similar future endeavours in order to recruit more people from their community to take up opportunities such as this. This outcome could extend the reach of this project and enhance its societal impact.

While this progress can be linked to greater prospects for future success (Yildirim et al., 2019), the initiative might have had more significant societal impact had the development of entrepreneurial skills received more focused attention. Statements such as *"Maybe if the project could get a person who is an entrepreneur to come and speak to the community"* (Trudy, I: line 100), *"Maybe the trainings, like ... we are different women and we want different things"*

(Brenda, I: line 104) and *"I don't have resources. It would be better if I could know that I have regular donors and how things should happen. It could make a difference in people's lives"* (Esther, I: 103) pointed to the need for a more specialised focus on addressing these particular needs as it could have been more effective in this case.

In order to enhance and sustain the outcomes of such initiatives for both the individuals and the communities involved, more attention would have to be paid to developing strategic networks exceeding the boundaries of the particular community involved. It is through building strategic relationships that individuals or groups can access and mobilise valuable resources to promote the success of the business endeavours (Marvel et al., 2016; Scales et al., 2020). This could enable potential entrepreneurs from the community to access and mobilise resources in support of their business endeavours and might have helped these women, in particular, to have been further along in starting up their own enterprises.

It must be noted that entrepreneurship development or economic empowerment is a process and, as such, implies that a series of actions and steps need to be taken and different stages traversed in order to achieve certain goals or outcomes. Hence, for these women it is a matter of **transitioning** through different stages of the entrepreneurial development process. The GULL Foundation levels 1 and 2 (Teare, 2019b) could be regarded as part of their initial stages of entering into entrepreneurial ventures. The concept of transitioning is therefore understood here as the incremental movement from one stage to the next, with the focus on the processes and periods involved in progressing through these evolving stages, and where the resulting change or outcomes are measured in terms of the impact on individuals, groups or processes (Child & Breyer, 2017). In the case of these women, it implies that they are in the process of moving from being unemployed or partially employed to establishing sustainable sources of financial income for themselves and their families. The women shared that while they had come to understand the logic of the process, it remained challenging not to become impatient. The impatience was often tied to the real financial needs of their families.

Transformation, on the other hand, infers a marked change in form, nature, or appearance that results in changes at systemic levels (Hölscher et al., 2018). The women in this project envisaged that the impact of their transitioning into positions of economic power would benefit their broader community as well through their plans to empower other women and youth. They believed that through their economic empowerment initiatives they would help to alleviate the existing poverty and thus induce transformation of their society at a systemic level. For the

women in this project it meant the possibility of establishing an umbrella entity that would create opportunities for themselves and others. This elucidates the GULL initiative, as embodied by these women, as more than just personal and professional empowerment to become self-sustainable. Much more, it entails a vision of fundamental shifts in the economic, social and mental well-being of women in their community at large. This could explain why their progression through Foundation Levels 1 and 2 extended over a longer time period than initially anticipated.

From the discussions above, it is evident that initiatives such as this need to take cognisance of a variety of factors and systems, including aspects related to the spheres of the personal, emotional, relational and the societal in addition to economic and financial know-how. Such multi-faceted approaches may deliver greatly improved outcomes and enhance the sustainability of social justice initiatives.

5.3   RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings from this qualitative, participatory action research study are unique to the particular research context and are therefore not simply generalisable to other populations. The insights gleaned from this study could, however, provide guidance to other poverty alleviation initiatives aimed at the personal and professional development of women to enable them to become self-sustainable entrepreneurs. The recommendations provided here focus on how attention to socio-emotional factors can enhance the efficacy and sustainability of community-based poverty alleviation initiatives:

- In order to increase the success and social impact of poverty alleviation initiatives, a more holistic view on the concept of economic empowerment which extends above and beyond matters of finances and economics, would be beneficial. Future projects could include a more intentional focus on building developmental relationships and enhancing women's self-esteem, as this will strengthen the sustainability of the outcomes of such initiatives.

- Based on the multi-faceted nature of empowerment initiatives, a systemic approach to economic empowerment is recommended. Recognising and building developmental connections across various systems should increase the reciprocal sharing of knowledge and expertise as well as access to social and economic resources. This, in turn, should enhance confidence and agency to access opportunities as they arise.

- Engaging the current research participants as role models in initiating future projects such as this could attract increased participation of community members. Opportunities should therefore be created where these women could share their learnings and experiences with members of their community and other similar communities. True testimonies could convince more community members to take up opportunities such as this. A consequent ripple effect should increase the reach and breadth of poverty alleviation initiatives and thereby enhance the social impact thereof.

5.4   LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Since this study involved writing a mini-dissertation as part of fulfilling the requirements to obtain a Master's degree, the study was limited in its scope. A rich data set was generated through the various interviews and qualitative activities that formed part of the data collection methods. In order to delineate the scope of the research, the women's experiences served as the main focus of research, while the government official served as key informant to contextualise the data where applicable.

A further limitation was that this study was undertaken in one specific community and with a small number of women. Within the boundaries of this study, the complexities related to the research topic could not all be explored in sufficient depth. Neither are the findings from this small sample viewed as universally generalisable. This study could, however, serve as one instance of the topic under study and could thus be an example from which other women and communities with similar characteristics could draw.

5.5   SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The findings of this study revealed insights into the contextual and relational nature of women economic empowerment and poverty alleviation initiatives. Although these insights may add to the body of knowledge pertaining to the role of socio-emotional factors in poverty alleviation, a number of issues may provide for a future research agenda in this field.

An opportunity for future research would be to build on this particular study by engaging in follow-up research where the further journeys of these women, beyond this stage of participation, could be explored. Gauging insight into their future paths could serve as confirmation of or even refute the findings from this study and reveal new information.

This study was focused on the experiences of a small sample of women from one community as well as one government official. Replication of this study at other similar communities may provide comparative data which could strengthen the understanding of the role of socio-emotional factors in women's participation in poverty alleviation initiatives, as well as the significance of promotive relationships across various systems. Future studies including the voices of successful entrepreneurs and businesswomen could also further contextualise the findings of this study from an economic perspective. This could possibly be strengthened by including industrial psychology perspectives as well.

Further qualitative exploration of a more holistic conceptualisation of the economic empowerment of women could provide additional insight into how socio-emotional factors such as trust, acceptance, belonging, confidence and visionary inspiration may enhance women's potential success as entrepreneurs. Notions of human capital development may provide avenues of research to draw stronger links between economic and humanistic factors as they might relate to entrepreneurship development.

5.6   CONCLUSIONS

Reporting the empirical work assisted in drawing the following conceptual conclusions in response to the research question:

- Trajectories through stages of unemployment are based in both contextual factors (such as a lack of opportunities or appropriate work experience) and personal mindsets or characteristics (such as individual agency or responsibilities taken on based on the division of roles in households or societies). In the GULL collaborative initiative, a more holistic view was taken of the economic empowerment of women to include aspects extending beyond financial skills and economic expertise. Recognition of the influence of the human mind and spirit allowed for a more dedicated focus on the socio-emotional development of women on their journey to entrepreneurial success. This was a restorative process for the women in terms of rebuilding their self-esteem and self-efficacy which had been eroded by adverse life and socio-political experiences. Affirming the women's identity, their voices and agency in this manner sustained their participation and enabled goal-directed collaboration even in sometimes difficult circumstances.
- Reciprocal relationships and emotional support within the group were essential to sustained participation in the project. Building trusting and caring relationships provides

the psycho-social support that could help participants to grow and learn according to their own needs and abilities (Agampodi et al., 2019; Zuber-Skerritt, Wood & Kearney, 2020). These relationships, together with continuous self-reflection, enabled the women in this project to realise their own potential and to identify areas of development in order to improve the group's chances of reaching its goals, as well as their own chances of entrepreneurial success. Building developmental relationships where care and acceptance are expressed, support is provided, power shared and a sense of belonging is experienced therefore enhances participation and collaboration in these groups. According to the principles of SIT, such participatory group dynamics can enhance collaboration and focus, which in turn could support attainment of the desired results (Van Mechelen et al., 2015).

- Opportunities to engage in critical self-reflection, to interrogate and even adapt one's own worldviews enabled these women to embrace the principles of participatory action learning. Individual as well as collective experiences facilitated active and cooperative learning in ways that augmented collaboration within the group. Reflexivity, combined with proximity of developmental relationships, strengthened group cohesion and encouraged each of the women to take personal responsibility for making positive contributions to the group. It further enabled the women to rise above the challenges that arose in the group from time to time due to diverse personalities and group dynamics. Hence, it was found that reflexivity enhances not only the resilience of individual participants, but also the resilience of the group as a collective. Research by Williams (2009) and Palaganas et al. (2017) also confirm reflexivity as an important aspect of learning as it enables people to interrogate the assumptions that underpin their practices and adapt where necessary in order to enhance such practices.

- Envisaging and committing to shared goals that are perceived as worthwhile to the group, to the individuals and potentially to the broader community as well, inspired the women to assume both personal and collective responsibility. It follows that shared goals nurture group cohesion, which in turn enhances participation and sustained collaboration. Moreover, the various roles that the women took on in this group complemented each other and served to keep the group cohesion intact. It was evident that division of labour directed toward shared goals serves as an enabler to participation and collaboration in such initiatives. This concurs with the finding by Van Mechelen et al. (2015) that diversity in skills, abilities and roles can serve as a positive force when the group is able to share

their diverse viewpoints and combine their individual contributions through processes of open communication and productive decision-making.

- The women in this project placed a higher premium on a lengthier personal development process at the risk of delaying access to job opportunities which could have provided them with more immediate (but smaller) financial relief at the time. The data revealed indications of decision-making processes based on the awareness of the opportunity costs involved in delaying immediate reward for the sake of later reward that could potentially be of greater magnitude and more sustainable impact (Read et al., 2017). This kind of agency and resilience had already been engrained in their being but is often misrecognised in poverty literature (Sheehy-Skeffington & Rea, 2017). Characteristics of cautious wisdom, which I would define as calculated risk-taking paired with agency, enabled these women's entry into this project and enhanced their participation throughout. Consequently, it is argued that decision-making based on opportunity cost is a socio-emotional factor that can play a significant role in women's participation in poverty alleviation initiatives.

- Furthermore, exposure to new experiences outside of and beyond one's own frame of reference has expansive learning potential and serves to expand marginalised individuals' or groups' possibilities of success. Such experiences inspire people to see new possibilities for the future and to act purposefully upon them. Creating such expansive possibilities increases the reach and impact of initiatives like this one.

- A lack of specialised focus and connections to experienced and successful entrepreneurs limited the women's professional growth. Introducing the women to strategic business networks could have accelerated the development of more specialised entrepreneurial skills and the professional confidence to start up their own businesses. This would have enhanced the impact and sustainability of the GULL initiative.

The collaborative action research approach thus revealed a number of socio-emotional factors that can either enhance or inhibit women's participation in poverty alleviation initiatives. A lack of expansive possibilities through establishing strategic connections to successful entrepreneurs inhibited the professional growth of the female participants and thus limited the socio-economic impact of this initiative. Conversely, recognition of the human mind and spirit, building developmental relationships and exposure to new experiences nurtured feelings of acceptance and belonging, which enhanced participation and broadened horizons. Similarly,

engaging in regular self-reflection, critical decision-making and committing to shared goals inspired collective accountability and group cohesion.

In conclusion, I provide a summary of my personal reflections on my engagement with these women and what I have learned through this process. Connecting with the women served as a zone of proximal development to me as well, as the women's voices and their lived experiences expanded my own learning regarding poverty alleviation and social justice initiatives.

> *The women's narratives of how they experienced their visit to the University and sitting in the boardroom, made me realise how valuable exposure to new opportunities and experiences could be to the empowerment of women. I thought of words like "from community, to library to university boardroom" and "from change to transition to transformation". Change is external, something that happens TO you or situations imposed on you by outside circumstances. Transition, on the other hand, is often an internal or psychological event. Sometimes it is a change in mindset and in spirit; a process of developing an understanding of what you are capable to do. I see these women as being in a process of transitioning. Transition requires use and practice of new skills and thus takes some time until you have transformed into your renewed being. During transition you need to decide what you want to hold on to from the old or what you want to lean into in the new. Their transition started when these women met up with GULL and recently graduated from Levels 1 and 2. What they cling to now in their next season of transition will determine whether they will go forward or stay where they have been up unto this moment. Starting their own businesses will provide them with a way to escape from poverty without keeping them enslaved in dependency on someone else to provide them with an income. Having graduated now, they have been "baptized" into becoming entrepreneurs and being self-sufficient. It is my desire for them that they will lean into the new and embrace their metamorphosis into successful businesswomen.*
>
> *(Personal reflection, 17 May 2020)*

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ADDENDUM A

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

Reflections on using Community Based Action Research with a group of women/youth to explore the socio-emotional factors that enhance or inhibit participation in sustainable poverty alleviation initiatives

Interview schedule for individual interviews

Opening questions

- Why did you decide to join this GULL initiative?
- Why did you stay in the project?

Subsidiary questions

- Based on your life map, can you describe experiences that you had which led you to being unemployed?
- The GULL initiative required you to work as a collective. As an individual you had to work with other people in the project as well as your mentor. Please share experiences of what it was like working together with these different parties?
- What are the challenges that you experienced in terms of participating in such a collective endeavour?
- Why did you engage in the process in the ways that you did? Looking back, what would you do differently?
- What suggestions would you make to strengthen the effect of this initiative on your own development?
- What are your ideas on how projects such as this one can better support people to implement and sustain what they have learned in the project, so that they can improve their lives?

ADDENDUM B

GUIDING QUESTION FOR FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

Focus group interviews

Main guiding question: How did you come to commit to this process?

The rest of the focus group interviews was guided by participants' responses.

ADDENDUM C

EXAMPLES OF 'RIVER OF LIFE' EXERCISE

ADDENDUM D

EXAMPLES OF PARTICIPANTS' COLLAGES
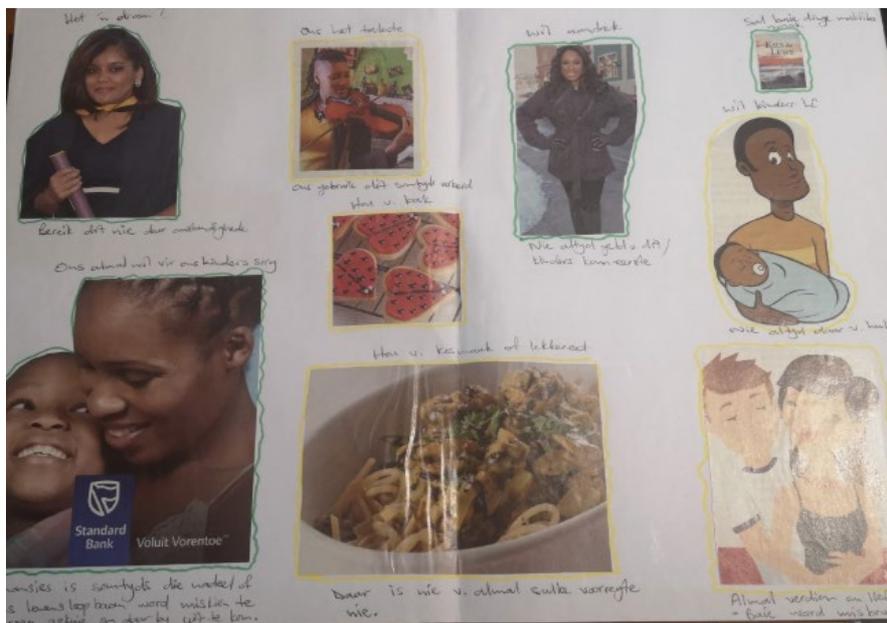
ADDENDUM E

EXAMPLES OF ECLECTIC CODING

RESPONSE 5		RESPONSE 6			
In 2013 I lost my mother. I fell into a depression, because my mother and I were very close. So, when E invited me to GULL, I decided to come and see how it could help me .	Was in a state of hopelessness when GULL was introduced; was unemployed at the time because she had been taking care of her terminally ill mother (Dianne)	I had different jobs, at age 30 I worked at Denel in a contract position. My contract expired and so I was unemployed when the GULL project was introduced. My son was about eight years old at the time and so I needed a job. Aunty S introduced me to aunty L and the GULL project. So, it was my contact with aunty S that gave me the GULL opportunity .	Had previous experience in volunteering work. But unemployed at the time GULL was introduced. Her previous experience and networking with government official gave her the opportunity to become part of GULL. (link to **developmental psychology**?) (Linda)	REASONS FOR JOINING GULL: unemployed at the time: was looking for a job opportunity; had nothing to loose; was open to new challenges and new learning opportunities; wanted to be empowered; wanted to learn something that could be taken back to also help and improve the community; got to hear about it from already existing contact with government official; to keep busy	(1) **Context** of being unemployed and in need of a job and financial income; (2) **Personal or intra=personal motivation:** wanted new challenge and to learn new things, had nothing to loose, to be empowered, to keep self busy; (3) **External motivation or factors**: to use learnings to improve the community; existing contact with govt official provided access to this opportunity. **Developmental psychology (ZPD)**
There is a bit of jealousy between us...this "I" mentality and then conflict happens	Working out challenges or contradictions: realisation of the importance of working collaboratively in order to achieve shared goals (object-oriented activity and engagement reciprocity/ mutual benefits. [almost all the women mentioned that where females are working together, there will always be some challenges or tension]. (Esther)	we are a bunch of women together and we do not always agree …. But we could always sort it out quickly. We could deal with each other and talk about stuff.	Challenges or contradictions; gender dynamics (Ayesha)	CHALLENGES: Difficulty to attend meetings during the times when you re working part-time (time management) or due to unforeseen family responsibilities (happenstance); individual or selfish motives among group members; innate tension between women; jealousy and harsh words from other communty members who did not join the project (regrets); learning to deal effectively with working together with different personalities in order to achieve the goals of the group; navigating complex relationships; communicating openly about differences and finding solutions	Time management; logistical challenges; division of labour (roles); individualism vs reciporicity/mutual benefits; gender (women) dynamics; anymosity from community members (tensions or contradictions/ paradoxical position/perspectives; happenstance; **shared goals (object oriented activity**/participation); reciprocity/mutual benefits; **building developmental relationships** and developing **problem-solving skills**

143

ADDENDUM F

LETTER FROM COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGIST

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PSYCHOLOGIST / SIELKUNDIGE

REGISTERED WITH THE HEALTH PROFESSIONS COUNCIL OF SOUTH AFRICA

9 April 2019

I, Hambly Randall Matthews, a registered Counselling Psychologist (PS 0077151), herewith agree to make my professional service available should it be required within the research project of Dr Melanie Petersen, a Masters students in Educational Psychology at Stellenbosch. I have been informed of the purpose of the study, entitled "**Reflections on using Community Based Action Research with a group of women/youth to explore the socio-emotional factors that enhance or inhibit participation in sustainable poverty alleviation initiatives**".

Yours sincerely

Mr HR Matthews

ADDENDUM G

INFORMED CONSENT

STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Dear ………………………………………… (Participant)

My name is Melanie Petersen and I am a Master degree student in Educational Psychology in the Faculty of Education. I would like to invite you to participate in a research project entitled **Reflections on using Community Based Action Research with a group of women/youth to explore the socio-emotional factors that enhance or inhibit participation in sustainable poverty alleviation initiatives.**

You were approached as a possible participant because you have completed the first phase of the Global University Lifelong Learning (GULL) personal development process that was followed in a social impact initiative in your community. Please take some time to read the information presented here, which will explain the details of this project and contact me if you require further explanation or clarification of any aspect of the study. Also, your participation is **entirely voluntary,** and you are free to decline to participate. If you say no, this will not affect you negatively in any way whatsoever. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any point, even if you do agree to take part. Should you decide to withdraw at any stage, I will engage in a process of exploring the reasons for the withdrawal request to determine whether any issues could be resolved without you having to withdraw from the study. Should you, after this process still decide to withdraw, all your information will be deleted or discarded and will thus not be included in the study. I will also provide you with written confirmation that you data has been discarded of.

1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Youth unemployment is a serious problem in many of our communities in South Africa. Therefore, government and even private organisations regularly initiate projects to relieve this problem. The argument is often made that if youths can develop themselves it may help them to make better life choices. Also, if they develop entrepreneurial skills, they may be able to start their own businesses and, in this way, lessen the issue of unemployment. Equipping young people with skills that can help them to make more informed decisions could empower them to become independent, self-supporting adults. It, however, seems that there are certain challenges that often keep young people from making the best possible use of the opportunities presented to them. In order to better understand what these challenges may be, this study will investigate and describe the challenges and benefits that may arise when different parties work together towards addressing youth and women empowerment. Therefore, this study will ask you to share your experiences as a young woman in a peri-urban area in the Western Cape, who participated in the GULL initiative that was aimed at empowering women and youth to address the challenge of poverty and unemployment in your area. The learnings from this study will help all parties concerned to find ways of working together in better ways so that poverty alleviation projects can be maintained more appropriately.

The aim of this study will thus be to answer the key research question:

How can a collaborative, action research approach be used to better understand the socio-emotional development of marginalised women/youth?

The following additional questions will also guide the study:

- What life experiences do you think caused you to become unemployed?
- How do you take part in the activities of this project and why do you respond in the ways that you do?
- What experiences within this project helped you to grow personally and in terms of developing entrepreneurial skills?
- What are the challenges or obstacles that you experience in terms of participating in this project where you have to work together with others?
- What suggestions would you make to improve the effectiveness of this project for your own development?
- What suggestions would you make to improve your chances of taking your learnings within this project and using it to become more independent and self-supporting?

2. WHAT WILL BE ASKED OF ME?

You will be contacted by the Stellenbosch University representative and the government official who are working together with you on the GULL community poverty alleviation project. They will ask you if you would be open to a meeting with the student researcher who is conducting a research study to produce learnings that will help all parties concerned to find ways of working together in better ways so that poverty alleviation projects can be maintained more appropriately.

If you are willing to consider participating in the research study, an information meeting will be scheduled with the group or individuals at the Sir Lowry's Pass library conference centre at your convenience. At this meeting, a presentation will be delivered to outline the aims and objectives of this study as well as what will be expected of you should you agree to participate in the study. During this presentation, you will have opportunity to ask questions in order to clearly understand what the project is about and what your role in it will be. You will be asked to indicate your interest in participating in this study by completing a sign-up sheet and providing your preferred contact details in order to arrange for individual interviews. This will be done on a flyer that will be handed out to you, outlining the aims and objectives of the study and your role in it. On this flyer, you will be requested to indicate your interest in participating in this study and to then provide your preferred contact details. t this information session, you will be informed that your decision to participate in this study or not, will not influence your continued involvement in the GULL project. You will also be informed that you will be asked to share biographical information such as your level of schooling or academic qualifications and your employment history during the research process. Throughout the research process, you will be reminded that you have the right to respond only to questions or requests that feel you comfortable with. You may also decide to stop your participation in the research study at any point in time, without any consequences or penalties to you.

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to be available for at least one individual interview with the researcher, as well as one interview in a group setting. The interviews will be more or less one hour each. If necessary, follow-up interviews will be arranged at your convenience. Interviews are scheduled to take place between 1 and 30 November 2019. Arrangements regarding the dates, times and venue for the interviews will be made at your convenience.

During the GULL community poverty alleviation initiative, you will compile all the visual items that you have created (for example your collages), along with the personal learning statements and diary reflections that you wrote as part of GULL levels 1, in a portfolio of evidence. Permission will be sought from the GULL representative as well as the government official to gain access to these artefacts. These signed permission letters will be presented to you. You will be asked to share and discuss parts of this portfolio of evidence with the researcher in order to provide insight into your experiences as well as your personal and professional growth within the community poverty alleviation project. The items contained in the portfolio will therefore serve as an indication of how you experienced your participation in this initiative and how it influenced your personal and professional growth.

3. POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

This study is categorised as medium-risk study as you will share some personal information related to your status of being unemployed or partially employed. Your identity will, however, be protected at all times. Neither your name nor the name of your community will be mentioned publicly. Only a description of the circumstances in your community will be provided in order to better understand the background to the study. You will be asked to share your opinions about the factors that influence unemployment in your community. This means that you will only have to share information about how certain circumstances could influence unemployment among youth and women. You do not have to share information that will personally identify you.

The information that you share in the interviews will be used for the completion of a thesis towards a Masters degree and possibly also for articles published in a peer reviewed journal. Your identity will, however, remain protected even when the results of the study are published publicly. Throughout the study your participation will remain voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty. You will also be informed about possible risk factors that may be involved in this research project, if any. The services of a qualified counselling psychologist (Mr HR Matthews, Tel: 021- 8621572) will be available to you should the need arise. The availability of psychological support could help to relieve any discomfort that you may experience due to your participation in this project. These services will be provided at your request and availability and will be conducted in the Sir Lowry's Pass Library mini-conference centre as a safe space where your identity will remain protected. Mr Matthews' private practice is based in Paarl (in the Western Cape) but he has agreed to meet with you at the Sir Lowry's Pass Library mini-conference centre should the need arise. The Library mini-conference centre is regarded as a private space, is easily accessible to you and will not put the protection of your identity in jeopardy. Mr Matthews has also agreed to provide these services to you free of charge as part of his Social Impact responsibility tied to his private practice's. Should the need arise, he will arrange individual meetings with you at times that would be suitable to both parties and he will negotiate access to the Library at the time(s) required.

Potential conflict of interest with the project owner at the University and the government official will also be addressed by asking both these parties to sign a waiver which will be presented to you as part of the information session. Presenting the signed waivers to you should provide you with assurance that your participation in the research project does not imply that you will receive any or extra benefits within the community project, neither that you will be harmed or denied any resources, opportunities or further participation within the community project should you refuse to participate.

4.   POSSIBLE BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO THE SOCIETY

The empowerment of youth and women is very important in order to alleviate poverty in a community and it often involves a partnership between various parties linked to that community. These partnerships are, however, sometimes challenged by factors that make it difficult to achieve the empowerment outcomes that are hoped for. Hence it is necessary to become better informed about what these challenges may be and how they influence the empowerment process. On the other hand, it is also crucial to find out what factors will help you to benefit from projects such as this one.

The benefits arising from this study will be in the form of generating new knowledge in order to gain better insight into how women, like yourself, experience working together with other parties as part of your own learning process. It is hoped that this study will help to gain better understanding of how collaboration with others can support your own learning in order to become more self-sustaining. The larger community could also benefit from the information if it is applied in order to improve poverty alleviation community interventions.

It needs to be noted, however, that this research project forms part of an academic endeavour that stands separate from the community project. Consequently, your participation in the research project does not imply that you will receive any or additional benefits within the larger community project, neither that you will be denied any resources, opportunities or further participation within the community project if you should refuse to participate in the research study.

5.   PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

There will be no monetary benefits to participants in this study.

6.   PROTECTION OF YOUR INFORMATION, CONFIDENTIALITY AND IDENTITY

Any information you share with me during this study and that could possibly identify you as a participant will be protected. This will be done by storing all information, including digitally recorded interviews and typed versions of it (transcripts) securely on a password protected computer, a password protected external hard drive and also in the researcher's personalised Dropbox folder for the period of this research. Only the researcher will have access to the recorded interviews and transcripts. As a participant, you will have access only to your own transcript so that you can check its accuracy before the researcher uses it for research purposes. These records, together with the physical items you created, will be kept in safe storage in a locked safe for a maximum period of three (3) years after completion of the study, after which it will be erased or discarded.

If you agree to take part in this study, you will have to give permission to the public use of the findings as it will contribute to fulfilling a thesis as part of completing a Master's degree at Stellenbosch University. You will thus be fully informed about the research which the interviews and visual items (artefacts) are going to be used for. Your privacy will be protected when publishing the results of this study, for example by replacing real names with pseudonyms or code names known only to the researcher. The names of individuals, groups or communities

involved will not be identified. When reference is made to particular geographical areas or social circumstances, it will be done in such a way that participants' identity will not be compromised.

Furthermore, an application for approval to do this research will be tabled to the Ethics Committee of Stellenbosch University. A major purpose of this ethics application process is to ensure that your best interests will always be protected during the research study.

7. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you agree to take part in this study, you may withdraw at any time without any penalty. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and still remain in the study. The researcher may withdraw you from this study if circumstances arise which may deem it necessary to do so. This may include circumstances such as severe illness which may render you unavailable for interviews or meetings during the research period or if you demand financial reimbursement to secure your participation.

8. RESEARCHER'S CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please feel free to contact Dr Melanie Petersen at cell phone number 083 290 7715 or e-mail address mpeter@sun.ac.za.

9. RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact Ms Maléne Fouché [mfouche@sun.ac.za; 021 808 4622] at the Division for Research Development.

You have the right to receive a copy of the Information and Consent form.

DECLARATION OF CONSENT BY PARTICIPANT

As the participant I confirm that:
- I have read the above information and it is written in a language that I am comfortable with.
- I have had a chance to ask questions and all my questions have been answered.
- All issues related to privacy, and the confidentiality and use of the information I provide, have been explained.

By signing below, I _____ *(name of participant)* agree to take part in this research study, as conducted by _____ *(name of principal investigator).*

....
Signature of Participant   Date

DECLARATION BY THE PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

As the **principal investigator,** I hereby declare that the information contained in this document has been thoroughly explained to the participant. I also declare that the participant has been encouraged (and has been given ample time) to ask any questions. In addition, I would like to select the following option:

√	The conversation with the participant was conducted in a language in which the participant is fluent.
	The conversation with the participant was conducted with the assistance of a translator (who has signed a non-disclosure agreement), and this "Consent Form" is available to the participant in a language in which the participant is fluent.

....
Signature of Principal Investigator   **Date**

UNIVERSITIET STELLENBOSCH

TOESTEMMING VIR DEELNAME AAN NAVORSING

Geagte……………………………………. (Deelnemer)

My naam is Melanie Petersen en ek is 'n Meestersgraadstudent in Opvoedkundige Sielkunde in die Fakulteit Opvoedkunde. Ek wil u uitnooi om deel te neem aan 'n navorsingsprojek getiteld **Besinning oor die gebruik van gemeenskapsgebaseerde aksienavorsing saam met 'n groep vroue / jeugdiges om die sosio-emosionele faktore te ondersoek wat deelname aan volhoubare inisiatiewe vir armoedeverligting verhoog of belemmer**.

U is genader as 'n moontlike deelnemer omdat u die eerste fase van die *Global University Lifelong Learning* (GULL) persoonlike ontwikkelingsproses voltooi het as deel van 'n maatskaplike impak-inisiatief in u gemeenskap. Neem asseblief tyd om die inligting wat hier verskaf word te lees, wat die besonderhede van hierdie projek uiteensit, en kontak my indien daar enige aspekte van die studie is wat vir u induidek is en verdere verduideiking aan u benodig. U deelname is ook **heeltemal vrywillig**, en dit staan u vry om te weier om aan die studie deel te neem. Indien u nee sê, sal dit u hoegenaamd nie negatief beïnvloed nie. U kan ook op enige stadium uit die studie onttrek, selfs al het u aanvanklik ingestem om deel te neem. As u op enige stadium besluit om te onttrek, sal ek u nader om te ondersoek wat die redes vir u onttrekkingsversoek is, om te bepaal of enige probleme dalk opgelos kan word sonder dat u aan die studie hoef te onttrek. Sou u na hierdie proses steeds besluit om te onttrek, sal al u inligting uitgevee en ontslae van geraak word en dit sal dus nie by die studie ingesluit word nie. Ek sal u ook skriftelike bevestiging gee dat ek van u gegewens ontslae geraak het.

1. DOEL VAN DIE STUDIE

Jeugwerkloosheid is 'n ernstige probleem in baie van ons gemeenskappe in Suid-Afrika. Daarom bied die regering en selfs private organisasies gereeld projekte aan om hierdie probleem te verlig. Die argument word dikwels gemaak dat as jeugdiges hulself kan ontwikkel, dit hulle kan help om beter lewenskeuses te maak. As hulle ook entrepreneuriese vaardighede ontwikkel, kan hulle moontlik hul eie ondernemings begin en op hierdie manier die kwessie van werkloosheid verminder. Deur jong mense toe te rus met vaardighede wat hulle kan help om meer ingeligte besluite te neem, kan dit hulle bemagtig om onafhanklike, selfonderhoudende volwassenes te word. Dit wil egter voorkom asof daar sekere uitdagings is wat jong mense dikwels verhinder om die geleenthede wat aan hulle gebied word, die beste te benut. Ten einde beter te verstaan wat hierdie uitdagings kan wees, sal hierdie studie 'n ondersoek doen van die uitdagings en voordele wat kan ontstaan wanneer verskillende partye saamwerk om die bemagtiging van jeug en vroue aan te spreek, en dit beskryf. Daarom sal hierdie studie u vra om u ervarings te deel as 'n jong vrou in 'n buite-stedelike gebied in die Wes-Kaap, wat deelgeneem het aan die GULL-inisiatief wat daarop gemik was om vroue en jeug te bemagtig om die uitdagings van armoede en werkloosheid in u gebied aan te spreek. Die insigte wat uit hierdie studie ontwikkel, sal alle betrokkenes help om beter maniere te vind om saam te werk, sodat projekte vir die verligting van armoede beter gehandhaaf kan word.

Die doel van hierdie studie is dus om die kern-navorsingsvraag te beantwoord:

Hoe kan 'n samewerkende, aksienavorsingsbenadering gebruik word om die sosio-emosionele ontwikkeling van gemarginaliseerde vroue / jeugdiges beter te verstaan?

Die volgende addisionele vrae sal ook die studie lei:

• Watter lewenservarings dink u het veroorsaak dat u werkloos geword het?
• Hoe neem u deel aan die aktiwiteite van hierdie projek en waarom reageer u op die wyse wat u doen?
• Watter ervarings in hierdie projek het u gehelp om persoonlik te groei en ten opsigte van die ontwikkeling van entrepreneuriese vaardighede?

- Wat is die uitdagings of struikelblokke wat u ervaar om deel te neem aan hierdie projek waar u moet saamwerk met ander?
- Watter voorstelle sou u maak om die effektiwiteit van hierdie projek vir u eie ontwikkeling te verbeter?
- Watter voorstelle sou u maak om u kanse te verbeter om dit wat u geleer het tydens hierdie projek, te gebruik om meer onafhanklik en selfonderhoudend te word?

2. WAT GAAN VAN MY GEVRA OF VERWAG WORD?

U gaan gekontak word deur die verteenwoordiger van die Universiteit Stellenbosch en die regeringsamptenaar wat saam met u aan die GULL-projek vir gemeenskaps-armoedeverligting werk. Hulle sal u vra of u gewillig is vir 'n ontmoeting met die student-navorser wat 'n navorsingstudie doen om beter insig te ontwikkel in wat alle betrokkenes sal help om op beter maniere te vind om saam te werk, sodat projekte vir die verligting van armoede beter gehandhaaf kan word.

Indien u bereid is om te oorweeg om aan die navorsingstudie deel te neem, sal 'n inligtingsvergadering met die groep of individue in die Sir Lowry's Pass-biblioteek se konferensiesentrum gereël word. Tydens hierdie vergadering sal 'n aanbieding gelewer word om die redes en doelwitte van hierdie studie uiteen te sit, asook wat van u verwag sal word indien u instem om aan die studie deel te neem. Tydens hierdie aanbieding sal u geleentheid hê om vrae te stel om duidelik te verstaan waaroor die projek gaan en wat u rol daarin gaan wees. U sal gevra word om u belangstelling om deel te neem aan hierdie studie aan te dui deur 'n inskrywingsbladsy in te vul en u voorkeur kontakbesonderhede te verstrek sodat individuele onderhoude met u gereël kan word. 'n Inligtingspamflet sal aan u uitgedeel word, met 'n uiteensetting van die doelstellings van die studie en u rol daarin. Op hierdie inligtingspamflet sal u versoek word om u belangstelling in deelname aan hierdie studie aan te dui en dan u voorkeur kontakbesonderhede te verstrek. By hierdie inligtingsessie sal u in kennis gestel word dat u besluit om aan hierdie studie deel te neem, nie u voortgesette betrokkenheid by die GULL-projek sal beïnvloed nie. U sal ook in kennis gestel word dat u tydens die navorsingsproses gevra sal word om biografiese inligting soos u vlak van skoolopleiding of akademiese kwalifikasies en u werksgeskiedenis te deel. Gedurende die navorsingsproses sal u daaraan herinner word dat u die reg het om slegs te reageer op vrae of versoeke waarmee u gemaklik voel. U kan ook besluit om u deelname aan die navorsingstudie op enige tydstip te staak, sonder enige negatiewe gevolge vir u.

Indien u instem om aan hierdie studie deel te neem, sal u gevra word om beskikbaar te wees vir ten minste een individuele onderhoud met die navorser, sowel as een onderhoud in groepsverband. Die onderhoude sal ongeveer een uur elk duur. Indien nodig, sal opvolgonderhoude op u gemak gereël word. Daar is geskeduleer om onderhoude tussen 1 en 30 November 2019 te doen. Reëlings rakende die datums, tye en plek vir die onderhoude sal op u gemak gemaak word.

Tydens die GULL projek vir die verligting van armoede, sal u al die visuele items (artefakte) wat u geskep het (byvoorbeeld u collages) saam met die persoonlike leerstellings en dagboekrefleksies wat u as deel van GULL-vlak 1 geskryf het, saamstel in 'n portefeulje van bewyse. U sal gevra word om dele van hierdie portefeulje met die navorser te deel en te bespreek ten einde insig te gee in u ervarings sowel as u persoonlike en professionele groei binne die projek vir die verligting van armoede in u gemeenskap. Die items in die portefeulje dien dus as 'n aanduiding van hoe u u deelname aan hierdie inisiatief ervaar het en hoe dit u persoonlike en professionele groei beïnvloed het.

3. MOONTLIKE RISIKO'S EN ONGEMAK

Hierdie studie word geklassifiseer as 'n medium-risiko-studie, aangesien u persoonlike inligting sal deel rakende u status as 'n persoon wat werkloos of gedeeltelik in diens is. U identiteit sal egter te alle tye beskerm word. Nie u naam of die naam van u gemeenskap sal in die openbaar genoem word nie. Slegs 'n beskrywing van die omstandighede in u gemeenskap sal voorsien word om die agtergrond tot die studie beter te verstaan. U sal gevra word om u opinie te deel oor die faktore wat werkloosheid in u gemeenskap beïnvloed. Dit beteken dat u slegs inligting sal moet deel oor hoe sekere omstandighede werkloosheid onder die jeug en vrouens kan beïnvloed. U hoef nie inligting te deel wat u persoonlik identifiseer nie.

Die inligting wat u tydens die onderhoude deel, sal gebruik word vir die voltooiing van 'n mini-tesis vir 'n Meestersgraad en moontlik ook vir artikels wat in 'n eweknie-beoordeelde vaktydskrif gepubliseer mag. U identiteit sal egter beskerm word, selfs wanneer die resultate van die studie in die openbaar gepubliseer word. Gedurende die studie sal u deelname vrywillig bly en u kan te eniger tyd aan die studie onttrek sonder enige benadeling. U sal ook ingelig word oor moontlike risikofaktore wat by hierdie navorsingsprojek betrokke mag wees, indien enige. Die dienste van 'n gekwalifiseerde voorligtingsielkundige (Mnr HR Matthews, Tel: 021- 8621572) sal aan u beskikbaar wees indien u dit sou benodig. Die beskikbaarheid van sielkundige ondersteuning kan help om die ongemak wat u mag ervaar as gevolg van u deelname aan hierdie projek, te verlig.

Hierdie dienste sal op u versoek en besikbaarheid aangebied word in die Sir Lowry's Pass-biblioteek-minikonferensiesentrum as 'n veilige ruimte waar u identiteit beskerm sal bly. Die privaatpraktyk van mnr. Matthews is in die Paarl (in die Wes-Kaap) gebaseer, maar hy het ingestem om u by die Sir Lowry's Pass-biblioteek-minikonferensiesentrum te ontmoet indien die behoefte sou ontstaan. Die biblioteek se mini-konferensiesentrum word as 'n privaat ruimte beskou, is maklik toeganklik vir u en sal nie u identiteit in die gedrang bring nie. Mnr. Matthews het ook ooreengekom om hierdie dienste gratis aan u te lewer as deel van sy gemeenskaps-verantwoordelikheid verbonde aan sy privaat praktyk. As daar 'n behoefte sou wees, sal hy individuele vergaderings met u reël op tye wat vir albei partye geskik sal wees, en sal hy toegang tot die biblioteek onderhandel op die tydstip wat benodig word.

Potensiële botsing van belange met die projekeienaar aan die Universiteit en die regeringsamptenaar sal ook aangespreek word deur albei hierdie partye te vra om 'n kwytskelding te onderteken wat as deel van die inligtingsessie aan u voorgelê sal word. Die beskikbaarstelling van die ondertekende kwytskeldings aan u, behoort aan u die versekering te gee dat u deelname aan die navorsingsprojek nie impliseer dat u enige of ekstra voordele binne die gemeenskapsprojek sal ontvang nie, en ook nie dat enige hulpbronne, geleenthede of verdere deelname binne die gemeenskapsprojek vanu teruggehou sal word indien u sou weier om aan die navorsingsprojek deel te neem.

4. MOONTLIKE VOORDELE AAN DEELNEMERS EN / OF AAN DIE SAMELEWING

Die bemagtiging van jeug en vroue is baie belangrik om armoede in 'n gemeenskap te verlig en dit behels dikwels 'n vennootskap tussen verskillende partye wat aan die gemeenskap gekoppel is. Hierdie vennootskappe word egter soms uitgedaag deur faktore wat dit bemoeilik om die bemagtigingsuitkomste te bereik waarop gehoop word. Daarom is dit nodig om beter ingelig te wees oor wat hierdie uitdagings kan wees en hoe dit die bemagtigingsproses kan beïnvloed. Aan die ander kant is dit ook belangrik om uit te vind watter faktore u sal help om voordeel te trek uit projekte soos hierdie.

Die voordele verbonde aan hierdie studie sal wees in die vorm van die skep van nuwe kennis, om sodoende beter insig te kry in hoe vroue, soos u self, saamwerk met ander partye as deel van u eie leerproses. Daar word gehoop dat hierdie studie sal bydra tot 'n beter begrip van hoe sameewerking met ander u eie leer kan ondersteun om meer selfonderhoudend te word. Die groter gemeenskap kan ook baat by die inligting indien dit benut word om gemeenskapsintervensies te verbeter.

Daar moet egter ook gelet word daarop dat hierdie navorsingsprojek deel vorm van 'n akademiese poging wat apart staan van die gemeenskapsprojek. Gevolglik impliseer u deelname aan die navorsingsprojek nie dat u enige of addisionele voordele binne die groter gemeenskapsprojek sal ontvang nie, en ook nie dat u enige hulpbronne, geleenthede of verdere deelname aan die gemeenskapsprojek geweier of ontneem sal word nie indien u sou weier om deel te neem aan die navorsingsprojek.

5. BETALING VIR DEELNAME

Deelneming aan hierdie studie sal geen geldelike voordele inhou nie.

6. BESKERMING VAN U INLIGTING, VERTROULIKHEID EN IDENTITEIT

Enige inligting wat u tydens hierdie studie met my deel en wat u moontlik as deelnemer kan identifiseer, sal beskerm word. Dit word gedoen deur alle inligting, insluitend elektroniese opnames van onderhoude en die getikte weergawes daarvan (transkripsies), veilig op 'n wagwoordbeskermde rekenaar, 'n eksterne hardeskyf met 'n wagwoordbeskerming, en ook in die navorser se persoonlike Dropbox-gids te stoor vir die periode van hierdie navorsing. Slegs die navorser het toegang tot die opgeneemde onderhoude en transkripsies. As deelnemer het u slegs toegang tot u eie transkripsie, sodat u die akkuraatheid daarvan kan nagaan voordat die navorser dit vir navorsingsdoeleindes gebruik. Hierdie rekords, tesame met die fisiese items wat u geskep het, sal vir 'n maksimum periode van drie (3) jaar na voltooiing van die studie in veilige bewaring gehou word, waarna dit uitgevee of vernietig word.

As u instem om aan hierdie studie deel te neem, moet u toestemming gee vir die publieke gebruik van die bevindings, aangesien dit sal bydra tot die voltooiing van 'n mini-tesis as deel van die voltooiing van 'n Meestersgraad aan die Universiteit Stellenbosch. U sal dus volledig ingelig word oor die navorsing waarvoor die onderhoude en visuele items (artefakte) gebruik gaan word. U privaatheid sal beskerm word tydens die publikasie van die resultate van hierdie studie, byvoorbeeld deur u regte name te vervang met skuilname of 'n kodenaam wat slegs aan die navorser bekend is. Die name van individue, groepe of gemeenskappe wat betrokke is, sal nie geïdentifiseer word nie. As daar na spesifieke geografiese gebiede of sosiale omstandighede verwys word, word dit op so 'n manier gedoen dat die identiteit van deelnemers nie in die gedrang kom nie.

151

Verder word 'n aansoek om goedkeuring om hierdie navorsing te doen by die Etiekkomitee van die Universiteit Stellenbosch ingedien. Een van hoofdoelwitte van die aansoekproses vir etiese goedkeuring is dat u beste belange te alle tye beskerm sal word gedurende die navorsingstudie.

7. DEELNAME EN ONTTREKKING

U kan kies of u aan hierdie studie wil deelneem of nie. As u instem om aan hierdie studie deel te neem, kan u te eniger tyd onttrek sonder enige benadeling. U kan ook weier om vrae te beantwoord wat u nie wil beantwoord nie en steeds in die studie bly. Die navorser kan u aan hierdie studie onttrek indien omstandighede ontstaan wat dit nodig ag. Dit kan omstandighede insluit soos ernstige siekte wat u tydens die navorsingstydperk nie beskikbaar sal stel vir onderhoude of vergaderings nie, of as u finansiële vergoeding eis om u deelname te verseker.

8. KONTAKINLIGTING VAN NAVORSER

Indien u enige vrae of kommer het oor hierdie studie, neem asseblief die vrymoedigheid om vir dr Melanie Petersen te kontak by selfoonnommer 083 290 7715 of e-pos adres mpeter@sun.ac.za.

9. REGTE VAN DEELNEMERS VAN NAVORSING

U mag u toestemming te eniger tyd terugtrek en u deelname stop sonder enige benadeling. U doen nie afstand van enige regseise, regte of regstellings as gevolg van u deelname aan hierdie navorsingstudie nie. As u vrae het rakende u regte as navorsingsdeelnemer, kontak me Maléne Fouché [mfouche@sun.ac.za; 021 808 4622] by die Afdeling Navorsingsontwikkeling.

U het die reg om 'n afskrif van die Inligtings- en Toestemmingsvorm te ontvang.

VERKLARING VAN TOESTEMMING DEUR DIE DEELNEMER

As die deelnemer bevestig ek dat:

- Ek het bogenoemde inligting gelees en dit is geskryf in 'n taal waarmee ek gemaklik is.
- Ek het die kans gekry om vrae te stel en al my vrae is beantwoord.
- Alle kwessies rakende privaatheid, en die vertroulikheid en gebruik van die inligting wat ek verskaf, is uiteengesit.

Deur hieronder te teken, stem ek _____ *(naam van deelnemer)* in om deel te neem aan hierdie navorsingstudie, soos onderneem deur _____ *(naam van navorser).*

....
Handtekening van Deelnemer   **Datum**

VERKLARING DEUR DIE NAVORSER

As die **navorser,** verklaar ek hiermee dat die inligting in hierdie dokument deeglik aan die deelnemer verduidelik is. Ek verklaar ook dat die deelnemer aangemoedig is (en genoeg tyd gegee is) om vrae te stel.

Boonop wil ek die volgende opsie kies:

√	Die gesprek met die deelnemer is gevoer in 'n taal waarin die deelnemer vlot is.
	Die gesprek met die deelnemer is gevoer met die hulp van 'n vertaler (wat 'n verswygings-ooreenkoms onderteken het), en hierdie 'toestemmingsvorm' is beskikbaar vir die deelnemer in 'n taal waarin die deelnemer vlot is.

....
Handtekening van Navorser   **Datum**

ADDENDUM H

EXAMPLE OF A PRIORI CODING

• Looking back, what would you do differently?

I am a person who is an introvert. I am a very private person. I always keep to myself. But looking back, I would have liked to open up more; to be more open and more trusting because it could have helped me. I had the opportunity to really share with girls that really cared, but because I was the kind of person who was very much to myself...and lack of trust...that is why I always kept to myself. Now, I know that I can share and it will stay between us in the sisterhood that we have now.

• What were the benefits that you gained from participating in this project?
• What skills did you gain in the project?

• What suggestions would you make to strengthen the effect of this initiative on your own personal development?

The project has done quite a lot for us. I think there could be more meetings. The longer time in between meetings, you start to lose interest. And go on more camps and have experiences of being together for a whole weekend. So, you get to know each other better. And you are outside of your normal space. So, you are free to speak and free to be yourself. It is more social, so you get to see a different side to people. [different levels of engagement and getting to know people in a variety of circumstances, which could help to further strengthen relationships] This helps you to get way from things at home. We spoke for long times, cooked together and prayed together. It was a good experience.

• What are your ideas on how projects such as this one can better support people to implement and sustain what they have learned in the project, so that they can improve their lives?

I think more entrepreneurial trainings. We gained a lot of skills; like how to write my CV and how to conduct an interview, how to dress and present yourself, the way you speak. For example, I think it would be good to start a little internet cafe where you can type CV's and fax or email things. So, if GULL could teach me skills specifically related to opening an internet cafe. So what would the business have to look like, what resources will I need, how many computers I will need and what it will cost, where will I be able to find sponsors, etcetera.

Also meeting an actual entrepreneur. Maybe if the project could get a person who is an entrepreneur to come and speak to the community...not just to us...also other people in the community who would like to become entrepreneurs. That would be a motivation for the people. So, you could ask the person questions and engage with him.

• Things that could have been done better in this project

Speaking to Richard, I would tell him: Get more people like mentors...people that are successful, to come speak to us and to motivate the people. In the beginning there were a lot of people at the first meeting, but most of them fell out along the way. If us ladies in the GULL project could get the opportunity to share our stories and share with other women what we have learned in this project and how lives improved, it would help to get more people involved in these kinds of projects to help themselves. If ever there are other projects, I would like to get involved to help convince our people to make more use of opportunities that may come to the community. So that they don't regret it afterwards that they didn't grab the opportunity.

ADDENDUM I

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL

Reflections on using Community Based Action Research with a group of women/youth to explore the socio-emotional factors that enhance or inhibit participation in sustainable poverty alleviation initiatives.
Project number: EPSY-2019-9727

<u>**Interview schedule for Government Official**</u>

Introduction

My name is Melanie Petersen and I am a second year Master student in Educational Psychology at Stellenbosch University. I am applying to the University's Ethics committee for permission to do research about the Global University of Lifelong Learning (GULL) initiative which was introduced in Sir Lowry's Pass as part of a Social Impact project with women in this community.

Opening questions
1. Please state who you are, what Department you work in and what portfolio you hold in your Department?
2. What is your experience of working in this community?
3. How did you come to know about the GULL initiative and why did you decide to join?
4. How did your Department come to commit to the GULL initiative?
   a. What role did your line manager(s) play in coming to the decision to join the GULL initiative?
   b. In what ways did you and your Department expect the GULL initiative to benefit the community and the participants?
5. How would you describe your and your Department's role in the GULL initiative?
   a. What potential do you and your Department foresee for future role-out of this or other similar initiatives in this and/or other communities?

Subsidiary questions
6. How would you describe the psycho-social challenges in this community?
   a. What insights do you have into the different types of employment opportunities available to women in this community?
   b. Have you played any role in creating access to any of these opportunities?
   c. What role do you think partnerships with universities and initiatives such as the GULL initiative can play in addressing psycho-social issues in the community?
7. The GULL initiative requires collaborative work. Please share your experiences of working together with the different parties within this initiative (i.e the female participants and the Stellenbosch University representative)?
8. What challenges did you experience in terms of participating in such a collaborative endeavour?
   a. What recommendations would you make in this regard?

9. What recommendations would you make to strengthen the effect of such a collaborative initiative on the personal development of women in this and other communities like it?
10. What recommendations would you make to strengthen the effect of such a collaborative initiative on the development of entrepreneurial skills among women in this and other communities and contexts like it?
11. How do you think this type of initiative can be enhanced to be transferable to the work you do in other communities?
12. What are your ideas on how projects such as this one can better support people to implement and sustain what they have learned in the project, so that they can improve the quality of their living conditions?

ADDENDUM J

INFORMATION FLYER

Project title: Reflections on using Community Based Action Research with a group of women/youth to explore the socio-emotional factors that enhance or inhibit participation in sustainable poverty alleviation initiatives.

Project number: EPSY-2019-9727

Introduction

My name is Melanie Petersen and I am a second year Master student in Educational Psychology at Stellenbosch University. I am applying to the University's Ethics committee for permission to do research about the Global University of Lifelong Learning (GULL) initiative which was introduced in Sir Lowry's Pass as part of a Social Impact project with women in this community.

Aim of the study

Youth unemployment is a serious problem in many of our communities in South Africa. Therefore, government and even private organisations regularly initiate projects to relieve this problem. The argument is often made that if youths can develop themselves it may help them to make better life choices. Also, if they develop entrepreneurial skills, they may be able to start their own businesses and, in this way, lessen the issue of unemployment. Equipping young people with skills that can help them to make more informed decisions could empower them to become independent, self-supporting adults. It, however, seems that there are certain challenges that often keep young people from making the best possible use of the opportunities presented to them. In order to better understand what these challenges may be, this study will investigate and describe the challenges and benefits that may arise when different parties work together towards addressing youth and women empowerment. Therefore, this study will ask you to share your experiences as a young woman in a peri-urban area in the Western Cape, who participated in the GULL initiative that was aimed at empowering women and youth to address the challenge of poverty and unemployment in your area. The learnings from this study will help all parties concerned to find ways of working together in better ways so that poverty alleviation projects can be maintained more appropriately.

What your role in this research study will be

If you are willing to consider participating in the research study, an information meeting will be scheduled with the group or with you individually at the Sir Lowry's Pass library conference centre at your convenience. At this meeting, a presentation will be delivered to outline the aims and objectives of this study as well as what will be expected of you should you agree to participate in the study. During this presentation, you will have opportunity to ask questions in order to clearly understand what the project is about and what your role in it will be. You will be asked to indicate your interest in participating in this study by completing this sign-up sheet and providing your preferred contact details in order to arrange for individual interviews. Your decision to participate in this study or not, will not influence your continued involvement in the GULL project. Furthermore, there is no monetary payment for participating in the research study.

As part of the research study, you will be asked to share biographical information such as your level of schooling or academic qualifications and your employment history. This information is collected only to provide background information to the study. The information that you share will be handled confidentially and your identity will be protected under all circumstances. Throughout the research process, you will be reminded that you have the right to respond only to questions or requests that feel you comfortable with. You may also decide to stop your participation in the research study at any point in time, without any consequences or penalties to you.

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to be available for at least one individual interview with the researcher, as well as one interview in a group setting. The interviews will be more or less one hour each. If necessary, follow-up interviews will be arranged at your convenience. Interviews are scheduled to take place between 1 and 30 November 2019, pending approval from the Stellenbosch Research Ethics Committee. Arrangements regarding the dates, times and venue for the interviews will be made at your convenience.

During the GULL initiative, you will compile visual items that you have created (for example your collages), along with the personal learning statements and diary reflections that you wrote as part of GULL level 1, in a portfolio of evidence. You will be asked to share and discuss parts of this portfolio of evidence with the researcher in order to provide insight into your experiences as well as your personal and professional growth within the community poverty alleviation project. The items contained in the portfolio will therefore serve as an indication of how you experienced your participation in this initiative and how it influenced your personal and professional growth.

Please indicate below whether you are interested or not in participating in this study.

I am interested in participating the research study: ☐

I am not interested in participating the research study: ☐

Full name and surname: ....

Signature: ....

Date: ....

My preferred contact details (Please only provide these details if you interested in participating in the study):

....

....

....

ADDENDUM K

PROFESSIONAL EDITING DECLARATION

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DECLARATION

I hereby certify that the Master's dissertation mentioned below has been properly language edited. The author was responsible for the final checking of the references and the technical editing.

Title of dissertation

'Reflections on using community-based action research with a group of young women to explore the socio-emotional factors that enhance or inhibit participation in sustainable poverty alleviation initiatives'

Student

Melanie Petersen
Student Number: 11171707
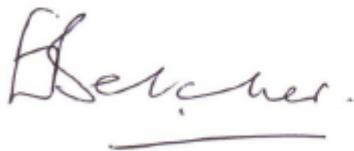
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