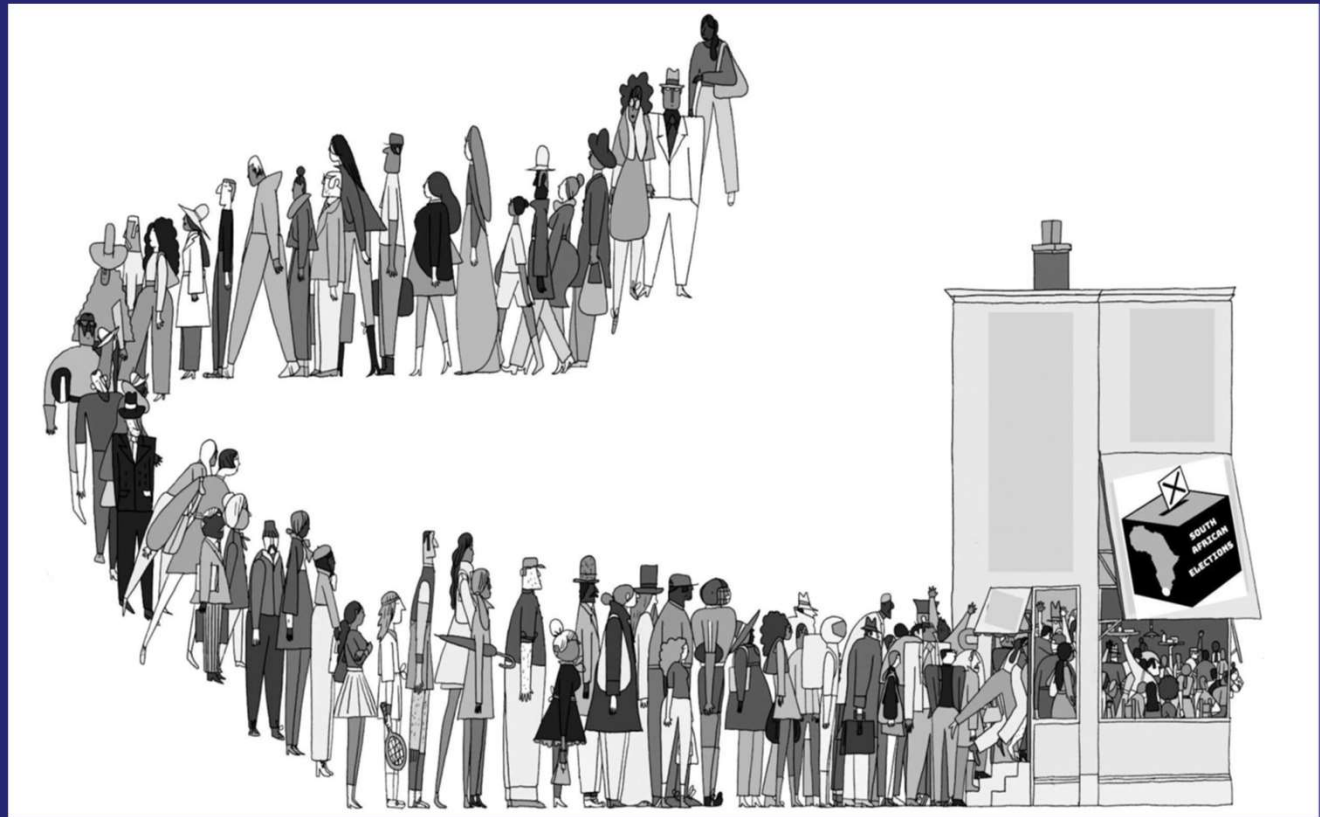


**Your Voice, Your
Choice:
democratic
dialogues for first
time voting youth**

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science & innovation

Department:
Science and Innovation
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



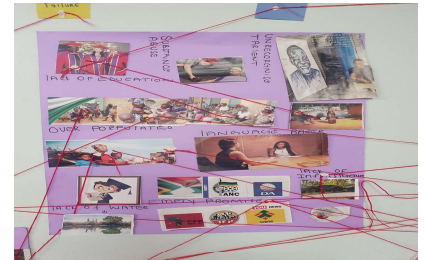
Background

Problem: Youth are disinterested in voting, lack of participation as active citizens, feel powerless.

Solution: Youth-targeted interventions that enable participation in both society and the economy.

Objective: to empower young people through increasing their voter awareness and their capacity to engage meaningfully in their communities through civic education.

Impact Goal: 1) increase **voter awareness** and **interest in civic engagement** broadly; 2) **Increase** first time **voter turnout**; 3) Upskill and train young people to facilitate their own dialogues; and 4) Learn what processes/praxes are more likely to foster transformative dialogue.



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Methodology

Intervention (2019): 13 Dialogues (4hours each) with 60 young people (age 18-25), involving stakeholders; Democracy Development Programme (MOU), Centre for Community Development, Electoral Commission of South Africa (IEC) and Abahlali Basemnjondolo.

Dialogue Plan: 'Identity and exploring differences/commonalities'; 'Understanding Governance in South Africa'; 'Everything you need to know about elections'; 'Hot Topics within Power and Agency'; 'Leadership and finding your voice'; 'Facilitation skills'; Action Planning and Network Building

2.0. (2023): re-recruited 10 Original cohort to lead x 3 Dialogues

4 focus group discussions (Umlazi, Lindelani/Ntuzuma, Marianridge) x 40 young people



10 x 5-7 Social Network Interviews = 55

SNI Categories

- Young person who has voted before
- Young person who has never voted
- A person over the age of 70yrs
- A parent
- A sibling
- Ward/Local Counselor
- Municipality/Worker at Sizakala Centres
- Employer
- Community Care Giver (Clinic, nursing staff, health practitioner)
- Local business owner
- Religious leader
- Lecturer (College, TVET, University)
- Worker at local NGO/CBO
- Member of Taxi Association
- Person living with Disability
- Police/Member of Community/ Policing Forum

Thoughts about Democracy

Democracy = access to livelihoods and educational opportunities (not disinterest):

“Someone who is uneducated and unqualified, they do not care.” – Umlazi
“...even if I vote, I don’t get the job.” – Ntuzuma

“It is hard and in most cases you find that you vote, you attend meetings, you do everything but when employment opportunities come, you do not get that employment opportunity.” – Marianridge

Democracy is failing due to corruption, patronage, nepotism:

“South Africa on its own is corrupt.” – Marianridge

“We have lost trust to be honest. Even me personally I do say sometimes even if I am given an opportunity to chew the money, I will chew it. It is wrong I know but it is how things are working. And being involved in certain spaces that I won’t mention... I have experienced so much.” - Umlazi



Thoughts about Democracy

Government failures rooted at the local level:

“The issue is the councillors” – Umlazi

“The local government is inefficient in their work” – Umlazi

“If the national government is the one funding local government, we as people who live in communities, we must think it is the national government that is causing all this.” – Umlazi

Recognition of the value of democracy:

“I feel like the idea of democracy is a good thing, but I feel like the way it is implemented in our country is wrong.” – Marianridge

“I think democracy exists; it is just a matter of inequality that we have because we are suffering from transparency from our political leaders” - Umlazi

Registering to Vote

Most participants had not registered to vote (in Umlazi cohorts, most participants had registered and planned to vote).

Few in Marianridge (most uninformed and disconnected) and Ntuzuma (disillusioned and anti-voting) planned to register or vote.

*“I think voting is a scam and I will never vote, never ever, even if they force us.” –
Ntuzuma*

“I didn’t see the need to register because they want our votes, but they do not help us with anything.” - Umlazi

Registering to Vote

- Many who had never voted **did not have adequate information** about where and how to register.
- **Misconception** about registering leading to or excluding one from **employment**.

“I was told that if you didn’t register you won’t get a job.” – Marianridge

Voting in the Election

Voting motivated by action, change and personal benefit:

“I think I will start voting when I see changes around me and the community, I live in but as for now I will never vote because there are no changes yet.” – Umlazi

“...as people we need change. Hopefully my vote will count, and we will have another party in favor, praying so. So that’s why I want to vote.” – Marianridge

“I will vote, I won’t lie. I will be voting for my own benefit. There is a project I wanted to do, and I needed funding, I went to town council, and they told me they can give me funding if I have voted for them.” - Umlazi



Voting in the Election

Fear-mongering and disinformation:

“I met a certain gentleman I work with; he is also a police officer. He told me something... there is a police technical response team, but it is still a secret because the elections are next year... Because the ruling party sees that there is no time and people do not want it and that most of the people who want to vote actually want to take it out, I do not know whether it is true or not. What he told me is that **the elections might happen, and they might not happen**. So, the elections for me next year are 50\50, voting for me may happen and may not happen.” – Umlazi

Hope remains for few:

“I still have hope shame, that’s why every time when it is time to vote, I vote, ever since I had the right to vote. I go even if every time I get disappointed. I am always scared that what if my vote is the only one that would bring change.” - Umlazi

Thoughts about the IEC

Lack of knowledge and civic education:

“We are not all involved in politics. Can you tell us what it [IEC] is?” – Marianridge

“What IEC? I don’t know what IEC deals with. So, I will not say they are doing nothing because I do not know exactly what it deals with except for seeing posts about IEC.” - Umlazi

Ambivalence:

“When we talk about IEC, I can say I trust them, and I don’t trust them at the same time. I don’t trust their numbers. They are snitches for the councillors.” – Umlazi

“For me I am 70/30. I might say, because of the history of IEC, I can say seventy percent I trust the process but trusting the process does not mean I agree with the process.” – Umlazi

Thoughts about the IEC

Distrust stems from IEC and government seen as two sides of the same coin:

“I do not trust IEC 100% because it has a relationship with the government” – Umlazi

Spread of disinformation about systems and processes:

“I can’t prove but I feel like elections are rigged.... I remember this one time, I cannot remember which year was it, but the DA was winning, and the ANC said we going to recount of the votes. They had never done that before. All of a sudden after recounting the votes ANC was winning again... you cannot prove nothing because it is the government. Who are you going to call right? Yeah I feel like elections are rigged but you cannot sit back and do nothing at the same time. Doing nothing is the only way that you fail.” – Marianridge

Thoughts about the IEC

*“I will vote because they say when you don’t vote when they count, **they just take all the number of people who didn’t vote and give them to the party with most votes.** So, I know it will make a difference because I would know it will be there and I would have voted knowing who I voted for. My vote would not be taken to anyone they like.”*

– Umlazi

“Boxes get lost” – Marianridge

*“It is about those counting the votes. Because even now there are votes that are said to be lost and were never found. So, **we cannot trust these people.**” – Umlazi*

Thoughts about the IEC

IEC is only as good as its people:

“IEC cheats us when votes are counted. They take other parties votes and mix with other parties votes to help them win. These parties are their favourites. My mother worked at the votes, so she told me that happened when the votes were counted.” - Ntuzuma

“They use the votes of people who are just sitting at home. Sometimes you will find discarded votes somewhere. You find that sometimes a car comes with a load of votes from elsewhere, by these political parties.” – Ntuzuma

“IEC must change the people who work at voting stations because every time when people vote, it’s like there is some corruption that they do.” - Ntuzuma



Information about Political Engagement

Where do young people get their information?

- News (ENCA, SABC 1, News24)
- Social Media (TikTok, Facebook)
- Word of mouth
- Billboards
- Moya App
- Radio (Ukhozi FM, Gagasi FM)
- Organisations like HSRC, Rivonia Circle, DDP, CCD

News more trusted than social media however social media a useful vehicle for civic education.

Increasing Political Participation

Increasing interest in voting:

- Civic education sessions/dialogues
- Seeing action and change in their communities
- Seeing youth in local leadership, municipalities and national government
- Understanding the electoral system

“I think the other thing that will make us more interested in voting is, I don’t know how but like to show them using the system to know that my vote is going to whom. Instead of just hoping that now these people are putting my vote in the right box.” –

Marianridge

Thoughts on Coalitions

Almost all had never heard of a coalition, nor were they aware that eThekweni is operating under coalition:

“...years have passed without me knowing that Durban was a coalition, and so I need to get more information, to do more research on this to find out whether it is something that will work. But judging by what is happening already, I can see that it will not work.” - Umlazi

Once it was explained, they saw the value in it:

“It’s like you have fifty people... maybe all agreed on something and there are two people coming from a different party with a different point of view and must influence those fifty people to change. So those two people might make things better for us. I feel like a coalition is a good thing.” – Marianridge

“I think it is something that is beneficial because they will hold each other accountable especially when it comes to budget and there will be more transparency, but I still want to know more.” - Umlazi

Thoughts on Coalitions

On strengthening coalitions:

“I have seen coalitions being formed and others failing due to the lack of proper implementation systems... if Lungelo wants to buy a car and I also want to buy a car, and then Lungelo does not find hundred percent funding then he needs to combine with me so that we become co-owners of the car. In the beginning it is not my purpose to join forces with him. That’s the biggest problem we have. Only if the government can begin as a coalition government, before the elections start. Not at the election time but working together towards solving problems of the community. Then for me it is when I will see or begin to trust that this coalition will work. But for now, I do not see them working because it is a matter of someone finding a partner or overthrowing a partner or a particular person from power.” – Umlazi

Thoughts on Celebrity Endorsements

Majority of participants were strongly against celebrity/influencer/athlete endorsements or campaigns for electoral participation, viewing them as **self-serving** and **out-of-touch**:

“They are not doing it for the benefit of us as the people of the country. It’s for their benefit basically. What they call referrals or things like that... If you get certified, you're going to get this much of money. It’s always benefits with the celebrities and all those type of things. So, it’s not coming from a place of good.” - Marianridge

“Imagine if it’s Kabza telling me to go vote, I’d tell him Kabza you are crazy my boy. You live in a mansion, and I live in a shack so when it rains you relax, and I must look for buckets and I’d tell him my brother I love you so much but you’re talking nonsense because you don’t know the life we live.” – Marianridge

Thoughts on Celebrity Endorsements

Message should be non-partisan:

“If they were just encouraging us to vote, not to vote for anyone.” – Umlazi

“I think they should be used just to encourage them to vote, in a neutral way not to take any side.” Umlazi

Local community workers would be most effective:

“Because they can probably see what's going on in the country, they are trying to uplift young people to vote.” – Marianridge

Ideas for Interventions

Accountability:

“A year after of voting, then the following year we must call the person we voted for and assess whether they have delivered their promises, and if not, we must give them a chance as maybe they are still knocking on other doors explaining that we are crying for this and that, pointing out the community needs.” – Umlazi

“We all know that we are the ones who choose them and there is also a follow up that has to be done to make sure that the councillor we voted for is doing his/her job. Can we fire the councillor if they don't their job before the end of his term? If it's possible, then that's the route we must follow.” - Ntuzuma

No cheap inducements:

“For starters, these organisations should stop bribing us with food – food parcels. We know we are starving and we know need the food but the organisations should try different approaches, not food parcels. They should introduce workshops and programmes that will teach us about IEC and other skills” - Ntuzuma



Ideas for Interventions

- IEC should hire youth for outreach
- Youth targeted recreational programs as vehicle for civic education (e.g., concerts, dancing):

“For me, for example, I love soccer. So, they can host the tournament and then after the tournament they can explain the importance of voting to us.” – Marianridge

- Interventions that are skills-based with a stipend
- Employment
- Young people hate queuing
- Digitising the electoral processes (though there was also acknowledgement of risk)

In Summary

- Employment/Education = Voting/political participation
- Corruption at local level = corruption national level
- Lack of information: IEC, Registration, Coalitions, Contesting etc.
- Registering for the possibility of opportunity/employment
- Adamant they will not vote (no matter what) – disillusionment
- Trust in community members more than prominent public figures
- Interventions desired (skills transfer, civic education with personal benefit)
- What do parties stand for?
- Know who WE are, what WE need