

**Report on a
Women RISE training workshop
addressing the question**

‘Is truth in the field?’

held in Cintsa East, Eastern Cape, South Africa

on 13-17 February 2023

1. Introduction

A workshop to train fieldwork researchers and supervisors, addressing the question “Is truth in the field?”, was convened in Cintsa West, Eastern Cape, South Africa, by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) with its partners in a “Women RISE” project sponsored by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) of Canada: McGill University in Canada; Walter Sisulu University (WSU) in the Eastern Cape; and the Eastern Cape Socio Economic Consultative Council (ECSECC).

Attended by the project’s principal investigator and co-investigators; fieldwork coordinators and research specialists; and administrative and communications support staff, the workshop offered:

- An introduction to the proposal outlining the rationale, purpose and proposed methodology for the two-year IDRC-funded international Women RISE research project as enacted in the Eastern Cape;
- An overview of the theoretical tools and methodology to be deployed in implementing the project;
- An introduction to previous relevant findings on the impacts of Covid-19 and the actions taken by the government and local communities in response to the pandemic and its aftermath;
- An overview of the broad historical, socio-economic and cultural dynamics shaping the research environment;
- Training to address issues relating to conducting the research on the ground in the rural Eastern Cape;
- Training in conceptualising and producing the written research outputs mandated by the project;
- Training in fieldwork and academic research ethics; and
- An opportunity for the research, administrative and communications staff involved in the project to network and address identified outstanding issues.

In terms of the project proposal (see sub-section 13.1 “The proposal”, below), a number of key research questions that needed to be addressed were identified:

- How have different categories of rural women in the Eastern Cape been affected by the pandemic in terms of their health and access to public health facilities?
- How have these women’s livelihoods strategies been affected by the pandemic in terms of the degree and nature of their welfare dependencies, and their capacity for finding economic support and security via paid work and via informal avenues?

- How did the Covid-19 lockdown and the consequent ban on customary practices affect women's extra-household social networks? How have they maintained associational networks and mitigated social "thinning"?
- To what extent and in what contexts have women been exposed to domestic or inter-personal violence before, during and since the pandemic?
- What strategies have they been able to develop to protect themselves against elevated levels of male aggression and criminality in their rural villages?
- How did the governance structures in rural communities operate during the pandemic and how has this affected women?
- Has the Covid-19 pandemic experience strengthened or weakened cooperation in certain households and what are the consequences of those changes, especially in relation to health and livelihood strategies?
- What successful initiatives have been undertaken by rural women to secure alternative livelihoods during and since the pandemic?

In asking these questions and analysing the answers, it was advised that the researchers need to consider how family networks have developed recently, particularly bearing in mind the issue of urbanisation. There should also be interrogation of commonly used analytical concepts, such as livelihoods and social capital, and the extent to which the framework that these offer captures (or fails to capture) the "structure of feeling" shaping rural women's experiences. In this respect, the present research offers an opportunity to produce a more nuanced understanding of rural spaces, such as those in the Eastern Cape, and the ways in which they remain connected to so many peoples' lives in South Africa. In this context, the research further offers an opportunity to foster the voices of the women living in these spaces.

More broadly, the research project may inform the international debate on the impacts of Covid-19 and consequent lockdowns on women's lives, contributing to an agenda of empowering women in a post-pandemic world.

In the South African context, the research should also help to foster a new cadre of black African social-anthropologists, inducting a new generation in the practice of fieldwork – which is a domain that has historically been dominated by colonialist anthropologists in Africa – and supporting the evolution of their research interests.

2. How the practice of anthropology can produce new understanding¹

Anthro-Vision: A new way to see in business and life by British public intellectual Gillian Tett seeks to promote the benefits of adopting an anthropological approach to understand a world that is in flux – a world in which older ways of producing and processing data are inadequate for addressing the new economic and political systems that have emerged.

She writes:

In recent years we have seen economic forecasts misfire, political polls turn out to be wrong, financial models fail, tech innovations turn dangerous, and consumer surveys mislead. These problems have not arisen because those tools are wrong or useless. ...The problem is such tools [big data] are incomplete; they are used without an awareness of culture and context, created with a sense of tunnel vision, and

¹ This section is based on a presentation made by Prof Leslie Bank, Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), at the workshop.

built assuming that the world can be neatly bounded or captured by a single set of parameters.

Tett notes that trying to navigate the 21st century world using only the tools developed in the 20th century, such as rigid economic models, “is like walking through a dark wood with a compass at night and only looking down on the dial”. She explains: “Your compass may be technically brilliant and tell you where to aim. But if you only focus on the dial, you may walk into a tree. Tunnel vision is deadly.”

A former financial journalist, Tett describes how such tunnel vision was produced among fund managers and quantitative analysts prior to the global financial crisis of 2007-2008, as their high status and predilection for a particular form of technological lingo led to them becoming quite divorced from the actual conditions underpinning the markets they sought to manipulate.

By contrast, the practice of anthropology enables lateral vision. It adopts a holistic view and focuses on context. In this regard, it digresses from the positivist scientific method that emerged in 17th century Europe, which deployed observation to test theoretical assumptions and find solutions to particular problems. Anthropology, by contrast, starts with open-ended observations – seeking to cultivate a mind-set of listening and learning with an almost child-like wonder. In this context, the silences as much as the noise can require attention. In other words, anthropology proposes that not only have the answers not yet been reached – the terms of understanding itself may not yet have been discerned, which can provide a useful starting position in seeking to understand the ways in which the recent Covid-19 pandemic has up-turned the world.

For Tett, the whole point of anthropology, which she describes as a practice of “obsessive curiosity”, is that it fosters collisions with the unexpected. In this regard, the practice, as she frames it, necessarily entails an encounter with “otherness”, which produces culture shock. At the same time, the anthropologist can only come to understand the subjects of their research by becoming embedded with them – which contradicts the colonial form of anthropology which placed the researcher in a dominant position. In Tett’s case, as she studied marriage and kinship in rural Islamic communities under Soviet rule, she had to learn Russian and become a Muslim woman in the space in which she was working. In the current research context – young Xhosa-speaking researchers living among rural communities which may be familiar from their own backgrounds – the dynamic will be more one of “a returning”, albeit not as an actual member of the community under study.

Embeddedness produces empathy and understanding of the terms of membership within the group under study – and the place of this group within its broader social context. So, for example, one of the themes of the present research may be the structure of feeling in South Africa’s rural gulags, even as these are depopulated, and their role in the larger economy, society and culture.

Tett argues that tribalism in various forms is everywhere. In describing the various tribes (cultural communities) that she has encountered, she continually looks for differences, generalisations and triggers so that she can more accurately describe how these groups relate within themselves and with other groups. In this regard, social theory has placed great emphasis on the ways in which institutions are shaped by their own moral cultures – their own ways of operating; their informal hierarchies; and their own circuits of value – rather than existing as mere embodiments of particular categories of things. For example, a hospital in Kinshasa bears little resemblance to a hospital in Switzerland despite their common categorisation as “hospitals”.

Similarly, civil service culture in the Eastern Cape, while shaped by formal rules, operates according to its own social protocols that determine hierarchies and access to opportunities within the public sector in the province. In another example, Tett found that the various “tribes” of lenders, data

analysts and bankers who were living in a technological bubble prior to the financial crisis of 2007-2008 had created their own self-assured, disconnected and risk-prone cultural silos, which was a significant factor in sparking the ensuing market meltdown.

Anthropologists produce analysis from their observations in a number of ways. One is to take instances found at the micro level and apply them at a meso- or macro level. Such theorisation can entail producing regional or cultural generalisations, revealing ethno-cultural logics that explain patterns of behaviour; systems of adherence or avoidance; and the nature of collective judgements. The other way anthropologists construct theory is by leveraging the holistic nature of their vision, which derives from their participation in the life of the community, to make connections between the various spheres of social, political or economic life as experienced by those under study.

In both cases, the anthropologist extrapolates from observation and participation to produce an explanation with validity beyond the particular instance. The conclusions may be presented as a folk model – a representation of the way that the local people think and behave – although it is actually an invention of the anthropologist rather than, say, a direct translation of indigenous knowledge – which can pose something of an epistemological conundrum.

In seeking to produce theory from the present research, it may be useful to consider whether and how what is observed indicates a change in the regimes of value being promoted at the socio-cultural and political levels among these communities. So, for example, what are rural people saying about themselves when they structure their spaces and places in particular ways; and when they adopt and adapt certain customs? There is also the question of the moral economy – for example, in relation to the role of women in provisioning and sustaining households, which may be expressed in a number of ways.

In general, Tett's analysis, which urges a quest for new understanding even in spaces that are considered known, as well as the need to counter accepted but outdated wisdom, offers a model for deconstructing the familiar that may be of value to the present research.

3. 'People's science' and official discrimination under Covid-19²

Paul Richards' 2016 book *Ebola: How a People's Science Helped End an Epidemic* describes how international prescriptions promoted by the World Health Organisation (WHO) for controlling the spread of a lethal Ebola outbreak in West Africa from 2014 failed and how, in their stead, a "people's science" co-produced by local communities in conjunction with doctors on the ground was effective.

The WHO, in trying to manage what it viewed as a trans-national crisis, had sought to impose a policy of separating local people, placing them in camps away from where they lived and restricting transport so that they could not move around. The strategy, which was imposed without considering how people should fight the epidemic themselves, had the effect of terrifying the local population.

Subsequently, in collaboration with Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) doctors who were acting outside national health systems, a new approach was adopted under which local leaders and women in local communities co-produced a more appropriate set of behaviours that could address the threat posed by the Ebola virus. New practices of managing death without touching were developed. Practices that Richards termed the product of a "people's science".

The idea has subsequently been used to promote the notion that governments should seek to coordinate with local people to understand their behaviours and how these may be leveraged to

² This section is based on a plenary discussion at the workshop.

address public health crises more effectively. In this context, a number of questions have recently been asked in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic: Was a people's science generated at this time in South Africa? And, if so, what has been women's role in this?

In seeking to find answers, it should be noted that the conditions for the evolution of such a science in South Africa since the outbreak of Covid-19 from 2020 vary greatly from those in West Africa during the Ebola epidemic. The way in which the international community sought to deploy its power in response to Ebola may be viewed as a product of a colonialist, Orientalist and racist mind-set. The aim was to ensure security and contain the threat through a number of externally imposed, top-down measures which clashed with the reality of life and death on the ground.

By contrast, the official response to Covid-19 in South Africa was directed from the national level – albeit following a model developed in the global North – and produced differential impacts on the basis of class, as well as race – given the relatively high status conferred by being white or close to “whiteness” in the national society.

So, while police raided and disrupted funerals in the Eastern Cape, lavish send-offs for the powerful and well-connected were held – and the discrepancy between the two was highlighted across social media, exacerbating the contestation over the ways in which the state was seeking to manage private spaces under its Covid-19 lockdown rules.

Police arrested tens of thousands of people for travelling illegally. Funeral parlours restricted access to the bodies of the dead and wrapped them in new ways. Restrictions on events prevented families and communities from coming together to mourn and enact funeral and burial customs. All of which created trauma and resentment at what were widely seen as oppressive measures.

There was a common view that white people and a “pro-white” president – Cyril Ramaphosa – wanted to prevent black people from practising their customs. There was also a view that it was best to steer clear of those who were close to the cities and white people – and in this way avoid what was seen as a “disease of the rich”. Remittances were welcome but not far-flung relatives in an echo of a warning issued by provincial premier Oscar Mabuyane that those with family in the Eastern Cape should stay away. Stigmatisation of people “beyond the gate” reinforced isolation. From a research perspective, it is important that such narratives and their assumptions about causality be documented to gain an understanding of the structure of feeling among local communities in relation to external factors, stakeholders and initiatives.

Meanwhile, there was adaptation by local people in response to the harsh lockdown regulations. The bodies of the dead were washed in secret so that they could be buried in a pure state. Family members buried their loved ones, regardless of the rules. In other cases, burials were arranged to take place as quickly as possible – and the two-weeks that used to be allocated to receiving and feeding mourners was reduced to one week.

In many cases, only blood relatives participated in mourning and the funeral. For extended families, this led to choices being made about who was involved and who was excluded, which created significant social friction. The exclusion of community members from proceedings meant they were unable to reciprocate and support families who had previously supported them at times of death and mourning. Bonds were broken as the form of funeral and burial practices was reconceptualised.

Widespread alienation produced under lockdown also shaped resistance to the implementation of the new rules. Although there was widespread surveillance, the image of the state did not loom that large in the mind of many. Indeed, in some cases, the lockdown rules had a levelling effect: ministers faced

being publicly punished for breaking the rules; and even high-status staff had to stand and have their temperatures taken by lowly security staff before entering a building.

Meanwhile, people responded to an alcohol ban that had been introduced by brewing their own drink; and they invented their own cures to ward off the virus.

In the context of policymaking which failed to address so many of the dynamics of local lives, the private domain rather than the public domain became a more effective locus for the production of appropriate behaviour. In this regard, church and community networks persisted despite the ban on public gatherings. Priests and gravediggers who had no choice but to care for the bereaved and the bodies of the dead placed themselves at risk. Power dynamics in households, that were both increasingly congested and increasingly isolated from each other, shifted; with the women facing greater pressure to sustain families and men being required to partake in care work (and learning from this).

Meanwhile, the official discourse presented efforts to curtail the spread of the virus, including the advent of vaccinations, as part of a “war” – begging the question: Who then should be considered the enemy? Poor villagers represented an easy target in this respect. The authoritarian approach adopted by the state was predicated on an assumption that the knowledge at its disposal was superior. Accordingly, vaccines were rolled out accompanied by an information campaign that indicated citizens were obliged to be vaccinated – or face the consequences. The state’s willingness to protect its citizens was predicated on its power over them. The messaging was consistently top-down and oblivious to the concerns of many people.

By contrast, a people’s science approach is embedded in local contexts, which is more akin to a feminist ground-up approach to human security. It is shaped by a number of factors, including: local power dynamics; the influence of local institutions, including schools, clinics and churches; and gender roles in family and community spaces. It is a fluid science, embracing a range of different and even contradictory responses and is responsive to the different ways in which knowledge can be brokered.

In the aftermath of the Covid-19 crisis that started in 2020, the extent to which a people’s science has been developed in poor, rural areas of the Eastern Cape remains uncertain, although it is clear that there has been a significant socio-economic and cultural shift in these areas. In this regard, there are a number of questions that the present research project may usefully ask:

- To what extent are government rules and medical behaviours combining to produce new forms of practice?
- How are deaths being recognised now? What kind of communal support is offered in cases of bereavement? Are the youth involved in funeral and burial practices – and, if so, how?
- How have family sizes changed? Have husbands returned to households – and, if so, what have been the impacts of such return?
- What has been the legacy of local engagement in the national vaccination programme?
- Have there been any people’s science responses that have facilitated the process of socio-economic rebuilding in the wake of the pandemic? And, if so, what shape have these responses taken?

An analogy to the production of a people’s science in relation to public health may be found in the agricultural sector. On one hand, Western researchers, with their obsession with a particular scientific approach, have operated according to the idea that they know best although they have continued to fail to recognise the value of certain crops in local context. On the other hand, and in response, African researchers from universities in South Africa have sought to put indigenous knowledge on a pedestal.

Meanwhile, on the ground, homestead farmers have tended to take what they want from the information on offer, producing local, blended forms of knowledge – growing home gardens with a range of crops, such as maize, calabash, amaranth and pumpkins, and defying conventional metrics for efficiency by producing more biomass per hectare than is produced by monoculture farming.

4. From ‘closing the gate’ to Covid and custom in rural South Africa³

It had been predicted that the mortality rate from Covid-19 would reach 61 deaths per 100,000 people, but the final number in the Eastern Cape was 700 deaths per 100,000 people, which represents a high mortality rate under the pandemic. As well as being a national hotspot for the pandemic, the Eastern Cape was named as the source of one of Covid-19’s variants.

Meanwhile, conditions of deprivation and poor infrastructure in the province were exacerbated under lockdown by restrictions on custom and practice which led to local villagers being stripped of their cultural dignity.

In a number of important ways, the official treatment of rural people in this area under Covid-19 pursued a logic of marginalisation and even cultural and political elimination (through assimilation) which was introduced by colonialism and which has subsequently been pursued by planners seeking to control labour and agricultural production in the province. In this context, the historical treatment of the rural population of the Eastern Cape as surplus, disposable and less worthy found an echo in the *modus operandi* of the democratic government in South Africa, which has done little to alleviate the conditions that have left the poor rural population of the province on the edge, barely able to engage in social reproduction.

In this context, the Northern bio-medical approach adopted by the South African government to contain the spread of the virus focused on individual behaviour and bodily discipline. The approach not only disregarded African customary social forms and needs but actively characterised them as a threat to public health. Under this view, Covid-19 rural funerals were presented as the nation’s nightmare, continually mentioned as posing the most fearsome threat to the public good. Suppressing “custom” came to be seen as necessary to save the nation from pathogens.

The manifest inequality underpinning the official response to Covid-19 was described by South African political theorist Steven Friedman in his volume *One Virus, Two Countries*, which references the differential impacts of the pandemic in middle-class suburbs and poor black townships. However, there was also a third rural space to which Friedman made little reference which is described in some detail in *Covid and Custom in Rural South Africa: Culture, Healthcare and the State* by Leslie Bank and Nelly Sharpley

The book argues that a Marxist analysis, which has characterised the Bantustan “homelands” as little more than labour reserves at the service of capitalism, fails to attend to the ways in which cultures of migration have deep roots in these areas – and how these cultures have been maintained through family and community ritual, and not merely as a factor of capitalist production. In this context, the state’s efforts to curb the pandemic through distancing and lockdown terminated cultural forms that were crucial to socio-economic subsistence and threatened the capacity for social reproduction in far-flung rural areas.

The marginalisation of the interests of those living in relatively remote parts of the countryside, such as the rural former Transkei – people who, it seems, were excepted from the state’s broad

³ This section is based on a presentation made by Prof Leslie Bank, Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), at the workshop.

responsibility to protect its own citizens – was implemented through a discourse of war and a centralisation of power. A Covid-19 “command council” was established which established its own set of rules. This council comprised only medical professionals, as the state adopted a position of failing, or refusing, to engage traditional healers, social scientists or cultural specialists in its deliberations.

A chain of command was established leading to provincial and district levels. Instructions were sent down to places of special pathology, telling traditional leaders to toe the line, and close initiation schools and crack down on funerals. These interventions were accompanied by English-language messaging as if this were an urban pandemic only. There was no local-language messaging, and no effective local leadership in shaping the response to the pandemic.

Access to funeral parlours and grave sites was tightly controlled, making it impossible for local people to wash the bodies of loved ones and family members and bury them with appropriate customs. Death certificates could not be acquired as local home affairs offices were closed. Local people’s attempt to dignify death were hampered and blocked. At the same time, the rural populations could not be serviced by the bio-medical system. Few formal public health facilities were operating; and such clinics as were would be closed for deep-cleaning as soon as an infection was reported, with nurses refusing to return to their stations until such cleaning was completed.

Customary practice and ritual have historically played a crucial part in the construction of a trans-local human economy in the rural former Transkei. In this regard, the restrictions on mobility under lockdown represented more than an anti-democratic suspension of rights. They threatened the actual return of people and bodies to rural homes, which historically often takes place in circumstances of sickness and death – thus rupturing patterns of movement and creating a crisis of social/cultural reproduction. In this regard, the cultural crisis produced under Covid-19 should not be viewed as a sideshow to the democratic crisis of rights being suspended, nor as secondary to the crisis of hunger and poverty that emerged, but as a fundamental crisis which, in the context of much of rural South Africa, underpinned the other two.

This analysis leads to consideration of the role of bio-medicine as a model for engagement in many parts of Africa – and the value of this model as it is implemented across the continent. Are the benefits that may be produced worthwhile in the context of the cultural and socio-economic damage and loss that may be wrought? Is there an alternative African metaphysical or even ethno-nationalist approach that should be deployed instead of this approach, leveraging indigenous methods of healing? Or is the answer to be found in a co-production of knowledge and practical strategies through the advancement of what has been called “people’s science”?

The present research project explores whether such “co-production” is possible and whether it could provide an effective intellectual and practical basis for a more inclusive, democratic and Afro-centric system of public health in South Africa.

5. Eastern Cape vaccination hesitancy study⁴

A number of findings from a survey into vaccine hesitancy in the Eastern Cape conducted by HSRC and WSU bear on the present research and may inform the kinds of questions to be asked in the field.

The World Health Organisation defines vaccine hesitancy as a “delay in acceptance or refusal of vaccines despite the availability of vaccine services”. Globally, rural populations are perceived to be threats to vaccine up-take because they are often assumed to harbour beliefs that are suspicious of western medicine and bio-science. In South Africa, stories circulated about the opposition

⁴ This section is based on a presentation made by Prof Leslie Bank, HSRC, at the workshop.

of traditionalists in rural areas to vaccination. Solving this problem was perceived by the government to be related to information dissemination, getting the right information to rural communities, which meant turning away from restriction and regulation to a policy of “opening the gate” (*isando ukuvula*) so that the merits of science and vaccination could be realised in rural areas.

From mid- 2021, the Eastern Cape Department of Health shifted the focus of its vaccine drive away from the main metros and urban centres and developed an elaborate province-wide intervention programme targeting rural areas. Vaccination was promoted via community radio; Xhosa language champions; community forums; free T-shirts; and R200 Shoprite vouchers. Vaccinations were made available via rural clinics, mobile units and rural outreach partnerships teams with doctors – all of which was supported by locally based non-governmental organisations (NGOs), as well as private donors.

The premier of the province, Oscar Mabuyane, insisted that vaccination provided protection and that it was rational to be vaccinated. He proposed that vaccinations should be mandatory and stressed that vaccine hesitancy would not be tolerated. One of the guiding ideas behind the programme was that once people were vaccinated, they would understand the value of this treatment.

However, it has been argued that WHO’s understanding of vaccine hesitancy, which informed the way in which the vaccine programme was implemented in the Eastern Cape, fails to appreciate the socially and politically embedded nature of vaccine engagements. In other words, those seeking to promote vaccination arrive in rural places which have long histories of western medical interventions and which have their own socially embedded knowledge systems and practices. In addition, attitudes in these areas are structured by experience and have been shaped by political, economic, cultural and institutional factors. So, context-specific understanding is required.

In relation to vaccine hesitancy, the HSRC/WSU study found that more than 60% of those who were surveyed in the Eastern Cape were opposed to vaccination, with more than 40% of those who were opposed aged between 18 and 34. At the same time, the majority of those surveyed (more than 53%) considered that there was stigma attached to not being vaccinated. Significantly, many more men (almost 65% of all men) were opposed to vaccination than women, of whom fewer than 57% opposed vaccination.

Many respondents said that they had been either persuaded or coerced into being vaccinated. More than 22% of those who had been vaccinated claimed they had been coerced. Only about 29% claimed it had been a personal choice. Almost 22% of those who said they had been coerced claimed that they had been coerced by government vaccination campaigns; while more than 16% claimed to have been coerced by family members. Conversely, almost 30% who said they had been persuaded rather than coerced indicated that they had been influenced by family members; while only about 19% said they had been convinced by the government’s public information campaigns.

In this regard, it is noteworthy that family members, in particular spouses, were widely seen as having persuaded people to be vaccinated; and that the government’s public health campaign had played a lesser role in this. Meanwhile, outside the family and community, doctors and nurses were reported as being much more influential in persuading people to be vaccinated than traditional leaders. More than 37% of respondents cited the influence of medical professionals, compared with only about 6% who referenced the influence of traditional leaders. In addition, more than 43% noted that they had discussed vaccination at clinics, which made this the most popular site for such conversations.

Many people adopted a provisional, word-of-mouth approach to vaccination – if someone they knew had tried it and survived then they also would try it. In a similar vein, many people were pragmatic in

their preferences for medical treatment. More than 38% preferred Western bio-medicine and only about 6% preferred traditional medicine – but the largest number of people – more than 54% – preferred a combination of both.

The HSRC/WSU research sought to place the vaccine hesitancy study in the broader context of shifts in the distributional economy which sustains so many people in rural Eastern Cape. It noted that household sizes had ballooned in the regions, from around four people in 2019 to more than six in 2022, with more than 46% of households growing in size. For the purposes of the present research, this begs the question: Who have joined and who have left the households?

The research further found that agricultural production was up, perhaps as a result of growth in the local labour force and/or in response to growing hunger. A total of about half of households reported that food production had remained level; but about a third reported an increase in such production. Again, this raises a number of questions. Should the rise in food production be taken as denoting greater interest in agrarianism – or perhaps a decrease in local urbanisation?

In a distributional rural economy, in which the grant component of household income is relatively high and there is significant reliance on remittances, the pandemic seems to have increased dependence on grants, including the special Covid-19 grant that was introduced, as employment opportunities fell away. A total of 24% of respondents reported a rise in income from grants; while 17% reported a fall in income through job losses, compared with only 7% reporting a rise in income due to employment. With about 64% of households describing grants and remittances as their primary source of income, there has clearly been great pressure on the care-givers (women) through whom these resources are distributed. In this regard, and given that 42% of respondents reported feeling more isolated in their families (compared with only 24% who said their families had become closer), a key question is: How does such distribution work when social relationships break down?

Meanwhile, young people, who were generally much more opposed to vaccinations than older family members, sought to leverage their opposition to the jobs for financial gain, saying, “If you want access to my body, give me a bigger grant.” In addition, many older family members reported a rise in household tensions as young people who had been charged with travelling the long distances to access their grants failed to return home in good time, and instead allegedly drank away much of the grant money they had received.

In general, the research found that the increasingly straitened circumstances in which many poor, hungry households in the Eastern Cape now found themselves may not be alleviated by the planned extension of the Covid-19 emergency grant – and that the hardship in conjunction with the cultural ruptures and dislocation produced by the pandemic and the official responses to it may rather ignite revolt in the region.

6. Reconstruction and recovery in rural households⁵

In seeking to understand the nature of reconstruction and recovery in rural households in 2023, a number of issues need to be interrogated in relation to gender, livelihoods and health.

In seeking to understand the challenges faced by women in the reconstruction and recovery process, there needs to be a clear definition of what is meant by “reconstruction” and what is meant by “care” insofar as this notion relates to the roles commonly occupied by women at the individual level and at the level of family and local community.

⁵ This section is based on a plenary discussion at the workshop.

This gives rise to a number of questions relating to women's practices, such as:

- If you can't care in the ways that you used to, how do you care now? How have childcare practices changed? Are there more or less opportunities for sharing childcare responsibilities with neighbours?
- Has there been a drop in income in your household as a result of unemployment, and how have you addressed this? How are you making ends meet?
- Are you a member of a voluntary association, such as a stokvel or the local church? Do these groups meet as often as they did before? Has the function of these associations changed?
- What have been the key changes in relation to cultural practices?
- In relation to language, are there new terms and words that you use, and others that are no longer in use?

There are also a number of attitudinal questions that may be asked – such as in relation to local women's views on their domestic roles and what they came to miss under Covid-19 – but the answers to these should be tested against practices and whether these have actually changed.

Questions should be asked about present and recent practices of mourning and grief – and whether there an additional layer of anxiety was produced as a result of the lockdown restriction imposed on funeral practices under Covid-19. The researchers should also interrogate the extent to which these rules were followed to the letter and the psychological impacts of the various responses to the rules. For example, did the customary space become an arena of fear? In addition, the emotional impacts of the limits that were imposed on socialisation, such as through church groups, should be a subject for study.

Six million households added or lost members under Covid-19. Against this background, the respondents should be asked about any changes in kinship networks, why these have taken place, and the nature of their impacts.

In relation to livelihoods, a number of questions arise around the importance of land – and changing relationships with land, such as:

- Has the movement of people to rural areas in the latter stages of the pandemic subsequently affected land use and crop production?
- What livelihoods have been lost?
- What plans for recovering livelihoods have been forged?
- What new land-based livelihoods have emerged?
- What actions have been taken to foster networks for opportunity?
- What new efforts have been made to manage grants, employment and other sources of income?
- How is the burden/opportunity of additional family members being addressed?

It is important to interrogate the issue of generational powers and rights and how these have been exercised as families have sought to reconstitute order under difficult circumstances. For example, there has long been a contradiction between social age and actual age in relation to the dispensation of grants, with many women achieving seniority (great social age) before they are old enough to receive a government pension. During the pandemic, the balance between rights (to grants) and accepted social roles and responsibilities was subjected to significant pressure, leading in some cases to a renegotiation of roles. In particular, women's inherent power in accessing land and providing

livelihoods was tested to the limit and beyond as they were forced to take responsibility for all aspects of social reproduction in the family in increasingly straitened and isolated circumstances.

In relation to healthcare provision, a number of questions arise around access, vaccinations, administration and psychological wellbeing. For example:

- What was the nature of the access, or lack of access, to healthcare and clinics under Covid-19 and subsequently? How did lockdown restrictions affect those seeking to travel for care?
- Was access to chronic medications restricted – and, if so, were there fatalities as a result of the aggravation of existing conditions?
- Was access to family planning restricted as a low priority?
- What, if any, restrictions were there on vaccination? How were vaccination symptoms managed?
- Has the new digitalised storage of medical records prevented or eased access to healthcare?
- How have local people responded to the loss of loved ones and livelihoods? Have they coped and, if so, how?
- What provision has been made for trauma and grief counselling?
- What have been the mental health challenges that have arisen from spiritual insecurity following the restriction of customary practices – and how have these been addressed?
- Which family members are responsible for the family's health, particularly in the context of offspring returning home? Has the dynamic for this responsibility changed? What are the health implications for the household member most responsible for caring for others?
- How did the attitudes of health professionals change during the pandemic – and how have these changed subsequently?
- How have traditional medicines been accessed?
- Have recent clinic closures, the arrival of pop-up clinics and the engagement of a number of NGOs significantly affected local people's experience of healthcare?

7. Women writing culture⁶

As pan-tribalism in culture in South Africa and elsewhere has increasingly eliminated differences, politics at both the national and international levels have promoted ethno-nationalism and the absolute value of indigeneity. In Europe and Asia, Vladimir Putin's project to restore a Russian empire has been based on claims of a shared ethnicity. Elsewhere, populism, Brexit in Britain, and the Make America Great Again (MAGA) movement promoted by former United States (US) president Donald Trump have deployed prejudice on the basis of race and ethnicity to achieve new forms of power. In response to racist and colonialist legacies, Black Lives Matter, Africanism, and the promotion of the notion of an essential African personality – which has been defined in South Africa as an aspect of *ubuntu* – have produced a complex set of identity politics. In this context, the notion of the field site in anthropology as a discrete place, separate from the rest of the world, which can be mined for knowledge is clearly problematic.

Anthropology as an academic discipline started with the study of objects. Then there was a move to put these in some kind of context, at which point, the idea of going to live with the people under study was born – and the discipline's characteristic holistic approach emerged. The aim was to describe it all. But then the question arises: Where is the site for the whole? What is the power of place in this context? Given that places are rarely discrete spaces, perhaps place may best be defined according to the structure of feeling and conditions associated with it – which then gives rise to the possibility of

⁶ This section is based on a presentation made by Prof Leslie Bank, HSRC, at the workshop.

comparison – comparing one place, one culture with the next, and comparing, for example, the rural with the urban.

The proposal for this project asserts that what is happening in a particular space – remote rural areas of the Eastern Cape – is of significance in relation to the roles adopted by women in these places and the ways in which they have produced, are producing and may further produce a people's science.

In undertaking fieldwork in support of this proposal, it is important to address the issue of the role played by anthropologists in producing particular versions of reality as this is experienced on the ground – in other words, how the local culture should be “written”. This is a problem that has been constantly addressed in anthropological theory for a number of years and which may be approached by considering the various genealogies for “writing culture”. It has become increasingly apparent, in a post-modernist context, that the causative schemes that anthropologists have historically imposed on the world produce illusions. Instead, the best that can be done is to recognise the fragments of culture as these are discernible and to record them, contributing to an expression of the world's cultural diversity.

In the 1980s, James Clifford and George Marcus published *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, which featured essays by eight men and one woman. The book revisited the anthropological canon and interrogated the authorial power and legitimacy of those who had produced it. The focus of the volume was on prominent male anthropologists of the 20th century, such as Bronislaw Malinowski, Reginald Radcliffe Brown and Clifford Geertz. Although *Writing Culture* did not specifically critique the coloniality of anthropology, the essays in this volume asserted that the anthropological constructs produced by these academics reflected their own cultural obsessions rather than any objective ethnographic knowledge of life in the field; and accused these thinkers of creating distance and deploying authority to validate their positions and theorisations. The ways in which culture had been written and rendered by these prominent anthropologists, the essayists proclaimed, was not innocent. Rather these masterful writers were accused of using tropes and literary devices to make their readers believe they were in the presence of insider truths and insights that illuminated culture. In this regard, Talal Asad, who contributed to *Writing Culture*, claimed that social anthropology as it has been written in Britain tends to claim to offer a secret way of seeing, acquired through empathy and closeness with the subject, which is more authentic or meaningful than other forms of analysis. However, the so-called “insider” view is clearly not always that inside.

Responding to *Writing Culture*, Ruth Behar and Deborah Gordon produced their own edited collection of essays, *Women Writing Culture*, in 1995. The volume questioned whether women anthropologists had been guilty of the same failings as their male peers. In reply, it emphasised the influence of psychology and personality in women's anthropological work in the US, which had led to an emphasis on comparing cultural patterns – which contrasts with the focus on holism and social structure as the main tenets for anthropological theory that had characterised men's engagement in anthropology. The volume further contended that women tended to do more fieldwork than men and had written more nuanced ethnography that had stood the test of time as a result. Female anthropologists were also less likely to compromise the integrity of the discipline in an effort to remain close to power than their male peers. In support of this position, essays in *Women Writing Culture* made the claim that the anthropological tradition has been led by a number of foremothers rather than forefathers, women such as Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead, Zora Neale Hurston and Ruth Landers.

In South Africa, the crucial role that women have played in the development of anthropology as a discipline remains under-recognised. At the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), only one woman, Winifred Hoernlé, is featured in a parade of framed photographs of distinguished former leading

professors along the corridors of the Department of Anthropology. However, there have been a number of distinguished women anthropologists, including Audrey Richards, Ellen Hellman, Hilda Beemer Kuper and Monica Wilson, who have made significant contributions to the discipline in South Africa. Responding to this silence, Andrew Bank and Leslie Bank produced an edited volume *Inside African Anthropology: Monica Wilson and Her Interpreters* (2013) and Andrew Bank wrote *Pioneers of the Field: South Africa's Women Anthropologists* (2016).

The female pioneers of anthropology include Monica (Hunter) Wilson, a Xhosa-speaking daughter of missionaries based in the Eastern Cape, who was devoted to fieldwork and published her classic study, *Reaction to Conquest: Effects of Contacts with Europeans on the Pondo of South Africa* in 1936. Wilson explored the impact of colonialism and contact by doing fieldwork on white farms in the province, and in black townships, including in East London, and later, in Cape Town. *Reaction to Conquest* was structured around elements of the anthropological framework of the day, which placed the emphasis on the structure and functions of tribes, but also engaged social change. Wilson made it clear that her work did not seek to portray people as part of a static rural state of being, which was a dominant perspective at the time.

Another pioneer was Ellen Hellman, who hailed from Johannesburg and who trained at the London School of Economics (LSE) in the 1930s. Her fieldwork, which was undertaken in the Rooiyard urban slums of Johannesburg, was only ever published as a paper, since this seminal study was considered unworthy of wider publication in its day. A similar aversion characterised the publication of Wilson's book, which was stripped of its social context in the first edition produced by Oxford University Press.

In general, the early generation of women anthropologists in South Africa were more applied in their approaches and showed greater diversity in their writing styles and scholarship. They also mentored some of the first generation of African anthropologists in the country. For example, Wilson worked with both Archie Mafeje and Livingstone Mqotsi; and Beemer Kupers mentored Ben Magubane.

The professional achievement of the pioneering women anthropologists was significant in the male-dominated world of the colonial academy. They were among the first female professors at South African universities. The relatively lowly status of anthropology, which was bundled into African studies departments, offered opportunities for women; it also facilitated, by necessity, the development of interdisciplinarity. Anthropology was also less respected as a "scientific" discipline than those that were practised by men wearing white coats, which had the effect of spurring the women pioneers to fight for the integrity and validity of their discipline as a "field science" which derived its data from observation.

There were also significant differences in the nature of the work conducted in the field by women anthropologists and their male peers. Women wrote less about formal power structures and political hierarchies, partly because they spent less time with men and their access to the field was negotiated through women's networks. Men in the field talked to the chiefs, producing an anthropology of power and political hierarchies; while women, whose access to the field was negotiated through women's networks, wrote from the ground up. Hellman, for example, talked to women brewers. Monica Wilson conducted many of her interviews in Pondoland while sitting on a bag outside a trading store run by Mary Soga, granddaughter of Tiyo Soga, a Xhosa journalist who was South Africa's first black ordained Presbyterian clergyman. In this respect, recent efforts to mine Wilson's work for evidence that may be presented as part of contemporary land claims has tended to prove fruitless, since she was not that connected to local power structures and dynamics.

The ground-up nature of much of the early anthropology on the continent is made clear in Lyn Schumaker's historical ethnography of the networks that create knowledge, *Africanising Anthropology: Fieldwork, Networks and the Making of Cultural Knowledge in Central Africa*. She notes that during this period, the discipline of social anthropology was concentrated at a handful of research institutes; however, actual access to the field was influenced by the African guides and the interpreters who helped to select the key informants; advised where the surveys should be conducted; and shaped the style of the engagement. In this context, the notion of anthropology as colonial knowledge is not entirely accurate – rather it has tended to be co-produced. Interestingly, the books produced by the anthropologists circulated among the local communities as testimony to how local people's lives had been "written", and became part of the history of those communities. At the same time and notwithstanding the democratic non-hierarchical work relationships at the centres producing anthropology, these institutions still operated according to the power dynamics that were generally in play in a colonial setting.

Meanwhile, anthropology also became an arena for the expression of African nationalism in the struggle against colonialism and apartheid. In particular, the Department of African Studies and Anthropology at the University of Fort Hare in the Eastern Cape was a site for lively debates about African nationalism and the sociology of modernising Africa. The leading figures in this department included:

- DDT Jabavu, who was follower of US educator Booker T Washington and his efforts to uplift those who had been slaves;
- ZK Matthews, an African National Congress (ANC) moderate whose work explored combining democracy and tradition;
- Livingstone Mqotsi who had an interest in traditional healers and cultural psychology; and
- Godfrey Pitje whose main concerns included coming of age, male initiation and masculinity.

These Africanist anthropologists were mainly interested in rural life as a site of cultural authenticity and indigeneity. In their debates on the cultural content of African nationalism, they: argued against the precepts of social Darwinism, contending that the embrace of modernity on the continent was a form of mimicry; rejected tribalism; and embraced nationalism and pan-Africanism. The early women anthropologists played a significant role in the intellectual development of this group of African intellectuals. For example, Matthews' autobiography, *Freedom for My People*, was written with Monica Wilson.

Elsewhere in Africa, Kenyan founding father Jomo Kenyatta's book *Facing Mount Kenya*, which he wrote after studying anthropology at the London School of Economics, was criticised as a text promoting Kikuyu nationalism and celebrating the greatness of the African nation. However, this volume was not an attempt at "salvage anthropology", seeking to save the remnants of an at-risk culture for posterity – it was rather a form of cultural analysis for freedom. These anthropologists were interested in the nation as a whole and were convinced that the idea of Africa that would inspire such nationalism was to be found in the deep rural spaces rather than urban settings.

Accordingly, these nationalist thinkers may also be seen as early proponents of indigenous anthropology which resists the overt and covert attempts to establish settler sovereignty through domination and assimilation. In this regard, indigenous anthropologists in Australia, Canada, Brazil and the US continue to be involved in land struggles against corporations and in fighting the legacies of colonialism.

A similar return to the rural is envisaged by Black American feminist bell hooks in *Belonging: A Culture of Place*. Hooks contends that the history of slavery has caused black Americans to turn their backs on rurality and rural values, trapping them in an abyss of urbanism, cultural emptiness and hyper masculinity. In this context, she writes fondly of a culture of place that she knew from her own childhood, having grown up and come of age in rural Kentucky as the daughter of a sharecropper in a community of artisan farmers. She recalls the intimate relations, intersections and associations that rural life brought to her family, the sense of conviviality and a culture of place; and contrasts this with the broader legacy of racism, patriarchy and violence that is the lot of most Black Americans. The yearning for a sense of community associated with rurality proposed by hooks strikes a clear chord with many South Africans, who also fear being separated from their sense of themselves in the urban abyss.

Against the background of these genealogies of anthropology, a number of key questions arise for the researchers undertaking the present project, which may inform their practice in the field and their writing in important ways. These include:

- Who are the black feminist writers in South Africa that may provide inspiration? Why is their work important, and how might it impact this project?
- What is understood by the idea of “women’s voice”? What are the differences between and among women based on their class, age and life experience –and how will these factors affect the work undertaken in the field?
- Is the act of women talking to women in itself a feminist act? How may the contrast between the life experiences and attitudes of the researchers and those of their interview subjects affect the questions they ask and the conclusions that they draw?
- Should one suspend activism and action to produce change while undertaking fieldwork?

8. Auto-ethnography

8.1 The autoethnographic method⁷

The classical colonial model is that fieldwork is about what is “out there”; and the reflection takes place, back home in the metropole. However, fieldwork is not just about the other but also about the self, and an intimate sense of self – hence the autoethnographic method.

Autoethnography requires some prior knowledge of those under study and their culture and language. It entails the ability to be accepted to some degree by those being studied, or to pass as a “native member” among them. Auto-ethno-graphy – self-culture-writing – involves both personal experience and research that connects the personal (auto) to the cultural (ethno) by examining it in writing (graphy) – and in this way interrogates the role of the self in the cultural context.⁸

The concepts of “insider” and “outsider” are often placed in opposition in political discourse. However, in anthropology they may be more productively viewed as aspects of a continuum. At some moments, with some identities – for example, when young black women researchers are talking to other young black women in the field – there may be an experience of being on the inside. But at other moments, such as when talking to an older woman about ritual, the young researcher may be on the outside. In general, identities and intersections relating to factors such as gender, race, class, age, cultural difference, places of residence and type of upbringing, can create lines of cleavage and commonality.

⁷ This section is based on a presentation made by Prof Leslie Bank, HSRC, at the workshop.

⁸ See Kathryn Mara and Katrina Daly Thompson. *African Studies Keyword: Autoethnography*. Cambridge University Press. 2022

The project to decolonise knowledge has created dualities, opposing indigenous knowledge systems to western or Euro-centric ones as the basis for ethno-national epistemologies and metaphysics. In anthropology the decolonial project emerged as thinkers like ZK Matthews sought cultural resources to resist genocide and cultural imperialism that aimed to eliminate indigeneity through force or assimilation. In its oppositional form, such efforts to decolonise knowledge can elevate indigeneity, which is often identified as residing in deep, rural areas, as a singular, pure cultural form. However, this project is not about discovering, or salvaging, such an essence, but rather about exploring the possibilities for co-production and beneficial hybridity in local practices.

Also, this project is not based on the concept of a fundamental opposition between personhood and communal belonging. In Indonesia, British anthropologist Marilyn Strathern found that the notion of the individual did not exist – Melanesians, she contended, saw themselves as fundamentally interconnected. In this regard, one of the challenges faced by the autoethnographic method is that it can elevate the self in situations where the self may be collectively constituted.

In the field the researcher's positionality will shift in different situations. The researcher's identity is not fixed. It will also shift as the individual's relationships with local people shift and their perceptions of the researcher change. Some locals might not want to engage at first, but this might change. At the same time, it might not always be possible to talk to everyone.

In entering the field, it is important – particularly as an academic who is a member of the elite in society – to be aware of the crucial role that collaboration with local people will and must play in the production of knowledge and of the ethics that such collaboration entails. All research requires and represents collaboration of some sort, including with fellow researchers and those who one may meet during a project, including among the global community, as well as with those individuals encountered in the field. Some local people may prove to be key mediators of local knowledge, decoding the meaning of local cultural forms. Accordingly, it is advisable for researchers and academics to recognise and acknowledge the impact of local networks and influences from the field on the work that is produced, rather than to present themselves as individuals operating in isolation with a mission to decipher the culture.

Recognition of the self-driven aspect of ethnography is not just an issue in the field, but also in the academy. In this respect, an academic's identity which may ease their work in the field may prevent their progress in the academy and vice versa.

A particular goal of the present project is to capture women's voices. This should entail allowing women to tell their stories on their own terms; using their categories; and expressing the structure of feeling that they present – their affect, their sense of belonging, and the meaning that they attribute to aspects of their lives. Being in the place and feeling what it is like to be there can engender empathy in the researcher, which, in turn, can produce a greater understanding of the overlaid traumas suffered by local women. Communication established on this basis may elicit the voice of the subaltern.

In this regard, although the various interviews should be structured and may feature similar questions, standardisation of the questions asked should be avoided as this may limit possibilities for expression and narration. The research is looking for multivocality – and expression of the complexity and diversity of rural women's experiences – rather than a single story. Similarly, the ways in which the observations are presented may vary widely – and take the form of various media – in order to ensure full expression of local women's voices. At the same time, the presentation of what is observed, heard and felt must be framed in an analytical context.

The research is also informed by the quest for women's agency; the aim being to produce a generative feminist ethnography, in which women are not just presented as victims.

In terms of process, a number of further meetings will be held at which preliminary and subsequent findings from the field will be discussed with a view to producing an ethnographic framework that can both inform further fieldwork and offer a vision of relevance and meaning in relation to the project's published outputs.

8.2 Autoethnography – discussion⁹

The concept of trans-languaging, which is used in the study of international relations to describe how ideas from one culture may be understood in another, may prove useful in considering how ideas encountered in the field may be inscribed by the researcher. Such inscription may deploy metaphor as a way of describing other forms of discourse in the terms of the dominant discourse.

It is important to be aware of how culture continuously shifts – and how the meaning of terms that describe key aspects of culture – such as “homestead” – may shift accordingly.

The portrayal of women as victims of the triple burden of poverty, unemployment and inequality in South Africa fails to account for women's generative capacity in the country's townships, where matrifocal households have been shown to be economically productive and powerful. In this context, there has been an increasing focus by contemporary African feminist ethnographers on how industriousness rather than domesticity characterises the role of women in such households. In this way the notion of feminine labour has been increasingly characterised on its own terms rather than in reference to the white bourgeois Victorian notion of domesticity, which is tied to particular historical notions of class and respectability.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) failed to address or elicit women's experiences of the violence and trauma that they endured during the apartheid era. Silence shrouds women's expression of their pain. However, in silence, women express much – for example, through facial expressions and gestures. Ethnographic research allows such forms of communication to be observed and noted, facilitating communication through silence.

In group situations, who can and cannot speak and the order of speaking is quite structured. Men, for example, may dominate. However, the interview method can allow women to respond and talk of their pain in ways that would otherwise not be possible.

The ways in which local women view the concepts of care and wellbeing may not correlated that closely with how these ideas are promoted in academia and among donors. This disjuncture should be addressed by the research given the importance of these themes in the present project.

The issue of access to and control over land may need to be addressed by the research in the context of a continuum between private and communal land.

⁹ This section is based on a plenary discussion at the workshop.

9. In the field

9.1 Undertaking fieldwork – experiences from OR Tambo District Municipality in the Eastern Cape¹⁰

9.1.1 Choice of research area

A number of structural, deliberate and unconscious factors can influence the choice of research area, including whether it is remote; whether the researcher is familiar with the place; and even whether the researcher feels a sense of belonging towards the place.

In my own case, having grown up in urban areas, my interest in conducting research in rural areas was triggered by a sense that this was a cultural space, with which I felt an affinity but understood little. In selecting a particular place for my research into how traditional beliefs influenced where women decided to give birth, I chose an area in the Eastern Cape where my mother had stayed with a local family as a teacher, cooking her own food and having her own cutlery in a rondavel on the homestead, and where I had attended school as a girl from grade 1 to grade 6.

9.1.2 Gaining entry into the research area

As an “insider” and “outsider” in the field, researchers experience both comfort and discomfort. In my case, I only knew one interlocutor, with whom I was “comfortable” and was otherwise “uncomfortable” and fearful of the kind of reception that I would be accorded by the local residents. In fact, I was received with some trust because of my interlocutor. In particular, she introduced me to the local chief/headman as a point of entry and for my own security. At this meeting, I introduced myself and my project, emphasising that I would respect the ways in which local people lived and would, in a way, become a part of the community. In general, an effective, working relationship can only be produced by establishing rapport, which may be achieved by recognising the ways of speaking and behaving that may need to be adopted to gain local people’s trust so that they are open in their communication and acting accordingly.

9.1.3 Multiple-sited research areas

A number of sites will need to be researched in a particular area so that a range of data for comparison is collected. Accordingly, the researcher will need to find several, different entry points; will need to meet a number of different chiefs and headmen; and may need to establish different kinds of relationships with the various interlocutors/contact people. In the regard, a range of activities and topics of conversation should be deployed to establish engagement with the various interlocutors. For example, the kinds of relationships that would need to be established with older interlocutors would be different from those established with interlocutors who are the same age, or perhaps even younger than the researcher. The researcher may need to adjust to the pace of their guide, who may have their own reasons and agenda for meeting other local people, and may also want to attend particular local events and ceremonies. Researchers will further need to adjust to the different environments in which they find themselves, and act in accordance with the spoken and unspoken rules at the various rituals and events that may be taking place.

9.1.4 Going native, participation and reciprocity

Young women should dress in appropriate attire. In my case, I was advised to dress as a newlywed, with a headdress, a long dress and an apron. The mode of dress should discourage the cultural practice of *ukuthwala*, under which young women may be abducted for marriage.

¹⁰ This section is based on a presentation made by Prof Kholekile Ngqila, Walter Sisulu University (WSU), at the workshop

Historically, anthropological researchers tended to co-reside with local residents, becoming a full-time member of the family. However, increasingly the arrangement has become that the researcher rents a space from someone. Nevertheless, researchers will continue to find themselves eating food and engaging in daily activities with local families, particularly those from whom they are renting accommodation. In addition, they may be required to undertake household chores and fetch water from local, dirty rivers. In my case, I found myself being presented with brownish water with bubbles in it, which I was supposed to drink; and brownish porridge, which I was supposed to eat. In such cases, researchers would be well advised to indicate from their facial expressions and body language that they are happy to share food and drink in this way. Refusing offers of food and drink, however politely, will create distrust.

9.1.5 Risks of participation

There are a number of risks to participating fully in local life. If a researcher becomes too involved in a local event or ceremony, they may miss opportunities to observe and take field notes. Living as local people do, can present health risks. Researchers may also be shocked by some of the things they witness and experience. In my case, I came across a dead new-born baby who was covered in blood at the scene of a home birth. Researchers may encounter everyday dangers negotiating the local landscape, such as when crossing a river without a bridge in a quest for information or when driving along a narrow road. Researchers may also enter spaces that they are not supposed to penetrate and be reprimanded for this.

9.1.6 Adjusting one's routine

The researcher and their contact person may have different schedules and priorities, as well as different interests. The contact person may want to go hoeing or go to the forest to collect wood. The researcher may want to collect data, while their interlocutor wants to attend a lengthy ceremony. There are a number of ways in which such clashing priorities may be addressed – but the researcher should always bear in mind the possibility of the beneficial unintended consequences for the study of accompanying their interlocutor even as this entails a disruption to their schedule.

In collecting data, the researcher may also encounter a number of obstacles, such as inclement weather, long distances and the lack of transport to certain sites. In addition, researchers should be prepared for quite long chats with their interview subjects before the business of data collection can commence.

9.1.7 Learning to detach oneself from the contact person and local residents

Fieldwork can lead to social ties being forged between the researcher and the local community and the production of expectations – such as that the researcher should remain in contact with and help local people in various ways. For example, a researcher may be expected to return to the area for a funeral – or to help advance the education of the children of local people. For researchers planning to return to the site for further fieldwork, such perceived obligations can pose quite a challenge.

There are also strong expectations of reciprocity during the fieldwork process itself. When a researcher accepts food that is offered, they are passing a test of belonging. In a similar vein, if the researcher is staying with an older person, they may be delayed because the householder is lonely and wants to spend time with them. Local people may approach the researcher to help them fill in forms; or even to help with the hoeing. They may find themselves accompanying their contact person to a local clinic, which may be hours away, and spending the whole day on this mission. However, such engagement can also produce interesting data. In general, the researcher must decide how reciprocal they should be in their behaviour, and draw the line as they see fit but without damaging the trust that underpins their local relationships.

9.1.8 Note-taking and identifying research themes

In my case, I would introduce myself and the purpose of the visit, and tell the interview subject that I would like to tape the conversation if they were agreeable. The researcher may that they are recording interview and taking notes so that they don't forget any key statements, or misinterpret or misrepresent the views of the interviewees. The process needs to be made explicit. In addition, permission must be asked before taking photographs.

In my case, I both recorded the interviews and took notes of what I observed in the milieu at the time, including vocal inflections and behavioural tics that seemed of significance. Once I returned to my room, I would listen to the recordings with my contact person, who would help me by explaining anything that was unclear. In reviewing the recordings, I would make notes of key themes that seemed to be emerging and of significant gaps in the information that I would need to address in subsequent interviews. The data collected from the interviews both served to confirm the existence of anticipated perspectives and themes and to indicate the possibility of other unanticipated ones.

9.2 In the field – discussion¹¹

In introducing oneself, it can be helpful to reference one's institution, as this can produce status. However, there can be free-flowing situations where a less formal introduction is required, although even in such cases it is important not to appear insignificant. In introducing oneself, the researcher should tell the story of why they are there. In general, it is important to be mindful of one's own position and that of the respondents during encounters, always respecting their dignity, so that knowledge can be produced from these interactions in an effective and ethical manner.

An important initial step is to interact with local community members and identify potential interlocutors. Some residents, including children, will volunteer as assistants and may be able to provide important local context. In this regard, it is important to note that the places in the field where the researchers will be working are embedded in power dynamics that are shaped by gender relations. Accordingly, some local men will want to know why the researcher is "snooping around" and talking to the local women. They may wonder why they are not being interviewed and volunteer themselves as interview subjects. In such cases, it may be best to interview them. It is also necessary to be explicit about the goals of the research, which cannot be conducted as if it were a secret study of women. The researcher may leverage early communications with men, some of whom may wield significant power locally, to gain a clearer idea of the pattern of local society and identify the women who may be key respondents. Eventually, once the local community is accustomed to the researcher's presence, they should become less noticed.

An early activity of the researcher should be to produce a physical and relational map of the area and community under study. The mapping should detail the local organisations and societies; where people are working; and how they are connected to other spaces and places. In particular, knowledge of local kinship networks can foster understanding of the social demography of the area. For example, many family members may be absent for long periods, which may be affecting the local landscape and economy in a number of ways. In this regard, there may have been significant changes in family size and structures as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition, it is important to learn which family members went to the local clinic during the pandemic and how the issue of responsibility for healthcare was managed with the family during this period.

There can be challenges in navigating local community tensions in the quest for rich data. The researcher may wish to go and to talk to a segment of the community which is regarded with distrust

¹¹ This section is based on a plenary discussion at the workshop.

by another – for example, by interviewing people who are seen by others as livestock thieves. In this regard, it is important that the researcher has a proper, clear conversation with their hosts, explaining the impartial nature of the research and that they are not there to take sides – in this way reassuring people that there is no prospect of betrayal.

Researchers should not be prejudiced in their search for interesting interviewees. Some people who are forthcoming are not interesting; while some who are quiet and elusive may have much of interest to reveal. In general, the researchers should not rush in their quest for relevant data. Rather, they should take their time and be helpful. Gifts may be used (sparingly) to curry favour. Fieldwork can be boring – in cases, where the researcher finds that their established routine for investigation has become stale, they should consider adopting new approaches.

The key questions that will need to be asked locally will emerge as the researcher's understanding of the area in which they are working develops. In this regard, it is not advisable to try and use a questionnaire survey until one has a clearer idea of the local situation. Similarly, the research instruments may also vary from one area to the next.

Once the researcher has produced a set of key questions, they need to be familiar with their core questions – and have a good idea of the follow-up questions that they are likely to ask. At the same time, when conducting an interview, the researcher should be able to recognise when they are pushing the interview subject too hard, which can create resistance, and know when to stop. The researcher can always come back and ask further questions another day.

It is important to cross-check the factual accuracy of the information that is received. Also, whether it reflects commonly held views or references common incidents – or is rather an exception that proves the rule. In this regard, researchers should be wary of being pointed in particular directions by local residents who may have their own agendas. Statements should be placed in the context of observed body language. In addition, stakeholder interviewers can provide useful background information that provide context for the nature of local social schemes.

Researchers should be aware that names for a particular thing may vary among sites. In addition, different things may fulfil a similar function across the various sites. For example, people in the various sites may use different medicinal plants for the same illness – but the smell and taste of the plants used are similar.

Medicine and the health system provide a framework in which difficult conversations, such as in relation to illness and death, may be held in a quite neutral way. People may be quite willing to talk about visiting the local clinic and the provision of treatment there. However, matters of trauma and violence suffered by interviewees can be much more difficult to address. Such conversations should be taken slowly as and when they arise.

The researcher must adopt an appropriate degree of concern in showing comfort, care and sympathy for those who have suffered. In the field, this entails assessing each situation on its own merits and managing one's spoken and body language accordingly. For example, the death of a baby, while upsetting for the researcher, may not be a cause for great grief in cases of unwanted teenage pregnancies. The researcher needs to manage the visceral experiences of being in the field in an appropriate way in the moment.

The line between being professional and sympathetic as an embedded researcher with a personal stake in one's work can be hard to negotiate. In this regard, there is a constant need to reflect on one's own position as a subject in the research – and, in many cases, to suspend one's desire for activism.

Researchers must consider carefully the extent to which they should intervene and the form that any such intervention should take – for example, whether and to whom they should be making referrals to alleviate suffering, including in cases of violence against women. In this regard, the researcher must manage local expectations carefully, clarifying their role as observer rather than saviour, and the limits to the actions that they may undertake in an effort to help.

Researchers encountering cases of great trauma and violence, which may upset them personally, should talk to their contacts in the field about this – and also talk to their supervisors about such issues so that appropriate action may be taken and appropriate support may be provided.

10. Producing life histories¹²

The researchers for the Women RISE project presented a number of life histories that they had prepared for the workshop. Based on interviews conducted with different women about themselves and their roles in their families, these life histories offered a range of information.

- One 54-year-old woman described her own childhood and her place in her family, including in relation to the number and age of her siblings; which children had lived where while the parents were away; who had been the favourites; and incidents of abuse in the home. She described how she had been forced to return to this domestic setting and undertake care work during the pandemic. She was placed in the position of provider after her husband lost his job and had to take responsibility for accessing the various social security benefits, including her own mother's pension, although these were insufficient to meet needs. Debts mounted and the family structure was placed under great strain.
- One married woman was left without an income after her husband, who was a factory worker and the breadwinner, died. Surviving on social grants and inadequate food parcels, compromises had to be made in terms of expenditure. As her previous business going into town and selling processed food became impossible, she was required to find alternative sources of income and food. She established a home garden; and started selling masks and sanitiser. Meanwhile, amid mounting conflict in the family, her health suffered. After lockdown came to an end, she returned to selling processed food although the business has not fully recovered. However, the conflict within the family that took place under lockdown seems to have caused a permanent rupture.
- One woman who had been working as a clinical coordinator in Cape Town returned to her family's rural home after a number of family members died in order to look after her niece. The impact of the deaths in the family have left her bereft and unwilling to talk about the impacts of the pandemic. She has now returned to Cape Town, where she is struggling financially since her hours have been cut.
- A 59-year-old care worker described how six of her parents' children had died and how she was the only one to live with her mother and father throughout childhood. She did not matriculate and later became a nursing assistant at the age of 26. She has subsequently lived on her own most of the time, although her sister came to live with her in later life. Describing her life as "normal" and her work as being "of service", she said she has never felt isolated. Under Covid-19, life became difficult; she could not travel that easily to work in a rural hospital. In the community, she found it difficult to strike a balance under the lockdown restrictions. For example, she says she was forced to break the rules and attend the funeral of a neighbour who had previously supported her. She also talked of the stigma that was attached to healthcare workers such as herself during the pandemic.

¹² This section is based on a plenary discussion at the workshop.

In reflecting on the life histories that were produced as part of the training, it was noted that the written accounts of these histories could be presented in a number of ways. They could tell a chronological story starting with childhood, or perhaps the year before the Covid-19 outbreak; they could be ordered according to the life cycle in rural areas; or they could be organised thematically. Whatever the structure chosen, the pattern of the narrative should be viewed critically. For example, the presumption of a passage from stability, to instability, to recovery may not be adequate to describe the actual trajectory of the individual under study before, during and since the pandemic.

The researchers should make every effort to track changes across physical space. In this regard, a constant moving from one place to another has become an important aspect of many Xhosa lives.

The researchers should also track change across social and economic spaces – for example, the ways in which women generate livelihoods and income by moving from one network, or one form of trade, to another should be traced. In this way, context can be provided for the rationale behind women's socio-economic decision-making.

The impacts of the decisions may be assessed by observing the subsequent new behaviours that have been adopted by the women and the consequences of these. So, the researcher may accompany the subject to the marketplace or the clinic or wherever – and may also talk to related agencies about the new activity so that greater context is provided. In this respect, the goal of the life histories is to offer depth of understanding of the behaviours that are taking place rather than to present a merely representative sample of experiences.

Researchers may follow a number of practical steps to deepen the life histories that they present:

- They may seek detail about the nature of conflicts in the family. Who fought and over what? Was the conflict violent?
- They may seek detail about the kind and nature of economic transactions within the household, including in relation to livelihood and employment opportunities that have been lost and gained.
- They may expand their narrative by producing kinship diagrams which can reveal the nature of the connections among the family and can include data on mobility and change of residence and place.
- They should interrogate the question of care work in the family and community setting which became an increasingly visible and acknowledged domestic issue after the “gate” was closed under lockdown. The effectiveness or otherwise of the coping strategies that were produced should be examined, including in relation to the mental health of family members.
- The researchers may also interrogate the dynamics of other networks in the community – such as stokvels and church groups – and the impacts of these on individual life trajectories.
- In seeking to understand the role played by the public health system, the researcher should ask about the nature of the efforts that were made to access the system and the actual experiences of the system.
- The researchers should focus on a range of cohorts among the women who are interviewed. Young lives are not the same as old lives. The lives of married women are not the same as those of single women or widowed women.

Various techniques and approaches may be deployed to mine the interviewees for the required kinds of information. For example, the interview subjects may be invited to talk from the present working backwards rather than asked for personal biographies from birth onwards. The aim should be to hook the interviewee into a conversation about their experience.

A sensible approach to compiling the life histories would be first to produce a sketch of the individual's story – before, during and after Covid-19 – and then to return and dig deeper into certain points in the story. The narratives that are produced need to reflect the interviewee's voice – to this end, the researcher should record the interviews and quote directly from the accounts they are given.

Each life history will entail more than one interview but fewer than many. Every history does not have to cover each of the topics in equal detail. Some will focus on some topics more than others. In addition, perhaps only ten or so of the 30 life histories that each researcher should produce need to be explored in depth.

A sense of the headings that will be used to categorise the life histories should emerge through the interview process. Once these are identified, further questions may be asked to explore the selected issues in more detail.

In this regard, it is important, given the focus of the research project, to ensure that questions are posed to establish the extent and nature of the interviewees access to healthcare – for example, the circumstances under which the interviewees accessed clinics, hospitals and traditional medicine.

It is further important to interrogate the dual professional and personal role played by a number of women as both nurses and community members – and the kinds of pressures and fears experienced by such women at the height of the second wave of the pandemic when as many as 1 in 3 of those entering hospitals died – and when many doctors and nurses themselves died. Where possible, the researchers should ask these women about the operations of the clinics, as well as the “moral economy” of these institutions. They may ask whether there were government vaccination targets that the health workers were supposed to meet and about popular responses to the vaccination programme. They may ask health workers whether they were bullied or stigmatised as a result of their engagement in officially sanctioned responses to the pandemic. In particular, the researchers may interrogate the status of nurses within the local communities, producing a narrative which may be placed in a historical context – that is, a fall from grace for a profession which is now under-recognised and under-paid.

11. Ethics and research¹³

11.1 Introduction

The researchers in the Women RISE project need to be aware of their ethical and legal responsibilities to protect the research participants, including in relation to how they conduct and report on their research. The researchers should also understand the basis of the research ethics review process. Before they go into the field, they must complete a questionnaire testing their understanding of ethics in research so that they may demonstrate that they can incorporate ethics into their research methodology. Upon successfully completing the questionnaire they will acquire an ethics certificate, which will last for three years.

A key principle that researchers should observe in their work is to do no harm. In pursuit of this principle, they should tell the subjects of the research exactly what they are doing and respect the confidentiality of the information that they receive.

The other guiding principles for ethics in research are, in no particular order, autonomy, beneficence and justice. It should be noted that ethical and legal standards are not the same. Ethical standards

¹³ This section is based on a presentation made by Dr Tim Hart, HSRC, at the workshop. The presentation was based on an outline, “Ethics in research: What, why and how?” produced by the chair of the Research Ethics Committee at HSRC, Prof Ames Dhai.

may be higher than legal standards which can be minimal. At the same time, ethics are constrained by the law.

Researchers may adhere to the following process when seeking to determine whether a particular proposal or action meets appropriate ethical standards. They should:

- Check the facts of the case;
- Check which ethical values are involved;
- Consult authoritative sources;
- Consider alternative solutions as necessary in light of the values and principles they uphold and likely consequences;
- Discuss proposed solutions with those who will be affected;
- Make a decision and act on it with sensitivity in relation to others affected; and
- Evaluate the decision and be prepared to act differently in future.

Although medical research has historically benefitted from experiments on people – such as, for example, in understanding scurvy and in discovering the beneficial impacts of penicillin – it became clear in the wake of atrocities committed in the name of such research in Second World War concentration camps that international and national ethical standards for such work needed to be established.

In South Africa, ethics in research is subject to the Bill of Rights enshrined in South Africa's Constitution of 1996 and is informed by a set of guidelines, *Ethics in health research: Principles, processes and structures*, produced by the Department of Health (DoH) in 2015. In addition, a Protection of Private Information Act (POPIA), which sets strict terms and conditions for the collection, anonymisation, storage and dissemination of information on individuals in the public interest, was promulgated in 2013. POPIA requires researchers to, at times, approach research subjects through intermediaries, and to gain consent from their research subjects that they may use the information obtained from them.

The implementation of ethics in research, including the issuance of ethics clearance certificates for proposed projects by local Research Ethics Committees, such as that at HSRC, is overseen by a National Health Research Ethics Council. This council is guided by the DoH's 2015 *Ethics in health research* in line with its mandate as outlined in the National Health Act of 2003.

11.2 Four principles for ethics

Ethics in research should ensure: the autonomy of the research subject; the delivery of appropriate benefits; absence of harm; and justice. These four principles should guide the quest for consent from individuals for their participation in research and the treatment of the research subjects.

11.2.1 Autonomy

Researchers should respect the right of research subjects to hold their own views, make their own choices and take actions based on their values and beliefs. Such respect should entail, as necessary, helping individual research subjects develop their capacity and competence to make autonomous choices free from constraints and the controlling influence of others. In all cases, individual research subjects should be treated with respect when they are disclosing information and when the researchers are helping them with actions that promote autonomous decision making, which may involve others. Instead of treating the research subjects as a means to an end, the researchers should help them to achieve their own goals and build their capacities as agents.

11.2.2 Delivering benefits

Research should seek to deliver benefits contributing to the welfare of an individual or community, although these may be long-term rather than immediate. Benefits should be determined by addressing local needs, values, priorities and cultural experiences. In this regard, prior consultation with individuals and communities is of great value in determining benefits.

11.2.3 Do no harm

In essence, communities and places should be left as they are found by researchers. To this end, there should be analysis of the risks versus the benefits that the act of research may bring, which may entail weighing potential conflicts of interest according to their likelihood and potential impacts.

11.2.4 Justice

There is an ethical obligation to treat each person in accordance with what is right and proper. A just approach should:

- Treat everyone equally;
- Ensure a fair and equitable distribution of burdens and benefits;
- Ensure that the process by which decisions are made and the manner in which actions are implemented is procedurally fair; and
- Compensate people for any injuries inflicted upon them.

The principle of equity may be considered as taking precedence over the principle of equality in implementing a just approach.

11.3 Discussion

Researchers will need to establish relationships of trust in order to conduct their work in the ground. However, these must always be grounded in the ethical principle of respect for the autonomy of the research subjects.

Rewards, whether immediate or more remote, should not be offered in return for participation in the research. Nor should undue pressure be placed on research subjects in the field. However, while coercion should be avoided, small gifts that may ease the researcher's path may be acceptable.

In the field, the researchers are seeking to uncover structures of feeling among the research subjects, which may form the basis for efforts to produce beneficial change. However, in reporting on these feelings, the researchers should discern the ethical line between what should be considered intimate and private, and what may be disclosed and published.

Pseudonyms should be used as appropriate to protect the identities of research subjects. In seeking and reporting on findings, the limits on the remit of the consent that has been obtained from the research subjects should be respected.

By contrast with journalism, under which the identities of respondents are revealed as a matter of course in line with minimal legal standards, social science ethics requires respect for the autonomy (and confidentiality) of research subjects.

Although social researchers tend to act with great integrity, there can be severe consequences for those who contravene ethical guidelines. Such contravention can also damage the institutional reputation of the project leaders and the integrity of the work being undertaken.

12. High-level overview of the economic and social challenges faced in the Eastern Cape¹⁴

The Eastern Cape Socio-Economic Consultative Council, which is sited in the Office of the Premier of the Eastern Cape, is a public entity providing medium- and long-term plans for the province. Having previously collaborated with HSRC on Covid-19 research which shaped funerals policy in the province and as a co-principal investigator in the Women RISE project, ECSECC is looking to the findings that may be produced by the present research as offering direction for future social and economic plans. In particular, the council is seeking to develop longer-term plans with a 2040 end date that can leverage community agency in new, imaginative ways.

The current context for socio-economic planning in the Eastern Cape is far from favourable. Politically, there is a general lack of trust in the government and in government leaders; in the nature of politics in general; and in institutions in general, both in the public sector and beyond. Widespread graft in the public sector is entrenched and those involved are prepared to protect their corrupt interests with violence, including by killing anyone who is prepared to blow the whistle. The graft is implemented in a society that is quite lawless, partly as a result of a breakdown in the functionality of the state, including the functionality of the police; and amid mounting ideological contestation and rising authoritarianism nationally, regionally and globally.

Economically, there is high unemployment among the youth, with local joblessness rates of from 60% to 90% across the province. This has given rise to the socio-cultural phenomenon of “waithood”, as a whole generation are left waiting for life to begin. At the same time there is low growth as a number of sectors continue to underperform; low levels of productive investment; and a rising cost of living which has had a disproportionate effect on the vulnerable and marginalised. The result has been that many youth and working people are leaving their home areas in search of opportunities elsewhere, leading to high rates of out-migration and urbanisation.

Socially, inequality has risen; poverty deepened and there has been a general lack of human development across the province. Drug abuse and endemic crime has been on the rise, with hopeless, unemployed youth becoming the prey of drug and other criminal cartels. Gender-based violence (GBV) is prevalent; many people in the province live in unsafe environments; and the intergenerational impacts of Covid-19 lockdown conditions remain quite unexamined. Meanwhile, powerful vested interests have led to the rise of an infrastructure mafia in the province, with contractors claiming “protection” fees equivalent to the value of 30% of construction projects to allow work to go ahead and to allow the contractors to deploy local labour and resources.

Meanwhile, the introduction of new digital technologies in the public and private sectors and in civil society has produced advances and opportunities, but also presented some significant network, access and training challenges that need to be addressed if South Africa is to compete economically. One positive outcome has been the deployment of an online appointment-booking platform by the Department of Home Affairs, which allows members of the public to avoid queues and be seen with five minutes of arriving at the appointed time. At the same time, long queues persist because much of the population lacks access to the online booking platform and because of widespread digital illiteracy, particularly among the older generation. In addition, the requirement that payment for official services should be electronic hinders those who only have cash in their pockets. Such individuals are often forced to turn to touts in the queue who will make digital payments on their behalf for a 10% fee.

¹⁴ This section is based on a presentation made by Ian Assam, Eastern Cape Socio Economic Consultative Council (ECSECC), at the workshop

Digital divide issues, such as that between rural and urban areas in terms of network capacity and access, are being addressed at the national and provincial levels by fourth industrial revolution (4IR) planners. For example, it has been found that many clinics in rural areas have connectivity issues. In addition, in an economy and world in which change is accelerating at an exponential rate, it is crucial to equip young people with the new skills that are required for the future world of work.

Environmentally, the Eastern Cape faces significant impacts from mounting climate change, including from extreme and adverse weather conditions and droughts.

Legally, the provincial government is beset by high costs. It is sued on a daily basis and faces continuous claims for failing to provide adequate medical services. It also has to answer a stream of requests under the Promotion of Access to Information Act (PAIA) of 2000. Legal challenges, civil claims and the slow pace of justice in the criminal justice system and at civil courts all drain the public coffers, taking away money that had been budgeted for something else.

In 2020, about 22% of households in the Eastern Cape were headed by young people, and the province's unemployment rate for youngsters aged 15 to 24 reached 78.5%. The province is trapped in a cycle of poverty, low growth and lack of economic sustainability. At the family level, children who grow up in poverty are significantly disadvantaged in relation to education and skills – and thus struggle to find work. Having failed to escape the poverty trap, they then rear a next generation of children in poverty – and the cycle continues.

In response, provincial planners and policy-makers seek to promote development through programmes and projects that can create growth and tax revenues, making the Eastern Cape less dependent on national transfers and fostering investment – and thus producing the conditions for further development. However, the grim reality is that the opposite is happening – the economy has stagnated and even shrunk creating greater dependence on national transfers. Provincial growth which was almost non-existent in 2019 fell to below -5% in 2020, before recovering to around 4% in 2021 and 1.8% in 2022. Projected growth for 2023 stands at 1.3%, which is far below the 4-5% level that the National Development Plan 2030 envisages as the minimum rate required to reduce joblessness significantly.

The provincial plight is exacerbated by the impacts of power outages and the ways in which urgent efforts to address these – such as through hauling large quantities of diesel by road in order to fuel power stations – are further distorting the networks on which the economy depends. Meanwhile, even though the South African Revenue Service (SARS) recently reported record returns, the provincial dependence on national transfers for its budget seems an increasingly risky proposition as the national budget becomes increasingly constrained by debt-servicing costs. These have risen as the country's investment rating is reduced to junk status on international markets, damaging the Rand.

In the Eastern Cape, the present dire economic straits have led to something of a crisis in social reproduction. For example, in the education sector, popular disillusion with many state schools has led to over-subscription at former model-C schools which are now packed with pupils. The shift has led to a teacher-staffing crisis, as near-empty state schools which used to cater to as many as 1,000 pupils remain staffed by the same teacher complement – even as the former model-C schools struggle with huge class sizes.

Meanwhile, many families are voting with their feet – moving to Gauteng and Cape Town in the search of a better tomorrow – which has led to a reduction in the province's budget, which is assessed on the basis of the size of the local population. The paradox is that even as the provincial policy-makers need to develop a properly budgeted plan that can provide hope of an improved future to the people, the

reduced national allocation has left it with barely enough money to fund emergency services and pay salaries, and with nothing for infrastructure.

Against this dire economic background, it has been noted that modern states – South Africa included – have no great interest in universal social reproduction and tend to welcome so-called “states of exception”, such as that produced under the Covid-19 pandemic, which allow them to disregard the interests of sections of their population – surplus people who may be left to die in large numbers. However, the application of such a logic to the disbursement of national funds has been resisted by relatively poor provinces such as the Eastern Cape and the Northern Cape, which wield significant political clout in terms of electoral votes.

Nevertheless, there has been a process of involution in the Eastern Cape since 1994, as the provincial government’s share of the national fiscus has fallen from 16% to 11.2%, which has particularly impacted education and health provision in the region since these sectors account for the lion’s share of the budget. Education and health receive more than R38 and R27 billion respectively compared with under R1 billion for sport, recreation arts and culture (hence the rising crime figures as sports activities fall away and libraries and other cultural facilities close).

The scale of the provincial crisis may be illustrated by the scale of youth unemployment, which is as high as 90% in some areas, such as Alfred Nzo District Municipality, as the school system fails to deliver proper education or produce young people with the skills required in the job market.

At the same time, the broad lack of economic opportunity in the Eastern Cape is leading the best minds to leave the province.

In an effort to reverse the process and support economic recovery in the Eastern Cape, the provincial government produced a five-point plan in 2014. The provincial development plan (PDP), which was established in line with the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030, sought to promote: infrastructure development; industrialisation; equitable, inclusive transformation; digital transformation; and strong public finances.

In 2019, an updated provincial development plan proposed that “By 2030, the Eastern Cape will be an enterprising and connected province where its people reach their potential”. The PDP is conceived as aligned to international and national development goals, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) produced by the United Nations (UN) in 2015, the African Union’s (AU’s) Agenda 2063, the NDP and the government’s Medium-Term Strategic Framework. In addition, the policies proposed by the PDP inform local integrated development plans (IDPs).

The PDP is also enacted as part of a reconfigured national spatial development framework. Under this framework, there is a focus on developing a coastal transport corridor from Durban (Ekurhuleni) to Port Elizabeth (Gqeberha), although the prospect of a high-speed train along this route (and on to Cape Town) has been vigorously opposed by the taxi industry.

It should be noted that the present framework for policy alignment may change greatly if the state is reconfigured so that there are only national and district levels of government. Meanwhile, there is a persistent lack of alignment among the planning and budgetary instruments at the various levels due to different definitions of what comprises the financial year.

At the national level, the NDP foresees 14 main outcomes:

- Quality basic education;
- A long and healthy life for all South Africans;

- Conditions of safety for all South Africans;
- Decent employment through inclusive growth;
- A skilled and capable workforce to support an inclusive growth path;
- An efficient, competitive and responsive economic infrastructure network;
- Vibrant, equitable, sustainable rural communities contributing to food security;
- Sustainable human settlements and improved quality of household life;
- Responsive, accountable, effective and efficient local government;
- The protection and enhancement of environmental assets and natural resources;
- A better South Africa that can contribute to a better Africa and a better world;
- An efficient, effective and development-oriented public service;
- A comprehensive, responsive and sustainable social protection system; and
- Nation-building and social cohesion.

The PDP proposes six main outcomes:

- An innovative and inclusive growing economy;
- An enabling infrastructure network;
- Rural development and an innovative, high-value agriculture sector;
- Human development;
- Environmental sustainability; and
- Capable democratic institutions.

The PDP deploys seven apex indicators to measure achievement of these goals:

- A service-delivery index;
- The Gini co-efficient (which measures economic inequality);
- A human development index (HDI);
- Investment as a percentage of GDP;
- Real GDP growth rate;
- The official unemployment rate; and
- The percentage of people below the food poverty line.

The province is generally failing to meet its targets according to these performance indicators, although it has achieved some successes in the field of improved service delivery and in the percentage of people with a post-secondary education.

At the same time, there is acknowledgment of the limited scope of these indicators as measures of performance. For example, the HDI index includes access to basic services but places insufficient emphasis on other aspects of human development such as wellness and social integration. Similarly, it is doubtful whether the current indicators can provide an accurate picture of the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. In this regard, the Women RISE research may produce a holistic outlook and evidence-based judgements that point to the use of other standards for measurement that may be more relevant and useful.

National and local government also face significant challenges in addressing the tenor of public opinion over recent years, which has been highly critical of official performance in addressing the country's problems. Opinion surveys conducted between 2014 and 2022 found that the public were particularly concerned with issues of high unemployment; the high cost of living; crime and corruption; disruptions in electricity supply; and other basic service issues. There was a high level of cynicism

among citizens about the direction in which the country was headed, with an increasing number of respondents indicating that the country was not being managed properly.

In surveys conducted from 2011 to 2022, unemployment was cited by as many as 76% of South Africans as the greatest challenge facing the country. Meanwhile, poverty and destitution became the second most mentioned challenge, overtaking crime and corruption as a commonly cited concern and perhaps reflecting the compound effect of unemployment, rising living costs and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on South Africans, especially the poor.

Surveys conducted between 2019 and 2022 found that trust levels in local and national government were lower than trust in religious and civil society organisations; the media; and business and academic institutions and experts. However, the government continued to rate highly as a reliable source of information on crime statistics, unemployment levels and efforts to address HIV/Aids.

Meanwhile, the 2022 statistics for reported crimes in the Eastern Cape indicate significant social instability. The number of reported crimes of violence and sexual offences has risen, as has the number of reported car thefts, truck hijackings and residential robberies. The only key areas in which the statistics indicated fewer reported offence were robberies of non-residential sites and cash-in-transit vans. Much of the crime, including theft from stores and homes, takes place at night. There has also been a wave of theft of metal items, which are stolen for scrap. In response, Buffalo City Municipality has started installing roundabouts in place of traffic lights.

Recent data measuring the progress on implementing the Provincial Development Plan indicate:

- A concentration of poverty among a number of districts in the east of the province;
- A slight increase in the number of people living below or close to the food poverty line between 2009 and 2019, with 20.6% of households living on under R625 a month, indicating the entrenched nature of poverty;
- A likely failure to reduce unemployment by 25% by 2024/25, in part because of the negative economic impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic;
- An unemployment rate of 44% in the first quarter of 2022, with 80% of the unemployed aged between 15 and 24 years and with men comprising 52% of the total;
- A preponderance of semi- and under-skilled workers. Skilled workers comprise only 22% of those with jobs, semi-skilled workers comprise 42% of the total, and low-skilled workers comprise 36%; and
- A lack of employment for the relatively highly educated. Only 20% of those who have a tertiary education are employed.

Reflection on the effectiveness of the provincial development plan has led to a number of recommendations, including that there is a need to:

- Decisively reinvigorate the development plan as a matter of urgency;
- Promote greater accountability within the state and among its social partners;
- Forge a renewed consensus on creating broader, more inclusive growth;
- Address the deep-seated structural impediments to growth, job creation, competitiveness and inequitable distribution of wealth and incomes;
- Prioritise the interests of vulnerable and poor people – that is, those without agency – and be deliberate in narrowing the gap between rich and poor;
- Improve the province’s long-term planning capabilities;

- Ensure more support for small businesses, and promote fuller participation and ownership in the economy among black people and women, especially in townships and rural areas. This may partly be achieved by implementing a District Development Model beyond the pilot programme that has been undertaken in OR Tambo District Municipality; and
- Produce planning and implementation strategies that focus on youth, women, children, people with disabilities and members of the LGBTQI+ community.

In seeking to implement these recommendations, the provincial government will seek to: establish a capable, ethical state; improve the quality of life for all so that no one is left behind; activate citizen participation in the development plan; promote equity; and pursue the goal of an inclusive economy.

It will also focus on a number of catalytic infrastructure projects with the support of the national government, including the establishment of a Wild Coast Toll Road and a 4IR economic hub at Port St Johns.

The province has also developed specific plans for transforming education, social protection and health provision. In relation to education, it is seeking to address major challenges relating to capacity building, economic relevance, 4IR and inclusivity, although it has scored some success in terms of improved matric pass rates.

In relation to social protection, there is a need to integrate the delivery of the basket of services on offer to ensure that no-one slips below a minimum standard of living while ensuring that provision promotes inclusive development. Social protection services play a significant role in alleviating poverty and providing relief to individuals, families and communities. At the same time, social risk and vulnerability persist due to: slow economic growth; high unemployment; limited entrepreneurship; limited or mismatched skills for economic growth or participation in the labour market; persistent social ills such as substance abuse, gender-based violence and femicide (GBVF), and other crime; the impact of Covid-19 and disasters; and disruptions to the network services on which the economy depends, such as the electricity supply.

Against this background, social development cannot be promoted by the Department of Social Development alone. Other actors in the state, the private sector and civil society, including at the international level, must be part of the drive to reduce the present high levels of social risk, vulnerability and poverty.

An example of the disjuncture between the social welfare and social development aspects of the system as it is presently enacted is provided by lack of productive economic impact produced by the disbursement of welfare grants. Currently, R2.8 billion is pumped into the province in such payments every month. Yet this disbursement producing few tangible long-term economic benefits even as it alleviates immediate hardship for many people. Mthatha in the Eastern Cape has the highest cash withdrawals in the country. However, in a consumption-driven economy, much of this money is used for debt re-servicing while much of the remainder is spent on food and goods that are not produced locally and at stores which are not locally owned. In other words, there is a lack of productive investment in this town and in the province more generally, notwithstanding the great sums paid out in grants every month.

In relation to health, the provincial government has embarked on a turn-around strategy, building on what was achieved under Covid-19 – in particular, the perceived success of the vaccination programme which boosted morale among nurses and at health institutions, as well as among the province's political class. In this regard, the HSRC study of the impacts of the vaccination programme

found that many people had responded positively to it and that it was viewed a part of a broader opening up of society and the economy in the wake of Covid-19, particularly among women.

The provincial government has based its health turnaround strategy around five pillars which seek to:

- Promote financial sustainability in the sector;
- Optimise service delivery;
- Digitalise many aspects of the services on offer;
- Build healthier communities together, including by boosting Covid-19 vaccination rates and addressing the prevalence of non-communicable diseases as a priority; and
- Produce an integrated medico-legal strategy under which compensation claims will be capped and costed according to their provision within the public sector with the bulk of this money going to the individuals making the claim rather than their lawyers who have reaped exorbitant profits from such actions over the past decade.

In its economic modelling, the provincial government has proposed four categories of residents according to their levels of agency and the support on offer in terms of properly maintained infrastructure:

- The flourishers, who are embedded in responsive and functioning infrastructure and who have a decent education and the capacity to be economically productive;
- The do-it-yourself (DIY) actors, who have the will and capacity to be economically productive but who are hamstrung by a lack of adequate local infrastructure and a paucity of economic opportunities;
- The “just-a-number” residents who live in relatively well-serviced areas but lack the education and agency to be that economically productive; and
- The destitute who live in poorly serviced areas that lack adequate infrastructure and whose low levels of education and agency render them dependent rather than autonomous in their economic decision-making.

Deploying this model, the provincial government aims to provide appropriate infrastructural and social development support so that the individuals in these four groups can improve their prospects. In particular, there is a clear need to provide those in the DIY category with greater infrastructural support; and to offer improved training and educational opportunities to those in the “just-a-number” category. In addition, improved infrastructure and the provision of appropriate labour can boost the productivity of the flourishers even further. Meanwhile, continual efforts must be made to improve services and infrastructural provision for the destitute – particularly given that these least productive residents of the province are among the most likely to leave for elsewhere.

In this context, the present project’s exploration of the productive potential of women, in relation to livelihoods and their social reproductive roles and networks, may generate findings that can inform the province’s development plans. For example, the findings may indicate how relatively small-scale economic activities offer the energy for renewal and may be usefully expanded. They may indicate the potential value of digital literacy or home gardens in supporting livelihoods and producing sustainable growth. In addition, the textured information that may be provided about the culture of local clinics, as well as the care challenges faced by women-headed households, may inform provincial planning in relation to the provision of healthcare and social protection. To this end, a process for connecting the research findings to provincial policy-making should be established.

13. Reflections on the project proposal

13.1 Summary of the project proposal¹⁵

South Africa's eastern seaboard was a centre of the Covid-19 pandemic in Africa, with estimated death rates exceeding 750 per 100,000 people. The pandemic devastated rural communities in this region; the under-resourced health system in the Eastern Cape province largely collapsed; and social cohesion was damaged under tough lockdown conditions. Community rituals and events such as funerals were deemed potential super-spreader events by policy-makers and were heavily policed, creating fear and disruption in communities – and undermining extra-household relations among communities and with relatives in urban areas who have helped to sustain rural communities. In this respect, survival in the impoverished rural Eastern Cape – in a social economy damaged by the structural violence of colonialism; the imposition of a migrant labour system; and repressive Bantustan governance – has come to largely depend on proximity to strong, socially connected women with access to welfare grants, migrant remittances and informal sources of income.

Against this background, the early state responses to the pandemic which pathologised custom and individualised the management and control of the pandemic were largely unsuccessful at protecting rural people from illness and the economic fall-out of lockdown. Rural women suffered disproportionately. Their rates of Covid-19-related infection and death have been higher and their exposure to poverty greater. Furthermore, they experienced heightened vulnerability as their ability to draw on social networks to secure food, money, medicine, and protection from mistreatment was severed even as their responsibility for care in the household mounted; and as increased alcohol abuse among men (at home, under lockdown) and confinement to domestic spaces rendered them increasingly susceptible to gender based violence.

In this context, the aim of this project is to determine how women in the rural Eastern Cape have been affected by the pandemic through longitudinal ethnographic case studies, which will explore their experiences of accessing healthcare; finding economic support in the formal and informal economies; and striving to mitigate the “thinning” of social relations and cohesion during the pandemic.

In 2020, rural women in the Eastern Cape used the metaphor *ukuvalo isango*, (“closing the gate”) to describe their experience under Covid-19 regulations of being trapped behind their garden gates and excluded from access to basic services, including health care. The present research will be an early step towards building policy and infrastructure that can “re-open the gate” (*ukuvula isango*). The research will focus on uncovering strategies and avenues for women to build back stronger, with greater resilience and health protection than before. Women in these areas have already demonstrated their readiness for such rebuilding through partnerships they have undertaken with the state and other actors – such as in support of Covid-19 vaccination campaigns in rural areas.

The model for engagement that underpins the project is a “people’s science” approach. People’s science is an innovative methodology that foregrounds the value of local community epistemologies, customs, and perspectives in adapting biomedical or dominant economic approaches so that they can be effective. Its utility has been proven in public health crises in areas of weak institutional governance – for example, during the Ebola crisis in West Africa in 2013-2016, when a number of effective prevention strategies were “co-produced” at the household and community levels, deploying Western biomedical and scientific knowledge in line with the precepts of local custom and practice. The approach also has application in the economic sphere, where external market models are often pitted

¹⁵ This sub-section is drawn from the text of the original proposal for the project submitted to the funder, the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) of Canada.

against household or community or informal economics as opposing rather than integrated spheres. In this regard, the dominance of the distribution base in the economy of rural Eastern Cape is often underestimated in rural development projects, suggesting that a more integrated model for rebuilding might be found in the application of a people's science approach, especially one that focuses on augmenting women's strategies.

Accordingly, the present research project seeks to explore and document women's lives before, during and after the pandemic to identify trends and triggers that have elevated or harmed their livelihood prospects and health status. In particular, it will explore dependencies on the state and the biomedical model and how these might be transformed into more locally sustainable approaches and strategies so that future external shocks, such as pandemics, might be better managed by and for women. The project will further exploring how new and innovative approaches and strategies, developed through the co-production of solutions and action by local women and other stakeholders and partners might help them to rebuild better, especially in the fields of public health and livelihoods.

The research will follow the lives, and livelihoods and health strategies of 300 women in some of the poorest communities in rural South Africa over the course of a year to map, trace and document how folk models and local practices and beliefs are shaping the social economy of health, labour and well-being for women in the shadow of the Covid-19 pandemic. The results and insights generated from this bottom-up research will be used to assess the effectiveness (or otherwise) of prevailing policies and development practices in the fields of health and economic development. In addition, having identified how new forms of knowledge and practice have been created at the interface of everyday social life and development planning, the project will aim to foster new democratic channels for communication, action and impact that may uplift rural women and their communities.

The project has been designed around the engagement of researchers who are either from the communities in which the research is focused or have long-term experience of living in similar settings elsewhere in the Eastern Cape. The team-members are fluent in the Xhosa language; known in the local communities; and trained in social sciences, including gender studies. The vast majority of those on the research team, more than 90%, are black African, indigenous researchers from formerly disadvantaged communities. The project will train these individuals and help them to develop their professional capacities and advance their careers as emerging researchers and development practitioners.

13.2 Reflecting on the proposal¹⁶

The funder of the present project has emphasised the importance of the role played by labour in livelihoods; as well as, the role of medical science in health. So, these are issues that must be addressed by the research in the field.

It is Important to be specific about the categories of women who should be interviewed. Factors that should shape the categories include: age; social status; marital status; occupation (formal or informal); dependents (children, grandchildren and others); and educational level. The influence of these factors may be adjusted in the findings according to local demographics, bearing in mind that the size of the various cohorts (by category) can affect the relevance and impact of these factors at the local level.

The narrative of the African life-cycle from childhood to adolescence to youth and seniority should be identified and acknowledged in the narratives produced by the life histories. In this regard it is important to understand the difference between social age and chronological age among local communities. The two are not necessarily the same, which can create tensions. For example, older

¹⁶ This section is based on a plenary discussion at the workshop.

women who are entitled to state pensions may enjoy less status than some younger women, whose social standing is not recognised by the state in the form of a pension.

In addition, it should be noted that structures of seniority within families were challenged and undermined during the pandemic, when young people became responsible for accessing grants under Covid-19 and exhibited different responses to the lockdown measures to those of their older family members. A common view was that the young seemed oblivious to the suffering of the elderly at this time. Against this background, the research allows for longitudinal analysis that may identify changing social relations within households and even the changing shape of African families in terms of who has entered and who has left. Such analysis may challenge the assumptions that there has been a trajectory from cohesion to thinning to renewed cooperation over the period of the pandemic and its aftermath. The trajectory may vary from area to area.

Similarly, the notion that the pandemic accentuated violent relations that were already embedded may be challenged by the research findings. In a similar vein, the present focus on gender-based violence as a main scourge of South Africa society may be seen as diverting attention from the country's histories of violence within and among communities. In this regard, rather than asking leading questions about increased or decreased violence, the researchers may do better to ask the more general question: What is different now?

After 1994, there was a drive towards urbanisation across South Africa – but the jobs on offer there were found to be precarious and there was a continued connection to the rural. However, under Covid-19 and the ensuing government lockdown, the migrant labour culture in which the urban and the rural had remained connected in many ways was seriously disrupted. In this regard, a number of interesting questions may be asked:

- Has insecurity and the official attack on custom during the pandemic led to a nostalgia for “tradition”?
- Did the restrictions on returning home for funerals under Covid-19, even as the death toll mounted, lead to a widening rift between urban and rural in the lives of many South Africans?
- Contrary to the notion of heightened socio-economic vulnerability in the wake of the pandemic, has a new form of DIY ruralism emerged as land and the agrarian have become more dominant in the rural setting?
- If so, what is the character of this ruralism in terms of its agency and its capacity to produce resilience and absorb dependents?
- Does the emergence of a DIY ruralism herald a severing of the urban/rural connection?
- As ties to the cities have weakened, how has the social been reconstituted in rural areas that were already quite isolated?

The responses adopted by the South African government to Covid-19 were shaped in the context of dominant market-based and bio-medical discourses. The model proposed economists and doctors as the experts – the ministerial advisory committee established to address the pandemic comprised 51 doctors and medical science academics, and not a single social scientist.¹⁷ In a number of ways, the effectiveness of the bio-medical model with its modernist focus on individual, rather than broader social, behaviour was confirmed under Covid-19, particularly in relation to the ways in which the public health and vaccination programmes based on this model seemed to achieve their goals. At the same time, however, economic models which are increasingly fed by big data have apparently failed to

¹⁷ Mark Paterson, “Covid-19 response – Where are the social scientists?”, *University World News*, 30 April 2020.

produce a recipe for recovery outside the financial markets. Furthermore, the bio-medical (and authoritarian) focus on ensuring correct individual behaviour failed to address the cultural concerns of many people living in rural areas and characterised such residents as inherently disobedient.

Against this background, the present project will test the validity of the dominant economic and bio-medical discourses that have been deployed and the effectiveness of their prescriptions in social contexts in rural parts of South Africa. It will further will seek to produce a greater understanding of the regimes of value on the ground in these places and the ways in which these may be able to produce more appropriate models for safeguarding people's health and livelihoods.

14. Reflections on the workshop and going into the field¹⁸

One of the goals of the Women RISE project is to support the production of a cadre of young sociological and anthropological researchers in South Africa, where there is a history of women anthropologists being marginalised and having to work harder to prove themselves within the discipline.

14.1 Producing life histories

In entering the field and adopting an auto-ethnographical approach, researchers need to consider their own positionality carefully. In talking to local women, they are not just talking woman-to-woman given their position of relative privilege.

The researchers should be creative in the ways in which they interrogate local residents and produce life histories. A key aim should be to capture the structure of feeling at the local level – so, it is important to capture key quotes after each meeting and interview. These should be recorded in a journal in which the researcher may reflect on their encounters on a daily basis – and then produce a weekly reflection from the daily accounts and a monthly reflection from the weekly accounts.

Interviewers need not try and track a person's life history in chronological order. An interview may start by asking the interviewee to talk about the most important events in their lives. After the trust of interviewees has been gained, one way of producing an account of their lives may be to ask them to, literally, draw a picture of the passage of their own lives, including their significant achievements, as well as those events and factors that have impeded them. Photographs and iconic images that have appeared in the press or online may be shown as a way of prompting interviewees to talk about and map out their lives. The goal must be to access the interviewees' own understanding of their lives and the kinds of meaning that they attribute to their experiences before, during and since the Covid-19 crisis.

In order to capture the structure of feeling offered by the interviewees, the researchers may present their findings in a number of formats – including even a novelistic one. They should also present a range of media to frame the life histories, including, as ethically appropriate, photographs and songs and other local cultural products produced in response to the Covid-19 experience. For example, one song that recently became popular on the ground declares: “[South African President] Ramaphosa doesn't like men to have jobs – he wants us to be idle.”

In support of the life histories, the researchers should conduct stakeholder interviews. These could be with an old person about the history of the village, or may relate to particular local issues, such as GBV, stock theft, or the impacts of decisions to impose new administrative divisions which have caused problems.

¹⁸ This section is based on a plenary discussion at the workshop.

Researchers need to interrogate the relationship between traditional and western medicines – for example, there may be stigma attached to using Western medicine. The ways in which different forms of medicine are used and the ways in which different forms of healthcare are enacted should be interrogated in order to understand the extent and nature of the co-production of a people's science in the local area.

The researchers should interrogate the specificity of people's cultural practices (and how the government's establishment of one-size-fits-all regulations in response to the pandemic failed to address this). For example, no two deaths are the same. If the funeral is for a respected elder, one speaker at the event is not considered sufficient. Interestingly, local police sent to enforce the rules at the time understood such concerns and would look away.

14.2 Practical concerns

Researchers will need to visit a number of sites in order to fulfil their mandates. Researchers will need to ensure that their arena of investigation in the local area is as wide as it needs to be, which may entail further negotiations with local residents so that they can move from one area to the next. Such research may involve snooping around neighbouring hospitals and neighbourhoods to follow up on stories one has been told.

The researchers will need to plan out their weeks.

The researchers will need to strategise to preserve the data they collect – uploading it to the cloud whenever possible. In tandem with the project administrators, they will need to take appropriate steps to ensure appropriate confidentiality of the accounts that are produced.

The research contracts set the terms for expected deliverables and the payments that will be made for these and the schedule for payments, as well as the rules that need to be followed when claiming expenses.

Information has been provided about the laptops that have been provided for the researchers, including in relation to their access to the cloud, their anti-virus capabilities and the terms under which they are insured.

Although the project's principal investigators and steering committee are ultimately responsible for the project's implementation, including by overseeing the ethics of this, the researchers are responsible for their own behaviours and safety on the ground. They should ensure that they do not contravene local cultural rights and should take reasonable precautions in relation to their own safety.

In cases of difficulty, the researchers should contact their immediate research supervisors, who are responsible for their pastoral welfare, as a first point of contact. A WhatsApp group will be established so that the researchers can chat openly among themselves in a non-judgmental way about the kinds of challenges they face and any useful advice they can offer.

14.3 Writing and communications

The researchers need to provide appropriate biographies and images of themselves for the online platform promoting the project. They should also provide a short summary of their own interest in the project. The online platform will also offer a site for the researchers to post new materials, feedback and images from their work in the field. The online and social media engagement, which will also include an Instagram and Facebook presence, will be shaped by the researchers themselves with appropriate support.

The profile of the researchers will be raised through the production and publication of evidence-based written reports which may take the form of blogs and published articles. These pieces, which will be produced with the support of an experience journalist on the project's communications team, should tell compelling stories. Media partnerships will be established to ensure their targeted publication. These pieces will also provide building blocks of writing that may inform the researcher's own contributions to the project, as well as future academic work that they may undertake in this field of inquiry. The conclusions of the project's research will be broadcast in the form of opinion pieces.