

# "We are also travellers": An action story about disabled women mobilising for an accessible public transport system in Khayelitsha and Nyanga, Cape Metropole, South Africa

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## ABSTRACT

The paper reports on the experiences of disabled women in Khayelitsha and Nyanga in Cape Town in mobilising for an accessible public transport system so that they had equal opportunities to participation in social and economic development. The paper highlights various policies linked to addressing/achieving equal rights and access for disabled people across sectors, with a specific focus on the centrality of accessible public transport to development. The specific aim of this action story was to explore the experiences of disabled women in mobilising for change regarding an accessible public transport system as a strategy for social inclusion.

A qualitative research approach using participatory action research (PAR) was chosen as the research design to allow for emergent process of collaboration and dialogue. Purposive sampling and snowballing were used to select the sample of disabled women living in Khayelitsha and Nyanga in Cape Town. Data was generated through pioneering narrative action reflection (NAR) workshops, as an innovative method to generate data of disability experiences collectively rather than on a one-to-one basis. The method enables storytelling and action learning by marginalised groups in impoverished contexts to mobilise collectively for equal opportunities and social inclusion. The theme "We are also travellers" emerged with two sub-themes that described the barriers and strategies for inclusion, namely "Waiting for transport" and "We have to stand up". The lessons learnt and outcomes included the power of action learning as a strategy for mobilising for social change, and the centrality of an accessible public transport system for the participation of disabled women in development opportunities. NAR workshops were also found to be a culturally sensitive method for emphasising the political and social aspects of knowledge production.

**Key words:** accessibility, public transport, disability, women, community-based rehabilitation, social inclusion, narrative action reflection workshops, participatory action research

## Introduction

The objectives of the Reconstruction and Development Programme will not have been realized unless we see in practical terms the condition of women in South Africa changing for the better, and that they have the power to intervene in all aspects of life as equals. (President Nelson Mandela, 1994<sup>a</sup>).

A rights-based approach to disability embraces both impairment and disability issues, where impairment is concerned with the individual needs and disability addresses the social barriers and creating an enabling environment<sup>1</sup>. Rule 5 of the UN Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities<sup>1</sup> identifies accessibility to physical environment and structures, information and documentation as essential if we hope to reduce poverty and promote inclusion in social and economic development in communities. Community-based rehabilitation (CBR) advocates for the rights of disabled people by ensuring equal opportunities. Accessibility to services and systems is central to health and rehabilitation services, the provision of assistive devices, and the participation in education, employment and social security, as well as social inclusion in family life, sport, recreation, and cultural and religious activities<sup>1,2</sup>. Poverty alleviation has been earmarked as an essential element to achieving equal rights and equity for disabled people<sup>3,4</sup>. A major challenge involves overcoming an inaccessible public transport system due to structural, financial and attitudinal barriers.

A partnership formed between Disabled People South Africa's Disabled Women's Programme in the Western Cape, the South African Christian Leadership Assembly (SACLA) Health Project, a non-governmental primary health organisation providing community-based rehabilitation as one of its services in the Khayelitsha and Nyanga health districts and the Department of Occupational Therapy at the University of Cape Town decided to tackle barriers faced by disabled women in accessing equal opportunities for

development and social inclusion. The action story in this paper reflects the experiences of these disabled women in exploring solutions to mobilise action to create an accessible public transport system as a strategy for development and social inclusion.

## Purpose and problem statement

Community participation is recognised as an essential ingredient for sustainability of and increased productivity in development programmes globally. But, historically, health and social services were inequitable, under-funded and insensitive in their response to the majority of the population in South Africa. There has been discrimination in the provision of services to different racial groups, which has impacted on black disabled women and children the most severely<sup>5</sup>. Participatory processes in research and development of partnerships between DPOs and professionals have been dogged by the fears and concerns of professionals that there will be a drop in standards with the sharing of skills and that their jobs, positions and status will be jeopardised<sup>6,7,8</sup>. Oliver<sup>9</sup> recognised that disabled people view research as a violation of their experience, as irrelevant to their needs and as failing to improve the material circumstances and quality of life.

While the White Paper on An Integrated National Disability Strategy<sup>5</sup> (INDS) attempted to guide the intentions of different ministries to ensure that the rights of disabled people are protected and promoted by recognising their contribution to the development of the country, there is an absence of meaningful strategic guidelines and resources dedicated to implementation for addressing the needs of disabled people, generally. In addition, there is little evidence that the concept of integration into mainstream development initiatives has benefited disabled women in contexts of scarce resources and deep levels of deprivation<sup>10</sup>.

In a Participatory Action Research (PAR) study that looked at how black disabled women in poor communities equalise opportunities for human development and social change, Lorenzo<sup>10</sup> found that a significant number of women sustained their impairment as

<sup>a</sup> Inaugural Presidential Speech, Pretoria.

a result of road traffic accidents or using public transport such as buses or taxis. Thus, accessible public transport was identified as a critical structural, financial and attitudinal barrier, the latter on the part of the drivers and other passengers, to their development in their communities<sup>11,12,13</sup>. Through the PAR process, a specific question was explored, namely, how do disabled women mobilise for change regarding an inaccessible public transport system? This paper presents the action story that was constructed from the data.

## Literature review

Disabled people generally, face a situation characterised by extreme levels of inequality and discrimination. The UNDP report of 1997 in Taylor<sup>14</sup> defines human development as:

"a process of change that enables people to take charge of their own destinies and realise their full potential. It requires building up in the people the confidence, skills, assets and freedoms necessary to achieve this goal" (p49).

Taylor<sup>14</sup> adds that human development recognises that people need economic, social, cultural and political rights in order to develop to their fullest potential, and to live meaningful lives. She identified access to water, knowledge, health care, employment and other productive resources as basic ingredients for human development. In South Africa, these rights were denied to the majority of the people. Writing on the situation of poor people in the new South Africa, Barberton<sup>15</sup> advocates that

"creating action spaces...seeks to encourage people to think about and debate how the challenge of poverty and democracy... might be achieved by doing some things differently... to establish a more just socio-political, economic distribution of power" (p3).

He contends that the nature of action spaces is transformative and democratic; the spaces push the boundaries and question policies; and from these action spaces, people may initiate projects or programmes. From this concept, the author conceived the term 'action stories' to construct a narrative of what transpired from the action spaces of disabled women. From these newly created action spaces, the women engaged in an inward and outward journey of conscientisation regarding their beliefs and values<sup>16,17</sup>. The action story in this paper needs to be contextualised within relevant policies that informed the women's actions.

## Policy context

Some specific international and national policies bear some relevance to the scope of the broader study and this particular action story. The United Nations Standard Rules on Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities<sup>1</sup> implies a strong moral and political commitment on behalf of States to take action for the equalisation of opportunities for disabled people. The Rules define the 'equalisation of opportunities' as:

"the process through which the various systems of society and the environment, such as services, activities, information and documentation, are made available to all, particularly to persons with disability" (p21).

The Standard Rules provide an holistic approach to integration of disability issues. The shortcomings of this policy are that implementation is dependent on the goodwill of governments, and there is no systematic capacity building of service providers and DPOs to use the framework as a guide for programme development in public and community service organisations.

Together with the Bill of Rights in the South African constitution, the Standard Rules provided a framework for disability policy development in post-apartheid South Africa<sup>18</sup>. The Bill of Rights identified socioeconomic rights, which incorporates the right to housing, health care, education, social security and employment, as basic human rights. Since 1997, the INDS<sup>5</sup> stated that the situation faced by disabled people in South Africa is one characterised by extreme levels of inequality and discrimination. Disabled women, especially black

women and those staying in rural areas, have experienced higher rates of exclusion. The overarching policy framework for transport provision in South Africa is based on the premise that transport is a means to an end, not an end in itself<sup>19</sup>. It envisages a smooth and efficient interaction between the various components making up the transport systems and people's needs. However, there are no clear imperatives concerning the accessibility needs of disabled people. Thus, Disabled People South Africa (DPSA) prioritised an accessible public transport system as one of its advocacy campaigns, together with disability awareness, economic empowerment, education, and sign language<sup>18</sup>. CBR provides a vehicle for promoting the rights of disabled people to equal opportunities.

## CBR and equalising opportunities

There is little doubt that CBR is a relevant strategy for Africa in facing the challenge of protecting and promoting the rights of disabled women against the backdrop of poverty, discrimination and marginalisation, if implemented with all critical stakeholders to promote the rights of disabled people to equal opportunities<sup>20,21</sup>. Even though CBR has identified the right of disabled people to equal opportunities and social inclusion in development<sup>2</sup>, programme implementers have frequently focused selectively on rehabilitation<sup>5,6,7,12</sup>. Accessibility of the built environment, information and documentation as well as services and systems is central to participation of all stakeholders<sup>1,12,20</sup>. DPOs have levelled criticism at professionals who have implemented CBR without consultation and ownership by disabled people and their families<sup>6,21</sup>. While South Africa's National Rehabilitation Policy of the Department of Health<sup>22</sup> has recognised CBR as a philosophy for service delivery, CBR has, with few exceptions<sup>21</sup>, been implemented mainly through the efforts of NGOs, with little involvement and commitment from government, DPOs or higher education institutions. The approach of DPOs has been stronger on advocacy and human rights through self-representation, economic empowerment and leadership development<sup>23,24,25</sup>. Their campaigns for an accessible public transport system are essential for equalising opportunities for participation in development to alleviate poverty and facilitate social inclusion.

## The right to accessible public transport

In South Africa, Dyanti and Frater<sup>26</sup> found that people from impoverished communities struggled to gain daily access to economic and social resources because of long distances, inadequate public transport facilities as well as overall poor levels of service. Low population density in certain areas makes access to public transport difficult and expensive. Long travel distances, high costs and overcrowding coupled with long commuting times and a general lack of personal safety characterise an inefficient public transport subsystem in Cape Town. They estimated that more than 80% of the people in Khayelitsha use public transport for travel purposes in the form of rail, taxis, buses and, least of all, private vehicles. Work opportunities are not close to where the majority of poor people stay, thus increasing the financial burden of travel they carry. Few people are fortunate enough to own a private vehicle, but those who do offer a private transport service at a cost much higher than public transport. In some situations, families have no option but to pay for the convenience and accessibility of private transport, especially in times of illness or emergencies.

The action story presented in this paper describes how the women recognised both their inward as well as outward barriers to gaining access to the public transport system, which mobilised them to explore possible solutions for action collectively. This action story reflects the complexity of an inaccessible public transport system as a barrier to opportunities for development experienced by disabled groups in impoverished contexts.

## Methodology

The aim of one of the cycles of PAR study<sup>10</sup> was to explore the experiences of disabled women in mobilising for change regarding

an accessible public transport system as a key strategy for equal opportunities and rights to development and social inclusion.

### Research design

A qualitative research approach within an interpretative, critical theory paradigm was adopted for the study<sup>10</sup> (See Figure 1). The methodology was strongly influenced by emancipatory research theory<sup>27,28,29</sup> and Freire's liberation adult education theory<sup>30</sup>. Adopting critical theory to a qualitative approach to disability research would promote the inclusive nature of the data generation processes; seeing the disabled person as the expert, and seeing the organisation of society as the root cause of disablement. PAR was chosen as it emphasises the emergent processes of collaboration and dialogue that motivate, empower, increase self-esteem and develop community solidarity amongst poor people who have been deprived, oppressed and marginalised<sup>31</sup>.

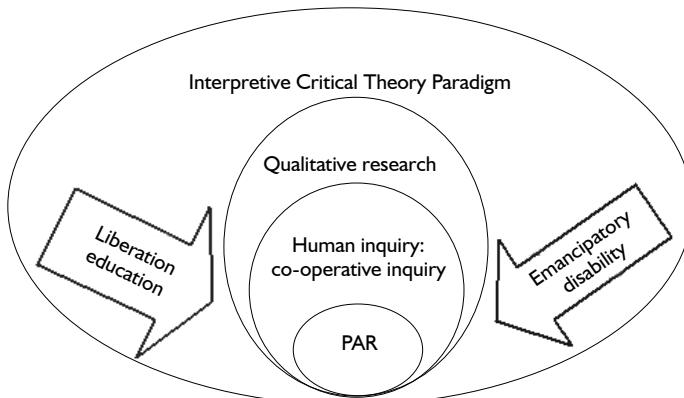


Figure 1: Aspects considered in choosing a methodology

Two objectives of PAR that were particularly relevant for the purpose of the action story were, firstly, to produce knowledge and action directly useful to the women through a combined process of research, adult education and socio-political actions; and secondly consciousness raising, or conscientisation, to empower people through the process of constructing and using their own knowledge, as the research participants have a role in setting the agendas, participating in data gathering and analysis and controlling the use of outcomes. De Koning and Martin<sup>32</sup> advocate that the strength of PAR is its potential to help those who are perceived as marginalised and deprived of opportunities for development, to gain self-confidence and pride in their potential to generate and contribute new knowledge. Professionals and researchers are able to empathise with the problems people face, leading to more respect for their insights and knowledge. Willms<sup>33</sup> supports such participation as "a process of rediscovering and recreating personal and social realities" (p7) and a journey in which there is movement "from the way things are to the way things could be" (p8), leading to meaningful social change. From her experience in China, Stone<sup>34</sup> concluded that PAR has potential to facilitate emancipation.

Three research facilitators guided the research process: the principal researcher and research assistant were staff members from the Division of Occupational Therapy at the University of Cape Town. The chairperson for the Disabled Women's Development Programme of DPSA Western Cape, who was an ex-nurse, was the third facilitator.

### Study population and sample

The research population included all disabled women who lived in the informal settlements of Site B, Site C, Macassar and Harare in Khayelitsha and Browns Farm in Nyanga. Many of the women were single mothers who looked after more than just their own children, as well as being responsible for members of their extended family. Many had migrated from the rural areas of the Eastern Cape in the hope of finding better medical care and

economic opportunities to alleviate their poverty.

Purposive sampling<sup>35</sup> was used to select the sample of women. Any woman who met the following criteria was invited to attend and participate in initial storytelling workshops:

- aged between 18–50 years, as these are seen as economically productive years, and women would potentially provide information rich data;
- known by SACLA Rehab Programme or DPSA;
- impairment status: there were no exclusions related to any impairment category as a process of snowballing occurred. None of the workshops focused on any one impairment group as such;
- economic status: no one was excluded on the basis of income, access to social security or employment.

Thereafter, the snowballing technique<sup>36</sup> was used to increase participation of women in the study. Approximately 180 women participated in the broader study over the two and a half year period of data generation, with<sup>25</sup> women participating in the two NAR workshops on experiences of the public transport system specifically. No quantitative data related to the women were collected.

### Data generation

The data was generated through a series of narrative action reflection (NAR) workshops. A NAR workshop is defined as a combination of storytelling and action learning to explore and describe the meaning of human actions that lead to social change<sup>10</sup>. NAR workshops arose from a realisation that there is a need for an innovative method to generate data about collective experiences that combined the liberation education approaches<sup>30</sup> and narrative inquiry<sup>37</sup>. Combining action learning with narrative inquiry enables participants to feel heard in a way that mobilises them to take action towards social change. For many women, participation in the NAR workshops helped them find their voice. The process ensured that the quieter members (often the younger members) got an equal opportunity to speak.

NAR workshops incorporate the use of creative activities as data triggers<sup>b</sup> or 'codes' to engage participants in action learning<sup>38</sup>, so that they discover the meaning of human actions for social change<sup>39</sup>. The different creative techniques, activities and games create an atmosphere where participants feel relaxed and comfortable to participate and reflect on the actions and changes that have occurred between workshops. The use of imagination and creative techniques is a non-threatening way of getting some resolution through engaging with one's shadow side<sup>40,41</sup>.

Table I on page 35 is a graphic presentation of the research process that illustrates the aspects of data production. At the beginning of each workshop, women shared their stories about what had happened between workshops. After the welcome, an icebreaker was done to introduce the theme for the workshop. The code or trigger activity was then presented in plenary. These plenary sessions were video-taped to provide data. Small group discussions were not video-taped, but a scribe in each group kept brief notes to use in reporting back. Workshops were often characterised by much singing, sound, movement and drama, which creates safe spaces conducive to participation, openness and exploration. There was a high degree of flexibility as the process of data gathering involved a continuous, cyclical process of storytelling, reflection, learning and action planning (See Figure 2 on page 35), followed by interpretation of the data in order to make decisions on how to proceed in the next workshop<sup>30,31,42</sup>. The cycle of action and reflection continued to happen within a workshop, as well as between and across workshops.

<sup>b</sup> I have chosen to use the term 'triggers' in place of 'codes' as defined by Freire (Hope and Timmel, 1995) so as not to cause confusion with the term 'codes' used in the data analysis process.

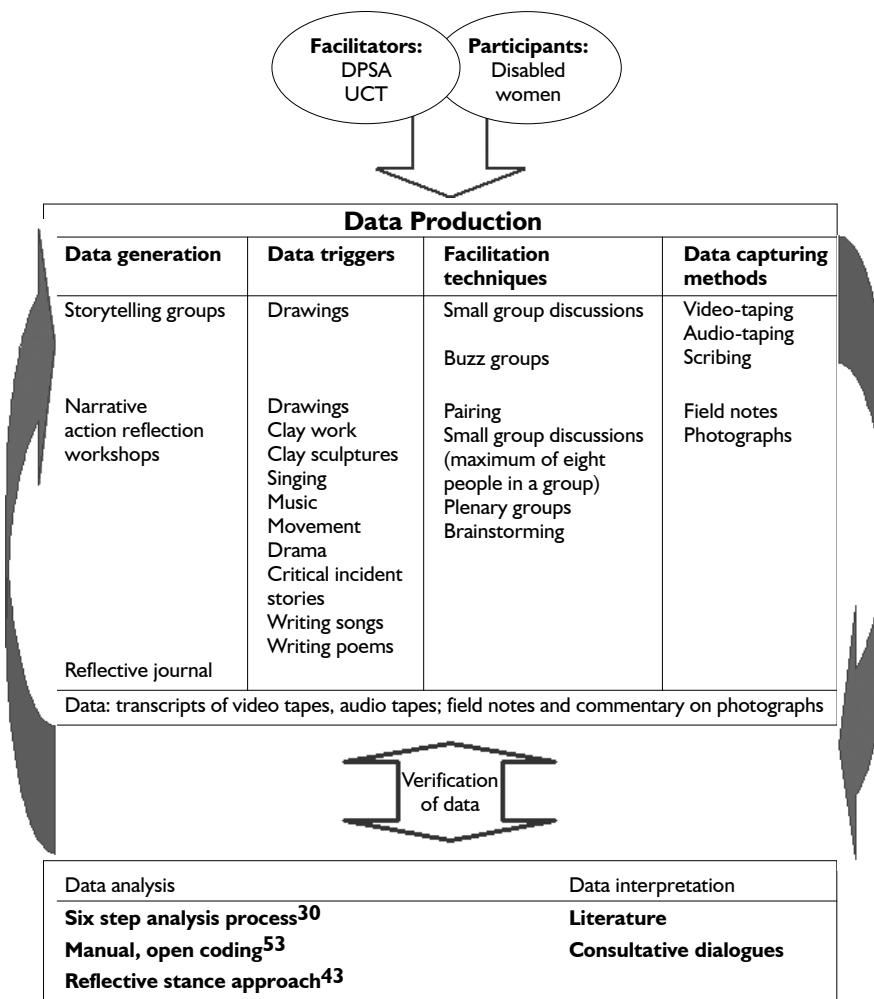


Table I: Data production process

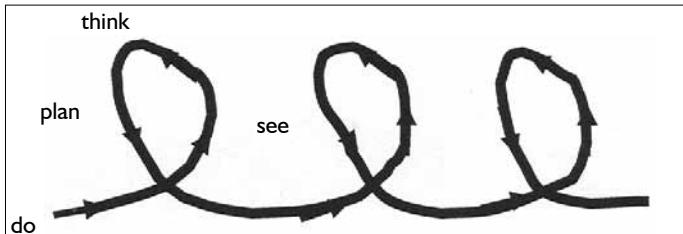


Figure 2: Steps in the action-learning cycle

### Process of NAR workshop on the action story of accessible public transport

There were four phases of the research (See Table II) and the action story in this paper was generated from data from the monthly NAR workshops held over a period of 30 months. Two workshops were specifically focused on transport. During the preparation phase of the broader PAR study, one workshop focused on the experiences of accessing public transport. The Western Cape provincial chairperson of DPSA, who was a member of the National Environmental Accessibility Project, presented a critical incident story to the women on the travel chain and their rights to accessible public transport as citizens. Six months into the implementation phase, the research assistant created a storytelling 'code' or trigger related to how disabled youth in the Eastern Cape addressed the barriers to transport, to generate discussion on how women were organising transport for participation in social and economic development opportunities. At the end of each workshop, women identified at least one action they would take between workshops.

### Data analysis

A two-pronged approach to analysis was carried out. Firstly, at an organic level, analysis and interpretation were fused into the

PAR process. As part of problem posing in the workshops, the women analysed the creative triggers using a Six-Step Analysis Process<sup>30</sup> (see Figure 3 on page 36) to reflect on what they saw happening in the trigger activity and how it related to real life for them. This analysis enabled initial interpretation by the women in order to direct actions they decided to take between workshops.

The Reflective Stance Approach<sup>43</sup> was used to analyse the transcripts across the monthly NAR workshops, with particular focus on the two workshops on public transport, so as to construct stories of action. The analysis, therefore, provided a longitudinal perspective over the study period. The first step involved reading and rereading the text by the researchers, who recorded their reactions, thoughts, and emotions in the margins of the transcript. The second step identifies the main issues that 'jumped out' for us. Step three considers the formulation of a theme from or on the basis of the issue. Step four required a scrutiny of the researchers' relationship with the theme and to determine whether it occurred in their life or work or whether it was part of their pet theory? Writing about it not only contributed to an understanding of the text, but of other texts to come. This step also allowed the researchers to reformulate a theme. In step five, a theoretical concept (or lens) was selected to give new meaning and understanding to the theme. Step six involved a continuation of the five steps until the text was exhausted. In each step, the researchers observed and watched their reaction, thoughts and emotions, while

Phase One: Setting the Scene
Preparation and planning
Storytelling:
Area A
Area C
Area B
Areas D and E
Phase Two: Planning to take PAR further
NAR workshops:
Planning the research
What is meant by participatory action research (PAR)
Experiences of using public transport
Phase Three: Implementation of actions
NAR workshops:
Understanding PAR
Reflecting on changes
Individual experiences of disability
Family attitudes to disability
Family and community attitudes to disability
Skills development and money management
Trip to Robben Island to celebrate Youth Day
Skills development
Member checking
Skills development
Celebration for National Women's Day, Selling t-shirts, Rural women's workshop in Boland district
Year end review
Participation in Adult Literacy Week
Organising Christmas Party
Phase Four: Dissemination of findings (happened concurrently during the other three phases)
Seminars
Documentation
Member checking for seminar at Uppsala University, Sweden
Member checking for OTARG conference, Uganda
NAR workshop with Leeds university staff, Cape Town
Zanempilo retrenches all staff
Writing up research
Member checking for CBR conference, Malawi

Table II: Time schedule of research phases

The discussion moves down step by step in six stages.

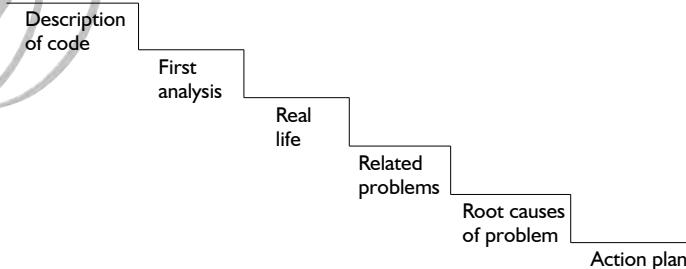


Figure 3: Six step analysis of data triggers<sup>30</sup>

'doing justice' to the text. Themes were named to illustrate the nature of the action taken or change that occurred. A narrative was constructed and, where relevant, direct quotes of women were used to provide thick description so that the reader is able to judge the relevance to another context<sup>44</sup>. The primary researcher (author of this paper) had to be adaptable and willing to change direction in response to the emerging understanding during the analysis process, as there was minimal translation from Xhosa to English and vice-versa during the data generation process. The action story on mobilising for an accessible public transport system follows.

### Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations during the research process were informed by Hagey's<sup>45</sup> principles of social justice, namely of equity, restitution and procedural justice, as well as Oliver's<sup>29</sup> yardstick for measuring emancipation of disability research, namely, reciprocity, gain and empowerment. A research proposal was submitted to the Faculty of Health Science, University of Cape Town's research committee and approval obtained for the study. Verbal permission for the study was sought from the SACLRA Rehabilitation Management team.

To maintain confidentiality, a decision was taken not to identify women by their own names or specific area in reporting the findings<sup>46,47</sup>, even though the women said we could use their names. A commitment to participation was negotiated with the women for each phase of the research. Informed consent was given verbally due to differences in literacy levels, and a register of participants present for every workshop was kept.

A conducive and safe environment was created in each workshop<sup>41,43</sup>, where the women were supported and able to share their vulnerabilities as the research facilitators had prior experience in counselling and group dynamics, with two of them coming from the same culture and language group as the women.

### Ensuring rigour

According to Lincoln and Guba<sup>48</sup> and Polit and Hungler<sup>42</sup>, there are four criteria that increase the trustworthiness of qualitative research. Firstly, credibility was achieved by the research facilitators immersing themselves in the setting and by prolonged engagement with the women. Member-checking was done regularly during the study at three-month intervals, as it allowed an opportunity for the women to confirm the 'truth' of the findings by verifying the analysis and interpretation done by the researchers. Transferability was established in the findings and seminar presentations, which provided sufficient description of the context where the data was collected and analysis of key parameters of the context of the study to allow people in other contexts to benefit. Dependability and confirmability were determined through an audit trail, which was drawn from the minutes of meetings, the audio and video recordings and journaling.

### Findings: "We are also travellers" — An Action Story

In sharing their stories, not all women revealed the details of their impairment, and records of SACLRA's Rehab Programme were not always accurate or complete. The major causes of impairment that were given were classified into three overlapping groups,

namely, medical conditions, such as congenital deformities, epilepsy or vascular diseases, road traffic injuries and trauma from violence and abuse. The impairment happened across the life cycle, with some women being disabled since childhood, some as young persons and others as adults. The action story explores experiences of the women captured in the theme, 'We are also travellers' (See Table III), which illustrates the inward changes that occurred as the facilitators explored the nature of the problem with the women. 'Waiting for transport' and 'We have to stand up' are sub-themes that illustrate how women overcame the barriers to inaccessible public transport.

Theme	Category	Codes
We are also travellers	Waiting for transport: Barriers to inclusion	Time spent waiting Poor planning and organising Taxi violence Emotional vulnerability
	We have to stand up: Strategies to inclusion	Negotiating collective responsibility Beginning to mobilise

Table III: Findings of the action story on accessible public transport

### Waiting for transport: Barriers to inclusion

**Time spent waiting** for public transport was a common experience that the women related in their accounts of actions taken. Until recently, if people in Khayelitsha wanted to do bulk buying of food, they would have to travel outside of Khayelitsha to significant chain discount stores<sup>26</sup>. The implications for incidental and weekly earners with little income security are significant in terms of time and money spent on transport. Shopping patterns are typified by frequent small purchases, particularly of staple and perishable foodstuffs, from spaza shops or convenience stores within walking distance of their homes. Cost margins are often as high as 25% above the wholesale price. At one workshop, a woman told how she had gone shopping with the research assistant for the ingredients and equipment for a catering group that was planned in the previous workshop. Her experience reflected how time consuming it was to rely on public transport.

*Woman: We got the equipment and ingredients. When I came back, the members who I said should wait were gone because I was late due to transport. They gave up that day and they don't finish it by going home before time. I was burnt by the sun because we didn't get chocolates from the first place. We had to go to Rylands. I sat there waiting for transport and I gave up and went to the bus. But with the group members it was so difficult to wait in the house. Later three women from U area arrived. We made chocolates at my place and the group members took chocolates worth R45 to sell. We have not met again with them. I made R18. We were going to sell in town but the chocolates were sold before then. They sold easily. People want them even now.*

Women wasted an enormous amount of time waiting for public transport. The way the public taxi system works in the townships is that passengers have to wait for the taxi to fill up (legal capacity is a maximum of 16 people) before it will depart from the taxi rank. A passenger can therefore wait for an hour or more on some occasions. Passengers are also dropped at a taxi rank and not door-to-door.

It became evident that there were tensions between the women, the community rehabilitation workers (CRWs) and the co-ordinators from SACLRA about who was responsible for the organisation of transport for the women. The root of the tensions was related to **poor planning and organising** in time to enable the women to participate in different events and opportunities. Poor communication and time management were also factors that compromised effective planning and organisation. The women felt

that they did not receive information about workshops timeously. The women and the CRW co-ordinator raised these difficulties, as seen in the dialogue, which sought to challenge the perceived passivity and dependency on non-governmental organisations (NGOs) for transport:

Woman: *Transport is a problem. Listen to me carefully. The CRWs come at this moment to tell you that there is a workshop instead of telling you a day before. You are waiting for transport, you are waiting for transport that won't come, especially transport from our home.*

MJ (facilitator): *Which one is that?*

Woman: *SACLA's transport. I phoned and they said the driver was not there and the co-ordinator was not there as well. They didn't know what's happening with the transport. So we have a problem. We need to look at these things from different directions.*

CRW co-ordinator: *I have a request, I'm struggling ... at this moment and minute, I would like women to volunteer and say 'I can help you with organising [transport for] the women's group'.*

MJ: *From CRWs?*

CRW co-ordinator: *Even if it's the women...*

CRW: *I was going to explain about participants hearing late about the workshops. We went to Macassar first but they didn't know where people had gone. So that is why the women don't hear about the venue.*

MJ: *So if CRWs don't hear about the venue it's worse for the women. So that is why [the CRW co-ordinator] is saying she needs people to help even if you swap and that gives you the skills and you just ask her how to do it.*

Through such dialogues, the women learnt the importance of planning and organising transport as an essential skill to accessing resources and opportunities.

The situation of public transport accessibility was complicated by **taxi violence**, illustrated here in the dialogue between MJ and the women from the one area, who were also disillusioned with Dial-A-Ride:

Woman: *There is also this taxi violence and we are scared to come nearer them. You hear these bullets whilst you are still at the taxi. Sometimes [the taxis] leave without even closing the doors.*

Group: *We had Dial-A-Ride but drivers are scared of entering the communities now because of taxi drivers fighting. We are struggling with transport now.*

MJ: *We won't expect you to come out of your houses when there is a fight. So we won't meet. We are talking about solving the transport problem at normal times.*

Besides the structural, attitudinal and financial factors described earlier, **emotional vulnerability** was identified as a further factor that influenced the women's confidence in accessing public transport. The women had to find the courage to challenge unacceptable behaviour of service providers and take responsibility for their own well-being. A dialogue occurred trying to find solutions around using public transport, as well as to establish mutual accountability:

MJ: *So it lies with us, what are we going to do? You need to phone Dial-A-Ride. So you'll be able to say to Dial-A-Ride if he comes at 11h00 'you have been asked to be here at 10h00, why are you coming this time? If you are not asking them because they were late when you went to town, that is not Dial-A-Ride's problem. Then you will need to be early so that you tell them, 'we are watching you; you've been coming late all the time'.*

Woman: *MJ organised Dial-A-Ride for us, but we got to town at 17h30. They were booked and they agreed. I went to town in my old apron. When I asked the driver 'where have you been?' he said the vehicle was broken, but he had a strong smell of alcohol. Dial-A-Ride doesn't improve.*

MJ: *So for the women's group, is there a person who used Dial-*

*A-Ride? For example, in your area you say 'there are four of us and I'm going to use it'.*

Woman: *The reason why we didn't bother about transport is because we had good transport [contracted by SACLA] except the time problem. The drivers have care, not this thing of being dished out. It's like the drivers have been trained for this.*

MJ: *But if you are not treating him nicely, you won't see his good side if he has to come back and forth to your group.*

Woman: *The problem is still with us.*

CRW co-ordinator [to TL]: *It seems as if when the drama group asks for money for transport they have committed a crime. Were you waiting for the women to fail first and then you would show them how stupid they are?*

This dialogue illustrated how the women's vulnerability influenced their decision-making regarding their preferred form of transport from SACLA. But dependence on this form of transport limited their opportunities for participation in social and development events. Emotional vulnerability was also seen in perceptions that only some groups got money to cover transport costs, which left other groups feeling angry, frustrated and further disadvantaged. There was a need to build self-esteem and trust to overcome suspicion. Such interactions indicated the value of building emotional resources and capacity to understand how organisational systems work so as to build sustainability in accessing resources. An action learning approach allowed the facilitators the space to deal with such events as they arose. There was also the need for better communication, to look at different ways to overcome barriers collectively. The next sub-theme illustrates the strategies women engaged in to overcome the barriers to transport.

### We have to stand up: strategies for inclusion

About twice during the PAR study roughly 15 women attended the NAR workshops. Later it was discovered that many of them seemed to be left waiting at their 'stations'<sup>c</sup> by the SACLA transport. Through dialogue and critical reflection with the women on the reality of the situation, some of the group began to realise that their endeavours regarding business development depended on **negotiating collective responsibility** to ensure accessible public transport:

MJ: *The problem with transport, we know SACLA's contract driver is on his own and there is a big group. What time must he start if he is going to take so many people? Are there people who are ready at 7h00?*

Group: *No.*

MJ: *So we are causing problems for him. If we say he must start at 9h00 we end up rushing because we don't have enough time. There is one transport and you want him to start at 9h00. Is that not a problem?*

Group: *It's a problem.*

MJ: *What must we do?*

Group: *He must start at 7h00, [some women said at 8h00].*

MJ: *Even if he starts at 8h00 people are not ready and he has to go back to them. He goes twice to the people.*

Group: *The problem is there are many groups*

Group: *We must wake up early if we are going for the workshop. Waking up early one day in a month is nothing. It's better because the transport will fetch you at home. How much more difficult if you were rushing for another transport?*

Woman: *There is nothing as important as being punctual. We are the cause of the problem. If the transport comes and it leaves we mustn't complain.*

MJ: *So let's say the transport mustn't come back. If I'm not ready they must go.*

Group: *Yes it must leave you.*

<sup>c</sup> Pick up points organised by the CRWs in each area where the women assembled to be picked up at an agreed time.

As women took more collective responsibility, there were renewed signs of **beginning to mobilise** around accessing public transport. The trigger activity (see data generation section) triggered a lively discussion and challenged the women to 'wake up' and revive the committee of the Masiphatisane Disability Forum, as some of the women were committee members. They decided to meet with the mayor in Khayelitsha. The facilitators questioned the women about why they left it to a disabled man to go alone to see local councillors. A CRW supported the idea of women choosing their own committee:

*CRW: Things start happening when women get up but if we wait for men 'oh no'. It seems as if we have to stand up because really there will be development*

**Group:** *As women, we are the ones who always have a need to travel and men don't. If we say we'll wait for them, there will be no development, the way these taxis are shouting at us. The drivers (mainly male) don't even mind if they need one more person in the taxi. If I'm standing there they would rather go with a taxi that's not full and I must take the next taxi.*

There was a need to address the pattern and assumption that SACLAs would continue to provide transport. A system of payment of taxis, together with the risk of creating dependency on the NGOs or the core planning team, was discussed. Women were borrowing money from a neighbour or a CRW with the expectation of being reimbursed by one of the partner organisations in the research. So the women were guided in reflecting on how they budgeted and planned for the costs of participating in development and social activities to ensure a sustainable system. There was a suggestion that the group be given seed money to generate money to cover transport costs – each participant would be given R5 to make something and from the profits of selling they could pay for transport.

The findings of the NAR workshops that explored the experiences of disabled women in accessing public transport revealed the barriers and strategies used to ensure their right to participation. Accessible public transport and the distances women had to travel to participate in different events or opportunities for development was closely linked to the planning and organisational capacity of the women and the organisations which worked with them. Unavailability of money made these tasks difficult for the women. The lessons learnt and outcomes are discussed further.

#### Lessons learnt and outcomes of women's actions

The themes in the action story showed the centrality of accessibility issues to the empowerment and inclusion of disabled women. Enabling the women to explore the feasibility of accessing public transport systems beyond just their participation in the PAR study reflected the complexity of mainstreaming disability in policy implementation. Accessible public transport was identified as an essential resource for skills development to foster sustainable livelihoods<sup>10</sup>. The unavailability of money made these tasks difficult.

In economically impoverished contexts, it seemed more feasible for the small business groups to meet together once a week instead of every day because of distance and transport costs. Such time would be sufficient for planning, organising and decision-making to maintain the momentum of small business. In between, the women would work individually, but still pool their resources. Other studies have shown the value of a supportive local network of small business groups which contributes to the sustainability of these initiatives<sup>49,50</sup>. It was agreed that the CRW co-ordinators and CRWs would tell the women about different opportunities timeously, but women also had to take responsibility and diarise the dates themselves. Thus, the relevance of planning and organisational skills linked to accessing public transport was recognised as essential for sustainability, as it would ensure access to resources, opportunities and markets where they could sell their produce.

There were signs of growing interdependence amongst the

women as they problem-solved together. They realised that they had to negotiate collective responsibility with the CRWs for organising transport for monthly workshops. This meant that by the first Friday of each month the CRW co-ordinator would tell CRWs of any changes in their staff meetings, so that there was ample time to disseminate this information. A committee was also elected to help women organise themselves into small groups in the areas where they stayed, so that they could arrange public transport as a group for the monthly workshops. This arrangement would also address the safety issues of young intellectually disabled women using public transport alone. The previous reliance on SACLAs to provide the transport for everyone had delayed the start of workshops. SACLAs would then provide transport for the few women who had severe mobility impairments.

This action story hoped to address the nature of the barriers experienced by disabled women regarding access to the public transport system. The lessons identified by the women can be shared with other non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and disabled peoples organisations (DPOs), as important organs of civil society, as the implications of the action story were multi-dimensional. The study proposed that accessibility (Standard Rule 5) be considered as a precondition for participation rather than one of the target areas, as it currently stands. Universal access, especially public transport systems, the built environment and information dissemination were found to be the weak links in ensuring sustained participation of disabled women in gaining their rights to equal social, political and economic development. The findings have contributed to increasing the understanding and awareness of disability issues for people involved in policy development and implementation across the various sectors of government to improve service delivery. Those involved in academic studies in disability, diversity, gender and social development would benefit from learning about the strategies identified to ensure that more equitable partnerships with disabled people, generally, are developed. Further research into strategies to build the capacity of disabled women to tackle accessibility barriers is indicated.

Narrative inquiry has been criticised for focusing on the individual and not the social context<sup>37</sup>. Another shortcoming mentioned is selective recall, which was addressed through the nature of the group interactions and the use of creative activities as data triggers. NAR workshops generated collective experiences as the stories were gathered in workshops and not on an individual basis. The understanding about groups, communities and contexts was enriched. In reality, as women shared their stories, they resonated with experiences of others or triggered aspects of stories that may not have been spoken about earlier. The women have voiced their right to inclusion.

NAR workshops were found to be a culturally sensitive method for emphasising the political aspects of knowledge production. The workshop process valued the lived experience of disabled women in ways that advanced their development and the fulfillment of their innate potential. They fostered participation in inclusive development of oppressed and marginalised people, as the process recognised alternative ways of being, which are attributed to human possibility, potential and experience<sup>51</sup>. NAR workshops provided a dynamic and interactive method for generating data of disability experiences collectively, as well as a strategy for equalising opportunities in human development. The data generation method has the potential to contribute meaningfully to social change through the incorporation of African values of Ubuntu<sup>52, 11, 16</sup>, namely, dignity, respect, solidarity and reciprocity to overcome the struggle for survival.

#### Further reflections

The current public transport system is fraught with barriers to participation, which left disabled women isolated and emotionally vulnerable. These barriers are particularly problematic, as they hampered their efforts to access opportunities and resources. The distances between the areas where the women stay made it



difficult for practitioners and members to communicate changes in what was planned and to meet regularly as there were limited phones and public transport. But the strategies they found to be effective were reinforced.

Action learning enabled the women to gain confidence in decision-making as they explored choices and options for action. The location and distance of resources, opportunities and markets necessitated confidence in planning and organisational skills. Through the NAR workshops the women began to effect change. The action story revealed the tensions and dynamics of moving from dependence and blaming to taking responsibility and self-empowerment. These tensions have to be balanced to enable and sustain change. The women gained a sense of being in control of their destinies. They began to use collective problem solving as a strategy to mobilise for accessible public transport.

The action of mobilising and organising disabled women to participate in this disability research yielded long-term benefits related to service delivery and community development through social change. Such actions have contributed to the rights of women to accessible public transport as a strategy to equalise opportunities for development and social inclusion of disabled women.

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