Fostering local wellbeing in South African communities
WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

CLIMATE CRISIS
Southern Africa will get hotter throughout the region as the climate shifts. Some parts of it will get wetter at times of the year; other parts will get drier. Overwhelm-ingly, it will do so unpredictably as weather patterns become more extreme, more changeable, more volatile. The aftershocks of these changes will hit every aspect of city life: the availability and cost of food, water, and en-ergy; people's health; infrastructure; transport and gen-eral mobility; people's settlements; job prospects and how local economies function; and how municipalities govern. Climate change will add another layer of stress to the existing development challenges that are concen-trated in the region's cities and towns.

YOUTH BULGE
The World Bank reckons that a fifth of Africa's population is between the ages of 15 and 24. This is equally a blessing and a curse because 40% of them are pouring their youth and vigour into the workforce, but that means that the remaining 60% are largely aimless and frustrated by being out of work. As Africa's population continues to boom – from today's 1.2 billion, and more than doubling that to 2.5 billion by 2050 – the 'youth bulge' will continue to swell, along with all the challenges and opportunities that will bring.

SLUM URBANISM
Villages, towns and small cities in Af-rica face a precarious and uncertain future: the bulk of the continent’s population growth will happen here in these smaller settlements, rather than in the mega-cities, as the continent’s city-dwellers are expected to reach 1.2 billion people by the middle of this cen-tury. Most of the urban sprawl that will spill out from this growth will not be formally built, managed and organised settlements. Rather, they will be part of the ongoing ‘slum growth’ that makes up most of the continent’s urban set-tlements.

RESOURCE DEPLETION
Our increasing demand for natu-ral resources like water, food and energy, means that we're using up more than nature can keep sup-plying. This ramps up the pressure within communities as more peo-ple have to compete for smaller amounts of available necessities.

UNDER-CAPACITATED LOCAL GOVERNMENT
Most local governments around the world don’t have the internal capacity, budget, or resources to adequately meet the mounting social, environmental and financial crises that are directly impacting their constituents. In a developing world context, these crises are made that much more daunt-ing by the development challenges as towns and associated infrastructure and human settlements grow.

FINANCIAL STRESS AND INSTABILITY
The world is awash in debt – over $200 trillion dollars of global debt is underpinned by only $70 trillion of actual goods and services (global GDP). Since the 2009 crisis, most governments and pri-vate households have gone deeper into the red. In 2014, the World Bank named South Africans "the world's biggest borrowers"; 86% of whom took out loans (global average is 40%), with over half of them struggling to repay home loans, 60% not meeting monthly credit card payments, and 11 million over-indebted. With one of the high-est Gini coefficients (measure of inequality) in the world, most South Africans face mounting eco-nomic stresses, as the global (and South African) growth engine grinds to a halt.
**WHAT WE DID**

- Funding proposal approved by SA National Treasury and the Flanders Government
- Project inception workshop (14 & 15 August)
- Recruitment and selection of FAs in Kokstad and Bergrivier
- Bergrivier FAs undergo survey training
- Bergrivier FAs complete control (baseline) survey of 200 small businesses in Velddrif
- FAs in both towns monitor BRAND and K’Mali usage and coach network members
- Explored ways to bolster (Piketberg/Goedverwacht) local food economy with BRAND bakkie
- Custodianship of BRAND and K’Mali transferred to locally based entities
- Final documentation and reporting concluded
- FLOW-GreenWin workshop takes place in Piketberg (15 June)
- Final project documentation and reporting concluded
- Bergrivier FAs (COHORT 2): ENERGY AND WATER MODULE

### RESEARCH & BASELINE SURVEY

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<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
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<td>Flow team</td>
<td>KOKSTAD &amp; BERGRIVIER FAs MAP LOCAL BUSINESSES, MAKE SHORT MOVIES &amp; ENROL MEMBERS FOR CURRENCY LAUNCH</td>
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<td>KOKSTAD FAs &amp; BERGRIVIER FAs (COHORT 1): BASIC TRAINING</td>
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Fostering local wellbeing in South African communities

AUTHORS
Leonie Joubert/ Mandi Smallhorne/ Anna Cowen/ John Ziniades
with contributions from the rest of the FLOW team

PHOTOGRAPHERS
Sydelle Willow Smith/ Sam Reinders/
Max Bastard/ Daniel Goodman
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Two years; two different regions with remarkably similar challenges; 28 out-of-work youth; some deeply rural, some from bustling small towns; an unlikely collaboration of academics, local municipality, development practitioners, and plucky funders; one great big out-the-box project that pushed the boundaries of development work.

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**WHO WE ARE**

**Anna Cowen**
is an architect and urbanist, and has spent over two decades working in social change, focusing on regenerative and participatory design, strategy and development. She and John make up Mestfield, conceptualisers and implementers of FLOW.

**John Ziniades**
is an electrical engineer by training, and listed his first Internet company on the JSE at 28. With several tech start-ups behind him, he turned his business acumen to seeing how technology could tackle society’s tough challenges.

**Gina Ziervogel**
is an architect, housing specialist and urbanist. As a principal of Lees & Short Associates Architects she has grappled with a broad array of issues related to inclusive sustainable development and spatial transformation.

**Joanne Lees**
has 25 years’ experience as an architect, housing specialist and urbanist. As a principal of Lees & Short Associates Architects she has managed applied action research at FLOW.

**Daniel Goodman**
is a graphic designer. He helped develop and facilitate the FLOW programme, applying creative expertise to the FLOW programme, applying creative expertise to the FLOW programme, applying creative expertise to the FLOW programme.

**Penny Price**
is a business and community currency practitioner, organiser and facilitator. She has spearheaded South Africa’s community currencies movement.

**Piet Bosman**
is a farmer, life-long student, linguist and inventor. He has a broad array of creative inventions, including the green Ambassador team.

**Martine Visser**
is a Professor in the School of Economics, and a Research Chair at the African Climate and Development Initiative at the University of Cape Town. She has set up evaluation and analytical components of the research for baseline survey.

**Ian Schaffers**
is a small-scale farmer in the Bergrivier Municipal area, with a background in Agricultural Science. He is Bergrivier local co-ordinator and is currently designing a longer-term FLOW programme for the area.

**Will Ruddick**
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**WHERE WE’VE COME FROM**

Most FLOW team members met each other through working together (in different combinations) on three unconnected projects in two regions on opposite sides of the country. They discovered a shared passion for exploring practical and grounded approaches to solving big societal challenges, whilst at the same time being interested in theory. The networks of trust developed in these earlier projects laid sound foundations for the challenging yet exhilarating ride that was FLOW.

The Bergrivier Municipality’s Climate Change Adaptation Plan was created in 2012 through collaboration between the Climate Change Sub-Directorate of the Western Cape Department of Environmental Affairs and Development Planning as part of their Municipal Support Programme (MSP), the University of Cape Town’s Climate Systems Analysis Group and the Department of Environmental and Geographical Science, and the Bergrivier Municipality. Penny Price, Gina Ziervogel, Tracey Stone and Hanlie Linde were part of this process.

The ACDI Climate Knowledge Network (CKN) was an 18-month trans-disciplinary process initiated in 2012 and facilitated by Anna Cowen and John Ziniades, which aimed to bring together 15 UCT academics from diverse backgrounds with five local practitioners, to come up with climate and development related research questions, focused in the Bergrivier region. Gina Ziervogel, Martine Visser, Tracey Stone, Penny Price and Ian Schaffers were part of this process.

The Kokstad Integrated Sustainable Development Plan (ISDP) was funded by the Development Bank of South Africa and created by a team led by City Think Space (2012). Anna Cowen, John Ziniades, Jo Lees and John Ziniades pioneered the Green Ambassador program during this process. Piet Bosman and Dom Vandenhoudt were also part of the Green Ambassador team.
FLOW worked in two South African municipalities simultaneously – the Bergrivier Municipality in the Western Cape, just an hour and a half’s drive north of Cape Town, and the Greater Kokstad Municipality in KwaZulu-Natal, a three-hour trip south west from Durban. Piketberg and Kokstad are the administrative centres of each municipality respectively and they include a number of smaller towns, villages and rural settlements. The FLOW Ambassadors came from their respective municipalities, infusing the project with a diversity of rich, lived experience.

Bergrivier Municipality

If Piketberg were a person, it would be an introvert, with some extrovert ways. It would be a bit shy, but kind and friendly. It’s got a lot to offer, although it may need some help to reach its full potential. There’s a bold personality beneath its retiring front.

Sometimes it can be a bit busy, and it loves to gossip. On a bad day, it might be a bit prone to self-medicating, mostly on booze.

Some people say it’s a ‘skew town with upright people’.

Piketberg started as a settler outpost, and many of its population are the descendants of the slaves who stoked this early agricultural economy. Today it’s the administrative capital of the Bergrivier Municipality. Its population is small, just 17 000 in all. The residential areas still largely echo the segregation and apartheid-era town planning policies which have middle-class mostly white folk in the ‘better’ part of town, and lower-income people of colour in the less-resourced side of town. Unlike many towns and cities in the country, though, Piketberg doesn’t have any informal settlements, because of the municipality’s strict enforcement of its policy on informal dwellings: if a shack goes up, within 24 hours it’s taken down.

Globally, the overarching trend is for rural people to trickle slowly towards bigger cities. This part of the world is no different. So, in terms of bigger cities being more attractive to rural folk, Piketberg is to its smaller neighbouring towns, what Cape Town is to Piketberg: the place that promises greater prospects of jobs, access to schooling and housing, education, good healthcare and the like. Its bigger gravity slowly pulls people in.

The catchment area around Piketberg, whose population is estimated at around 15 000, includes communities like those in and around the towns and villages of Redelinghuys, Eendekuil, Aurora, Veldrif, Porterville, Dwarskersbos, Laaiplek, Goedverwacht and Wittewater. The entire Bergrivier District’s population comes in at about 70 000.

It’s a curious mix of small independent businesses, with their hand-painted and decorated shop signs and store fronts, and big national chain stores with their distinctive branding.

The N7 highway is a thumping artery of trade and traffic that passes along the edge of the town: northwards, to the Namibia Tourism Route; and southwards, to ‘the Cape’. Like many of the grain trucks that thunder along this asphalt artery, occasionally dusting seed onto the roadside which grain-eating birds descend on in hungry packs, so the passing N7 traffic clearly allows some economic benefits to spill over into the town.

WHERE FLOW WORKED

FLOW worked in two South African municipalities simultaneously – the Bergrivier Municipality in the Western Cape, just an hour and a half’s drive north of Cape Town, and the Greater Kokstad Municipality in KwaZulu-Natal, a three-hour trip south west from Durban. Piketberg and Kokstad are the administrative centres of each municipality respectively and they include a number of smaller towns, villages and rural settlements. The FLOW Ambassadors came from their respective municipalities, infusing the project with a diversity of rich, lived experience.
Greater Kokstad Municipality

On the long drive from eThekwini (Durban) to Kokstad, the terrain shifts from tropical to temperate. As the road twists inland at Port Shepstone, the tarmac is littered with sweet debris, mashed bits of sugar cane dribbled from trucks carrying the harvest up the national road, the N2, towards eThekwini. The single-lane highway heads west from the coast through a tunnel of commercial forests, and the outside temperature drops steadily as the Drakensberg mountains draw closer.

The approach to Kokstad winds through a grand sweep of foothill country, soft contours of grass curving away on either side, dotted with cattle grazing dreamily. The N2 slingshots past Kokstad, twisting east and south towards Mthatha in the Eastern Cape. You turn right up Hope Street towards the clear outline of Mount Currie, crossing the Mzintlava River and approaching the town through a brawling throng of trucks and minibus taxis.

Kokstad is a frontier town, a short drive from the borders between the KwaZulu-Natal and Eastern Cape provinces, and between Lesotho and South Africa. The town is a junction, a regional hub, a waystation for trucks and tourists. Go straight through town and curve right, and you'll reach the Drakensberg town of Underberg and after that, the Midlands. Turn left onto the Matatiele Road, and drive through Quacha's Nek into Lesotho. Whichever road you choose, you'll pass guesthouse after guesthouse, serving business people, tourists and mountain hikers.

With nearly 66,000 residents, according to the 2013 Census, it’s said to be the fastest-growing town in KwaZulu-Natal (KZiN), drawing people from the Eastern Cape to the south, as well as other parts of KZiN, seeking work and education (in 2007 Oprah Winfrey opened a school, one of a number of good schools in the area). The largest business sector here by far is agriculture.

Looking east from a vantage point above the golf course in the late afternoon, the town lies in a sun-drenched bowl of cradling hills. The middle-class suburbs sweep down towards the centre of town, where muti (natural medicine) shops and shwe-shwe boutiques cram the alleys across Main Road from the large chain stores.

On a hill rising on the northern side of town is the township, Shayamoya (Hit the Wind, or ‘Windy Place’), with row upon row of regimented state-built little houses. Water supply is erratic, and a few years ago there was sewage running in the streets due to sanitation failures. Chaos reigned for days in May 2016 when residents shut down the area in protest at poor service delivery, amid allegations of officials misusing funds.

Zinc-and-cardboard shacks have sprung up on a slope to the east, a hill crowned with rocks painted white by followers of the Shembe faith. On the other side of the hill is a cramped area called Bhongweni and Horseshoe, where, the Shayamoya people say, ‘they take drugs’, and ‘it’s not safe’.

In the undulating, grassy country beyond the town are other small communities within the greater Kokstad catchment area, like the small town of Franklin and rural settlements like Pakkies. Kokstad draws in people from here, as well as far away, to make up the vibrant mix of energies that give the town a special frontier dynamism.

MS
WHAT'S THE THEORY?

FLOW was built upon three intersecting elements that are seen as foundational to supporting communities to develop and harness their transformative capacity to shape the future/s in which they want to live:

1. re-connection to life support systems (tapping into the essence of life)
2. agency (mastering our own destiny) and
3. social cohesion (the ties that bind).

Growth in each one of these areas supports the other, becoming a supporting cycle that builds greater strength within individuals and communities. When people and communities are fit and healthy in these ways, they are more likely not only to recover from disaster, but to thrive in the face of uncertainty, and actively create the kinds of communities and cities in which they would like to live.

FLOW’s goal was to team up with communities in the Bergrivier and Kokstad regions and to strengthen these traits within them. They did so by working with out-of-work youth who have few study opportunities or work prospects, to groom them to be ‘ambassadors’ for social and environmental change in their towns. The project also set about starting a new conversation around how we exchange those services into our homes and communities.

Core to FLOW was finding ways to allow people and communities to re-connect with the natural systems that give us these life-supporting resources, and the human systems that bring these services into our homes and communities.

Agency (mastering our own destiny):

- supporting creativity in individuals so that they may actively engage in crafting the kinds of lives, communities and settlements in which they wish to live.

When a person has a sense that they are the masters of their own destiny – that they are independent, self-reliant and self-sufficient – then they might have a sense of healthy human agency.

Without that sense of agency, we become victims in an uncertain world, and passive recipients of what the state, or teachers, or parents, or preachers, or bosses decide for us, in terms of how our cities and settlements grow and are managed. With too much agency, we become entitled and self-serving.

Three groups of unemployed youths, from the age of 18, but also some as old as 35, agreed to work with FLOW, as part of a process that aimed to catalyse engaged, creative, and contributing citizens. The hope was that they would become the kind of people who influence their neighbourhoods, towns and local government processes.

The aim was to work with out-of-work youth, local potential leaders, businesses, and people in the municipality – to nurture within each of them a person who can be an agent of change in their own lives, institutions, and communities.

Social cohesion (the ties that bind):

strengthening community bonds so that people are tightly knitted to one another and supportive of each other.

Wealth, when we are hungry, may not take the shape of cash in our pockets, but rather it may be a neighbour who cooks us dinner each night. It may be an aunt who can take care of our baby so we can go to work and earn a living. Or it may be a friend who can drive us to hospital when there’s an emergency. These are examples of wealth – a different kind of wealth from the usual way of measuring it – which lead to wellbeing.

When people and communities pull together in ways that allow them to thrive and prosper, then they have a sense of social cohesion.

FLOW’s third pillar was geared towards growing community ties, and strengthening that social cohesion though the broader Bergrivier and Kokstad regions, working with the youth ambassadors and the community currencies to foster this connectedness.

LJ & AC

‘Anti-fragile’ and ‘bouncing forward’

Being ‘anti-fragile’ and ‘bouncing forward’ are ideas that inspire FLOW. ‘Anti-fragile’ was coined by writer Nassim Taleb in his 2012 book of the same name, and elaborates the potential for humans to thrive and grow stronger in the face of difficulty, uncertainty and complexity. The phrase ‘bouncing forward’ was suggested by Keith Shaw, a community resilience expert, and social science professor at the University of Northumbria in the UK. He describes two main approaches to ideas around resilience. One is the survival approach where vulnerable people or communities or organisations recover, bounce back, and then persist after a crisis, and they do this through taking action before disaster strikes. The other approach is about ‘bouncing forward’: this is about more than just surviving, but about ‘attending to possibilities for life,’ while holding out for the possibility of optimistic alternatives centred on hope, renewal and transformation. It means adapting, innovating and trying new things. AC & LJ

Ecosynomics: the science of abundance

Ecosynomics is a term coined by James Ritchie-Dunham, of the Institute for Strategic Clarity, and means ‘the principles of collaboration’. It points to the emerging field of understanding abundance-based agreements between people that lead to greater well-being, harmony and vibrancy, and is evidenced all around the world and across cultures. The project has drawn on the Ecosynomics framework to inform FA curriculum design, as well as the way the FLOW team work together. ‘This framework makes it possible to see the often hidden, underlying agreements that most affect the human experience, enabling people to choose the fundamental assumptions they accept, the structures and processes that result from those assumptions, and the behaviors they want to experience in their daily interactions with others,’ says Ritchie-Dunham. AC

On wellbeing

Ask the people of Kokstad, Piketberg and Goedverwacht what ‘wellbeing’ means, and this is what they say. It’s what happens when everyone is taken care of, and has the basics they need in life, such as food, water, and shelter. It’s when young people have good education, and the hope of a job one day. It’s when people look out for each other, and each person knows someone’s ‘got their back’. It comes with being in hearty health, both physically and mentally. When their neighbourhood is free of crime and abuse, that’s a well state to be in.

When people are free to explore ideas, express their opinions, and make choices for themselves, it happens in a community where there is fairness. Where people feel safe to explore and express their own selves, while respecting each other’s individuality. It happens when each person has a sense that they can provide for themselves. When a person has her hand on the tiller of her life, and can steer her way through the swells and troughs that come with the inevitable storms in life, rather than being tossed back and forth on heavy seas.

Wellbeing, in its fullness, is about a sense of happiness, peace, and having a degree of control over your life, they all agree. LJ

NAME RIEL dancers at the Snoek-en-Patat festival in Goedverwacht
For some youngsters born into the rural provinces, the razzmatazz of the big city is irresistible. They want college degrees and professional jobs and houses in the suburbs. There’s no need to return once they’ve got that. But for many others, there’s no escaping the comparatively lacklustre economic prospects of their home towns. They can’t leave – either because they lack the means, the will, or the breadth of vision. Survival becomes paramount. These are the youth most at risk. Three groups of such young adults in and around Piketberg in the Western Cape, and Kokstad in the Eastern Cape, agreed to work as FLOW Ambassadors, to test drive an initiative that would push them into a new realm of possibilities.

Leonie Joubert

Small is beautiful
Does money matter? Does wealth make us rich anymore?

Stephen Hawking, Astrophysicist

Lorita Majernie likes to call herself Loritha - ‘Loritha!’ she says, ponceing it up beneath twinkling eyes - because it ‘sounds more English.’

‘It’s softer on the tongue. You know, like the name Anna,’ she chuckles, her Afrikaans salted with the drum-rolling Rs of the platteland, ‘but in Cape Town you say Anne.’

If the 35-year-old ‘late bloomer’ could sit down with her 12-year-old self now, she’d have a thing or two to say to her.

She’d say: ‘don’t be so afraid!’

‘I was a fearful child…’

She’d say: ‘do what makes you happy. And study what you need to, to get yourself there.’

‘I wanted to be a social worker, but I didn’t have the right subjects at school. I just did what my friends did…’

She’d say: ‘grow where you’re planted, put your roots down deep, so that when the time comes, you’ll be ready.

When her time came, she wasn’t.

She’d say: ‘don’t be afraid to dream.

Now, seasoned by life and her dream of social work long abandoned, Loritha has other plans. She’d like to try her hand at motivational speaking, and after surviving some hard knocks in the past few years, she’s probably well qualified to do so.

She’d like to try her hand at motivational speaking, and after surviving some hard knocks in the past few years, she’s probably well qualified to do so.

Her father was a farm worker, and her mother, a huis hulp (house help, a domestic cleaner). She was a fearful youngster and wouldn’t ‘sleep out’ at friends’ houses. Loritha didn’t want to leave town or be far from her family. After school, she enrolled in a bookkeeping course at a college in Malmesbury, about 65km south of her hometown, Piketberg, but the distance was too far. It would have taken her 18 months to get her certificate.

‘I didn’t last six months.’

In the years since that first attempt at studying, Loritha supported herself as a cashier and then later in various management roles at the Win- kelshoek petrol station on the edge of town. She’s also become the single mother to four kids who she has taken into her care.

The first, her niece, joined her when one of her sisters had a third child, and couldn’t cope. Then, when that sister passed away in 2009, Loritha took on the other two older nephews. Not long after that, her mother passed away in 2010. Then an adult niece from another sister ran off to Cape Town to chase down a crystal meth habit, leaving behind an infant girl. Loritha took on this baby too. But it was while she was shouldering the darkest moments of them all, that she found herself recruited as a youth ambassador with the newly launched FLOW programme in October 2014.

It was then that the manslaughter charge resurfaced. It’d been brooding for two years, and in 2014 the cops finally decided to bring it to court.

‘Manslaughter’, she says, ‘and another charge of reckless and negligent driving.’

Dreaming small

Loritha’s story is not unusual. Soon after the programme took off, most of the team noted how stifling the lack of prospects can be for youngsters here. Many teenagers don’t know there are any prospects beyond Grade 7. There’s also a big dropout rate at Grade 9 (usually aged between 15 and 16).

When the FLOW organisers began this work in the Bergvliet area, they were struck by how these youngsters’ realm of possibilities had never grown beyond believing they could be more than farm labourers, or admin clerks, or be trained up as artisans at the PPC cement factory a few kilometres out of town. It never occurred to them that they might become a writer, or a musician, or an astronaut.

Many of the young people who could leave town, did. Some of the ambassadors’ school friends became dentists or lawyers, and now work in the city. The school leavers that couldn’t leave, stayed. Many of the young people who signed up for FLOW, did so because they were bored and wanted to get out of the house.

There’s a difference between those who have seen the world, and can choose to come back, and those who feel trapped. It’s the ones who might be trapped by circumstance – without the will or
means to study beyond high school, the lack of job opportunities, the fear of moving away – that are at risk of the apathy that comes from few prospects, and the hopelessness that follows.

‘Royal, but dressed like a vagrant’

They’d driven through to Moorreesburg to run an errand for her friend Margie. Loritha was nervous. It was the farthest she’d ever driven as a recently licensed driver, an hour’s drive from Piketberg.

She still can’t remember what happened, just that they’d stopped for KFC, and she was back behind the wheel and trying to cross an intersection.

‘The next thing, someone was asking if I was ok. ’

In the fortnight following the accident, Loritha’s world shrank to a tunnel-visioned dreamscape. Her right arm was shattered, her ribs buckled, with one lung punctured and slowly re-inflating. It was as if someone had turned the lights off, she says, cupping her hands on either sides of her face, like the blinkers on a horse’s bridle. Her sleep was stalked by images of scattered shoes, and a truck, and funerals.

‘Then one day a doctor asked if I was a believer, and said ‘there are some things in life that you can change and some things that you just have to accept…’

That’s when they told her that all the other passengers in the car had died.

‘It would have been Margie’s birthday today, the 8th of June,’ she says. Her eyes, hemmed with a line of dark kohl and a twinkle of glitter, are unreadable. Margie’s little boy, JJ, died in the ambulance en route to a paediatric hospital in Cape Town.

She says something about how she’s dealing with the guilt, although she seems peaceful. But when the charges finally brought her to court, she really thought she was going to be sent to jail.

Loritha was amongst the first intake of ambassadors on the FLOW programme, eight from Piketberg and ten from Kokstad, between the ages of 18 to 35. It was a young and initially timid group, but they rallied around her, becoming a surrogate family as the whole grim chapter unfolded. The group’s regular ‘check ins’ in the office across from a big agricultural supply store on Long Street became a safe space for her to show people how anxious she really was. On the days of court appearances, there’d be text messages flying back and forth.

‘I was prepared to plead guilty in the end, and then asked the state to withdraw the charges, on the basis that I was also badly injured, and that family had died in the accident, too. And so they did.’

Four years later, Loritha wants to be a motivational speaker. She’s also busy writing up her life story. The memoir is drafted in longhand and waiting the chance to be typed up on a computer.

Publishers want manuscripts to be typed, she knows that much.

‘It’s called Koninklik aangetrek soos a boemelaar. ’

Roughly: Royal, but dressed like a vagrant.

‘My father treated me like a princess when I was little. But I was chubby, and I had short hair, and people judge you on that.’

And they judge you for what your parents do, too. Her self-esteem wasn’t great. So much of what has happened in the FLOW programme has been about tackling that self-esteem stuff. Getting over the inferiority complex of being poor, of being a country bumpkin, of having few job prospects, little chance of study, and neither the will nor the means to escape to the big city. Because that’s where it’s all happening, right?

Maybe this is why she’s so specific: she wants to be a motivational speaker, and she wants to work in the local prison, telling people her story. If Loritha could sit down with her 12-year-old self, she’d have something else to say.

‘I’d say: you’re important.’

She’s at her most animated when she talks about the book, and about her aspirations to help others. And maybe this is her effort to mollify the last of the ghosts that remains after that dreadful intersection crossing on 28 August 2012.

‘Development... happens when people, however poor in money, get together, get organised, become sophisticated and go to scale. It happens when they are savvy and able to influence or change the course of events or the order of things locally, nationally or even globally - or are themselves able to become that order or part of it. Development... is that stage you reach when you are secure enough in yourself, individually or collectively, to become interdependent; when ‘I’ can emerge as ‘we’, and also when ‘we’ is inclusive of ‘them’. Getting organised is the foundation of all the other developmental goals we have set; it is the essence of good governance and of sustainable work; it empowers and opens doors; it makes you money and wins you respect.’

Nabeel Hamdi
Small change: About the art of practice and the limits of planning in cities, 2004 published by Earthscan
Hanlie Linde had a plan. The first group of youth ambassadors had just finished their nine-month pilot phase and she wanted to give them a bit of pomp and ceremony. Flags, gowns, the whole gedeloe (deal). 

‘I thought: many of these youngsters will never have given a real graduation ceremony at a university. For them, this is big.’

So she borrowed an enormous candle from the church across the road, and summoned everyone to the municipal Council Chambers. They dusted off their old council robes to glam up the proceedings. ‘We looked like proper clowns,’ Hanlie is tickled by the memory.

Each ambassador carried a small candle, which they lit off the central candle, while Hanlie told them a story about spreading light in their community, and reminded them that this central candle was symbolic of the Bergrivier Municipality. ‘They lit their candle here with us, and we will always keep this memory.’

Then, each one had to stand before the council and give a five-minute speech. They were so different, compared to how they were at the start of the programme. They hadn’t just learned a whole lot of useful skills, like storytelling, movie editing, survey methods and mapping. ‘They had shifted in their “sense of self”.’

They were upright! They looked people in the eye, they had shoulders to the project, managed to get money directly from the municipality’s frugal budget. ‘I thought: many of these youngsters will never have had access to the Council Chambers the way the Bergrivier group did, and so didn’t have a chance to spread their wings as individuals in the same way, or get such direct access to the democratic process. But their growth in confidence was measured in different ways. What does Hanlie think is one of the most important things for these emerging adults? They must think that they can do more, be more, and become more.

Unfortunately, though, the Kokstad ambassadors didn’t have the same champion within their local municipality as the Cape crowd had in Hanlie. They didn’t have access to the Council Chambers the way the Bergrivier group did, and so didn’t have a chance to have the experience of spreading light in their community, and reminded them of the importance of spreading light in their community.

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Maybe there is truth in what novelist, poet, and playwright GK Chesterton once said: ‘There is the great lesson of Beauty and the Beast, that a thing must be loved before it is lovable.’ Maybe these youth need others to believe in them, so that they can believe in themselves.
Former FLOW Ambassador Marlin Swartz (20) wants to be a lawyer. He’s been accepted at a university in Port Elizabeth, about 800 km south-east of home, but problems with accommodation scuppered his plans to start this year. He’ll try again for 2017.

Meanwhile, he’s working as a cashier at a local supermarket and for fun, hangs out in the local library or plays Playstation with his friends. Sometimes, he tutors a friend who didn’t finish school because of family problems. ‘His mother couldn’t afford his school clothing so he dropped out (at Grade 9). His mother is also a heavy drinker. He decided ‘that’s it’. I tried to get him into a college here, but he’s not very keen. ’

‘The big city is not for me;’ says Loritha Majerrie. The traffic bothers her, and she loves how peaceful and safe she feels in Piketberg.

Her experience isn’t unique. Ian Schaffers, FLOW Ambassador co-ordinator in Bergrivier, chose to return to his home community of Goedverwacht, about 20 minutes’ drive from Piketberg, after he completed his agricultural studies in Stellenbosch, because he ‘likes to sleep with the windows open at night’.

But at the same time, there’s this notion that city people are sophisticated, and that these Bergrivier youngsters are ‘country bumpkins’. Loritha’s family moved from a farm into Piketberg when she was about six. She still recalls the culture shock. ‘It always felt for me that I was lower, because I came from the farm,’ she says. ‘Farm people felt less than town people. Town people have that manner about them, that makes us feel that way.’

Municipal manager Hanlie Linde recalls a conversation with a man named Gus, from the Piket-Bo-Berg farming community in the mountains overlooking the town. ‘He told me how difficult it was for him to switch from a farm school to a town school, because they don’t see themselves on the same playing field as town kids. They didn’t have the opportunities that town kids had. He stood out like a sore thumb when he came to town. Even a few kilometres for these farm kids is a big step.’

‘The municipality sets aside 15% of its housing projects for farm applicants, so that farm people can move to town if they need to. ’It must be amazingly difficult for them,’ Hanlie says.

As Loritha has grown into her skin as a more confident adult, she’s shed the inferiority of her farm-kid origins. ‘I can say now that I don’t feel like a plaas jaapie (country bumpkin) in town. I feel like a city girl in town; she dissolves into self-deprecating mirth. LJ’

Culture shock: even though some farming families may only live 20km from town, they often feel like they don’t fit in

Motivating his friend has been frustrating. The school dropout rate across the Bergriver area is already high, according to Hanlie, and the youngsters in the rural areas around Piketberg are even more at risk than those here in town.

This is farming country. Sweet potato and potato are big, and nearly half of the regional economy comes from tilling the soil, or from parallel supply chains.

Many farm kids will go to a near-by junior school, but come Grade 10 they’ll head into the nearest town to finish high school. This is partly because the state is shutting down smaller rural schools, leaving the young people with no option other than to become boarders. Hostel from Monday to Friday, home for the weekends.

This is where the dropout happens, according to Hanlie. ‘A mother who works on a farm must now pay R800 a month to get her child home every weekend. But she only earns a salary of R1 000. There’s no ways she’s going to spend that money on transport. So what happens?’

The child stays on the farm, and becomes a labourer at the age of 16.

LJ

COUNTRY DWELLERS AND THE CLASH OF CULTURES

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The modern African city is young, informal, and making its own way in the world.

That means its population is largely younger than 24; and most of its residents live in shanty towns – built by them, for them, with no help or planning from the state. The economy that they live off, and thrive in, is largely an informal one, off the radar of national tax collectors and planners. This means that city managers need to forget the idea that they – as regional representatives of the state – are building and developing cities for their inhabitants. Residents are building the cities themselves, and municipalities are mostly just responding in trying to then deliver services, infrastructure and so on.

This is according to urbanist Professor Edgar Pieterse at the University of Cape Town’s African Centre for Cities (ACC) in the book Rogue Urbanism, who writes that Africa is the fastest urbanising region in the world, with a population that will more than double by 2030 (reaching 742 million), and reach 1.2 billion by mid-century, quoting the United Nations’ HABITAT figures. Already, almost two-thirds of city dwellers on the continent are living in shanty town-type conditions – ‘informal, auto-constructed, makeshift shelters’ – writes Pieterse, and almost all the future growth will be slum growth.

About this number of people are also dependent on what researchers call ‘vulnerable’ employment, meaning their livelihoods, employment and income are rooted in the informal economy. These communities are reliant on unpredictable resources or forces, such as water and energy supply, or people settling on marginal land. If these people and communities aren’t part of the formal city system, they’ll have to take care of their own needs, and find ways to adapt without the support of the state.

Associate professor and geographer Gina Ziervogel from the University of Cape Town notes, there isn’t a handbook on how to survive in African urban areas. ‘You need to learn on your feet. People are living on marginal land, exposed to high risks and having to create opportunities for earning an income given the lack of formal employment. This is tough but it means that those living on the edge have had to adapt, and some survive better than others.’ By far the largest urban growth is going to happen in the smaller cities and towns across the continent, where the populations are fewer than half a million people. This, argues Pieterse, debunks the popular notion of ‘mega-city explosions’. The ‘youth bulge’ is another important trend, he writes, with over half the population being under 24 years old.

How does this apply to the FLOW programme? ‘Well, we need to understand the dynamics of these small towns, and where there might be opportunities,’ argues Gina. ‘How can we help them grow so that they are places where things happen and people want to stay?’

There’s this idea that small towns are inevitably going to become degenerative negative spaces as they grow, but it doesn’t have to be like this, says Gina. There is huge potential for these towns to be exciting places where innovation happens and opportunities exist. Take a look at a slum like Kibera, in Nairobi, with its ‘pencil towers’ (unsafe, slum-lord managed, high-rise buildings) and ‘helicopter toilets’ (where people relieve themselves into plastic bags, and then fling the bags out of windows or from rooftops, into the slum below). ‘Kibera is one of the most studied sites in Africa. Looking at slum growth like this, can we find different ways of living close to each other and make the most of the resources we have?’

FLOW was trying to find innovation at a societal level, through building capacity in ordinary citizens, so that they can be actively involved in imagining and planning their own futures, says Anna Cowen, FLOW co-creator and implementer.
How could FLOW create in the ambassadors the idea that another world is possible?

‘The traditional planning paradigm is top-down and centralised, where trained experts tell people how their town or city will be managed and run and developed. FLOW is about showing young people that they don’t have to be passive recipients of outside expertise, planners, architects, and engineers. They can be active participants in shaping their environment and planning their settlements,’ Anna says.

It’s about giving them agency, stimulating active citizenry and seeding democracy.

‘If there are enough young people who know about alternatives, who understand the natural and human-made systems that support life, and who understand how things are linked, they can become active in shaping their settlements.’

Returning to the question of Africa’s booming population and the inevitable slum growth, the ACC’s Edgar Pieterse argues in a lecture on the subject, that the problem is systemic ‘If these trends continue into the future, if the current conditions remain more or less the same, what we can expect to see is an agglomeration of a number of negative pressures... the urban polycrisis, where you see water scarcity being reinforced by energy scarcity, which in turns produces pressure on the availability and quality of food, and the scarcity of land.’

‘This is in the biophysical context,’ says Anna. ‘In the economic context, you’ll see more underemployment and unemployment, and the degradation of ecosystems.

‘Young people are no longer willing to accept this. We have seen more and more protests, an expression of democratic voice. These phenomena reinforce each other and generate a cumulative dynamic that will represent a very challenging urban crisis.’

LJ

WE WANT YOU!

‘Youth of Bergrivier, do you want to hone your leadership skills, and get involved in your community and help run your town? Do you want to boost the local economy and understand how climate change will impact you and your neighbours? Do you want to become a citizen journalist?’

That’s the call that went out into the wider community of the Bergrivier municipal area in the Western Cape in the spring of 2014. A similar message went out in Kokstad in the Eastern Cape. Anna and John had already piloted a ‘youth ambassador’ programme in Kokstad, involving citizen journalism and training around environmental sustainability. They decided to roll out that model in both towns as part of this new FLOW programme.

If you are between the ages of 18 and 30, have completed high school and are computer literate, then we want to you to consider being a youth ambassador with the FLOW programme. Send us a motivation letter...

Many of those first two groups of recruits didn’t really have an idea of what they were signing up for, but they pioneered a process that has now had a third group pass through the programme.

LJ

‘For the first time in human history, most of us live in urban settlements – from megacities of 10-20 million, of which there were 28 in 2014, to medium-sized cities of 1-5 million (417 in 2014), and smaller settlements (525 of between 500,000 and one million people in 2014). Looking ahead, the biggest growth will occur not in megacities but these small- and medium-sized cities.

...If we continue to design and build as if the planet can provide unlimited resources, then this near-doubling of the urban population will mean a doubling of the natural resources required to build and operate our cities – which is not sustainable.’

Prof Mark Swilling
Sustainability Institute
WHAT WE DID  
FLOW AMBASSADOR (FA) TRAINING CURRICULUM

**BASICS**

- Selfie exercise
- My Town exercise
- GPS/Smart Phone Intro exercise
- Mobile Journalism training
- Life Support Systems training (climate change, water, waste, resource flows, resource depletion)
- Household Flows exercise
- Home model exercise
- Understanding Waste Site visits
- Understanding Water Site visits
- Municipality at Work

**LIFE-SUPPORT SYSTEMS**

- EXCHANGE
- Training on Exchange: money systems, local economic exchange, community currencies
- Visible business mapping
- Less visible business mapping
- Local Business movies
- Training on Baseline Surveys and subsequent execution of surveys
- Community Currency Events
- Community Currency network member education and recruitment
- Community Currency Launches BRAND in Bergrivier

The FAs took “selfie” photos, wrote a personal bio/blogpost and uploaded these onto the project website, introducing themselves and beginning to navigate new technology.

The FAs responded to the question, “What are five things I really love about my town?” by taking photos of and blogging about their favourite places. They saw their towns with new eyes.

The FAs located local landmarks using GPS, gaining familiarity with GPS and smart phone mapping capabilities.

The FAs undertook a five-day training course covering storytelling skills on mobile phones, included concept, storyboarding, shooting, editing and developing basic mobile journalism capacities.

The FAs participated in lectures, interactive dialogues and focus group discussions, and watched documentary movies in order to develop greater awareness.

The FAs analysed how energy, water, food and waste flowed through their homes, capturing information in diagrams, photos and blogposts.

The FAs measured up their homes, then built cardboard scale models, developing skills to support community-led planning discussions.

The FAs made site visits to a waste transfer site, a recycling yard and a landfill site, documenting through photos and blogs, and developing an understanding of waste flows and municipal waste management.

The FAs made site visits to the local water purification plant, storage dam and waste water treatment (sewer) works, documenting through photos and blogs, and developing an understanding of municipal water management and vulnerabilities.

**EXCHANGE**

- The FAs participated in community currency role plays, lectures, interactive dialogues and focus group discussions, and watched documentary movies, developing knowledge and greater awareness.

- The FAs created maps (both digital and physical) of their local towns and villages through mapping visible economic activity, both formal and informal, as well as periodic, developing a basic understanding of local economic activity and creating the data base for the baseline survey and the currency enrolment process.

- The FAs mapped informal economic activity in their towns through local knowledge and scenario-based focus group discussions, capturing the data on digital and physical maps, growing their understanding of social networks and the informal economy.

- The FAs identified interesting local businesses and made two-minute documentaries/advertorials about them to support the introduction of the community currencies.

- The FAs assisted with testing the survey, underwent survey training and conducted 200 surveys of small businesses (potential community currency network members) in their home towns, as well as an additional ‘control’ survey in a nearby town, developing confidence and surveying skills.

- The FAs assisted with the planning and delivery of monthly community currency events in their home towns, developing community organising capacities and a deeper knowledge of local exchange systems.

- The FAs assisted with member education and recruitment, developing self-determination, event planning and community organising capacities.

- The FAs assisted with the planning and delivery of the Community Currency launch events in their home towns, developing their logistic and event planning skills.
CRAFT A CO-CREATED AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE FLOW TEAM AND THE AMBASSADORS

Each FLOW Ambassador training programme commenced with an interactive process designed to co-develop an agreement about how the FAs and the FLOW team would work together, laying the foundations for mutual trust and reciprocity. This was in addition to the ‘formal’ contract signed with the municipality that covered their weekly stipend (in Bergrivier only).

The process was structured as follows:

• Divide the FAs into pairs and ask: In order to create a happy working environment - What are the things you expect the FLOW team to do? What can the team reasonably expect from you?
• At the same time the FLOW team works on the same questions, but from their perspective: What are the things that we expect the FLOW Ambassadors to do? What can they reasonably expect from us?
• The whole group draws up a ‘contract’ on the board with two columns - Party 1 (the FLOW Ambassadors) and Party 2 (the FLOW team)
• Starting with the first column – Party 1 – the FLOW team asks the FLOW Ambassadors to list their expectations, ensuring that similar points are grouped together and adding any missing elements from the FLOW team perspective.
• Everyone then systematically works through each point in order to clarify, integrate and amend the proposed agreements.
• The same process is repeated for Party 2 (the FLOW team)
• Everyone commits to revisiting the agreement on a regular basis (monthly) so that new learnings can be included or existing agreements be amended.

In miniature: The ambassadors built architectural-style models of their own homes, to scale.

WHAT WE LEARNT

• Allow sufficient time to do a thorough FLOW Ambassador (FA) recruitment process (3-4 months)
• Advertise the programme widely in local newspapers, church groups, and community halls, and ask for recommendations from old FAs and the local municipality
• Appoint the FLOW local co-ordinators at least one month before interviewing a new cohort of FAs so that they can participate in the selection process
• Ensure there is enough diversity across the group
• Score the potential candidates with a well thought-out rubric, but choose them from your heart
• Aim for a good balance between too much curriculum structure that may stifle creativity, and too much uncertainty and ‘freedom’ that may make things feel unsafe
• Co-create FLOW Ambassador agreements that set the tone for trust and collaboration
• Ensure that there is a physical space that is ‘owned’ by the FAs for learning, working and meetings
Complementary or local currency models around the world are still in their infancy. Communities design their own currency systems, give their own values to those currencies, and use them as a way of trading alongside the country’s official money, in order to get specific environmental and social objectives along the way. The purpose is more than just to pump up trade, and keep profits within a community in order to reinvigorate a small-town economy. It’s also a way of building confidence amongst the locals, and knitting a community more closely together. Meet FLOW’s BRAND and K’Mali complementary currencies.

MANDI SMALLHORNE
18 May 2015: The community hall in Kokstad has been filling up with a crowd of the curious, musing and simmering like a pot coming to the boil. They’re here to hear Will Ruddick, a bearded American with close-cut hair, help the FLOW team to explain a strange new concept: a currency that will belong to Kokstad alone, a complementary currency. Helping Will with the translation is Aphinda Ndlobeni, affectionately known as AP, because most of the audience is Xhosa-speaking. Four women and a man have volunteered for an evening of currency simulation, where they will play a fun game that explains how complementary currencies work.

But Will is confident; he’s done this before, with people in Kenya. ‘Let’s say you want to trade chickens for vegetables,’ he says. ‘How would you do that?’ The crowd gets involved as a robust round of trading follows, where the volunteers discover that fixing a value for a chicken is not so easy. Now Will hands each volunteer vouchers, each of which has a specific value. ‘First they bartered; then they used [the vouchers], and they saw how much easier it actually is to use currency instead of bartering,’ John Ziniades, FLOW co-creator and implementer, explains. ‘Once the rules had been explained, there was a sudden frenzied burst of excited conversation and activity as the group traded vouchers onstage. Will, of course, couldn’t understand a word and just had to step back and surrender to the process.’

This May evening in Kokstad was the first of several preparing the local community for the July launch of the K’Mali, Kokstad’s very own complementary currency (‘imali’ means ‘money’ in Xhosa, the most common indigenous language spoken in Kokstad). A parallel process had already entrenched the concept in the Bergrivier region of the Western Cape, where the launch of the BRAND currency (‘B’ for Bergrivier, coupled with the South African Rand) was just days away.

Complementary currencies, which sit alongside national currencies, have emerged in different contexts to address objectives that traditional money cannot. In particular, community or local currencies (which are a subset of complementary currencies) are introduced and used by a designated community within a particular geographical area. A surprising number across the world (the Complementary Currency Research Group estimates the total number to be over 3,800) are meeting a number of diverse needs in countries such as Brazil, Germany, UK, France, Japan, Switzerland and the USA. These currencies can be paper-based or digital and are used as a medium of exchange. Instead of offering a direct trade – ‘my plumbing expertise for your sourdough loaves’ for example – the currency becomes a placeholder for the trade: ‘Take this voucher for your loaves and you can exchange it for some other goods or services from a participating member when you need it.’

Because complementary currencies only operate in a clearly defined and quite small area, they keep value circulating within the local economy, instead of letting it leak away to major economic hubs. The K’Mali and the BRAND were the key ingredients in FLOW’s recipe, which was designed to knit communities more closely, boost local trade, amp up a sense of community pride and power, and nurture an ability to ‘bounce’ – to cope better with challenges and to thrive.

Local money, local power

‘We were not complementary currency experts, but I was very inspired by the papers Will Ruddick had written,’ says John. Will had designed and implemented a community currency in Kenya, called the Eco-Pesa, where people were paid in Eco-Pesa for collecting waste, planting trees and other things that helped their environment. They could then spend it with local businesses who had signed up. ‘He was on the path that we were on, aligning good behaviour with this currency.’

Local enterprises are more likely to employ local people, provide services to improve the local quality of life, spend money locally and so circulate wealth in the community, promote community cohesion and, by reducing transportation of goods from across communities, are likely to have a smaller environmental footprint.

New Economics Foundation (NEF) Plugging the Leaks, 2008

A Kokstad trader proudly displays a sign showing she accepts K’Mali, the complementary currency
The currency aspect of the initial FLOW funding proposal was based on the Eco-Pesa design – a donor-backed currency, where a donor provides funding in national currency as backing for vouchers, which are then used to fund specific desired activities such as environmental restoration (through waste collection, for example) and health activities. These vouchers circulate in the local business network and are eventually exchanged back in return for national currency.

Will’s next iteration of his currency in Kenya is a mutual credit-based design, backed by the goods and services of participating business network members. When Will joined the FLOW team, he felt that this design was more suitable for the local context and application.

Complementary currencies enable people without enough of the national currency - because they don’t have a formal job, perhaps - to have a way of exchanging value. A complementary currency can also be a way of encouraging certain desirable behaviours, such as caring for the elderly, vaccinating babies and recycling (this was the drive behind the Eco-Pesa, for example). In Kansas City, as Gwen-dolyn Hallsmith and Bernard Lietaer describe in Creating Wealth: Growing Local Economies with Local Currencies, students at the University of Missouri have to earn Buckaroos by doing community serv- ice in order to pay university fees.

Another example is a plan to develop a currency called the Saber (‘knowledge’ in Portuguese) to increase literacy in Brazil. The currency would be used by school children to pay for mentoring and tutoring from older children, trickling up until learners graduated, and could use their Sabers in part payment for university fees.

The conventional money system is set up in such a way that it concentrates wealth, and this works to destroy social capital, as Emeritus Professor Dennis Meadows with the Club of Rome notes in his foreword to Money and Sustainability: The Missing Link (2012). He adds that it inevitably sets up ‘boom and bust’ cycles. Creating and using complementary currencies offers societies an invaluable tool for resilience.

Having additional currencies available with which to conduct business has proven crucial in situations where the national currency is under stress. Based in Zurich, the Swiss WIR was founded in 1934 as a direct response to the Great Depression, and is the most successful example of a complementary currency that helps buffer local economies from external shocks. Research has shown that the WIR has a counter-cyclical effect – when the Swiss economy is stressed and there is limited circulation of the Swiss Franc, more people use the WIR, and vice versa when the economy is strong.

The FLOW core team saw these as positive possibilities that could be regenerative, building social cohesion, a sense of personal agency. It was also recognised that with targeted interventions, it could play a part in reconnecting people, not only with each other, but also with the systems and sources of the things that make urban life pos-sible: water supply, food supply, energy provision and sanitation. Perhaps most importantly, people who learn to reimagine their currency – one of the bedrock facets of life – would have acquired a pre-cious skill: to be able to ask ‘Why does it have to be this way?’

In practice

The speed with which people in both towns embraced the concept of the complementary currency amazed the team. ‘I was quite disappointed in the first currency evening in Piketberg,’ says Ian Schaffers, FLOW project co-ordinator in Berg-rivier. ‘But the second one blew me away – people grasped the idea very quickly and were quite will- ing to raise their concerns.’

The BRAND launched on 30 May 2015, followed by the K’Mali on 18 July, with a ceremony during which interested businesses and key indi-viduals signed on, agreeing to use the currencies and to accept a proportion of payments in the local currency (usually ten percent). In the months that followed, the currencies

‘...the monoculture of national currencies, justified on the basis of market efficiency, generates structural instability in our global financial system. Economic sustainability therefore requires diversification in types of currencies, specifically through complementary currencies.’

Bernard Lietaer
Is Our Monetary Structure a Systemic Cause for Financial Instability? April 2010

We will never create sustainability while immersed in the present financial system. There is no tax, or interest rate, or disclosure requirement that can overcome the many ways that the current money system blocks sustainability. I used not to think this. Indeed I did not think about the money system at all. I took it for granted as a neutral and inevitable aspect of human society. [...] I now understand... that the prevailing financial system is incompatible with sustainability.

Dennis Meadows
Money and Sustainability: The Missing Link 2012
developed differently in the two regions. In Bergrivier, municipal officials quickly got the idea that this tool could circulate value through their region, and became involved in on-going conversations with the FLOW team about how best to integrate the BRAND into the local economy. Ian notes that their interest was not purely altruistic. ‘They needed to be seen to be doing something for the community’.

In Kokstad, on the other hand, the local municipality was largely uninvolved, but FLOW’s Kokstad project co-ordinator Piet Bosman had a web of contacts throughout the town, and that worked in the programme’s favour. Piet was able to get big business on board, and soon key local retailers like Pick n Pay and Spar (both of them major national supermarket chains), the Link pharmacy (always a hive of activity) and Kokstad Copiers, were displaying K’Mali-branded posters indicating that they accepted K’Mali. For them it was also not a purely altruistic decision – many saw it as a corporate social responsibility programme, a commitment to the community, which would impress customers, John Ziniades notes.

The end of the beginning

The next 11 months were a roller-coaster ride that showed the team the bottlenecks that hampered the currency in each region. For example, in Kokstad the large trusted national retailers such as Pick n Pay tended to accumulate K’Mali and the smaller downstream business barely traded in K’Mali at all: the money was piling up, rather like river debris snagging on a rock, instead of moving freely through the town. In addition, the communities naturally needed time to build trust in this very new concept. ‘With hindsight, we should have spent more time on designing currency systems that were tailor-made for the features of each community, rather than importing a ready-made design from elsewhere,’ says John.

And as June 2016 drew to a close, both currencies seemed to be in the doldrums. The team were feeling a little despondent. But then they made a trip to Kokstad for an event that would wrap up their work in the town.

On a wintry afternoon, the restaurant at the upmarket Imbali Guest House (a K’Mali supporter), was golf cart-style vehicles), which would accept only BRANDs in payment. In fact, the name being mooted for the service is the B5, the ‘five BRAND route.’ Complementary currencies never take off instantly or achieve universal adoption, John points out. Some necessary tweaking will happen along the long road to a sturdy currency. ’It’s a lot harder to get people to change than we think,’ he says. ‘And people’s habits of use, particularly in terms of money, are among the hardest of all to change. And that long road means that it’s too early to judge whether the currencies have succeeded or failed. But recent developments are reason for hope.‘

The Kokstad Q&A session comes to an end. The lights come on and the group breaks up into little deep exchange with one of the audience who still has some questions. At the back, around the tea table, overheard fragments of conversation reveal that several people are engaged in discussions about the currency’s viability. The K’Mali, like the BRAND, is plainly developing a life of its own.
SOMETHING BIGGER AT WORK

A series of ‘currency evenings’ leading up to the launch of the K’Mali and BRAND complementary currencies allowed the FLOW Ambassadors to familiarise their communities with the notion of this parallel way of exchange.

It was more than that, though. It was also a space for the ambassadors to test their new skills as community organisers and lobbyists for their ideas. And it was a space for the FLOW organising team to trust their young recruits.

In 2015, as winter approached and the evenings got chilly, people still braved the cold to turn up in numbers – between 50 and 80 people at each event – and get involved. We’d just sit back and leave it wald done with them before; whatever training we’d given was enough for them to be able to focus and engage with their community in their own way, says John Ziniades. ‘There was something bigger here than my anxious perfectionist self, it needed to flow in the way it flowed.’

A thread running through the project, John says, was ‘this feeling of surrender, and deep trust.’ One of the things that struck me was that, in both Bergrivier and Kokstad, the community always chose to open [events] with a prayer, a handing over to the ‘divine’; he recalls. ‘There was a kind of mirroring in this practice for me. I similarly felt that the FLOW team needed to allow things to unfold in their own way.’ MS

LEARNING TO FLY

We made a rookie mistake with the design of our local currencies,’ says John, showing the kind of self-reflection that the team have tried to build in the ambassadors’ recruits. ‘We imported a complementary currency ‘voets-toets’ (as is) that was designed specifically for the Kenyan small business environment, and assumed that the trading conditions were similar.’

The Eco-Pesa had taught them some early lessons in Kenya, and when John, FLOW’s money-man, says. ‘The driver then allows their customers to pay their taxi fare with either BRAND or Rand; he says. ‘The BRAND that the driver accumulates can then be spent at participating businesses in the BRAND network, or used to pay rent to the municipality or the Tuk-Tuks. Rinse, and repeat!’

The municipality can help drive the currency’s uptake, by insisting that locals pay for the taxi fare with BRAND.

They can also initiate community projects, such as clearing alien vegetation, litter collection, or tending urban food gardens. These jobs can all be paid for with the BRAND, giving locals currency with which they can pay their taxi fares.

This is how ‘bespoke’ a community currency design needs to be, concludes John. ‘You find the burning issue in the community – like the transport shortage in Piketberg – and align the currency with that need.’

TUK-TUKS FOR TOWN-HOPPING

The people of Piketberg have a mobility problem: the shortage of public transport hampers their movements around the town. And the municipality has a plan: they intend buying a fleet of solar powered Tuk-Tuk-style taxis, and setting up the ‘BS’ taxi route (the BRAND route). The idea is that the municipality then rents these to local taxi drivers, explains John, who pay for the vehicles with BRAND and Rand.

‘The driver then allows their customers to pay their taxi fare with either BRAND or Rand; he says. ‘The BRAND that the driver accumulates can then be spent at participating businesses in the BRAND network, or used to pay rent to the municipality or the Tuk-Tuks. Rinse, and repeat!’

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Community members and businesses signed up to participate in the K’Mali currency at the launch these small businesses are very important to the economy. Moreover, these are really small operations: 97% of them consist of one to five people in total; 70% of them are just one-person operations.

Conversely, South Africa’s equivalent MSE’s (outside of the agrif-sector) is only 18%, and their contribution to the GDP is just over 10%.

A business community like Piketberg’s demonstrates the problem:
But beneath their humour is an important ethos. Building adaptive capacity in people and communities in a project like this calls for flexibility, constant self-reflection, and changing their plans and approaches as they learn and respond. John’s take-home message from the currency rollout: there’s no such thing as a plug-and-play package in the world of community currencies; you need to custom-make each one for the context in which it’s going to be used. It takes time for a currency to get a critical mass of people using it, so that it gains enough momentum to keep circulating. And it would help if it had a big backer, like the local municipality who can make a policy decision to link a local service to the currency. LJ

Above: A K’Mali network member locates a new member on the Kokstad map.

In the middle of 2013, Will Ruddick was thrown into jail outside Mombasa, Kenya, accused of masterminding a terror plot because of his work in launching a community currency. It was an act seen as worryingly subversive by the authorities. Less than a decade earlier, he’d been doing graduate work in high-energy physics at the University of Colorado Boulder. After completing graduate school five years earlier, Will found his lasting passion when he came to Kenya with the Peace Corps to teach maths and science. Joining the Peace Corps was ‘a means for learning development finance’, he says. Using the tools of a physicist to analyse what he saw in Kenya, he realised that people had plenty of assets and skills, but very little money. Money is simply a medium of exchange, he realised, a way of measuring goods against goods, services against services, and all the possible permutations of exchange. ‘How much excess capacity are we not tapping into as a result?’ he wondered.

Will started by designing the Eco-Pesa (‘pesa’ is Swahili for ‘money’), where environmentally helpful activities were paid with a donor-funded voucher that could be exchanged for conventional currency - a way to ensure better use of donor funds. Then he designed the Bangla-Pesa, his first true complementary currency. Bangla-Pesa is only used in the Bangladeshi shanty-town in Mombasa, where Will now lives. It’s a system of ‘vouchers’ - much like the K’Mali and BRAND, available in various fixed amounts, which can be exchanged for goods and services. Since then, he’s launched another three currencies in Kenya and is working with groups in Uganda and Nigeria to set up currencies there. MS

REAL SOLUTIONS FOR REAL PROBLEMS

‘We were presenting something quite wild and outlandish, in many respects, to people who could really buy into what we were speaking about, and not just that, but take ownership of it and represent things in their own ways,’ says Dan Goodman, remembering the energy and excitement of the FLOW currency evenings in both Bergrivier and Kokstad. Dan was an integral part of FLOW from its inception. Born and raised in Cape Town, he started working on the ground with people who have real problems that need solving, but also there’s a real eagerness in terms of people wanting to take charge of their communities. For him, it was a ‘great thing to be able to work with people as opposed to brands’. But besides that, he says, FLOW was like coming home. ‘I was working together with like-minded people and trying to actually bring our ideals to life.’ MS
How do you dream up a new currency? What should it look like? The FLOW team had been designing a programme on the fly, responding to real-time feedback from the two communities. Now, as the reality of the first complementary currency launch drew inexorably closer, they found themselves working on the design of a currency that was by the community, for the community.

The currency evenings in both towns, where the concept and workings of the currency had been explained, had been full of energy, vibrancy and a kind of local pride that needed to be reflected in the actual notes.

Designer Dan Goodman used colours that had an instant familiarity, echoing the national currency of South Africa. ‘The imagery is quite different, though, reflecting ideas that were developed with the communities,’ says Dan, ‘with words that spelt those ideas out.’ The K’Mali 10 has a stylised maize cob against the silhouette of Mount Curry, which dominates the Kokstad skyline, and the words: Kokstad – kos vir die toekoms (Kokstad – food for the future). The K’Mali 50 shows a heart against the mountain, and the message is ‘Kokstad – batho pele’ (‘Kokstad – people first’). ‘It needed to have authority, and not just look like a naïve artwork,’ says Dan. ‘It was kind of straddling a line between something that was very local, but also something that people wanted to aspire to,’ he says. ‘So we added all the special security features - not just to make it safe, but also just to make it feel special, to make someone feel proud taking it out of their wallet, and feel that it has worth.’

MS
Goedverwacht farmer, Merle Dietrich, knows first-hand the benefits of growing veggies in this small community: it means she has fresh produce for her home, and a surplus to sell to neighbours or some of the smaller independent shops here in the valley, or in nearby Piketberg.

But because of the unusual nature of the local economy, her veggies are a form of currency in their own right.

‘Sometimes I’ll take broccoli or cabbage down to the bakery, and exchange it for bread,’ she explains, saying the barter system works well in this small farming community. ‘Or, if I need to use a plough from the local mechanisation centre, I’ll exchange some of my fresh veggies for equipment hire.’

She’ll also sometimes give them veggies on credit, so when planting time comes, she’s already paid for the ploughing services.

Selling locally also means she doesn’t have to rack up additional expenses on packaging, shipping, or freezing her produce, leaving more profit to till back into the farm or support herself.

LJ
WHAT WE DID

DESIGN GUIDELINES FOR A COMMUNITY CURRENCY: BRAND AND K’MALI

OBJECTIVES

WHY?

- Promote localisation
- Encourage import substitution
- Tap into unused or spared local capacity
- Connect supply and demand when national money is scarce
- Provide a mechanism for community to co-fund green and social enterprises

AIMS

- Designing, developing & delivering community currencies

FUNCTIONAL DESIGN OF THE K’MALI AND THE BRAND

WHAT?

WHEN?

- Grassroots Economics (Will Ruddick)

WHO?

- Participants
- Funders & Backers
- Users

WHO?

- Individuals who assist with planning, design and operation of the currency
- Local Business Network members (BBN/KEN - K’Mali)
- Community members

UNIT OF ACCOUNT

- Common unit of account, medium of exchange, store of value
- Denominations:
  - paper notes
  - paper, coin, website, app, electronic
- FUNDERS & BACKERS
- Organisations which provide financial and other support
- Users
- Ministries
- Local Business Network members (BBN/KEN - K’Mali)

How is money created and put into circulation?

- When a business joins the Network, it gets 500 units - 300 for spending, 200 for the community pot (a community “tax” on network members, used to fund community services).

MANAGEMENT OF QUANTITY OF NEW MONEY AND TOTAL MONEY SUPPLY

- How is money taken out of circulation?
- When a business decides to leave the Network, it returns 300 units to committee. Members can leave at any point.

WHAT? continued

RULES FOR BUSINESS NETWORK MEMBERS

- Minimum/Maximum balances
- The minimum balance on hand must be greater than zero (i.e. businesses need to sell goods and services for BRAND/K’Mali in order to replenish its community currency balance)
- The maximum balance on hand must not be greater than 500 units (i.e. should the business have more than 500 BRAND/K’Mali on hand, the excess amount needs to be spent back into the network)

CONVERTIBILITY INTO NATIONAL CURRENCY

- e.g. WIR - no convertibility permitted in terms and conditions; Brixton pound - full convertibility, but includes Bonus + Malus
- No convertibility at present for BRAND/K’Mali. This avoids the legal requirements/compliance issues (such as legal tender reserves), minimises risk, and simplifies the issuance process
- Anti-counterfeiting/security features on notes

- Special security paper used
- Specialist security printer
- Holographic foil
- Embossed
- Serial numbers with checksum
- Spot varnish (similar to a water mark) of the BRAND/K’Mali logo

Adapted from People Powered Money: Designing, developing & delivering community currencies published by the New Economics Foundation.

BACKING

- Material: e.g. gold, silver, collateral; National currency e.g. Rand, USD
- Immaterial e.g. a promise, collective consent, enforceable contract, government bonds or taxes

Disadvantages: Dilutes the strength of identity/purpose

Renewal

- The notes expire on 31 Dec 2016
- They will be renewed with a holographic foil sticker for a further two years – the members will exchange “old” notes for “new” notes that have the sticker in place

Total quantity of money in circulation at any given moment

- The amount issued per business was initially limited to 500 units, therefore total quantity in circulation = number of business network members x 500 units
- BRAND/K’Mali in order to replenish the community currency balance
- No material or national currency backing

-ブランド - 80 x 500 = R40,000
- K’Mali - 120 x 500 = R60,000

- The members will exchange “old” notes for “new” notes that have the sticker in place
- The amount issued per business was initially limited to 500 units, therefore total quantity in circulation = number of business network members x 500 units
- PHONE NUMBER - no convertibility permitted in terms and conditions; Brixton pound - full convertibility, but includes Bonus + Malus
- No convertibility at present for BRAND/K’Mali. This avoids the legal requirements/compliance issues (such as legal tender reserves), minimises risk, and simplifies the issuance process
- Anti-counterfeiting/security features on notes

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Adapted from People Powered Money: Designing, developing & delivering community currencies published by the New Economics Foundation.
HOSTING A COMMUNITY CURRENCY EVENT

Monthly community currency events were held in both regions (Kokstad and Bergrivier) during the first part of 2015. During the months of February, March, and April, these events coincided with the parallel process of the Flow Ambassadors conducting the baseline survey of small business owners (potential community currency network members for the launch). In the Bergrivier region, this also included the ‘control’ town of Velddrif.

The aim of the currency evenings was to:
- Raise awareness about the money system, local exchange and the potential of community currencies. This was done through presentations and role plays;
- Screen around twenty 30-second business advertorials that the FAs created about local businesses;
- Provide aggregate feedback to the survey participants on their responses;
- Enroll new members in the community currency network;
- Form a committee through identifying local champions who could step forward to take a more active role in supporting the currency.

Later events also included sharing first draft designs of the proposed notes and getting community input and feedback, as well as having launch planning discussions.

The outline below gives an indication of what was discussed at a typical community currency meeting in Kokstad.

1 INTRODUCTION
Introducing the FLOW team and the FAs, and explaining what the FAs have been doing – mapping local business, making movies about local businesses and conducting the baseline survey.

2 INTRODUCTION TO COMMUNITY CURRENCIES
Introducing the ideas behind community currencies, sharing African and global examples and discussing why it could help in Kokstad. The FAs translated one of Grassroot Economics’ animations about the Bangla-Pesa into Xhosa and this was screened.

3 BASELINE SURVEY DATA FEEDBACK
Sharing aggregated data from the baseline survey as a way to illustrate why a community currency may be useful in Kokstad.

4 FLOW AMBASSADOR MOVIES OF LOCAL BUSINESSES
Screening of 30-second advertorials of local businesses made by the FAs and illustrating the potential trading circles.

5 HOW TO JOIN THE BUSINESS NETWORK
Explaining how to join the business network.

6 SIGNING UP AND FINDING BACKERS
A ten-minute session with people discussing the currency and some signing up.

7 Q&A AND LUCKY DRAW
Concluding the event with a lively “lucky draw”, with prizes of cell phone airtime and grocery vouchers. Only baseline survey respondents were eligible for the draw. The FLOW team used this as a mechanism to encourage people to attend the currency evenings.

NOTE – the network name changed from KBN (Kokstad Business Network) to KEN (Kokstad Exchange Network) and the K-Rand became K’Mali.
FAs monitor the use of the K’Mali after the launch and train business network members in its usage.

WHAT WE LEARNT
LAUNCHING A COMMUNITY CURRENCY

- Get support from a trusted group of local institutions such as anchor tenant businesses or the local municipality to best infuse the new currency with trust. Make sure they are prepared to accept the new currency for specific goods and services, and then have a clear plan to spend currency back into the network.
- Be clear about the local challenges and design the initial currency intervention around those challenges. Be focused about who is invited to participate in the initial launch.
- Avoid a one-size-fits-all approach. Be careful when “importing” other currency system designs from other regions in the world. Always understand your unique contexts and challenges.
- Use social network analysis as a design tool to understand the key players in your local economy. A mapping tool like Kumu (kumu.io) enables one to see patterns that are not obvious at first. For example, the local connectors/hubs, the businesses that have high visibility of the whole network and can get information out there quickly, and the bridges/gatekeepers of information flow, which may also become key strategic partners.
- Remember that the currency launch is just the end of the beginning – the hard work lies ahead to encourage uptake and understand how the community wants to use the currency. Each currency will mutate and change over time, as it adapts to local conditions.

Community currency is typically used in combination with the national currency.

Above: Graphics produced for community currency evenings showing how usage of community currencies can keep exchange flowing locally and prevent ‘leakage’. In the top graphic, the national currency comes in from social grants and remittances, and ‘leaks’ out of the local economy when it is spent at the national chainstores and retailers. In the bottom graphic, the community currency can only be spent locally and its increased circulation boosts the local economy.

NATIONAL CURRENCY FLOW

COMMUNITY CURRENCY FLOW

NATIONAL CURRENCY FLOW
Ties of family and friendship, the bonds formed when people work, worship or make art together, are among the most important assets humans have, and are both natural and essential to healthy communities that have long, stable histories. But in fragile and fragmented societies, the kind of communities which factors like climate change and economic crises will stress, these bonds have been frayed or lost completely. In Kokstad and Bergrivier the FLOW programme aimed to grow a sense of family between the FLOW Ambassadors – family type connections that would bolster existing families, or, in the case of many of the young people involved, fill an aching gap. The goal was for these new bonds to become a seed that would forge links throughout the community.
Three young women sit on a home-made wooden bench, polished by years of age, with a four-month-old baby and a withered matriarch nestled between them. Behind them, a hill clad in winter-fawn grass rises, in a vast landscape that dips and folds into the blue mountain, silhouetted against a sky the colour of lapis lazuli.

The old woman has refined down to leather-like flesh and bone as she has aged, rather like a log that shucks off its bark as it dries, leaving just the essential wood. There are deep laughter lines around her eyes.

‘This is my granny,’ Nthabeleng Jafta says, as she takes her baby, Vanilla, from the old woman’s arms. ‘We are lucky to still have her.’

The little group looks so comfortable together, you’d swear they were all blood relatives. But they are not, Nthabeleng, or Nthabi, has brought her new ‘family’, fellow FLOW Ambassadors Unathi Hams and Thandokazi Duku, to visit the family that raised her, in a small farming community called Pakkies in KwaZulu-Natal near the town of Kokstad.

The people of Pakkies own and farm this land, growing vegetables and tending sheep and cows in the protective embrace of the mountains that surround them. It was a good place to grow up, rooted in this sturdy little community of many relatives (Jafta is a common name here). Nthabi, 26 years old, has a strong presence and sense of self, clearly due to the encouragement and affirmation she received here as a child.

But this powerful rootedness is not enough in itself for a young person who seeks broader horizons, in a world of wider opportunities. Nthabi needed to venture out of her small world into the unknown world of Kokstad to flex her muscles and grow. ‘There were big surprises,’ she says. ‘For me, it opened a big door.’

Fractured communities

While big-city urbanites might assume that everyone in such a small area knows each other, that’s not true. What’s the distance between Pakkies and Kokstad, after all? Many city-dwellers would travel as far – 25 kilometres – just to go shopping. But for the transport-and money-poor people of these communities, it’s far enough to make the other place seem somewhat alien.

Even within Kokstad, the FLOW Ambassadors living there found that they did not know their own town. When Nthabi’s group helped with the survey of Kokstad, she was surprised by some of the things she saw.

‘You go door to door and see how people live, how the businesses are doing. I was shocked sometimes by the way that the people live in these places. You can think that you are in a bad situation, but when you are seeing some people, eh, it’s very sad.’

There’s also a tendency for those in the alienating big cities like Johannesburg to romanticise smaller towns as places of community, places of strong social bonds. That, too, is not always true. Kokstad has a separation built into its geography, an inequality expressed in the ‘big houses’ on one hillside, looking across town centre to the poor communities of Shayamoya, Bongweni and Horseshoe, on the other, separated by an open space (wetland) ‘buffer’.

The constant changes, the coming and going of people sucked in to town by the opportunities here, or drawn away from Kokstad to bigger things, creates shifting sands where there should be solid social networks - a stark contrast to sturdily rooted communities like Pakkies, a farming community made up of inter-related family members. Many of the FLOW Ambassadors come from somewhere else – places like Lusikisiki or Mthatha in the Eastern Cape, for example. Even those who grew up here retain a sense of being foreign to Kokstad. Lindi Ntaka says she comes from the small Eastern Cape town of Qumbu, even

Opposite page: A Shembe church overlooks the town of Kokstad below
though her mother and father came to Kokstad before she was born.

Within communities in this region, some social cohesion remains, but it has been very stressed by the domino effect of the global economic crisis, a two-year-long drought and consequent deepening of poverty. When the ambassadors talk about their town, they reflect on the fruits of this: violence or self-harming behaviour such as drug-abuse. ‘We’re a really, really vulnerable community,’ says FLOW Ambassador, Mlu Dlamini.

Moving out

There’s a very frail link between the outlying communities, which are part of the Greater Kokstad Municipality, and Kokstad itself. Pakkies is a world unto itself, as Nthabi points out: ‘When you’re in Pakkies, that small place, you don’t know anything about Kokstad. Everything to us was rumours. Me, I got a chance to see those things.’

Like any other young person, at first she relied on blood relatives to help her to ‘see those things’ – showing just how important a helping hand from family and friends is in creating possibilities for young people. The first time Nthabi left Pakkies, just after she finished school, she went to a sister in Durban (eThekwini) to study: ‘I went to SA Maritime [School and Transport College] but I didn’t finish it because of a financial problem.’

The second time she ventured out of Pakkies, when she was 24, her springboard was friendship. It was a friend who alerted Nthabi to an ad for a job that she thought she might be well suited for. But transport was a problem – how would she get from Pakkies to Kokstad for the interview?

‘I must thank my friend Happiness. I don’t have money, so she said ‘I give you R50’. When I got the job she was screaming.’

Her next step was forming ‘family’ from a network of unrelated people. The FLOW programme brought a new set of interpersonal relationships and new experiences, all of which had a profound effect on this young woman’s life.

Nthabi presents as a confident and self-assured person, a persona formed by her background and key experiences of personal achievement. At a young age, she’d become a local champion at Morabaraba, an indigenous board game that is thousands of years old, played across large swathes of Africa. Like chess, it’s a game of strategy and daring.

But the confident exterior hid some personal insecurities, the classic baggage of the farm-child-come-to-town. In the whirlpool of new experiences, some of these insecurities would naturally surface. Because Nthabi was not just taking on a ‘job’ when she signed up for the FLOW programme; she and her fellow FLOW Ambassadors were adventurers in a new world of sophisticated technology and interpersonal challenges. The bonds they formed helped them to navigate this world, and also to overcome personal obstacles.

Owning the solutions

During the ups and downs of FLOW training, Nthabi began to make a new kind of family in her relationships with Thandokazi Duku, Unathi Hams and the other FLOW Ambassadors, relationships which endured through sticky patches and thrived on achievements. The group was nurtured by architect Joanne Lees in Durban, who, in addition to being a member of the core team, was also the FLOW project manager for Kokstad, and became such a strong maternal presence that the group simply calls her Mama Jo. ‘They built us a home, a warm home, we were the kids of the same woman, Mama Jo,’ says Nthabi.

But the groups in Kokstad and Bergrivier were not kids; they were adults in a country riven with lines of fracture that have painful histories – fracture between black and white, between rich and poor, between urban and rural, between resourced and poorly resourced. This creates a complex landscape for those who are ‘doing development’. Whilst working on the design of FLOW implementation, the core team was constantly

What is needed is a realisation that power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anaemic. Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love.

Martin Luther King Where Do We Go From Here? (1967) Address to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference
conscious of the need to avoid imposing solutions from the outside.

‘We didn’t want to be seen as the mungus [whites] coming in with all the answers, that any problem that arose we were going to fix it,’ says Jo. ‘Anyone who has ever ’done development’ will know there is always that line, where you come in as the expert, and everyone sits back and waits for you to tell them what to do. We were very clear from the beginning that we wanted them to take this thing and make it their own. This is about your community and it’s not going to work if outsiders are driving it.’

A big aim of the FLOW Ambassador programme was precisely to address this issue, she adds, to train local youth to be the link between the project and the community, and so they were very involved in the evolution of the programme. ‘We changed things that they felt would not work or might not be acceptable to their community; they ran the community meetings; they informed the survey questions. The project relationship with the committee was completely through them, and through the regional co-ordinator for the Kokstad ambassadors, local farmer Piet Bosman, who wore a local businessman hat as well as a project hat. We were actually pretty hands-off with the broader community.’

The design of FLOW also shifted this dynamic, because it was a training programme. The young people were attracted to it as a means of gaining skills they could use elsewhere, which instantly put the core in the position of trainer, and the ambassadors were trainees. ‘Our roles were more clearly defined,’ says Jo.

But the training involved much more intimate and personal work than your average computer course would entail. ‘One of the things that draws the FLOW core team together is that none of us would have ever done development before. It was essentially a training programme. The young people were attracted to it as a means of gaining skills they could use elsewhere, which instantly put the core team in the position of trainer, and the ambassadors were trainees. ‘Our roles were more clearly defined,’ says Jo.

They wanted parameters that defined their requirements and how they would be held accountable – the kind of structure you would find in a formal job. Together with the core team and project co-ordinator Piet Bosman, the Kokstad ambassadors forged formal agreements that spelled things out more clearly. One example was the time-keeping agreement: ambassadors agreed that each month, on payday, they would contribute R20 into a kitty. If an ambassador was late more often than twice in a month, they’d have to fork out a R10 fine. At the end of the month, the money in the kitty would be shared among those who’d been in on time every day. This agreement was seen as fair, and created a sense of order and certainty.

Support and challenge

Undertaking projects which pushed them to their personal limits – such as modelling their own homes or editing footage into mini-documentaries – demanded a willingness to help each other and to share. ‘I discovered things that I never thought I was able to do,’ says Unathi. ‘Through FLOW I’ve discovered that I was able to do presentations.

The ambassadors often found inside themselves – and inside each other – skills they didn’t even know they possessed, in what were sometimes difficult circumstances. ‘Organising together, and doing difficult tasks together, builds trust,’ says Anna. Trust in each other and trust in self – both core goals of the FLOW programme. ‘The organising of the currency events was often rather challenging, and filled with disappointments, even though the FLOW ambassadors always pulled it off in the end.’

So Nthabi, for example, morphed her Morabaraba thinking skills to become the champion negotiator of deals with taxi drivers for event transport. ‘To have these innate skills recognised by those around you is a powerful affirmation. The design of FLOW was one of support and challenge – the ambassadors were asked to take initiative, in ways they never had before.'
Making communities

These newly learnt skills and understanding could play another outward-looking role, as Mlu puts it: ‘... through me, a community can be developed.’ Amaza Jara has gone on to consciously use what she’s learnt in this sphere: ‘I want to stay [in Kokstad] and help, I definitely want to stay and help. I’m involved in an organisation called Life After BAVS [a name taken from the initials of the founders]. We do a lot about substance abuse, teenage pregnancy and mostly, the people that come from jail, but who have changed, who want to change and have seen their mistakes and want to be part of the community. We try to be there for them, because we know they’re not gonna get jobs. The Department of Social Development has finally funded us. It has been a long ride.’

And this was one aim of FLOW: to create a group of enabled young people whose experience of the power of organising and working together would become a fractal, a pattern that repeats within the community, rippling outwards from the core to impact on the social cohesion of the whole community.

As the current stage of the project draws to a close in the winter of 2016, the group meets at a steakhouse in the centre of town. There are shrieks of delight, hugs and kisses, and a flood of rapid-fire catching-up conversation.

The three who stayed on until the end of the programme have spent the most time together, and have become a tight-knit group. At 32, Unathi is eight years older than Nthabi, who sees her as a ‘big sister’. She’s played a maternal role during Nthabi’s pregnancy, reminding her when she was due to go to the clinic for a check-up. ‘She’s always there for me,’ says Nthabi. ‘She always guides me on my daughter... she’s so supportive.’

‘With FLOW, I’ve met new friends and sisters, we are very close,’ says Unathi.

Thando felt the development of this family, this inner circle of three, especially. The quiet 31-year-old woman with a talent for movie-making had originally landed in Kokstad due to a family decision to move for work opportunities. While the programme was underway, she found herself alone in Kokstad: ‘I was living with my aunt, she moved back to Bisho, then I stayed behind because of FLOW. Thando is now sharing a home in Shayamoya with Nthabi.

‘We became family for each other; our families, most of us, were not here, we became close,’ says Thando.

MS

WHO AM I?

The team used the Business Model Canvas (BMC), developed by Alexander Osterwalder to explore the potential of new business ideas. Business Model You (by Tim Clark) grew out of this concept. Both are very much rooted in an affluent business world, so they required a lot of adaptation for use in Kokstad and Bergrivier, but they proved remarkably useful.

‘The journaling process was a key part of this, and we wrapped this up with a one-day workshop in each town,’ explains Anna. The FLOW Ambassadors created a single sheet of all the answers to the exercises they’d done, and Anna in Bergrivier and Jo in Kokstad worked with each individual to distill the essence of what they had learnt about themselves.

‘It’s good to know your strengths and your weaknesses,’ says Chevonne Cornelius in Piketberg. ‘In Business Model You I learnt new things about myself which I never knew before.’

For Aphinda in Kokstad it was a life-changing experience that triggered a total shift in the university course she chose, from her original choice of environmental management to corporate communications. ‘We did this Business Model You exercise, where you get to look at yourself,’ she says. ‘I found that I’m more of a creative mind than a technical mind.’

MS

Though some Kokstad ambassadors, like Aphinda Nitokeni (centre) and Marvin Mqweba (right) had to leave the group, the ties between the FLOW family remain very close.

If you treat an individual as he is, he will remain how he is. But if you treat him as if he were what he ought to be and could be, he will become what he ought to be and could be.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

As they surveyed Kokstad’s people and coached them in using complementary currencies, the ambassadors gained confidence.
BreaKING and rEMAKING

Mlu Dlamini is a vivid, creative personality, a natural actor and speaker whose whole personality changes when he has a mic in his hand. ‘It’s like he takes ownership of the stage,’ explains Jo Lees, ‘he loves the audience response.’

But Mlu really needed the bonds he formed in FLOW. ‘I’m one person who had lost a lot through family,’ he says. Mlu was in crisis when he suddenly left the tight-knit group that had formed; he felt like he was being ‘bullied’ and ‘tortured’ at home – not by his grandmother, but by the aunts who shared the family home. He fled to Durban (eThekwini) without telling anyone he was going, or where.

His peers did not take it well. ‘We felt that it was so unfair to just leave without saying anything, and we called and he didn’t come back to us, we did everything to contact him,’ says Nthabi. Mlu had disappeared before, but never for so long, says Jo Lees, but this time it was for much longer - he was not on Facebook or on his phone’s text message service, and he was not responding to calls.

The little group put to use the skills they’d been learning for interpersonal resilience, through strategies such as morning check-in, which had taught them the powerful tool of empathy. ‘Sometimes, with people coming from different homes, the other person didn’t have someone to say, ‘How are you today, how are you feeling?’ says Aphinda. ‘And those check-in sessions, they helped with that. So you grew emotionally, you grew personally, and you were able to empathise with other people.’ When the proverbial prodigal son returned, some of the ambassadors bumped into him in town. ‘When he came back, he explained it was a family crisis, so we had to accept him back,’ says Nthabi. By this time the group had such a strong sense of unity that they did not feel the need to take a vote; they knew, without question, that all of them would feel the need to help a comrade in trouble.

In a stroke of empathetic genius that played straight to Mlu’s strengths, the group asked him to be the MC at the launch of the community currency K’Mali – a role which he simply ate up, enjoying himself thoroughly. After that, there was no question as to whether he would become a FLOW Ambassador again. With the assistance of their regional co-ordinator Piet, Mlu found somewhere to live and furnished it with the basics; he merged almost seamlessly back into the life of the group.

‘We did work as a team, we did bring Mlu back,’ says Thando. ‘If he has a problem, if anybody has a problem, we help; we’re always there for each other.’

‘They call me the man with the green fingers,’ says the irrepressible ‘Oom’ (uncle) Sollie Kayster, dissolving into his characteristic mirth.

The self-schooled gardener, who lost his right forearm when he was flung from a train in Cape Town while he was working there in his late teens, says he doesn’t let that disability get the better of him. Now, the 54-year-old has started up a rose nursery after collecting clippings from pruning jobs he’s done around Piketberg in the past year. He’s planted them in a square of land right at the entrance to the town that the local municipality was staying at a friend’s place, Mama Jo was so sorry for him; says Thando. But this time the group had such a strong sense of unity that they did not feel the need to take a vote; they knew, without question, that all of them would feel the need to help a comrade in trouble.

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Bed of roses: Oom Sollie’s dream of having his own rose nursery is coming true

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agreed he could use, rent-free, land. If he wanted to expand, he’d need more space, Merle suggested that he consider moving some of his operation to the Goedverwacht valley, where they have plenty of land available for just this sort of cultivation.

This is still the germ of an idea, and Oom Sollie hasn’t followed up on it yet. But the connections he made – first, in the municipal gardens with a manager of influence; and second, with a fellow entrepreneur from a nearby community who has resources that he doesn’t – is the kind of relationship building that FLOW’s business network aimed to foster, building closeness between these two towns otherwise divided by a high mountain and a 20-minute drive.

It’s a chilly June morning and Oom Sollie is busy planting another few rows of clippings into narrow trenches that he prepared in the soggy clay soil earlier, swinging his spade expertly in spite of only having one hand to wield his tools. ‘I don’t let this disability get me down,’ he grins, planting another stokkie (little branch).

It may take a few weeks for these cuttings to take, the way the first batch did, but hopefully before too long, they’ll bloom too.

LJ
THE HEART OF THE MATTER

If you ask anyone what makes Tracey Stone’s part in FLOW so key, they’ll say it’s because she brought so much heart to the project. For this former strategic manager with the Bergrivier Municipality, people and relationships were as important as sticking to the more sterile protocols of bureaucratic procedure.

And maybe it’s on the strength of these relationships that Tracey was able to win over the municipal councilors at that level and the senior town management who embraced the idea from the get-go. Tracey, a self-confessed environmentalist who had already taken up the cause for such issues within the municipality’s agenda, was an active participant in the 18-month trans-disciplinary process convened by the African Climate and Development Initiative (ACDI) at the University of Cape Town. This process, which was facilitated by John Ziniades and Anna Cowen, won the network of trust that supported the birth of FLOW in the region. This included selling the idea to her colleagues, and locking down money from the municipal budget.

‘Ultimately, FLOW is a partnership of people that couldn’t have happened if all the partners didn’t work together. My contribution was also to see that everything was in place on the municipality’s side, so that we could fulfil our role in this partnership,’ she says. Tracey moved on from Bergrivier in April 2014, to take up a position in the Cape Agulhas Municipality on the Cape south coast, but the groundwork she did in the lead up to FLOW was crucial to the project’s success.

‘Bergrivier is a small municipality with a limited budget and human resources to drive projects of an economic, social and environmental nature. The magic of FLOW is that it is a singular project that could meet all three of these needs. That’s one of the reasons for the overwhelming acceptance of the project.’ LJ

WHO’S THE BOSS?

Week in and week out, the FLOW programme had different leaders, rotating repeatedly through all the individuals in each group at Kokstad and Piketberg. That was a great time and a great opportunity to be a leader,’ says Nthabi, her face cracking into a gleeful grin as she reminisces about her times as leader.

‘When you’re a leader, you are like a champion.’ Leadership comes rather naturally to someone like Nthabi. For others, like Unathi, the idea went against her natural inclinations. And yet, somewhat to her surprise, this chance to experience the programme as ‘leader’ instead of ‘follower’ proved positive.

Despite being one of the older ambassadors and a committed mother, the 32-year-old Nthabi, her face the programme as ‘leader’ instead of ‘follower’ proved positive.

Describing herself as the quiet leadership she discovered within herself, the confidence to speak and reveal her ideas, will stand her in good stead, whatever the future brings.

Another quiet person, Lindi Ntaka, found the experience opened up a space to be heard: ‘I felt like a president sometimes. When you are in the big chair, everyone is listening to you… you know, you don’t always get that.’

Today, although she remains reserved, Unathi is clearly confident. The quiet leadership qualities she discovered within herself, the confidence to speak and reveal her ideas, will stand her in good stead, whatever the future brings.

The big thing – the thing I feel most proud of – is that we have changed the way [the FLOW Ambassadors] see themselves,’ says Jo. ‘They can get up in the morning and believe that they can be agents for change.’

Shifting roles – and shifting perspectives – has played a part in this new sense of autonomy. MS
WHAT WE DID

FLOW AMBASSADOR PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT CURRICULUM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTIVITY</th>
<th>WHAT THE AMBASSADORS DID AND LEARNT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daily journaling</td>
<td>The FAs took home a relevant question to ‘sleep on’ each day, and then wrote their responses in their private journals each morning after the ‘check-in’ circle, developing and enhancing self-reflection skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Model You exercises and workshop</td>
<td>The FAs worked through a series of exercises from the handbook including ‘Life line’, ‘Role Models’, etc. in preparation for a wrap-up Business Model You workshop. Through this, they learnt to appreciate and crystallise their talents, skills and ideas for their future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rotating FA leadership</td>
<td>The FAs took turns to lead the group on a rotating weekly roster. This included leading the ‘check-in’ and ‘check-out’ circles, and being the group spokesperson when interfacing with the public and the municipality. They developed their personal leadership skills and confidence, as well as an appreciation for different leadership styles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team agreements</td>
<td>The FLOW team used the ‘Integrative Decision Making process' as used in the Holacracy system to resolve team conflicts, improve internal agreements and support the development of conflict resolution skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public speaking</td>
<td>The FAs presented and spoke at a series of public events, including community currency events and various municipal events, as well as presented their own research outputs to the FLOW team. They developed self-confidence and visual presentation skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event planning, management and co-ordination</td>
<td>The FAs planned, co-ordinated and executed a range of public events including managing SMS campaigns, and door-to-door invitations. They handled logistics planning – transport, food and venues. They developed planning skills, as well as how to work as a team towards a common goal.</td>
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* What is Holacracy? It is an interconnected set of group practices that support deep listening, deep democracy and agility in uncertain times. Everyone has a voice, but no-one dominates. Holacracy grew out of the diverse practices of Sociocracy and Agile Software Development. For more information go to www.holacracy.org.

ACTIVITY WHAT THE AMBASSADORS DID AND LEARNT

CONDUCTING A FLOW AMBASSADOR BUSINESS MODEL YOU WORKSHOP

One of the final exercises in the FLOW Ambassador training was a process derived from a book called Business Model You*, by Tim Clark in collaboration with Alexander Osterwalder and Yves Pigneur, which is intended as a manual for career reinvention. The exercise was adapted for the ambassadors as a simple process to help them see where they could add value to the world in a way that is satisfying, and to guide the next steps towards that goal.

The process starts a few weeks prior to the workshop, with specific journal questions to help gather the information needed to prepare a Business Model You poster in a facilitated workshop. In many ways this brought the personal development training full circle, starting with the same journaling question that had kicked off the training on day one of the programme – ‘Who Am I?’

‘Who Am I?’ as a question was further broken down to unpack various aspects of self, including personal perception of me, now, interests, skills, talents and role models. A second part of this question uses an exercise directly from the Business Model You book, to identify dominant personality traits, both from the individual’s perspective and from at least one peer’s perspective. The journaling part of the process concludes by looking at roles and purpose.

The facilitated half-day workshop starts with sharing and a review of the journal entries to be used as raw material, the preparation of a timeline with emphasis on highs and lows, and a ‘wheel of life’. The workshop concludes with each FA producing a poster depicting the work the FA would like to do in the world.

FLOW AMBASSADOR BUSINESS MODEL YOU WORKSHOP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TIME</th>
<th>ACTIVITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>09h00 – 09h30</td>
<td>Greet and check-in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09h30 – 11h00</td>
<td>SESSION 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11h00 – 11h30</td>
<td>TEA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11h30 – 13h00</td>
<td>SESSION 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13h00 – 13h30</td>
<td>WRAP UP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* For more information on the process go to http://businessmodelyou.com/
Thandokazi Duku, Nthabeleng Jotta and Unathi Hams share a joke with Piet Bosman (extreme left) as they plot their own personalities for the Business Model You exercise.
Africa’s ‘youth bulge’ is a blessing and a curse: one in five is young, out of work, and potentially frustrated by their lack of prospects. Rather than look to big business, government, or budding entrepreneurs to create the kinds of jobs that will soak up their vigour and potential, how can we create a ‘new world of work’ through ‘going local’? This was central to FLOW, where weaving together youth development with a community currency challenged some myths about how to achieve economic growth. In the process, FLOW discovered that many youth don’t have the appetite to risk becoming entrepreneurs, but at the same time aspire to work at something that is more than just a ‘job’.

LEONIE JOUBERT
When you order a meal of snoek en patat at the annual winter festival here in Goedverwacht, each part of the platter tells a piece of their story: a slab of Cape snoek, a kind of mackerel, roasted over the open coals so that it gets that smoky, charred finish; a wedge of steaming old wood-fired Dover stove; a slice of Cape snoek, a kind of mackerel, roasted over the open coals so that it gets that smoky, charred finish; a sweet potato baked in its skin, preferably in an open coals so that it gets that smoky, charred finish; a sweet potato baked in its skin, preferably in an open coals so that it gets that smoky, charred finish; a sweet potato baked in its skin, preferably in an open coals so that it gets that smoky, charred finish; a sweet potato baked in its skin, preferably in an open coals so that it gets that smoky, charred finish; a sweet potato baked in its skin, preferably in an open coals so that it gets that smoky, charred finish; a sweet potato baked in its skin, preferably in an open coals so that it gets that smoky, charred finish; a sweet potato baked in its skin, preferably in an open coals so that it gets that smoky, charred finish; a sweet potato baked in its skin, preferably in an open coals so that it gets that smoky, charred finish; a sweet potato baked in its skin, preferably in an open coals so that it gets that smoky, charred finish; a sweet potato baked in its skin, preferably in an open coals so that it gets that smoky, charred finish; a sweet potato baked in its skin, preferably in an open coals so that it gets that smoky, charred finish; a sweet potato baked in its skin, preferably in an open coals so that it gets that smoky, charred finish; a sweet potato baked in its skin, preferably in an open coals so that it gets that smoky, charred finish; a sweet potato baked in its skin, preferably in an open coals so that it gets that smoky, charred finish; a sweet potato baked in its skin, preferably in an open coals so that it gets that smoky, charred finish; a sweet potato baked in its skin, preferably in an open coals so that it gets that smoky, charred finish; a sweet potato baked in its skin, preferably in an open coals so that it gets that smoky, charred finish; a sweet potato baked in its skin, preferably in an open coals so that it gets that smoky, charred finish; a sweet potato baked in its skin, preferably in an open coals so that it gets that smoky, charred finish; a sweet potato baked in its skin, preferably in an open coals so that it gets that smoky, charred finish; a sweet potato baked in its skin, preferably in an open coals so that it gets that smoky, charred finish; a sweet potato baked in its skin, preferably in an open coals so that it gets that smoky, charred finish; a sweet potato baked in its skin, preferably in an open coals so that it gets that smoky, charred finish; a sweet potato baked in its skin, preferably in an open coals so that it gets that smoky, charred finish; a sweet potato baked in its skin, preferably in an open coals so that it gets that smoky, charmed finish.

The shoe shop
Lottie’s Tuckshop has all the basics: cooking oil, packets of bi-carb and baking powder, flour, maize meal, drinking glasses, packets of crisps, fridges with all the usual fizzy drink brands, mayonnaise, washing powder, soap, candles, cartons of UHT milk, a few different kinds of dried herbs, shampoo, chest freezers with labels that are unreadable from the serving hatch.

The shop operates out the back of Lelani Cunningham’s grandfather’s house, about five minutes’ walk across the valley from the Goedverwacht tourism centre where Lorraine sells her roosterbrood, and it’s where Lelani’s first business operation started.

‘I like shoes.’

The 28-year-old minister’s daughter and former FLOW Ambassador is soft spoken and reserved. She’s reflecting on what it takes to venture into things entrepreneurial in a community like hers, where jobs are few and people don’t have much cash.

‘I had some money after finishing a job in Piketberg in 2012. And I had to decide what to do with it, spend it or invest.’

Lelani saw a pamphlet for a factory shop in Cape Town where one can buy shoes cheaply and so she took R250 (less than US$20) and travelled to the big city to buy a few pairs of sandals, slippers and boots. At first she sold them from home, but then put them on display on a single shelf in Lottie’s Tuckshop, and let people buy them ‘on the book’. She would set a pair of shoes aside for a customer until they’d paid them off in instalments.

‘The second time, I spent R3 200 (I think US$225), because I saw there was an opportunity here. No one else was selling shoes in Goedverwacht.’

The third and last time she brought in a consignment of shoes, she spent about R2 000 (US$140) on stock. Even then, it was risky because her customers couldn’t always pay for the shoes in full.

When the FLOW Ambassador programme was first taking shape, the notion of building up a group of young entrepreneurs was central to the plan. It wasn’t so much a set policy of the municipality, explains municipal manager Hanlie Linde, but it was about boosting economic development here, a way of ‘assisting people to raise money and do their own thing.

This kind of approach is partly rooted in one of the prevailing narratives around economic growth and unemployment, argue Anna Cowen and John Ziniades, FLOW’s co-creators: if you can grow a generation of entrepreneurs, and graduate their small businesses so that they make it in the formal sector, then the jobs they create will soak up the unemployed and the economy will take off.

But it soon became clear that many of Lelani’s peers don’t have the same appetite for this kind of small business.

‘A lot of youngsters are afraid to take the risk,’ says Lelani of her contemporaries. ‘I was fortunate to have some money. Not everyone has that kind of finance to start up a business.’

FLOW co-ordinator Ian Schaffers says the original idea was to support the ambassadors who already had businesses, and help them to grow those further. Janelle Bailey, from the first group of Bergrivier growers, sold snoek and needed a fridge if she wanted to expand the operation. Loritha Majerrie had a small hairdressing operation at her home, and would have needed equipment and a proper salon. Lelani could also have done with some support.

The intention was also linked with the BRAND currency, and the role which it might play in fostering local business growth, explains Anna. The ambassadors with small businesses were amongst the first signed-up members of the BRAND network, and they hoped that they’d be role models to other potential members.

But most of the ambassadors were clear: they wanted jobs, with salaries and benefits, and little risk.

‘We talked about it a lot, and one of the ambassadors straight up said “I don’t want to run a business” Ian explains.
‘A salaried job is much more attractive,’ he says, reflecting on his two years as a co-ordinator for these ambassadors. ‘They want to go into HR (human resources), or nursing, or teaching. Some want to work at the local municipality. One wants to be a policeman, another wants to be a lawyer.’

Sure, the FLOW team argues, there are some entrepreneurs in the community whose small businesses can drive this sort of job creation (Ian and Lelani might be seen as such). But tackling the unemployed youth bulge needs more than that.

This is where the second narrative around tackling unemployment comes in, argues John: the idea that government must create jobs, particularly through large infrastructure projects or top-heavy bureaucracies.

It’s a hangover from the New Deal approach put forward by President Roosevelt, to steer the USA out of its mid-1930s economic depression. In addition to a suite of policy reforms, it included a series of public works-type projects that created low-skill jobs. But adopting a policy like this creates a passive workforce that is waiting for someone else to create work for them.

‘This kind of thinking will remain a remnant of the industrial era, where either big business or government will create jobs for people,’ says John.

‘Underpinning both of these narratives is the idea that development through “economic growth” is based on the extraction of limitless resources,’ he argues. ‘In FLOW, we wanted to question this strategy. We propose something different, what the UK economics commissioner for its Sustainable Development Commission, Tim Jackson, calls “prosperity without growth.” It’s about measuring “wellbeing” instead of GDP.’

The FLOW team was curious to explore these narratives, including the assumption that young people want to be entrepreneurs.

‘We were fascinated to discover that, in many respects, this was not the case with the ambassadors. It rarely was.’

Since the first intake of ambassadors has graduated, some have taken part-time jobs or short-term contract work, such as at a food retailer, or at the local Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) Piketberg office ahead of the local government elections in August 2016. Loritha doesn’t do hair anymore, but gets a bit of cash from running people around town in a car. Some of the graduates are hoping that FLOW will seed a development initiative here that could give some of them employment.

Most of the youth who do tinker in small business ventures here, are running hand-to-mouth operations that support them until a real job comes along.

‘We wanted to encourage entrepreneurs, but many of the first ambassadors fell back onto salaries,’ explains Hanlie. ‘Don’t be too harsh on them. They need a salary. We thought of mentoring them and raising entrepreneurs, but to go from zero to entrepreneur is very difficult.’

What comes after a world of jobs that is based on extractive Capitalist growth, or hand-me-downs given by government? And how does one stimulate a more vibrant local economy, that isn’t dependent on industrial-scale businesses and associated supply chains, to thrive? And how, within that, do the out-of-work youth of Africa plug into this system, and find life-enhancing work that is “more than just a job”?

They might not have the answer yet, but what they learned through FLOW was that this kind of community gives the context and scale to play with ideas around localisation for job creation and economic growth.

In the meantime, Lelani admits that she isn’t selling shoes at the moment. She’s busy with her IEC work, and her other business venture, which is renting out a second-hand jumping castle that her and her builder boyfriend Fernando Cornelius bought a few months back. She’s thinking of investing in some children’s chairs and tables, and getting a friend to bake cakes, so she can set up a full-on kids’ party outfit. As much as she likes shoes, those are going to have to wait for a while.

LJ
LJ ‘in that platter of wine caused a lot of problems for the community. Back from selling their sweet potato, they would also come back with wine. ‘The grape jam symbolises the wine of our fathers, because when they came upon fillet of snoek for the guests. It was a point of pride for the community. When I was at university, I was starving. But not when I was at Goedverwacht. And so he went back home. ‘You don’t see someone going hungry at Goedverwacht.’ Ian managed to finish up his degree eventually, and now farms a small piece of land near his home in Goedverwacht. Since 2014 he has been the local co-ordinator for FLOW. It was the work of a Cape Town-based environmental and social justice organisation, the Environmental Monitoring Group (EMG) that first allowed Ian to make the connection between a healthy environment and a healthy community. The organisation was working within the Goedverwacht community to consider how climate change would affect them, and how the community could steel itself against these impacts. ‘It opened my eyes. I realised we need to be in symbiosis with the environment, and not be parasitic. So when researchers and the local municipality began working on the Bergrivier’s Climate Adaptation Plan a year later, he was well primed to begin the kind of work opportunities that FLOW would throw at him. When he went for the local co-ordinator job, he took a leap of faith in September 2014, he wasn’t sure what the role would entail, but he was offered the post on the same day and by that afternoon was sitting in on interviews with the first ambassadors. Since then he’s become a leader, a counsellor, a confidant, and conflict mediator in his role with the FLOW ambassadors and within the wider community. ‘Ian was exactly the right jockey (for this role), because he is an entrepreneur and a farmer,’ explains municipal manager Hanlie Linde, who has worked closely with this FLOW liaison over the past two years. ‘If he wasn’t an entrepreneur they wouldn’t have had the focus that it did.’ One of the toughest aspects of the job has been dealing with the changeable nature of things – ‘they’re always having to adapt to changing plans.’ ‘And my job is to translate all of this into something that the ambassadors will care about.’

While so many others wish to leave these small towns, Ian is happy to be back, after his years of study. He loves the quiet and safety of his community, being able to sleep with the windows open at night, after having been a bit jaded by the abrasiveness of city life. ‘I like to help people,’ he says, ‘over a warm cappuccino at a favourite haunt around the corner from FLOW’s Piketberg office. I tried to help someone once in the city and I got robbed!’

The 30-year-old was raised by his mother and Merle Dietrich, his teacher-turned-farming aunt who was instrumental in getting him into agricultural college for high school and through his tertiary studies. Maybe this is one of the reasons he has a keen eye for the richness that community brings into someone’s life, something that can’t be measured in Rands and Cents, and why you don’t see people going hungry in this town. ‘Even if you don’t grow your own vegetables, there are people there who do, and if you need something, just ask someone for it,’ he says. ‘No one’s going to say “no” to you. They’ll say okay, you can get this, but then you must do that for me.’ Young, smart and savvy, Ian has a unique perspective on the youth in his community. What does wealth and wellbeing mean to them? ‘If you ask them, they’ll say it’s access to quality education, and by that afternoon was sitting in interviews with the first ambassadors. But for him, Ian believes he has everything he needs right here. ‘You might have money, but you won’t be able to do what you want with that money. If you have social networks, though, and skills, you can survive without money.’
The idea was simple: if South Africa could create a class of small-sized business people, they would create jobs and carry the country’s economy to cruising altitude. This has been the philosophical updraft of many economists here in the past two decades. With this in mind, FLOW set out to see if it could nurture the young ambassadors into a clutch of fledgling entrepreneurs. What they found, though, is that the reality of many young South Africans doesn’t match the lofty aspirations of economics theorists.

LJ

Small and diverse: Ewald Dirks repairs a chainsaw. A community that has many small businesses is more resilient.
South Africans have a rather quaint saying: ‘local is lekker’. And it means more than that local is merely ‘nice’. But in the context of trying to foster more resilient communities, going local is key to thriving, and it’s about much more than just returning to some romanticised bygone era of localised bartering, or hand-made clothes, or home-grown food. The FLOW programme tried to explore what ‘going local’ means in terms of a post-globalisation world.

What it is

For communities to move towards resilience, they need to be able to ‘shape decisions that affect them’, according to Hopkins, or ‘create an Orania system’. The BRAND and K’Mali were not about creating alternative currencies, but currencies that are complementary, and parallel to, the existing monetary system. The localisation movement, according to Hopkins, is not about cutting off trade, or being entirely self-sufficient, or going off-grid, or shutting off from the rest of the world. That’s not what localisation is, chuckles John. FLOW, and the local currency, was not about trying to create an Orania system. The BRAND and K’Mali were not about creating alternative currencies, but currencies that are complementary, and parallel to, the existing monetary system.

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What it isn’t

There’s a peculiar town in South Africa, called Orania. It’s a kind of tribal enclave for a group of Africaners who maintain that they want to protect their language and heritage. But critics say they have rejected the new, racially integrated and democratic South Africa, that they have hunkered down into an insular community and shut themselves off from the rest of the world.

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MORE THAN JUST JOBS

We want to go beyond the world of ‘McJobs’, argues Anna. ‘We need to create a new world of work, one that goes beyond the traditional sense of the ‘job’. It’s a place where work is connected to place and community, where there is a sense of purpose, of people offering their unique gifts. It is a place of self-actualisation, where the workplace doesn’t see people as expendable and replaceable, or just some cogs in an industrial wheel.’

Localising is part of creating that space, where everyone’s needs are met at a local level, and the things that people make and grow are at the appropriate scale.

By localising, the FLOW project believes, people can produce their own energy within their communities, where there is enough for themselves and to share with others who may have a shortage. The same goes for harvesting and cleaning their own water, or growing their own food, or using household waste in a way that benefits the system. (See some of these solutions in Chapter 6 Seeds of Tomorrow.)

The idea is to have a distributed, decentralised production system, using open source tech, for instance, where everyone has gainful

STAYING LOCAL

Fruit seller Kevin Farao was one of the BRAND network members and meaningful employment.

If a community can meet its own basic needs locally, through using sustainable technologies, open source and commons-shared ideas, and collaborative government, then people won’t need to earn as much cash to survive, and then won’t be as vulnerable.

There is also a relationship between the concept of a local currency, these new kinds of work, and what already exists in the small businesses in each community. LJ

The industrial harbour of Saldanha Bay, just 100km west of Piketberg, is about to boom. A massive industrial upgrade of the port means it’s going to need 18 000 new artisans by 2018.

To recruit a generation of new fitters and turners, electricians, plumbers, cabinetmakers and joiners, machinists and the like, the Western Cape government set up a programme through a college near Saldanha: free education to anyone enrolling in the programme, and a guaranteed job afterwards.

The Berg River Municipality was offered 90 guaranteed slots on the programme. Tracey Stone, the municipality’s strategic manager at the time, and Hanlie Linde, municipal manager, decided to recruit 120 youngsters to enrol, just in case there were a few drop-outs.

‘Do you know how many youngsters we could get? All they had to do was travel that…’ her finger traces a line in the air above the map, following the road running from Piketberg to Saldanha, ‘for this opportunity? They didn’t have to pay a cent for their training, and they had a guaranteed job at the end.

She pauses, holds up her hand, her finger makes a ‘0’ in the air. ‘Zero. And the reason? Dis darem reig te ver. (It’s just too far). Dis darem baie mooite om nou daar te gaan studer (It’s a lot of effort to go and study there.)

Her exasperation is tangible. But as she says, reflecting on her colleagues’ attempt to understand this: Piketberg doesn’t so much have a case of joblessness, but of job shyness.

No one has done a proper study of why a whole generation of recent school leavers was so disinterested in this opportunity. Was it youth apathy? Was it lack of belief in themselves? Was it poor recruitment strategies? Was it that their parents simply couldn’t afford the cost of transport and accommodation if their kids took up studies 100km away from home?

But then, as John notes, the aim of seeding micro-businesses in communities like Piketberg and Kokstad, and fertilising them with initiatives such as a community currency and the strong social networks that grow around them, is so that the youth here don’t have to leave town in search of work prospects elsewhere.

Despite what looks like apathy and boredom, even lacklustre behaviour amongst the youth that might seem like it is bordering on entitlement, there may also be an inherent wisdom in not being drawn into this kind of big scale industrial work such as that seen at Saldanha, argues Anna.

‘Work like this is far away from ‘home’ and ‘place’. ‘At an instinctive level, people know what they love.’ LJ
The scent of a real Perigord truffle (Tuber melanosporum) is heady, almost erotic, and stays with you for hours. It’s little wonder these fungal delicacies fetch unbelievably high prices (around R22 000 a kilo). The Truffle Hunter

\[\text{THE TRUFFLE-HUNTER}\]

Goedewacht has a communal bakkie – the local name for a pickup truck – that is central to their operations. It’s small, fire engine-red, and thunders with the self-importance of a muscly diesel engine. Few of the farmers here have their own vehicles, or even drivers’ licences, and because they’re tucked away in the blunt nose of the bakkie, they’re difficult to find. Even the few people there with a licence to drive it, you’ll often see her at the wheel, delivering local produce to Piketberg. The bakkie belongs to the Goedewacht Tourism Development Forum and because Merle Dietrich is one of the few people there with a licence to drive it, you’ll often see her at the wheel, delivering local produce to Piketberg. When the BRAND complementary currency was launched in the Bergrivier area, local businesses thought that the bakkie could be a way to strengthen the ties of the business network between the food-producing region of Goedewacht and Piketberg, as well as stimulate use of the currency itself.

The idea was simple. Goedewacht farmers were already shipping their veggie to Piketberg. But now that there was a business network, with its own currency, why not get members of the network to trade direct and in that way, will start creating wealth within the community.

Max had planted oak seedlings inoculated with truffle spores about four and a half years previously, to much raising of eyebrows among the local farming community, who wondered whether he had any chance of success. Now he’s harvested the first truffles, a year or so before expected, and diners at the upmarket Hartford House near Moziriver, some 275 kilometres away, have been treated to authentically locally grown truffles.

Max, a third generation farmer at Willowdale, sees possibilities for local communities where others see obstacles. ‘Many South African farmers are grappling with the challenge of tenant labourers’ land tenure,’ he says. ‘We initiated a programme where 638 hectares of land have been transferred, bought by the government, for the benefit of the Willowdale community, which is the community that lives on the farm. The community is about 150 strong. They’re going to start building 83 houses by the end of March 2017. That will then allow the community to move onto their land and into their own housing, and through that start to unscramble that egg that was inherited from the apartheid system.’

There is an iconic pink church on that land, fronting onto the N2 national highway, which is a landmark for locals and travellers alike. Max envisages turning it into a farm stall for the community. Earnarked for local produce, such as the stewed and bottled peaches that are produced annually by many in this small community and the Pakkies community a couple of kilometres away. A percentage of the profits could go back into the community to fund development, such as an early childhood development centre and training for farmers, he suggests.

‘What interests me about the KM’ is that it could be a very good tool in a closed system like this,’ he says.

‘The challenge in these rural areas is that, if you think about it, our current financial system is an incredibly extractive system,’ he says. Any money that comes into this community, the first thing that people do at the end of the month is they’ll jump into a taxi and drive into town; they’ll go to your big supermarkets and chain stores, and that money is extracted immediately out of the community and it goes off to the bigger centres, Durban and Jo’burg, and of course to shareholders, leaving the community back where it was before the money came in. So I’m very interested in developing a closed loop whereby a percentage of any money that comes into the community can be circulated back into the community and in that way, will start creating wealth within the community. ‘Max sees opportunities for the community in his success with truffles. Too, he’s exploring a plan to develop 10 to 20 hectares of truffles for the community. The upshot is that the bakkie is funded – and he’s earmarked some possible funders – but the input costs are low, and it is low maintenance and resistant to some of the climatic dangers such as hail storms. The type of revenue that could generate over a fifteen to twenty year period really has the potential to impact very positively on the community.

Goedewacht farmer Merle Dietrich drives local fresh produce to nearby markets in Piketberg be the ‘face’ of the trading network, with the BRAND logo emblazoned on its doors.

The idea was that the Goedewacht farmers would pay for access to this distribution network, namely the BRAND bakkie, in BRAND, and Piketberg consumers could pay for a portion (up to 20% of their purchases) in BRAND. This idea is one of the many that grew out of the first seeds of the business network and currency initiative. At the 11th hour, the arrangement fell through, but as Anna says, it’s not about whether or not the idea worked, the point is that the project created a space where people can explore ideas and test them out.

‘It’s about learning as we go.’ The FLOW Ambassadors pitched the idea to Piketberg business owners (members of the Bergrivier BRAND Network), and managed to get a lot of initial orders for veggies. ‘People were willing and keen to do this,’ says Anna. ‘We mainly sold veggies. The demand was clearly there, but there was a hitch in the logistics and supply of the service. Learning from this might be an opportunity to fine tune a similar endeavour later down the line.’
INITIAL MAPPING OF THE LOCAL ECONOMY BY WALKING THROUGH THE TOWN AND CAPTURING LOCATION DETAILS

- Break up the town into walkable sections and identify the visible businesses (those that have a sign outside their premises) and capture their details and GPS locations using a mobile phone.
- Brainstorm the less visible businesses (these are businesses that typically operate from home, and that are only known to the social network. For example, the person that bakes cakes for weddings, the local DJ, the person that runs a hair salon from their home etc.). Capture the details and GPS locations using a mobile phone.
- Map the visible and less visible businesses on a physical map (visible businesses have an orange dot; less visible businesses have a green dot).

COACHING THE BUSINESS NETWORK MEMBERS TO LOCALISE THEIR PERSONAL AND BUSINESS EXPENDITURE

- Identify the main business expenditure items and suggest local Business Network members who could provide these items locally.
- See if the business owner or proprietor could also identify personal expenditure that could be sourced in the local business network.
- Use the BRAND/K’Mali business network guide to suggest alternatives.

MAP CURRENT NETWORK OF TRADE OF THE BUSINESS NETWORK MEMBERS

- Map the local business network using this form. Get each business to fill out one of these forms, indicating which of the businesses in the network they do business with (regardless of whether this was in Rands or in BRAND/K’Mali).
- Indicate the frequency of trade i.e. daily, weekly, monthly or annually.

USE KUMU.IO TO ANALYSE THE LOCAL ECONOMY AND IDENTIFY KEY BUSINESSES AND ROLEPLAYERS

- Enter the data collected in the business network trade form above into a spreadsheet and import it into a Kumu map (kumu.io).
- Analyse the data to understand the key players in the local economy. Kumu can assist one to see patterns that are not obvious at first, such as the local connectors/hubs, which businesses have high visibility of the whole network and can get information out there quickly, and the bridges/gatekeepers of information flow, which may also become key strategic partners.
For many people, when they turn on a water tap, they don’t think of the complex network of pipes and reticulation systems, the engineers, or the mountain wetlands and weather patterns that run all the way back up to the source of the water. By training the ambassadors to ‘see’ these often invisible systems – for water, food, energy and waste – FLOW's aim was to build up a group of youngsters who would take ownership of those systems, and champion their care and conservation. They learned how to see anew, through movie making, modelling, and mapping.

MANDI SMALLHORNE
’The world starts looking like a new world, every single day,’ Aphinda Ndlobeni muses on her experience with FLOW Kokstad.

’When we were doing the mapping, we were moving around the places. Even though I was born there, I didn’t know that Kokstad was that beautiful,’ says Pumeza Mbedu.

’Kokstad is like a little child that needs to be nurtured and given guidance,’ says Unathi Hams.

During the FLOW programme, many of the young ambassadors fell in love with their home towns, developing tender insights, seeing the heart of the place, sometimes coming to shocking realisations about poverty and lack, sometimes experiencing epiphanies. ’Before the programme I had never been to Shayamoya and Horseshoe. You’d be surprised how many people own their own business. They want to take part in the economy and change their lives – they just need proper skills. The ideas are there, it just needs a way to grow it,’ says Aphinda, known as AP to her fellow ambassadors.

Pumeza’s eyes were opened to the precious, fragile nature of the town’s water supply; Unathi was troubled by how so many of her fellow citizens live.

A new lens
Looking at their familiar places with new eyes, seeing new worlds in them, was a core intent of the programme. All the activities the FLOW ambassadors engaged in – mapping, making movies, conducting surveys, and introducing community currencies – were aimed at shaking and remaking old ways of seeing, like a kaleidoscope, so that new pictures became possible.

And each activity also created assets, which the FLOW team began to refer to as ‘commons artefacts’ – maps of business flows and life-support systems, short films, survey data, community currency. They were community assets, created by the programme for the community as a whole, unlike official town plans, designed by others and tucked away in the rebarbative halls of officialdom, to which few of the citizens have access.

’One of the seed ideas for FLOW emerged from my experiences as an architect and urbanist,’ says Anna Cowen, who, with partner John Ziniades, conceptualised and facilitated the FLOW programme. ’It became clear that there was a gap between the sophisticated planning and development instruments we use, and the communities about which they talk. Integrated development plans, spatial development frameworks… these are instruments that talk about the future, and yet they do it in a way that keeps the knowledge privileged, inaccessible, arcane. For the communities who are the object of the work, they’re even more unreachable.

In her view this way of working with the future is exclusionary. Communities use and share ‘the commons’ within their spaces; they should and need to have free access to the knowledge, understanding and thinking around the present status and the future imagining of their places.

Who, after all, ’owns’ these route maps to the future? Surely it’s not the municipalities alone, or national government? In their hands, complex plans, long laboured over, often end up gathering dust in a filing cabinet, seen once, but not read. This knowledge, this data, should not be owned by government or corporates. ’We were conscious of the possibility of the data the programme was generating being exploited; it was one of our biggest fears,’ says Anna.

At all times in the FLOW project, there was an awareness of the tension between the protectionism around data (a feature of the world of research, where sometimes data is seen as a valuable owned asset), the open source movement, and the rights of people on the ground to take ownership of and feedback on the data they helped to generate.

FLOW set out to empower young people in the municipalities of Bergrivier and Piketberg with a knowledge of and insight into ’place’, which they gathered themselves, using practical and sleeves-rolled-up methods.

’We wanted them to understand the systems within which they live, whether economic or environmental; to see the complexity and interrelatedness of every element in those systems,’ says Anna. ’We wanted them to see themselves as inher-
ent parts of the system, both acting and acted upon.
Understanding the web of living systems, both natural and human, is a crucial insight as people face a world growing ever more uncertain. As the reality of climate change bites, as economic and political uncertainty rumble beneath the surface in vulnerable places like Kokstad and Bergrivier, it is becoming important for local communities to be able to trace connections between people and natural systems.

Models and maps
Oh, it was fun!’ says Thando Duku. It’s the common response when the FLOW ambassadors are asked to recall their attempts to make cardboard models of their own homes, the first piece of training they experienced.

Nthabi Jafta snorts, remembering her initial derision at the very idea – and competitive feelings it aroused: ‘When you see the other one worked better than yours, and you must start again!’ But it was another bond forged between the ambassadors, she adds: ‘It’s when we built our team, we started to know each other, even if someone’s short-tempered… but then they love your house… and so we got to know each other.’

The ambassadors also made unexpected discoveries about their most intimate spaces, as they compared rooms and shapes of buildings. ‘Your house – the skin that protects you from the elements – is something that you don’t even think about,’ says Anna. But when you have to model it, the relationship shifts. ‘This is barefoot architecture,’ she says. ‘The skills involved are easy to learn and should be accessible to everyone.

Seeing the invisible
The process was repeated when the ambassadors set out to map elements of their towns. The mapping took place according to themes, explains Anna: ‘The first three months of the programme, we touched on all of these, with a stronger emphasis on exchange – the flow of trade between local businesses. We then deepened this thematic focus over the rest of the programme, expanding on the themes one at a time.’ Both Bergrivier and Kokstad are regions at the moving edge of climate change, already experiencing the vulnerabilities that bring. Underlying the exercises designed to ‘make visible’ the previously invisible was an intent to allow the young people to discover for themselves, and own, the unseen web of life, resources and resource flows that support them and their communities. The more they understand their life-support systems, the more able they will be to make necessary adaptations.

In Bergrivier, audits of household water use revealed where the demand for water was highest; audits of municipal water systems provided insights into how marginal and threatened the resource is, even in a region supplied by a river. ‘We went to see the wetlands,’ says Ian Schaffers, FLOW project co-ordinator in Bergrivier. ‘We’d heard about them, but now we can see why they are so important to us and what the various threats are [to the wetlands].’

Searching for the ‘invisible’ micro businesses in Kokstad’s streets, AP started to make connections: ‘There are a lot of skills here, and ones that are in short supply – artisans and plumbers, for example. They just need to take that one small step.’

When it comes to the surveys, maps and movies, AP’s insight is an example of what can be revealed by this process, of ‘making visible’ that which was previously unseen: a landscape of possibility, of hope, with the potential to make the leap to a more agile and resilient future community.

‘Asking the most straightforward of questions can be mind-blowing – where does the water come from? How does it get here?’ Anna says. ‘What FLOW has achieved in Kokstad and Bergrivier is just the start of an imagined future in which planning will be participatory and owned by the community,’ says Anna. The production of these ‘commons artefacts’, sketching out the lay of the land through modelling, mapping and making mini-movies, can be seen ‘as a kind of strategic opening into a completely new kind of dialogue, one that is fundamentally anchored in commons thinking’.

It helps to understand that commons are not just things or resources. Outsiders to commons scholarship are prone to this mistake, either because they are economists who tend to objectify everything or because they are commoners declaring that a certain resource ought to be governed as a commons (what I call an “aspirational commons”). Commons certainly include physical and intangible resources of all sorts, but they are more accurately defined as paradigms that combine a distinct community with a set of social practices, values and norms that are used to manage a resource. Put another way, a commons is a resource + a community + a set of social protocols. The three are an integrated, interdependent whole.’

David Bollier, Think Like a Commoner - A short Introduction to the Life of the Commons, New Society Publishers 2014
The commons is a widely used term for resources—natural, cultural, social, economic—which are shared within a society, and in which many people have a stake or interest. It derives from the term ‘common land’ in Britain, or ‘the common’, where all residents of a village had the right to use a large area of pasture to graze their own livestock, often a central piece of land owned by the lord of the manor, around which the houses and church were clustered.

The term came into general use for a broader range of ‘property’ after biologist Garrett Hardin wrote an essay titled The Tragedy of the Commons in 1968. His thesis was that common goods and property would be degraded or过度used to the point of extinction, since each person using a ‘common’ good would be driven only by his or her own profit or interest.

The narrative around the commons was largely shaped by this idea over several decades, and found its way into other fields, such as economics and conservation. Then there was a dramatic shift, as scientists and thinkers like Nobel Prize Winner Elin Ostrom showed that, far from leading automatically to degradation and a running down of resources, many ‘commons’ systems across the world have worked very successfully. One case she analysed was the use of common grazing land in Switzerland, a system which has been successful over hundreds of years.

Since then, the advent of the interconnected online world has expanded the vision of the commons far beyond natural resources, to include a huge landscape that embraces digital and intellectual commons, and has resulted in a great deal of work around the notion.

To have a commons isn’t to license a free-for-all, as Hardin suggests, and it is not what happened historically. The precise shape of commoning was negotiated in a particular place and time, dependent on the ecology and the community. Common rights evolved over time, shaped by the relative power of those around the table as well as the changing geography of the physical commons itself. The commons was, in other words, both a place and a process of freedom in which people fought for the right to shape the terms on which they could share the commons.


**DROP BY DROP**

In the early hours of the morning, the water starts its slow surge through Kokstad’s pipes, rolling down from the waterworks high on the hill behind the town, gurgling through infrastructure that went dry the day before. People rise early to get washing machines going, and fill water tanks huddled against the walls of homes and guest houses. Because the water will be shut off again in just a few hours’ time.

Water restrictions have been in place here since the last months of 2015. This part of the KwaZulu-Natal province, like the Berg river municipality in the Western Cape, has been hit hard by the disastrous 2014/2015 drought, worsened by El Nino that has scoured southern and eastern Africa. Kokstad takes its water supply from the adjacent river and the Crystal Springs dam, which was down to 2% of volume in late 2015.

‘Water-shedding’ was absolutely essential as the Greater Kokstad Municipality tried to coax the dam volume upwards, under a relentless arid sky. But it was only when the young FLOW Ambassadors went to the sanitation and waterworks plants in the two municipalities that they fully ‘saw’, understood and contextualised the fragility of this precious resource.

I got to see the whole process of them cleaning the water, and how much they go through to try and make sure the water is clean for us to consume. The manager who was taking us through the whole works showed us a lot of things, and made me realise that I can do little things at home. You know mos when you’re brushing your teeth, you leave the tap open, but after that experience, now I know that I need to save water, I can use a mug.

Water restrictions happen with our waste water, that it gets saved, recycled, and used for irrigation.

For all the FLOW Ambassadors, the idea that water needs to be cleaned before it is piped into homes was a revelation: ‘For us in Pakkies there was like a rumour, water from the toilet, they purify it, but we said, ‘No, it cannot be’, comments Nthabi Jafta. The mental map of how water gets from A to B, the idea that water needs to be cleaned before it is piped into homes was a revelation: ‘For us in Pakkies there was like a rumour, water from the toilet, they purify it, but we said, ‘No, it cannot be’, comments Nthabi Jafta. The mental map of how water gets from A to B in an urban environment was surprising and thought-provoking to this young woman, who grew up with water coming, ceaseless and pure, from a mountain source.

**In Common**

When we went to the waterworks, the young FLOW Ambassadors were in an urban environment was surprising and thought-provoking to this young woman, who grew up with water coming, ceaseless and pure, from a mountain source. The narrative around the commons was largely shaped by this idea over several decades, and found its way into other fields, such as economics and conservation. Then there was a dramatic shift, as scientists and thinkers like Nobel Prize Winner Elin Ostrom showed that, far from leading automatically to degradation and a running down of resources, many ‘commons’ systems across the world have worked very successfully. One case she analysed was the use of common grazing land in Switzerland, a system which has been successful over hundreds of years.

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Kirwan Klaase, who was involved in mapping the water system in the Berg river area, echoes her feelings: ‘Now I understand where our water comes from, and what processes it goes through so that we have clean water to drink, and bath with, and water for the gardens and grass. And also what happens with our waste water, that it gets saved, recycled, and used for irrigation.'
GET YOUR MOJO ON

It was 1989, and the Berlin Wall was being dismantled, brick by brick. A young Dominique Vandenhout was right there, wielding a camera in his first job as a news cameraman, shooting history as it happened, with an immediacy that became addictive and which he is now helping others to experience.

‘It was this big thing that bit me... I’ve always been bitten by adrenalin. But I wanted to do something else, something completely different. ’

As the years went by, he would be bitten by another bug: the itch to put moviemaking or mobile journalism (mojo) into the hands of young people, to give them a tool for capturing history as it happens, ever since, ‘ says Dom, who was born and raised in Belgium. Back in 2005, there were no big news or-ties able to tackle future challeng-es: he moved to South Africa. ‘By coming to South Africa, I could give my family more quality life – living in Europe is so hectic, ’ says Dom.

And then he took a leap of faith that ultimately drew his passion into a partnership with a commitment to nurture resilient communi-ties able to tackle future challeng-es: he moved to South Africa. ‘By coming to South Africa, I could give my family more quality life – living in Europe is so hectic, ’ says Dom.

He had developed a concept for hyper-local reporting, based on reporting he’d been doing in his own home town in Belgium. Back in 2005, there were no big news or-ties with video news feeds on their websites, so this was brand new thinking.

The initial idea did not work out, but while Dom started a training organisation, the Media Academy, and worked as a consultant, it stayed with him. ‘I had seen how much impact [hyper-local TV] had on people,’ so when he and John Ziniades, FLOW core team member, connected via a project they were both consulting on, the concept seemed a natural fit with what John was working on at the time, the Kokstad Green Ambassadors. Soon Dom found himself teaching young people mobile journalism (mojo), and this work naturally became part of FLOW when it was birthed.

‘It’s such a nice thing to teach these youngsters, it really gives me a good feeling that I can give them a set of skills which they can use to communicate with the world. Maybe it’s just an idea you put in their mind, something that makes them think of new possibilities, encourages them to do new things, think out of the box. So that excites me; and when they say they really liked the training, you can’t get a better compliment! It’s different from the kick of shooting breaking news, but both make me excited.’

FLOW was a natural in front of the camera – she’d made a good presenter, says Dom. Each of the ambassadors found a niche for themselves. In Kokstad, Thando brought some raw experience to the moviemaking – she had worked for the national electricity supplier, Edecom, and had done some photography for them. ‘She said in her interview that she liked taking pictures,’ says Jo Lees. ‘She took to the film-making immediately.’

And this quiet woman knew she was good: ‘I like making movies, I’m on top of video cameraing,’ says Thando. ‘It’s really, really cool to learn aP . ‘You were put in charge of editing, but it was worth it: ‘Yo, I’m proud of myself, not eve-rybody knows about editing. I know what to take [out] and I know what to put in.’ She felt that Dom was a patient and appreciative trainer: ‘He’s a nice guy, very gentle when he’s teach-ing, he makes sure you get what he is saying. He doesn’t shout, he is calm and soft. ’

When Dom Vandenhout ar-rived to show the ambassadors how to do this – how to find angles, to understand light and composition, storytelling and editing – the programme ‘took on another life,’ says Anna.

The FLOW Ambassadors in Pieterberg and Kokstad were equipped with good equipment that they shared, like iPhones. ‘I learnt a lot of responsibility,’ says AP. ‘You were put in charge of very expensive equipment. You knew that, without this equip-ment, I can’t further myself. I can’t work. And the work that we did here, it wasn’t just about you as a person, it was about the community as a whole.’

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Eventually, the ambassadors found a niche for themselves. In Kokstad, Thando brought some raw experience to the moviemaking – she had worked for the national electricity supplier, Edecom, and had done some photography for them. ‘She said in her interview that she liked taking pictures,’ says Jo Lees. ‘She took to the film-making immediately.’

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Movie making performed several functions in FLOW, not least of which was empowering the young people with a skill and exposing them to useful technol-ogy. It also shifted the way they saw their places and the people within them. And when the informercials were shown at cur-rency workshops, it shifted the way the ‘objects’ of the movies saw themselves.

‘All these people came all dressed up, like when you went to the movies in the 1960s – they looked at themselves and they started feeling proud,’ says Dom. ‘They had never seen themselves as successful entre-prenuers before, he adds, ‘but now they see themselves with their whole body, and they say, ‘hey, that’s me!’’

That reflecting back to the community is something the FLOW team would like to see taken further, says Anna. ‘We were thinking of all sorts of ways to share the movies with the community.’ That way, the movies too would become ‘com-mon artefacts’, owned and used by the people in them as well as those who made them. And as living proof of the value of ‘com-mon artefacts’, the Bergrivier Municipality used a movie the FLOW Ambassadors made about the local waterworks at an Integrated Development Plan presentation, to share infor-mation about the services it is providing that is usually invisible to citizens of the municipality. MS

THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

‘It’s been incredible to see how they’ve grabbed the opportunity and made great little infomer-cials,’ said Piet Bosman, FLOW project co-ordinator in Kokstad, reflecting on a day of training in movie making for the FLOW Ambassadors.

Learning to capture moving images of their town, their place, and the people was a crucial aspect of FLOW training. They made movies of local heroes; they made infomercials about local busi-nesses. And, not surpris-ingly, the ambassadors loved it.

‘Many people in these small towns have not had the same kind of access to technology that city kids do,’ says Anna. The cell phone is ubiquitous, even in rural South Africa, but not necessarily the smart phone, the androids which have changed life – living in Europe is so hectic, ’ says Dom.

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It was a tour through the slums of Addis Ababa in 2003 that crystallised in FLOW co-originator Anna Cowen the idea that youth can be – indeed, need to be – included in shaping the towns and places in which they live. She had been practicing as an architect in Cape Town for eight years, but was frustrated by the limited ‘scope and scale of architecture. If she wanted to do work that tackled inequality, poverty, and environmental over-extraction, she believed she needed to be working on the system in which buildings are constructed, not only the buildings themselves.

So she signed up to do a master’s in African urbanism and sustainability, which brought her to visit a housing improvement initiative in the slums of Addis. ‘It was a slum upgrading initiative run by a nurse – not a town planner or an architect, a nurse! It involved doing a needs assessment in the community to see who should be prioritised to get the first house up – grades. ’

Initially, the project sent university students out into the community with clipboards and questionnaires to find out who were the families most in need of improved housing.

‘But they discovered that by using students, it thwarted the needs assessment. ’ The students were outsiders, and people didn’t tell them the truth in the interview process. The wrong people got bumped to the top of the list, and the students got caught up in the community’s power struggles.

To get around this, the project got teenage girls from within the community, dressed them in yellow bibs, and sent them from home to home to gather the same information. Because they belonged here, and had grown up here, people told them the truth. This ‘transcended the power dynamic’, and got the people most in need to the front of the queue for bricks and mortar homes in the slums.

‘This was one of the most powerful insights in my professional life, a really crystallising idea,’ she reflects over a decade later. The dissertation for her degree took a look at the public participation processes behind three public spaces on the Cape Flats, outside Cape Town, an area that was segregated for working class coloured people under the apartheid state and still echoes this enforced separation today.

‘It was out of this, that I started developing seeds of the idea that was to become the FLOW Ambassador programme. It was about looking for ways to design processes that are participatory and inclusive. That’s when I started thinking about getting young people to document and map their own communities so that they can be designers of their own places rather than having outsiders come in and do it for them,’ she says, as she contemplates the wrap-up of the FLOW initiative.

For more than 20 years now, she’s been trying to ‘change the way we make things’, particularly through moving towards ‘globally connected yet localised, circular economies, with a strong focus on growing the commons’.

The idea of fostering ‘localisation’ through mapping and storytelling has come through strongly in the design of the FLOW Ambassador programme. But while FLOW had a strong youth development component, another idea lay at the germination of the idea: that the researchers knew that they too would develop and transform when doing this kind of work.

‘I’ve deepened my understanding of how change happens, and developed more patience. In this kind of work, things take their own time. They will happen when they are ready.’

There are these two young fish swimming along, and they happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way, who nods at them and says, ‘Morning, boys, how’s the water?’ And the two young fish swim on for a bit, and then eventually one of them looks over at the other and goes, ‘What the hell is water?’ […] …the most obvious, ubiquitous, important realities are often the ones that are the hardest to see and talk about.

David Foster Wallace
novelist and essayist
commencement speech, Kenyon College 2005
WHAT THE FLOW AMBASSADORS DID AND LEARNT

**ACTIVITY**

**WHAT THE FLOW AMBASSADORS DID AND LEARNT**

**HOUSEHOLD ENERGY AND WATER USE AUDIT**

- The FAs improved their understanding of household water and energy consumption through undertaking a two-week audit of their household energy and water use, and researching energy and water saving strategies for households.

**NEIGHBOURS’ ENERGY AND WATER USE AUDIT**

- The FAs learnt about the benefits of comparative analysis and developed skills to begin a neighbourhood-wide conversation about energy and water saving through conducting a two-week audit of their neighbours’ energy and water use.

**MUNICIPAL WATER SYSTEM MAPPING**

- The FAs developed an understanding of where household water in Piketberg and Kokstad comes from and to where wastewater/sewage goes. They went on site visits to municipal water system sites – Piketberg, Wittoogte and Kokstad water purification plants, and the Piketberg Waste Water Treatment Plant. They documented through blogs, photos and videos. The FAs created a Prezi and shared their learnings with the Municipal Infrastructure Committee.

**GOEDVERWACHT/WITTWATER WATER SYSTEM MAPPING**

- The FAs developed an understanding of the differences in water supply and management systems between municipal management and Moravian Church management through site visits to non-municipal supplied water systems in the Moravian Church towns of Goedverwacht and Wittewater. They documented through blogs, photos and videos.

**BIO-REGIONAL NATURAL WATER SYSTEM MAPPING**

- The FAs developed an understanding of the water cycle and the role of wetlands and grasslands in the natural system through site visits to the Grootwinterhoek reserve and the Berg River estuary in Bergriver, and to the Mount Currie reserve in Kokstad. They documented through blogs, photos and videos.

**SCALE**

ACTIVITY

**WHAT THE FLOW AMBASSADORS DID AND LEARNT**

**ACTIVITY**

**WHAT THE FLOW AMBASSADORS DID AND LEARNT**

**HOUSEHOLD SCALE**

**NATIONAL ENERGY SYSTEM**

- The FAs researched the national energy mix, exploring SA’s reliance on coal and the climate change implications. They created explanatory PowerPoint presentations to share their learning.

**MUNICIPAL AND GOEDVERWACHT/WITTWATER ENERGY SYSTEM MAPPING**

- The FAs developed an understanding of how electricity moves through their towns and villages, and how payment is structured through site visits to the different parts of the municipal energy supply system. They compared the various tariff structures, and explored the difference between the municipal and Moravian Church systems.

**REGIONAL RENEWABLE ENERGY MAPPING**

- The FAs developed an understanding of the potential of renewable energy as an alternative to fossil fuel-based energy production through site visits to various large scale renewable energy projects in the wider region.

**ENERGY STORIES FROM THE ELDERS**

- The FAs interviewed community elders around what they did before ‘Eskom (the national energy utility) documenting in short movies and digital mapping. Through this, they strengthened inter-generational bonding and appreciation, and learnt resilience strategies from the older generation.

**‘SEEDS OF TRANSITION’ MAPPING – HOUSEHOLD SCALE**

- The FAs identified and documented household-based resilience strategies such as solar photovoltaic systems, water tanks, vegetable gardens, solar water heaters, wood burning stoves etc., all ‘seeds’ of a more sustainable future. They developed an appreciation of ‘what is already working’, as well as identifying existing local capacity and ingenuity to reduce the need for relying on costly external expertise.

**‘SEEDS OF TRANSITION’ MAPPING – INTEGRATED SYSTEMS**

- The FAs went on an overnight site visit to Kruistementvlei farm, an integrated organic farm that demonstrates ‘the circular economy’ in action and shows the benefits of linking ‘point solutions’ into a symbiotic whole. They documented through photos and videos and developed an embodied understanding of integrated systems thinking.
DAY 1
- Introduction to film language
- Visual Thinking - Introduction to the Five-shot Sequence
  (a) close-up of a subject’s hands e.g. a baker’s hands
  (b) close-up of the subject’s face
  (c) move back from the action and capture a medium shot of subject
  (d) move to an ‘over-the-shoulder’ shot: standing just behind subject, shoot downward toward the action e.g. hands kneading dough
  (e) think of the most creative composition possible. Use an unusual angle, from the ground or above subject’s head, or move far away and take an extreme wide-angle shot. For example, baker through bakery window.
- Exercise - Divide FAs into groups of three and ask them to take photos using the Five-shot sequence
- Exercise - Shoot one event/sequence in video
- Introduction to the iMovie video editing application, importing footage from mobile phones and creating a sequence on the timeline

DAY 2
- Camera handling basics
- Introduction to some technical considerations when shooting (white balance, focal length, aperture, etc.)
- Introduction to the Filmic Pro App on the iPhone
- Introduction to audio levels and using microphones
- Exercise – Script an interview and film an interview with each other
- Introduction to etiquette when doing an interview
- How to create a shootlist and a storyboard
- Introduction to Steller, a story-telling app using photos and videos
- Exercise - Research potential characters for a Steller story

DAY 3
- Exercise – Create a Steller script and shoot the video
- Introduction to Steller (the platform)
- Exercise – FAs shoot video sequences in the field

DAY 4
- Introduction to Steller layout and formatting
- Exercise – FAs continue shooting video sequences in the field
- Exercise – Create final Stellers (https://steller.co/flowambassadors/)

DAY 5
- How to do voice-overs and sound editing
- How to create a final polished version of a video story, including adding title sequences and end credits
- Exercise – Do a final edit, using the sequences previously shot
- Upload final cut of videos to YouTube
- Final evaluation

WHAT WE DID
THE FLOW AMBASSADOR
FIVE-DAY STORY-TELLING AND MOBILE JOURNALISM TRAINING

Opposite page: Turning the camera lens on local people and local businesses, from farming to hawking, opened the FLOW Ambassadors’ eyes to the distinctive beauty and potential of their hometowns in the Bergrivier and Kokstad.
The FLOW Ambassadors mapped different food and water-related sustainability solutions in their town.

Understanding how food fits into the web of life in each region is a first step to boosting and protecting local farmers and local produce, like these pumpkins grown on Piet Bosman’s farm outside Kokstad.
FLOW Ambassador Illicia Cloete sketched her understanding of the Bergrivier municipal water system and the way that electricity is generated and distributed to the Bergrivier region.
‘The future has already happened,’ the novelist and essayist William Gibson once said, ‘it’s just unevenly distributed.’ What he means is that society doesn’t have to wait for some yet-to-be-discovered miracle fix to the present-day social and environmental challenges. The solutions are already all around us. We just need to notice, map and document them, share them widely and in this way, accelerate learning. We then need to explore their potential to scale into locally rooted green and social enterprises. The FLOW team went in search of local innovators.

LEONIE JOUBERT
By 4pm, up here in the crags high above Piketberg village, the early winter sun is watered down and low in the sky. The thermometer in farmer Jeremy Bryant’s hands just manages to nudge into the double digits: 12ºC. But then he pushes the half-metre-long thermometer probe into the heart of a domed compost heap out the back of the farmhouse kitchen, and the digital reader almost steams, its numbers ratchet up so fast: 27ºC, 32ºC, 38ºC, 43ºC, 48.8ºC... eventually settling at 49ºC.

To prove the point, Jeremy leans over an outdoor basin at the kitchen door, soaps up his hands, and spins the faucet on the hot tap. Before long, the water’s almost too hot for him to keep his hands under the stream.

The hot water system for the Kruistementvlei farmstead, up here in the Piket-Bo-Berg mountains about 20-minutes-drive from town, isn’t heated by the usual electricity driven cylinder. It’s not gas-fired. It doesn’t come from burning wood in an old outdoor ‘donkey boiler’, or from solar-thermal pipes snaking across the roof.

The water is warmed by the hungry bacteria munching their way through the plant matter inside the compost heap, churning out heat as they feed.

‘We call it the compost-powered shower,’ Jeremy says, gleefully.

The system is labour intensive at first, but relatively simple: a layer of mulched alien trees to give the dry organic matter; a water pipe coiled five times; a layer of farmyard manure; another layer of mulch; more coiled pipe; manure; mulch.

‘And so you build it up,’ he says, prodding the pile whose summit reaches about waist height. He’ll add some volcanic dust for extra nutrients, and a cup of molasses syrup mixed into a litre of water, and let nature do its thing. Cold water in one end, warming up through the several layers of coiled piping, and hot water out the other end.

Jeremy began experimenting with compost-generated water heating a few years back after reading up on it online, and then testing, testing, testing the system. After about ten experimental attempts, and his wife Riette and two sons fast losing patience, he finally got it right. Now, one heap of slowly composting organic matter can keep the four-person home in hot water for bathing, showering and doing the dishes for ten and a half months, even during the coldest months of the year.

‘In winter, sometimes there’ll be ice on the sides of the compost heap, but steam coming out from inside,’ he says.

Once a heap has burned itself out, the remaining compost will go out into the fruit trees, and he will build another pile. It takes a bit of time and labour to construct the heap, but once it’s actively composting, it delivers free hot water for three-quarters of the year.

‘It costs about R2 000 to make the heap, in terms of fuel, labour and so forth, and we’ll save about R500 a month on hot water bills.’

Farming with soil

The soils up here are notorious: sloughed off ancient sandstone, sandy as dunes in places, they don’t hold water well. Eons of rinsing by rainfall has leached the nutrients away. The twiggy, fili-greed indigenous fynbos veld just loves it, but not much else does.

So the former engineer and now IT consultant and part-time farmer’s entire operation is geared towards farming soils to life, using various forms of composting, and conserving water either above or inside the soils.

Jeremy’s farm has become something of a bridgehead in the FLOW project and it is viewed as an inspiring local example of systemic thinking and innovation. In the same way that a circular economy tries to close the loop in local exchange, to keep value and profit within a community, so a farm like Jeremy’s is about linking a suite of different technologies that feed into each other and create a more resilient and less extractive form of production. In this case, it is food, but it could apply to any system.

Because of Jeremy’s innovative approach to sustainable farming, he became a close ally of FLOW in the Bergrivier area. His contemporary in...
the Kokstad constituency is Piet Bosman, FLOW’s regional co-ordinator there, and also a farmer with progressive ideas about sustainability and social justice (see A man on the edge of the future below.)

Just like the technologies they use and link up, these individuals could be seen as ‘seeds of transition’ into a more sustainable future, argue the FLOW co-founders Anna Cowen and John Ziniades.

‘These are the kinds of innovators we’re looking for,’ they say. ‘People like Jeremy and Piet are important because they each go beyond single-point solutions, and move into looking for complete systems that work as solutions.’

Back to the fabric of Jeremy’s farm: there are the hugelkultur beds hemming the front of the property where it meets the passing road: bulky mounds of heavy pine or eucalyptus logs, covered with soil, and planted with various fruit trees and ground cover. This makes for a ‘12-year compost heap’ as the chunky timber slowly decays.

The swales (trenches constructed to slow down water as it runs down a slope) run parallel to rows of infant pecans: each trench filled with rolls of toilet paper, discarded by a local factory, or old carpeting, small tree branches, and a layer of mulch. They bank away water, and their organic contents slowly compost over time and release nutrients to the roots of the growing trees.

The almond orchard is carpeted with a thick mat of grass, which keeps the soils beneath damp and nutrient rich. There’s a small forest of fast-growing pines and eucalyptus trees on the far side of the farm, to provide lumber, firewood and wood for chipping into mulch.

At the kitchen door, a worm farm takes care of the kitchen waste, producing ‘worm tea’, the nutrient-packed liquid that runs out of the stacked tubs. The vermicompost bins out the back of the house, in various stages of decomposition, have worms and soldier flies steadily processing the waste that Jeremy’s collected from a local jam factory nearby.

A series of rectangular vegetable patches behind the farmhouse, just last season, were pigsties. The pigs live in small enclosures for a few months, eating and defecating the soils into ample life. Then he moves the pigs on, digs in beds, and pops in the seedlings.

It’s all about food: food for the soil, and food for people and other creatures living off the soil.

Close the loop
In nature, there’s no such thing as ‘waste’: every organism’s waste byproduct is another’s food. This kind of cradle-to-cradle thinking tries to reverse the wasteful, consumptive nature of the linear economy, which is about extraction, production, distribution, consumption, and disposal, explains John.

‘In the FLOW project, we’re interested in creating a circular economy, one that keeps things recycling inside the community,’ says John. ‘We can apply this to energy, water, food, local production, and local exchange, things that are the foundation of wellbeing.’

Jeremy’s farm is about closing the loop in terms of nutrients and water, and keeping everything cycling and recycling in the system. It’s about finding a whole lot of clever technologies and ideas that support one another to make a farm like this more sustainable and resilient.

It’s this kind of thinking that the FLOW Ambassadors were looking for when they set out to map what people were up to in their neighbourhoods: the local hardware store owner who has put photovoltaic panels on the roof of his home to make him a little less dependent on the grid; the water tanks that collect rainwater from neighbourhood roofs; a cleverly insulated house; a farmers’ market.

Even small home industries, or people remem-
John points to a picture of one of those early mainframes. ‘Compare that with the internet today,’ he chuckles, switching to a graphic image of the globe, covered with a spiderweb of lines linking up different hubs across the planet. ‘With that old, centralised system, there was one point of failure. When that goes, everything breaks.’

Many of the systems we’re dependent on these days – water, electricity, waste removal, food – are similarly centralised, he explains. They’re usually run by large and powerful entities, either state or the private sector. And while it frees the rest of us up to apply ourselves to other things, it also leaves us disconnected from the origins of these resources and services. We forget how fragile they might be, or how much we need to conserve them. And we’re also vulnerable should the system of delivery fail.

‘Consider energy,’ he says. ‘With new technologies, we can have a decentralised energy system on a scale we never have had before. Let’s say, in a community like Piketberg or Kokstad, we link up a number of small energy producers so that we have a micro-grid here. So if I produce more than I need today, my neighbour can buy it.’

What if we did the same with water, and with our recyclable and compostable household waste, and with our food? ‘This isn’t about replacing the existing system, but complementing it,’ John explains. ‘With a few massive coal-fired power stations up in the highveld of the country to power the entire country’s grid.’

‘Sit down, do your thing and wipe clean as usual,’ Jenkins writes that after a year, this kind of composting process is active. ‘Disperse of paper in the toilet. Scoop a bucket of sawdust/mulch from the bin in front of you and cover whatever you have deposited in the toilet. Ensure there is no sawdust on side of toilet seat as this is very uncomfortable for the next user. Thank you for your contribution to the farm!’ Every day, the buckets are removed, and the contents tipped out into a composting mound in the ruin of an old water reservoir. It’s covered with more sawdust and, over the course of a year, occasionally turned to keep it oxygenated and the composting process active.

‘This isn’t about replacing the existing system, but complementing it,’ John explains. ‘If people have water tanks at home, it eases a bit of the load on municipalities, particularly when they have to put water restrictions in place during times of drought. Imagine that: instead of a town being dependent on one central dam, we have a community with lots of little dams. It takes the pressure off the grid.’

The heat kills off some of the pathogens, but time needs to take care of the rest. In The Humanure Handbook, self-styled human manure composter and organic gardener Joseph Jenkins writes that after a year, this kind of compost is safe enough to at least use on trees that will only bear fruit about six years from now. Like the nut orchard to which Gift is about to haul this load.

Gift Ngundu, a young Zimbabwean farmer who is interning with Jeremy for ‘as long as he needs’ to learn, is half way through shovelling up a pile of compost that’s almost the size of a small car. He’s tossing it up into a trailer that’s about to head off into a new nut orchard to fertilise young trees. Jeremy stoops to pick up a handful of the dark, earthy matter, and gives it a sniff. ‘It smells just like a forest floor.’

Gift and Jeremy are equally unfazed by the origin of the compost they’re busy working with. The Zimbabwean smiles, twin dimples sinking into his cheeks, as his garden rake swings through another arc, flinging the dark, earthy compost up onto the back of the trailer.
Harvesting the rain

If every household in Goedverwacht captured rain runoff in tanks like this one, it would help lighten the load on the municipal water system, particularly in times of serious drought when state-run dams run low. Having a ‘backup’ system like this – essentially, a series of little dams within the neighbourhood - is what makes communities and families more resilient in the face of an environmental ‘shock’, like a drought, or if the state fails in its service delivery.

LJ

Cool cob

There’s a lot more to getting good temperature regulation in a cob house, than merely building it with exterior walls made of straw bales, clad with clay and plaster.

‘To get good heat efficiency, the orientation is important. Where possible, the house should be north facing (if it’s in the southern hemisphere), with most of the windows on the north side, some on the south, and none on the east and west sides, especially to avoid the extreme heat in summer,’ explains retired risk manager Johan van Kraayenburg, who has built his retirement home up here on the Bella Vista farm in the Piket-Bo-Berg, just a few kilometres along the road from Kruistemvlei.

The windows are low to the floor, with the sill just above ankle height, which lets more light and heat into a room, particularly during winter when the sun is angled low in the sky. To capitalise on that, the floor should ideally be covered with dense materials like tiles or stone, preferably in a darker, heat-absorbing colour, so they can act like a battery, absorbing heat during the day and slowly releasing it into the room later, once the sun has moved on. This kind of ‘solar design’ can be applied to any building, not just a straw bale house, explains Johan.

The skylight windows are made with double glazing, but the lower windows are all reclaimed window frames and therefore just filled with normal glass. Because of this, the interior does need a bit of extra heating during the bitter winter hours, hence the fireplace with a long chimney.
The ceilings should be well insulated, and the roof must have a reflective colour to bounce away the summer heat.

The interior walls of the double-level home are made with conventional bricks and mortar, because straw bale walls are too thick and would take up too much space.

Johan chuckles a bit at the irony of the fact that he spent most of his working life in the cement industry, one of construction’s least sustainable materials. By his back-of-cigarette-pack calculations, this house cost about half of what it would have to build with conventional materials.

Living memories

The camera is zoomed in on the plump hands of Annie Booys, who makes a show of snapping the brittle twigs of a sugarbush protea tree into kindling for a fire. A FLOW Ambassador is capturing all this theatre on film. The final vignette is less than a minute long, but is part of a journey of documenting the often hidden and unappreciated ease of using it. Making that connection again, is often a direct incentive to use energy more sparingly.

‘We need to document many of these ideas,’ explains FLOW co-ordinator Ian Schaffers, ‘otherwise we’ll lose (this important local knowledge).’

By capturing some of this know-how amongst their elders, through storytelling and movie making, the FLOW Ambassadors were able to make these ‘living memories’ visible, and appreciate the value of the old-timers who have held onto this knowledge for so long.

Old ways: many of the elderly Goedverwacht residents remember ways of living efficiently and sustainably

Needle and thread

Seamstress Tannie (auntie) Constance Nomdoe is one of the small operations that the ambassadors discovered in their survey of the ‘invisible’ businesses in Piketberg – the home industry type operations that don’t have an obvious shop front to advertise their existence to passers-by. She was also one of the first to sign up to the BRAND Business Network.

Small businesses like these are good ‘resilience strategies’, and see people rewarded for their skill while keeping money circulating within the community. Ambassador Marlin Swartz didn’t know about Tannie Connie’s seamstress service before, but now says he sometimes takes his clothes to her if he needs a hem taken up or a piece of clothing mended.
flow co-founder and entrepreneur-in-residence John Zinnadu is trying to hack the financial system and he’s using his prowess as a tech entrepreneur and start-up veteran to do so.

An electrical engineer by training, John set up his first internet-based business in the mid-90s at the age of 25, when the ‘net in South Africa was still only something available to governments or research institutions. Within three years it was listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange. Then he’s been involved in several other start-ups, and now he’s interested in how this kind of entrepreneurialism can be used to meet society’s social justice and environmental challenges.

‘A start-up is a temporary organisation, designed to search for a repeatable and scalable business model,’ John explains, quoting Professor Steve Blank, a Silicon Valley entrepreneur and the ‘godfather’ of the lean start-up movement.

‘Before you start investing in factories and marketing, you first see if there is a business model there.’

The reality, though, is that nine out of 10 start-ups fall within the first decade. ‘But if we can increase the success rate of these sorts of start-ups, then we can create a positive feedback loop,’ he maintains.

Part of this is his efforts to subvert the money system, as a key leverag point for large-scale systems change.

‘Hacking,’ according to Brett Scott, the author of The Heretic’s Guide to Global Finance, ‘is an action that combines an act of rebellion with an act of creative re-wiring.’

With this in mind, John argues that transforming a town or community can’t be done with one simple bespoke solution. It needs an intervention that changes the entire system, and social or green entrepreneurs need support so that they can think in this way.

FLOW, John hopes to be that kind of a platform in towns such as Pieterburg and Kokstad, and their surrounding communities.

‘Tackling the money system – hacking it with a community currency – is part of it.

‘The current design of our money system is incompatible with sustainability,’ he says, referencing the US sustainability guru, Professor Dennis Meadows, ‘and often works against efforts to transition to a more environmentally safe and socially just world.

But the emergence of digital currencies, crypto-currencies, and complementary currencies – think ‘Bitcoin’ and beyond – has allowed communities to start working together to redesign the money system.

These currencies, he argues, have the potential to support local communities to develop their self-determining power, while giving the economic fuel to co-fund the transition. ‘Thomas Greco, the alternative currency theorist, says it’s about democratising the credit commons.’

FLOW co-originator and entrepreneur-in-residence Piet Bosman

HACKING TOMORROW

The farm road drops away from the tar. A thick green field rises to one side, full of chickens, pecking with inescapant energy, and there’s another drifting mass of chicke ns around the scatter of buildings at the road’s end. They’re beautiful birds, plump and sleek, some speckled, some shades of russet, some white. Among them struts a large turkey, spreading his tail feathers in a magnificent and hopeful display.

Beaks are busy picking up seed and grass and insects, while their tough claws scratch to release more bounty.

Piet Bosman strolls through the feathered throng on his Mountain View farm out here in the rolling hills, a ten-minute-drive from the KwaZulu-Natal town of Kokstad. He is also the local project co-ordinator for the FLOW programme. Just 32 years old, with eyes that echo the blue of his jeans and K-Mali-branded golf shirt, he has the leanness of a man who spends his spare time hiking, rock-climbing and trail-running. He explains that the birds are a permaculture agriculture tool for soil regeneration and pest control: as the chickens, ducks and geese move through the farm, they reduce insect populations and leave behind rich little packets of manure.

‘It’s an open education platform that’s freely available to local people, from the township or neighbour farms.’

In the repurposed milk parlour, there are books, magazines and a collage of postcards pinned to a board, one a quote from people as varied as Jimi Hendrix and Nikola Tesla, others black and white or all in one side, waiting for an audience, all of them painted with Chinese pictures for an English word… ‘generue, ‘compassion’, ‘confidence’, ‘kindness’.

Another world is possible

One of the concepts he encountered while away was permaculture farming, just another of a large, fizzing and fermenting barrel of ideas that he brought back with him when he ran out of funds to study, five years ago.

The farm seemed the ideal field for experimentation. Years earlier, his parents had abandoned their dairy farming. His mother, Michelle, was running a laundry operation from some farm buildings, washing linen for the local hospital and guest houses. The land was lying fallow, and Michelle was supportive of her eldest son’s desire to try out some of what he’d learned.

Piet sees life through a lens that is wide open to social injustice and obstacles which prevent people thriving. He’s been wrestling with ways to subvert the ‘system, as he calls it, and regenerare and reinvigor ate the community around him, in particular the farm workers and residents of Shayamoya township, which borders the farm. He sees a lack of access to information as a key stumbling block.

So he has turned an old dairy building and a shed on Mountain View arm into centres of learning and information for the people who live in the area. He calls it an ‘open education platform’ that’s freely available to local people, from the township or neighbour farms.

In the repurposed milk parlour, there are books, magazines and a collage of postcards pinned to a board, each one a quote from people as varied as Jimi Hendrix and Nikola Tesla. Right now he’s leading a hike, filled with all of them, all printed with Chinese pictures for an English word… ‘generue, ‘compassion’, ‘confidence’, ‘kindness’.

FLOW co-originator and entrepreneur-in-residence John Zinnadu

A MAN ON THE EDGE OF THE FUTURE

The farm road drops away from the tar. A thick green field rises to one side, full of chickens, pecking with inescapant energy, and there’s another drifting mass of chicke ns around the scatter of buildings at the road’s end. They’re beautiful birds, plump and sleek, some speckled, some shades of russet, some white. Among them struts a large turkey, spreading his tail feathers in a magnificent and hopeful display. Beaks are busy picking up seed and grass and insects, while their tough claws scratch to release more bounty.

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Next door, the old shed has morphed into a cinema. Plastic chairs in neat rows fill the court facing the screen; on the outskirts are wooden benches lining the walls, with old mealie (maize) sacks filled with reclaimed shredded plastic as cushions. This is where Piet shows documentaries and films to groups of locals, aimed at showing them how people around the world are experimenting with ideas that could create a more sustainable and just world.

Piet understands the power of visual storytelling: ‘I’m inspired by seeing people doing things that create wholesomeness in the environment, in producing food, in human relationships,’ he says. ‘Some of it’s quite controversial in terms of the current mainstream way of doing things.’ He has thousands of hours of video stacked up for use here, and has shown documentaries like The High Price of Cheap Gas, about fracking; Home, about the damage humanity has done to our environment; and a number of documentaries about permaculture.

Learning is often seen as a chore, Piet says. ‘But I find it very cool. I wanted to create a space where it can be cool. This cinema uses subversive ways of bringing new ideas to people’s minds, through pictures, through videos; thought-provoking stuff that can be instilled locally. How do we create soil fertility without having to buy a bag of fertiliser every year from now onward? How do we create these systems that re-energise themselves, that re-mineralise themselves? So it’s that kind of information I’ll be sharing – on food, energy, finance, economics.’

Moviegoers will find some of the images on screen being lived out in practical reality on the farm. The cinema has low-flush urine-diverting toilets that separate the two products; faces head for the composter, while urine is diverted elsewhere (the world is facing a crisis in terms of phosphorus, a key element in soil fertility, and it can be harvested from urine).

Another shed – lit by solar bottle lights that use the power of refraction to provide as much as 55 watts during the day – contains an impressive rack of drawers filled with heirloom seeds, soil samples and a tumble of harvested pumpkins piled up like an art installation. This is where Piet teaches some of the components of permaculture.

Community assets
Piet and several co-founders have set up two institutional arrangements – a non-profit and a cooperative that are constantly evolving – to serve the people of Kokstad and surrounding farms. The first, the Mount Currie Community Development Organisation (MCCDO), houses educational initiatives, including the Maidambriane initiative, teaching permaculture to community members who want to learn; 150 hectares of Mountain View that borders directly on Shayamoya township have been set aside to be worked by township residents and adjacent communities. The MCCDO has also taken over Kokstad Tourism, which connects different sectors, and is a means of encouraging interconnectedness within the community.

The cooperative will become a business venture to market and sell the surplus produce from these lands. Piet is a pioneer, a visionary, inhabiting the ‘adjacent possible’ – a term described by author Steven Johnson as a ‘kind of shadow future, hovering on the edges of the present state of things, a map of all the ways in which the present can reinvent itself.

Fields of gold
Downhill from the educational buildings is something akin to a permaculture demonstration: rows of old bathtubs have been turned into earthworm farms where the eager little workers do their job of making humus into worm manure as rich as chocolate. Swales run along the contours of the land, capturing and retaining water; ducks nibble at delicacies like slugs in herb and vegetable gardens. There is a small orchard of tree saplings that will one day be a permaculture forest farm for fruit, mushrooms and vegetables planted under the tree canopy.

‘In a couple of seasons, we will be in a position where we can produce a lot of organic food, and then people will be asking, ‘Why is it we can produce organic food more cheaply than conventional food?’ Piet says.

He steps into a small fenced enclosure filled with a bustling mass of baby chicks and lifts out their mother, one of his favourites. He strokes her speckled russet feathers gently and gazes across the veld. His mind is probably busy dreaming up yet more ways to nurture a fertile future for his community.

The ‘adjacent possible’ is a kind of shadow future, hovering on the edges of the present state of things, a map of all the ways in which the present can reinvent itself.

Steven Johnson, The Genius of the Tinkerer
WEAVING IT ALL TOGETHER

The mapping process identified the local ‘seeds of transition’ and these ‘seeds’ provided insights into new ways to address local challenges. These enabled local entrepreneurs to develop three potential business models and prototyped them with the Business Model Canvas. Incorporation of the community currency provides support to the viability of these business models, supporting localised economies and further developing resilient communities.

FERROCEMENT WATER TANK CONSTRUCTION AND MAINTENANCE BUSINESS

The Berg River municipality is in the water-stressed West Coast region of South Africa. All water is extracted from the Berg river, which is highly polluted from farm pesticides and fertiliser run-offs, and raw sewage from the upstream informal settlements (particularly in winter when the region experiences its heaviest rainfall). By the time it gets to the extraction point and water purification plant it has to be treated with large volumes of chemicals which are imported into the region by motorised transport. This water treatment is also a single point of failure, and is dependent on a chemical supply chain and dependable transport networks. There are also areas in this municipality where there is a high degree of leakage due to aging infrastructure. Ferrocement water tanks are a low cost, labour-intensive complementary strategy to ensure that each household has access to roof-harvested rainwater that can be used as a resilience strategy and to water household food gardens.

This thermometer measures the temperature inside the compost heap which can reach up to 49 degrees Celsius and is used to heat the water.

COMPOST-POWERED HOUSEHOLD WATER HEATING SYSTEMS

Distributed compost-powered water-heating creation and maintenance business, which uses chipped, cleared alien vegetation and organic waste as inputs, and generates rich compost and heated water for households for most of the year. 28m³ of mulch from alien vegetation and 2m³ of manure becomes 22m³ of compost and provides hot water for household use for 7-10 months of the year, generating net savings of R3,000 per year, before considering the potential income from compost for nut, vegetable and herb crops.

CENTRALISED SOLAR-CHARGING OF BATTERIES AND DISTRIBUTION TO HOUSEHOLDS

High capital cost of solar photovoltaic cells and battery storage are prohibitive for households. In addition, the difficulty to maintain batteries for storage is also a hurdle. This provides an opportunity to provide a solar battery charging and distribution service business. These charging stations will be for basic household appliances such as lighting, cellphone charging and television. This business will lay the foundation for the eventual development of a solar-powered micro-grid.

The mapping process identified the local ‘seeds of transition’ and these ‘seeds’ provided insights into new ways to address local challenges. These enabled local entrepreneurs to develop three potential business models and prototyped them with the Business Model Canvas. Incorporation of the community currency provides support to the viability of these business models, supporting localised economies and further developing resilient communities.

INITIAL BUSINESS MODEL CANVAS FOR COMPOST-POWERED HOUSEHOLD WATER HEATING SYSTEM

- **Compost business pays Tuk-Tuk to deliver alien chips to households**
- **Community members clear alien vegetation for BRAND**
- **Farmers use Tuk-Tuks to deliver food to households and market**
- **Households sell excess compost to farmers for BRAND**
- **Heating systems inspired by Jeremy’s compost heap/hot water system showing how it could integrate with the BRAND**

Initial Business Model Canvas for compost powered household water heating system
Rebuilding rich fertile soil: the foundation for the seeds of tomorrow

GreenWin workshop participants explored opportunities using the Business Model Canvas.

HOW TO

CONVENING THE FLOW-GREENWIN ‘SEEDS OF TRANSITION’ WORKSHOP
15TH JUNE 2016, PIKETBERG

The second phase of FLOW implementation in Bergrivier wrapped up with a one-day workshop, co-hosted by FLOW and the Bergrivier Municipality. This also concluded FLOW’s participation in the first year of a multi-partner, multi-disciplinary European Commission-funded research project, GreenWin, which is exploring the potential of viable green and social enterprises that simultaneously mitigate against climate change and meet local economic needs.

Building on the two-year partnership with the municipality, FLOW explored and documented local ‘seeds of transition’ to a more socially just and environmentally sustainable future in the region. These include micro-renewable energy strategies, organic farming, rainwater harvesting and passive design. The FLOW Ambassadors brought these stories to life through movies and other visual media, highlighting the potential for fledgling local social and green economy businesses. The workshop focused on presenting these ‘seeds’ to a broader group of stakeholders and then collaboratively exploring ways to amplify and link up these sustainable, bottom-up innovations in the broader West Coast District area, supported by the integration of the local currency, the BRAND.

WORKSHOP PROGRAMME

TIME ACTIVITY
09h00 – 09h30 Meet and greet over tea and coffee
09h30 – 10h00 SESSION 1 - INTRODUCTION
• Welcome address by the Municipal Manager, Adv. Hanlie Linde
• Introductions
• Intentions and outcomes of the workshop
• Overview of the GreenWin Project
10h00 – 11h30 SESSION 2 - ‘SEEDS OF TRANSITION’
• Overview of FLOW
• Presentation of the local ‘seeds of transition’
• What is working and why?
• Presentation and discussion on local assets and challenges to taking these forward into green businesses
11h30 – 12h00 TEA
12h00 – 13h30 SESSION 3 – ‘SUSTAINABLE FUTURES’
• What could be? Examples of similar innovations being undertaken by other local authorities
• Introduction of community currencies and the BRAND in particular
• Discussion on what could work in Bergrivier or the broader West Coast region
13h30 – 14h30 LUNCH
14h30 – 15h30 SESSION 4 - ‘MAKING IT REAL’
• Populating the Business Model Canvas as a tool for local green innovation
• Presentation of business models
• Discussion regarding business models presented
15h30 – 16h00 SESSION 5 – WRAP UP
Wrap up and closing remarks

ACTIVITY
Meet and greet over tea and coffee
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SESSION 5 – WRAP UP
Wrap up and closing remarks
WHAT WE DID

FROM ‘SEEDS OF TRANSITION’ TO GREEN AND SOCIAL ENTERPRISE BUSINESS MODELS

IDENTIFYING OPPORTUNITIES
Drawing on distributed infrastructure thinking, as well as the local knowledge of the FLOW co-ordinator and the FAs, the team identified the most promising potential enterprise opportunities to develop further.

DEVELOPING THREE ‘FIRST DRAFT’ BUSINESS MODEL CANVASES
The FAs then brainstormed three potential enterprise opportunities, using the Business Model Canvas* as a thinking tool.

INTEGRATING THE LOCAL COMMUNITY CURRENCY – THE BRAND
Building on circular economy thinking, the participants explored ways in which the BRAND could provide co-funding opportunities from community members to enhance affordability, profitability and local ownership.

COLLABORATIVE WORKSHOPS TO TEST ASSUMPTIONS AND REFINE THE BUSINESS MODEL CANVASES
A diverse range of stakeholders in the region explored the practical implication of the enterprises in the FLOW-GreenWin Workshop, June 2016, using the Business Model Canvas.

* For more information go to http://www.businessmodelgeneration.com/
They jokingly call it the ‘Porterville Rebellion’. The research team hit an unexpected rumble-strip when the business people in the nearby town of Porterville decided they didn’t want to just be a comparative ‘control group’ for what to them sounded like the exciting work happening in Piketberg. What the uprising uncovered was the natural tension in ethical approaches and study methods in the different research disciplines and fields.

Leonie Joubert & Mandi Smallhorne
They had called a community meeting in the Porterville through sampling and they wanted everyone there: the auntie who bakes bread in her kitchen or makes clothes at home, the Rastas who sell herbs on the corner near the supermarket, the fruit peddlers, and those ladies who braai meat on the curb-side in the centre of town.

‘We wanted the visible businesses and the invisible ones,’ explains Ian Schaffers, FLOW co-ordinator for the Bergrivier crew. They wanted to explain to the entrepreneurs of Porterville why the FLOW team was wandering through their neighbourhhood with clipboards and questions, plotting each business’s location on a map and asking about sometimes rather private business affairs.

It was the summer of 2015 and everything seemed to be going alright, Ian recalls. Until the audience heard about the BRAND.

When Ian explained that the purpose of their research in Porterville was to use its local economy as a comparison for Piketberg, 30km away, where they planned to roll out the experimental complementary currency, a few people in the room got restless.

At first there were just some questions about why the big businesses weren’t involved. ‘Surely you want big businesses in on this if you want it to work?’ one man quizzed.

Then another stood and declared, pretty categorically, that he thought the BRAND should be rolled out here in Porterville, too. ‘We want the visible businesses and the invisible ones,’ he said, rolled out here in Porterville, too. ‘We want random sampling.’

‘The economist, Professor Martine Visser, wanted quantitative approaches here,’ says John Ziniades. ‘I felt the tension between the qualitative and quantitative approaches here,’ says John Ziniades. ‘The economist, Professor Martine Visser, wanted – needed – the questions in the survey to elicit information that would be statistically relevant, and she wanted random sampling.’

But the part of the team that does the ‘practice’ of a development project like this, needed to get targeted information that would help them develop the currency model on the ground. John says that, because of the demand for statistical relevance at a basic numbers (quantitative) level, a lot of the qualitative questions that relate to sustainability and resilience, for example, were sidelined in favour of the more tangible and fact-based ones

Pulling together

In a project like FLOW, which draws together different academic disciplines, and crosses the boundary between research and practice, some interesting fracture-lines appear. There’s the tension between the approaches of those doing qualitative research, and those engaged in quantitative research, but it’s also there between theory and practice, between thinking and doing.

As the team drew up the baseline surveys ahead of the fieldwork in Kokstad and Piketberg areas, discussions got heated.

‘We wanted the visible businesses and the invisible ones,’ John says that, because of the demand for statistical relevance at a basic numbers (quantitative) level, a lot of the qualitative questions that relate to sustainability and resilience, for example, were sidelined in favour of the more tangible and fact-based ones

population size, and where they could get a big sample of participants to satisfy the needs of the behavioural economist on the team.

They settled on Velddrif, 65km on the other side of Piketberg, down on the coast.

For the researchers behind this work, it showed up the very real tensions between how, for instance, economists view the people under scrutiny in their research, compared with how geographers or anthropologists might view them.

In the Porterville Rebellion, the ‘data points’ who were just supposed to be observed and counted, stood up and said ‘No, we want to be part of this. We are active agents here, hear us speak’.

So the baseline survey became more of a ‘numbers game’, as calls John.

Quantitative research of this nature also calls for the use of a specific kind of language: ‘control’ and ‘treatment’ group; ‘subjects’; ‘sample size’; ‘phenomena’. These kinds of words place a distance between the researchers and the people being studied, ‘othering’ them, and are an uneasy fit with a project that embraces seeing people wholly and fully.

Wherever they sit on the spectrum between on-the-ground practice and pure academia, all of the FLOW team members know that these practices can remove autonomy and agency from the people or groups that become their ‘subjects’, seeing them as passive data points rather than individuals in their own right, with agency and independence.

They understand clearly how the language surfaces the values in the research, and shapes how meaning is made.

All the researchers – qualitative and quantitative, alike – were sensitive to the subtleties, and were conscious of the need to work ethically, and not ‘extractive’ in their research process, Anna asserts.

‘We saw the need for both of these research methods to work side by side’.

The Porterville Rebellion shows what happens when the ‘data points’ demonstrate their autonomy and challenge the language and methods of numbers-based quantitative research.
In practice

‘With hindsight, it’s almost like we asked the wrong questions [in the surveys],’ says John. Later in the process, the FLOW Ambassadors in Kokstad developed a map of business transactions in the town and immediate surrounds, which showed the flow of business-to-business transactions. ‘The Kokstad map showed that there were not a lot of lateral transactions, that business was being done in a very hierarchically structured fashion. This suggested that we should have leveraged some of the big anchoring businesses like Pick’n Pay and Link Pharmacy … this kind of research would have been more useful to us from a design perspective than what was revealed in the baseline survey.’

Both quantitative and qualitative research often does not feed back its findings or conclusions into the groups studied; in the FLOW programme, however, the practitioners were aiming to do just that to generate insight and new consciousness. ‘Making visible’ hidden or unappreciated facets of community experience (such as connections to resources like water and food) was a key part of creating transformative shifts within individuals and communities.

FLOW attempted not only to marry quantitative and qualitative research, but also to have several disciplines working alongside each other: economists, human geographers, and scholar practitioners. ‘Trans-disciplinary research requires people who are really well grounded in their root discipline to step above it, to say I’m informed by my discipline, but I’m not constrained by it,’ says John. ‘It requires researchers who can say, I’m interested in doing research that rises above, that integrates with other perspectives...’ It was an interesting, if not fully realised, attempt to achieve trans-disciplinary research, he feels, and to combine it with on-the-ground action.

‘The action research aspect of this was the most interesting part of FLOW,’ he adds. ‘It couldn’t have been done in any other way – it had to be grounded in a real project.’

Moving to the coast

Moving the control survey to Velddrif disrupted the research team’s plans. It was double the distance. For the Porterville work, they’d been able to use municipal transport, and do the research on day trips. For Velddrif, they had to arrange their own transport, and had to stay in the town from Monday to Friday, which pushed field work costs through the roof.

‘It was disruptive. Some of the ambassadors have kids, so it was hard for them to come. I had my patat to look after,’ recounts the farmer-cum-FLOW co-ordinator, Ian Schaffers.

The research needed a decent sample size to satisfy the rigours of the economist’s methods, but the local businesses just weren’t interested. Some of them were suspicious of people from that university in Cape Town where students were tearing down monuments to Cecil John Rhodes. Others found the questions intrusive.

‘I started to get impatient,’ says Ian. And then the innovative young farmer discovered that the town had its own smartphone app that listed all the local businesses. He got it onto his phone pronto, and started down the list, cold calling one business after another. Eventually, after hours of wooing people over the phone, the FLOW Ambassadors got all their questionnaires filled out, from dozens of businesses, and the experiment had its control group data.

Top: Dom Vandenhoudt coaching the Bergrivier FLOW Ambassadors on interviewing techniques

Bottom: The FLOW Ambassadors interviewing a research subject in the field
The primary focus of FLOW was to ‘foster local wellbeing’, to figure out how communities – specifically those in smaller towns like Kokstad and Piketberg – could encourage and grow resilience and the ability to thrive in the teeth of challenges ranging from economics to climate change.

The idea was not to do an ‘intervention’ – mechanisms which are parachuted in from outside seldom take over the long-term, as they struggle to generate a sense of ownership amongst those they are designed to help – but to ‘fertilise’ those strengths that already exist within the communities.

It was important to use methods that were as respectful and mindful of the assets and features of each community, the FLOW team stresses.

Knitting everything together was an overarching systems approach, an understanding of both the complexity and the fragility of any system, combined with the idea of making things visible.

A system can be described as an ‘inter-related set of elements that act over time in relationship to each other,’ FLOW’s Anna Cowen explains. All too often, when people in development work set out to solve problems, they offer what could be called ‘point solutions’ that solve a particular problem, without regard for the impact on other parts of a system. So, for example, if the problem is reduced soil fertility, we may try to solve it by adding fertiliser to the soil. This in turn leaches into the waterways, overdosing them with nutrients that result in algal blooms, which reduce available oxygen and kill off aquatic life like fish and molluscs.

‘Systems theory is a very useful way to think about change,’ says Anna. Instead of finding point solutions which would have the potential for triggering unintended consequences, the FLOW design tried to find leverage points (such as the complementary currencies), which would nudge many points simultaneously, in a creative and healthy way.

To see the system fully, you must be able to see elements in the system that are often ‘invisible’ to people. For many people, when they turn on the tap, water comes out; they haven’t learned to look and see the complex, but also fragile, water reticulation system that collects the water in a mountain catchment, cleans it, channels it into the town and to that tap.

‘It’s about shining a light on things that seem obvious, of paying attention to the backdrop of our lives,’ says Anna. ‘It’s a mindfulness of one’s context, rediscovering a sense of wonder about the most basic things, such as where our water comes from. As we begin to understand these things that support us, we begin to care about them, to experience a kind of awe and reverence… It could be described as falling in love with the ordinary.’

What we are able to see and value becomes part of what we treat with care, leading to a respectful and protective understanding of the life-support systems that cradle communities.

The communities of Kokstad, Bergrivier and Piketberg are human and natural worlds of subtle and abundant complexity; encouraging a move towards greater resilience and adaptability demanded that they be approached with a kind of reverence.
2 Appreciative inquiry: ‘What’s working?’

‘This approach – developed by David Cooper-Rider – asks the question, ‘What’s working?’ first, as opposed to asking, ‘What’s wrong?’’, says Anna. A number of the project’s different approaches are informed by this idea. ‘A part of it is about reframing wealth, seeing wealth as not about financial wealth but as [community assets like] clean air, or strong relationships... It’s a way of beginning to understand a place and each other, a way of looking at what is good and what we can build on. It’s looking through the eyes of possibility, as opposed to lack.’

3 Learning by doing

‘People support what they create and resist what they are excluded from’, says Anna, referencing Margaret Wheatley.

An ideal approach therefore provides support and structure – such as the training component of FLOW – but also challenges people to make their own choices, and to be part of the production. An example, Anna says, would be the launch events for both the K’Mali and the BRAND.

‘We didn’t say, ‘Here’s the formula for a launch’. The FAs made their own decisions about what the entertainment and refreshments would be, as well as the order and planning of the event; we were there to support their capacity.’

‘Whole person’ development

‘I see you, all of you, fully and without judgment,’ the humanist psychologist Carl Rogers once said. This is a key principle of the whole FLOW programme: seeing the people involved with unconditional positive regard.

‘We’re not only interested in part of a person, but in their whole potential’, says Anna. Even the rough edges, the bruises, the failures are part of the potential of each whole human being, she explains.

‘This whole person approach was crucial to building both a sense of personal power and interpersonal bonds.’

‘The thing I feel most proud of is the way the ambassadors have changed the way they see themselves,’ says Jo Lees, FLOW core team member and Kokstad programme manager, ‘that they can be agents for change in their world.’

FLOW Ambassadors

Nthabi Jafta, Thando Duku and Lindiwe Ntaka learn about framing
Somehow the rumour grew that Nthabi was a champion of traditional stick-fighting, and her presence makes it easy to believe: tall and lithe, she moves with athletic elegance. But she’s not without her insecurities. The young lady from Pakkies Farm read the little snorts of laughter from one of her fellow ambassadors as contempt for her ‘bad English’, and was hurt and angered.

One of the tools built into FLOW aimed at allowing the team to discover more of each other than they might do on an average project: the morning ‘check-in’, where the FAs come together and are given a space to share how they really felt on some or other issue. For Nthabi, the tension burst open when she told Piet about her feelings. The next morning, when Nthabi had to be absent from ‘check-in’, he raised the issue with the rest of the group. The ambassador who had laughed at the previous meeting was horrified; she had no idea her chuckles were causing such intense feelings. She apologised as soon as she saw Nthabi again.

This space allowed Nthabi to show that she is a complex person, with raw places that could hurt, and not just the self-confident character that most saw. She was, perhaps, more approachable to the others when they saw her this way. She was, perhaps, more approachable to the others when they saw her this way. The other ambassadors had learnt an important lesson: what you say and how you act can hurt other people, whose whole selves may not have been made known to you.

When you are with people you learn a lot of things, you understand the characters of the other people, and you learn how to communicate,’ says Pumeza Mbedu, for whom the experience was particularly enlightening as she’d been raised as an only child by her grandmother.

‘Every day, in the morning, you’d share how your day has been, your work. It’s very important for you to know how your colleagues are doing. It makes it easy to interact with them, and be sympathetic, and to get to know your colleagues,’ says Amaza Jara. ‘You get to share a lot of things, a lot of experiences you are facing at home, you become more like a family when you share things.’

Other tools within the FLOW programme worked to teach unconditional regard: doing the survey meant going to places that the youngsters may never have been before, allowing them to see how other people live, and to do so in a neutral fashion, without judgment or admiration. It allowed them to see what was there, gathering cameos together to create a whole picture of their town. ‘The experience changed all of us,’ says Jo. ‘Perhaps it changed us – Anna, John and me – more than the FAs.’
A new kind of scholarship

Winner of South Africa’s 2015 Distinguished Woman in Science Award, Gina Zieervogel is a new breed of academic, one who sees the need for evidence-based research, that’s founded on strong theoretical thinking, and nevertheless digs its roots deep into the ground and connects with people in real-world contexts.

Not without its challenges, this kind of trans-disciplinary research classifies, categorises, counts and constructs statistical models. This kind of work takes longer, and takes more resources. And academics are measured by their outputs, which isn’t the primary goal of this sort of research. LJ

The connector

If you ask Penny Price what she’s good at, she’ll say it’s that she connects people, which might be why she’s ideal for a project like FLOW, bringing together so many different groups, institutions, and people. She acts as a ‘bridge’ in the Berg river team, leaving John and Anna to do the strategic thinking and higher-level project management, and supporting Ian Schaffers with the local co-ordination.

Penny was the lead on the Western Cape’s climate change adaptation work which, at a provincial level, gave her an appreciation of the scope which that level of government gives one to work across a wide geographic region, and across many different sectors. Penny argues that she can make the implementation of climate responses more effective. But nevertheless, it’s this implementation that’s sorely lacking in many tiers of government, both in terms of the content of these sorts of development plans, as well as the pace of rollout.

This role allowed her to connect researchers, government, and people working in the development field who were thinking about climate change adaptation for the Berg river area, something which ultimately created the fertile soil in which FLOW was later able to grow.

What I bring to the team is the ability to spot potential in others,’ she smiles over the phone, ‘it’s about being open to novel ideas, and innovation.’

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‘In the end we will conserve only what we love, we will love only what we understand, and we will understand only what we are taught.’

RESEARCH: MORE THAN JUST CRUNCHING THE NUMBERS

If you’re a researcher wanting to measure how healthy a community is, or how vibrant the economy is, and to gauge the community’s basic wellbeing, the FLOW team decided to post up a survey that was custom-made, allowing them to change direction from the original plan.

When FLOW went into the Bergrivier area to get a measure of the state of things – the baseline survey against which they could later measure any change that might result from the programme – they did three things: the communities were unusual for this kind of social science research.

One: they did their own primary research, in that they drew on data already had a sense of connection with the community, and insider knowledge. It also meant that these youngsters were given a job that allowed considerable personal growth: for many of them they were really intimidated by having to walk door-to-door, introduce themselves to strangers, explain the research, and convince them to participate.

Three: once the Masters-level researcher Jaime Davidson, with UCT Environmental and Geographic Sciences, had done her analysis of the results of the baseline survey, in particular the community’s ability to adapt to social, economic, or environmental changes, she went back to the community, and discussed the findings with the ambassadors. She asked them what they thought of some of the findings, and then integrated their ideas into her final briefing notes, adding a ‘qualitative’ dimension to what might normally be a ‘quantitative’, numbers-only way of understanding a community’s state of wellbeing. This give-and-take approach to their research was an attempt to offset the sometimes extractive nature of some research, which might take, but give little back to a community that has opened itself up for scrutiny and helped open doors to get information.

And yet research that starts with a baseline survey needs to wrap up with an end-line survey in order to test what’s changed or not. After much discussion, the FLOW team decided to post-pone this end-line survey until the community currencies have had more time to become properly bedded in their contexts.

The baseline survey was particularly focused on the local economy with only businesses being surveyed; states Anna. ‘The FLOW team felt that undertaking an end-line survey at project close in 2016, would be premature and not yield a meaningful comparison to the base-line survey’.

Yet academics and people doing development work often fear a ‘null result’ in research. ‘There’s no such thing as failure’, argues Anna. ‘It’s feedback.’

Yet academics and people doing development work often fear a ‘null result’ in research. ‘One really unusual and positive thing about this project was the funder’s attitude towards unexpected results. The funder was prepared to accept outcomes that didn’t match to specific line items on a fixed budget, allowed the team to be flexible. If feedback taught them something about the project, they could build that ‘learning curve’ into the next stage of implementation, allowing them to change direction from the original plan. This kind of flexibility is critical in complex research where many of the approaches haven’t been tried before.’

‘Ring the bells that still can ring, Forget your perfect offering, There is a crack in everything, That’s how the light gets in.’

Leonard Cohen, Anthem

NO FEAR OF FAILING

Jonas Salk, the acclaimed American virologist who developed the polio vaccine, famously said that there is no such thing as a failed experiment, because finding out what doesn’t work is a necessary step to learning what does’, according to a 2014 Time Magazine article.

The scientific process actually sees failure as a vital and important part of inquiry, where ‘failed’ results need to be reported and published just as much as successful results are.

‘There’s no such thing as failure’, argues Anna. ‘It’s feedback.’

Yet academics and people doing development work often fear a ‘null result’ in research. ‘One really unusual and positive thing about this project was the funder’s attitude towards unexpected results. The funder was prepared to accept outcomes that didn’t match to specific line items on a fixed budget, allowed the team to be flexible. If feedback taught them something about the project, they could build that ‘learning curve’ into the next stage of implementation, allowing them to change direction from the original plan. This kind of flexibility is critical in complex research where many of the approaches haven’t been tried before.’

‘Everything hasn’t worked out the way we planned,’ says FLOW’s John Ziniades. But he reckons that what they’ve learned from this will help them and others in the field.

Their experiences gained through running the FLOW programme will be available to the donors, to people working in similar fields, and to the people of Kokstad and Pikesberg.

Without the willingness of the funder to see ‘failure’, or unexpected results, as feedback, and as a building block rather than a disappointment, there would not have been freedom to learn on the fly, to tweak elements of the programme as they learned, and to observe without the pressure for a ‘result’.

MS
FUNDING INNOVATIVE WORK

How do you fund early-stage, high-risk, cutting-edge innovation on a shoe-string budget for projects that primarily have social and environmental impacts, rather than profitability at their heart? Ask FLOW’s Anna Cowen and John Ziniades, as they reflect on the funding of the project, which was not without its occasional hitches.

How do you fund this kind of work when there is no clear short-term way to generate cash flows to sustain the project beyond the initial funding?

And how do you spread the funding burden through partnerships, to participants who are best-suited to ascertain and manage the risks? They ask, rhetorically.

The bulk of the funding came through the Technical and Management Support (TMS) Programme (managed by the South African National Treasury), which is part of the Development Cooperation Agenda between the governments of South Africa and Belgian Flanders. National Treasury contracted with the University of Cape Town (UCT), and UCT subcontracted the project implementation to Meshfield, John and Anna’s consulting entity.

From the outset, John and Anna intended co-funding the project. John had just sold a business, explains Anna, so ‘we had some money, and we wanted to invest it in new ways of working. We had had enough experience of working within agendas set by others to know that we needed to come up with new ways.’

By the end of the project, Meshfield had co-funded about a third of the total project budget. And while Anna and John could inject the cash to keep the project floating through a funding crunch-time that nearly jeopardised it at one point, the rest of the team contributed with time and skills, working beyond their allocated hours because they believed so strongly in the initiative.

The cash flow crunch came just months after launching the local currencies in both towns, which meant we had minimal capacity to implement really important parts of the project at a time when it was at a vital and vulnerable point.

In addition to the above funding, though, further support came from the buy-in of the Bergrivier municipality, which funded the ambassadors’ roles. This first came out of national development budget, and then from the municipality’s own tighter operational budget. It took a real champion of the project – former strategic manager Tracey Stone – to sell the value of FLOW to her colleagues in the municipality. When the council came to vote on this budget item and the broader inclusion of the FLOW project into the Bergrivier Municipality’s youth and local economic development plans, the vote was unanimous.

‘This was one of the few non-partisan moments between the usually combative councillors,’ recalls John. ‘This funding covered the ambassadors’ monthly stipend, as well as extras, such as their ambassador clothing, printing, transport, catering, and the cost of venue hire.

In Kokstad, the municipality didn’t show the same level of buy-in, though. But local business stepped in with the local food retailer, SPAR, donating office space and the cost of venue hire.

If we had some money, and we wanted to invest it in new ways of working, we had had enough experience of working within agendas set by others to know that we needed to come up with new ways.”

Upon review, the team now reflects, became an ‘adventure of interesting partnerships’.

HOW TO INTEGRATING STUDENT RESEARCH INTO FLOW – THE ADAPTIVE CAPACITY INDEX

Jaime Davidson’s Master’s thesis was titled, A participatory approach to developing a holistic and interdisciplinary adaptive capacity index for urban livelihoods. She was particularly interested in how communities’ insight could feed into the assessment of adaptive capacity.

Often indexes rely on quantitative data and there is little opportunity for local communities to input into the index design or reflect on the interpretation of results. To address this, she organised two workshops in Pietkberg with the FLOW Ambassadors. The goal was to share her approach with them and get feedback on the indicators. The first workshop familiarised the FLOW Ambassadors with the concept of an index and with the three adaptive capacity domains. The outline below helps to give a sense of what was covered in this workshop.

INTRODUCTORY PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

SESSION ON EACH ADAPTIVE CAPACITY DOMAIN

‘RICH PICTURE’ EXERCISE ON ADAPTIVE CAPACITY

WRAP-UP AND DEBRIEF

The concepts of quantitative and qualitative data were introduced.

The use of indicators to measure a complex concept was presented.

Agency, social cohesion and access to resources were explained as the components of adaptive capacity.

The FLOW Ambassadors were asked to give instances where they felt people from their community showed good or bad examples of agency, social cohesion and access to resources.

In pairs they wrote their examples on coloured post-its and then presented their examples to the group. See Figure 1 for a depiction of this exercise.

Discussion around the examples was encouraged and similar examples from different pairs were grouped together and stuck up on A2 worksheets for each domain.

Participants were asked to imagine the Bergrivier region, their community and themselves in 20 years where there was a very high level of adaptive capacity. Participants were then left with minimal facilitation to write down words or draw pictures that came to mind from this scenario on a large A1 worksheet with colourful pens.

Workshop participants discussed their responses with the group.
**FLOW AMBASSADOR VOX POPS**

**BERGRIVIER**

Ian Schaffers 30  
FA co-ordinator  
‘I have learned that we are lucky to have so many natural resources here in our area, and that we’re so dependent on them, but also that we’re very vulnerable. We have to look after these, because without them, we won’t be able to live here in this area.’

Loritha Majerrie 35  
‘Now I can speak to all types of people, from different walks of life. Down-to-earth people, and high-brow professionals. I’d like to be a motivational speaker, and work in the prison, like those people who run programmes on forgiveness.’

First intake

William van der Byl 25  
‘The skills I’ve learned at FLOW have definitely helped me get where I am today. (The experience) has helped me with my current job. And I’ve learned things about myself that I didn’t know before.’

Marlin Swartz 20  
‘I learned that the wetlands here need to be protected, because they collect water, and clean it, and prevent water-borne diseases.’

Chevonne Cornelius 22  
‘I’d like to see the FLOW Ambassadors get more involved with the teenagers out there, and share the knowledge they’ve learned on this programme with the children, youth and teenagers out there.’

Lelani Cunningham 28  
‘I think FLOW should target matriculants who have just come out of school because it’s a good platform for them. It will give them skills training, especially for those who aren’t planning to study further.’

Christine Dietrich 22  
(later a mentor)  
The BRAND launch (was a highlight), and when we graduated in the municipality, where we got certificates and had a ceremony. I’d like to be a human resources manager, and just be happy.’

Kirwan Klaase 26  
(later a mentor)  
‘Now I understand where our water comes from, what it goes through so that we have clean water to drink, and bath with, and water for gardens and grass. Also what happens with our waste water, that it’s saved, recycled, and used for irrigation.’

Jonelle Bailey 35  
The skills I learned have helped me to get new work. In the same way that we had to introduce the BRAND currency to the community, now in the work that I do with the Independent Electoral Commission, I am educating people about the local government election, and where they can register.’

Second intake

Lizel Vollenhoven Jansen 25  
‘My ‘wow’ moment was when I could sit in the Chamber at the District of West Coast. I never thought I could sit in there.’

Shalton Cornelius 19  
‘My highlight was when I did my first movie, it was my best one. I’d like to be a policeman.’

Mckyllin Donkerman 22  
‘My highlight was when we went to the wind farm in Hopefield and stood under the wind turbines. What I learned is that you can do anything if you put your mind to it. For my future, I really want to be a teacher.’

Phagon Heyns 25  
‘When we came together as a team and got to know each other, that was my ‘wow’ moment.’
For me, the highlight was when we sat in a circle and got to know each other.

Nicole Le Fleur 20
‘I enjoyed it when we first got to know each other, and the events... that made each other stronger and become leaders. I would like to study journalism at the University of the Western Cape.’

Ashlene Goliath 21
My WOW moment was when I got to speak on Mooiloop (a television programme) and when we went to a council meeting in the municipal Council Chambers. It was interesting to see how the council operates in the Chambers, very professional and respectful.

Victor Benjamin 22
‘My wow’ moment was when we got to know each other as a team.

Aphinda (AP) Ndlobeni 24
I think [joining FLOW] was one of the best decisions I’ve made. It gave me a sense of responsibility, and it gave me motivation... I was learning something every day.

Unathi Hams 32
Kokstad (is like) a little child that needs to be nurtured, a person that needs to be guided, a person that you can talk to. It’s not really difficult to live in Kokstad... If you can just be gentle to Kokstad, it will be gentle to you.

Pumeza Mbedu 37
I really enjoyed the currency evenings; we were like a family, we were working as a team, organising the event together. I still miss them.

Amaza Jara 26
I learned from FLOW that in order for you to see a change, you’ve got to be the change you want to see.

Mlungisi (Mlu) Dlamini 27
I’m so proud of the guys who are still continuing with the K’Mali. To give what you never had, what you were never given, to the community, you feel so proud of yourself.

Ntabeleng (nthabi) Jafta 26
‘The best thing I learnt [from FLOW] was to be open, to talk with anyone; firstly I was not comfortable to talk to anyone. And to work with each other even if you don’t know them.’

Thandokazi (Thando) Duku 31
‘In life you have to stand up and do things for yourself, don’t wait for anybody to do things for you, go out there and hustle, bra.’

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Advertorial in local Kokstad newspaper showcasing the way that Kokstad Exchange Network (KEN) members each support the K'Mali

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