Goals For Life: Empowering Youth Through Sport in Lesotho

A CASE STUDY OF A PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

By

DARA NATALIE PARKER
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This paper explores the opportunities and constraints of employing Participatory Action Research (PAR) to conduct a Social Impact Assessment (SIA) with youth in Lesotho. Participatory research methodologies have become virtually synonymous with ethical research, yet a growing body of literature challenges the ubiquitous nature of participatory theory.

This paper provides a unique case study of a PAR project undertaken in Lesotho, Southern Africa. It analyses my two-phased experience in using PAR to develop the Olympiafrica Youth Ambassador Programme (OYAP), a youth volunteer programme that uses sport as a tool for development. OYAP was initiated in June 2003 and is designed to address pressing social issues facing youth in Lesotho such as HIV/AIDS, poverty, drug and alcohol abuse, and sexual health. OYAP’s mandate is youth empowering youth through sport, training young people to enhance their own capabilities.

In the first phase of my experience developing OYAP, I was unaware of PAR as a methodology useful in community development practices. In the second phase I became well versed on PAR as an approach; I also became more reflexive of my own limitations and weaknesses in the course of my personal journey using PAR, and was able to explore the constraints of PAR as a community development methodology.

This study examines the inherent challenges and possibilities related to PAR, detailing issues of accountability, quality, ownership and voice. Building on my first experience in Lesotho where I unintentionally engaged in PAR, I examine a methodology reputed for empowering marginalized communities, ultimately focusing on the role of the facilitator in the PAR process. I argue that the ability to successfully implement PAR depends largely on the individual practitioner’s adherence to PAR principles and ethics and the ability to negotiate the terms of their partnership and collaboration with local communities. I underscore the importance of reflecting on the personal journeys that PAR practitioners undergo while adhering to methodological principles and ethics, and becoming emotionally involved in the work they are doing.
Table of Contents

ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................... II
TABLE OF CONTENTS ....................................................................................... III
LIST OF FIGURES .......................................................................................... IV
LIST OF ACRONYMS ...................................................................................... V
PREFACE: FEBRUARY 13, 2003 ................................................................. VI
ARIVING........................................................................................................... VI
DEDICATION .................................................................................................... VIII
1.0 THE RESEARCH PROJECT INTRODUCED ............................................. 1
   INTENTIONAL PARTICIPATION ................................................................. 1
   AN UNINTENTIONAL PAR PROJECT ......................................................... 4
   THE PROCESS ........................................................................................... 8
2.0 GEOGRAPHIC AND INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT: OYAP AND LESOTHO .. 14
   LESOTHO .................................................................................................. 14
   YOUTH IN LESOTHO .............................................................................. 19
   OYAP: YOUTH EMPOWERMENT AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT THROUGH SPORT ........................................................................... 21
   OYAP PROJECTS ..................................................................................... 26
   OYAP AND PAR ....................................................................................... 28
3.0 PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH METHODOLOGY .................... 30
   PAR ORIGINS .......................................................................................... 30
   PAR PRINCIPLES AND PROCESS ............................................................ 33
   PAR APPLICATIONS: COMBINING PARTICIPATION AND SOCIAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT ................................................................. 36
   PAR CRITIQUES ....................................................................................... 39
   CONCLUSION ......................................................................................... 42
4.0 PAR: FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE .................................................... 44
   KEY FINDINGS ........................................................................................ 44
   CHALLENGES OF ACCOUNTABILITY IN DOING PAR WITH VOLUNTEERS ........................................................... 47
   CHALLENGES IN ENSURING THE QUALITY OF PARTICIPATION ....................... 49
   CHALLENGES IN DEALING WITH THE TEMPORAL DIMENSION OF PAR ................................................................................................. 50
   CHALLENGES OF USING PAR TO ADDRESS LOCAL POWER DYNAMICS .................................................................................. 52
   CHALLENGESPOSED BY LANGUAGE BARRIERS ............................................ 53
   CHALLENGES OF OWNERSHIP AND VOICE .............................................. 54
   OPPORTUNITIES FOR TRANSFORMATION THROUGH PAR ....................... 56
5.0 REFLECTIONS ON THE OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS OF PAR .... 58
   LESSONS LEARNED FROM A PERSONAL JOURNEY .................................. 58
   OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES OF USING PAR IN YOUTH EMPOWERMENT .......................................................... 61
   IS THIS THE QUESTION: TO PAR OR NOT TO PAR? ...................................... 64
   THE END OF THE JOURNEY ..................................................................... 66
6.0 REFERENCES ............................................................................................. 71
7.0 APPENDIX ................................................................................................ 75
   APPENDIX A ............................................................................................. 75
List of Figures

Figure 1: Map of Lesotho ........................................................................ 14

Figure 2: Action-Reflection Diagram ....................................................... 34
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CGC</td>
<td>Commonwealth Games Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIDA</td>
<td>Canadian International Development Agency</td>
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<td>CSLC</td>
<td>Canadian Sport Leadership Corps</td>
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<td>EIA</td>
<td>Environmental Impact Assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td>HIV/AIDS</td>
<td>Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome</td>
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<td>LHWP</td>
<td>Lesotho Highlands Water Project</td>
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<td>LNOC</td>
<td>Lesotho National Olympic Committee</td>
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<td>LNVC</td>
<td>Lesotho National Volunteer Commission</td>
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<td>OYAP</td>
<td>Olympafrica Youth Ambassador Programme</td>
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<td>PAR</td>
<td>Participatory Action Research</td>
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<td>RA</td>
<td>Research Assistant</td>
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<tr>
<td>SIA</td>
<td>Social Impact Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UBC</td>
<td>University of British Columbia</td>
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Arriving

Development planning takes practitioners to places and encounters that often take them by surprise; my first experience was no different. I stood in front of the immigration officer at the airport unsure of how to answer, intimidated by her stare. "Who is supposed to be picking you up?" she repeated insistently. I had no idea. I had just spent over 40 hours on planes, in and out of airports, on three different continents, and I barely knew that I was in Lesotho. The oppressive heat made my head feel heavy and my mind was fuzzy. I scrambled to remember whether or not my organization had provided me with a name of the person that was supposed to meet me at Moshoeshoe International Airport. My eyes searched the crowd desperately, hoping that someone would jump to my rescue. Nobody materialized.

Having travelled significantly over the last five years I am no stranger to customs. However, it was my first time on African soil and I had no idea how strict these officials would be if I did not provide the correct answer. I hesitated as she looked at me inquisitively, jumping into what I hoped would pass for an explanation. "I'm not sure of her name but I'm here to work with the Lesotho National Olympic Committee and the president was supposed to meet me here." Suddenly the mood lightened and I was greeted with nods and smiles before the immigration official winked at me reassuringly and disappeared. I was not reassured just yet.

Minutes later she returned and with a smile in her voice said, "Ahhh, Zonge is coming to pick you up. He is coming just now." Excellent. I smiled in return unknowingly having participated in my first lesson in Basotho culture – time works differently. I waited another twenty minutes for my host to arrive, learning to interpret exactly what "just now" really means. "Now now" is a few minutes earlier than "just now", which is much faster than "now." Regardless I was incredibly happy to be greeted enthusiastically by Zonge and Matlohang, the Secretary-General and President (respectively) of the Lesotho National Olympic Committee (LNOC).
After preliminary introductions I made small talk by mentioning how the immigration officials questioned me when I could not produce a name. Zonge laughing replied, “Ah yes, my wife works at the airport so they called me to tell me you were here.” Everyone is connected to everyone in Lesotho and there is a network that any telecommunications corporation would envy. If you want something to be known in Lesotho you certainly do not send post. Nor do you rely on the burgeoning electronic forms of communication we have become dependent on. In Lesotho you tell your neighbours, specific ones if the need is urgent. I had just had my second lesson in Basotho culture; Lesotho is a very small country.
To my father, whose unconditional love and unwavering support encouraged me to believe that I am capable of accomplishing anything (even writing a graduate thesis). I wish you were here to celebrate with me.
1.0 The Research Project Introduced

Intentional Participation

My interests in embarking on this research project came from what in retrospect appears to be an unintentional Participatory Action Research (PAR) project. I first travelled to Lesotho in February of 2003, on a youth internship programme sponsored by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). I had been hired by Commonwealth Games Canada (CGC) to work in partnership with the Lesotho National Olympic Committee (LNOC). During my internship I developed a youth volunteer programme called the Olympafrica Youth Ambassador Programme (OYAP) based on what I would belatedly come to understand as principles of PAR. The concept behind the programme was to use sport as a tool for community development and youth empowerment. Little did I know the journey that I had embarked on would lead me back to Lesotho to conduct research that would result in writing a graduate thesis 3 years later.

I left Lesotho for the first time in October of 2003, however as much as possible I stayed in touch with both the youth and the programme administrators. Upon learning about OYAP’s continued growth and self-proclaimed success, I became interested in evaluating the programme to learn more about how OYAP was affecting the youth. I was eager to undertake a Social Impact Assessment (SIA) of OYAP, however my priority was to use a participatory research methodology that would emphasize the role of the local community. Participatory methodologies are presented as the antithesis to studies that have previously been conducted with a top-down, so-called 'objective', technocratic, prescriptive, 'expert-driven', blanket approach (Chambers, 1995, 1997; Wright & Nelson, 1995). My commitment to ethical research made me wary of returning to Lesotho and playing the role of the outside expert, negating local knowledge; I feared unintentional exploitative actions. My goal was to have the youth undertake the research while facilitating the process and working closely with them to develop a research report.

My personal interest was in exploring the impact of OYAP on both the participants and the communities involved in the programme. I wanted to understand the ways in which the programme has affected and/or changed the lives of youth in Lesotho. Had OYAP
lived up to its expectations and was it addressing the issues that the programme was designed to tackle? Was this a model with the potential to be replicated elsewhere? Having read about OYAP’s success on paper; I wanted to see what it looked like on the ground.

While I had my own questions about the programme, my intention to use PAR meant that the ultimate research questions would be posed by the youth themselves – integral to PAR is that the research problem originates from within the community (Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991; Hagey, 1997). Exploring the possibilities of engaging in a participatory SIA, I approached both the CGC and the LNOC to gauge whether there was any interest on the part of the hosting organizations to conduct this research. I was met with broad enthusiasm and encouraged to move forward with the planning.

I wrote a proposal for the research project involving two trips to Lesotho and in order to move forward with the project I required CGC and the LNOC to approve, alter or deny the proposal. My motivation went beyond receiving a simple yes or no response; I genuinely had no interest in moving forward with the project unless there was a true partnership in place. In my proposal I emphasized my methodological approach, explaining that I did not have a specific research question I would be bringing to the project, though I suggested the possibility of conducting a SIA. Rather my role would be to provide a framework for the project by contributing my research skills and experiences in order to best facilitate the process for the youth researchers.

Here I acknowledge having breached the first rule of PAR, to have the problem originate within the community. In having approached the community rather than having them approach me, I immediately compromised the ethics underlying the research, but also created the opportunity for the community to begin a PAR process. One of the inherent problems within PAR is that the ideology assumes that the community has the capacity to know the possibilities available to them – in reality this is not always the case. This is a significant critique accompanying the approach and I will further problematize this process in my methodology section. Despite this ethical consideration in the start-up phase, the community was enthusiastic about the research project and encouraged me to pursue planning the process.
When first conceiving of the project, my idea was to conduct an SIA using PAR. The research would benefit OYAP by contributing recommendations on strengthening the programme while validating their current achievements with a credible academic framework. Simultaneously I would be using the research for my master’s thesis. I was overt in my intentions, conscious of being upfront and honest about how I would personally benefit from the project. In doing so I wanted to address any potential concerns from the outset. As it happened, there were no concerns that were brought to my attention, nor was anyone fazed (or upset) by my intentions to use this research towards my master’s degree. If anything, the fact that I was backed by a reputable academic institution further validated the efforts of the youth.

My intention to have the research be completely driven by the youth proved challenging in many respects. Within a month of my first research trip, I realized that it would be difficult to use the SIA as the basis for my own thesis. Given the varying levels of education among the youth researchers, and the varying levels of effort put into the project, the research did not necessarily translate into academic standards at the master’s level. Equally the research was conducted by the youth, not me; therefore I was uncomfortable with taking their direct words, and using them for self-gain. I came to the conclusion that there would have to be two final products: (1) an SIA detailing the research findings of the youth, and (2) my own thesis, an exploration of process and challenges of conducting an SIA based on PAR principles.

Thus my research evolved into an examination of the use of PAR in conducting an SIA with youth in a cross-cultural setting. I am primarily interested in using self-reflection to tell the story of my experience working with the youth in OYAP – the majority of the issues raised are addressed in chapter 4. Self-reflection is perhaps the most critical component of PAR, and will drive the research question, “What are the opportunities and constraints in using PAR as a methodology?” In this way the research is less about the community, as I feel that I will always be a bit of a voyeur in this respect, and more about my own journey, of which I am an unqualified expert. It also speaks to the heart of the approach I have taken with all of the projects that I have worked on with youth.

Upon re-visiting OYAP during my studies towards a master’s degree, it was suggested by peers and mentors that I use PAR as my methodology to conduct an SIA. Learning
more about the methodology I began to understand that OYAP had first come about through my unintentional use of PAR. While I intentionally aimed to work with ethical principles and standards, I recognized that ethics are interpreted in a variety of ways among different people. As I had no specific framework to guide my work I was drawn to the principles of PAR, in part believing the methodology would lend both structure and legitimacy to my research. My original approach to working with youth in Lesotho and the creation of OYAP was the foundation of this research project. Were it not for the relationships I forged, the trust I developed, and my understanding of working within the community, I could in no way have hoped to complete this project with any degree of success. Therefore it is essential to understand the process I used to develop OYAP during my first time in Lesotho.

An Unintentional PAR Project
In this section I review how my internship became the initial research process for my project. I detail the protocol I observed, the organizations I worked with and the organic development of OYAP. My intimate experiences with the community led me to choose a first-person, participant-observer account of the research. By detailing the sights and sounds, emotions and introspection, I present a holistic account of the research undertaken.

My original internship was an 8-month placement with the LNOC in Maseru, Lesotho. The mandate of my internship was to use sport as a tool for community development with youth (a growing field in international development whose rationale I explore in chapter 2). My passion for people and travel, my educational background in political studies, my interests in social justice issues, combined with my lifelong love of sports as an athlete, made this internship the perfect opportunity to merge several different passions while exploring my career interests in international development. Preparing for the internship I was excited about travelling to Southern Africa, nervous about my ability to contribute in a meaningful manner, and wary of the impact that I might have in such a short time. Ultimately I was keen to learn and eager to challenge myself in ways that I might not anticipate.
The Canadian Sport Leadership Corps (CSLC) places young Canadian sports leaders in Africa and the Caribbean for 8 months at a time. Interns are charged with the mandate of using sport as a tool for development through a variety of programmes and initiatives. Interns work in government or civil society, hosted by local organizations. In 2006 CGC will be sending out their sixth generation of sports leaders to different countries, a testament to the success and enthusiasm behind the programme.

When I participated in 2003, the CGC internship programme was still in its early stages having gone through only two cycles prior to hiring me. As such I was the first intern that they sent to Lesotho. Equally I was the first intern that the LNOC had ever worked with. I soon learned that this presented both opportunities and challenges in my work.

CGC's philosophy to build equal partnerships with host countries with whom they work requires that interested organizations fill out an application to request an intern. In the application they are required to detail the responsibilities of the intern, relevant projects, and a work plan. Knowing this I assumed that upon arriving, the somewhat vague mandate of “development through sport” would become clearer.

Upon setting out for Lesotho people asked me what I would be doing in the country. My quick answer was that I would be working with the LNOC using sport as a tool for development with youth. My slightly more detailed answer involved rattling off the benefits and the universal popularity of sport; that sport is a universal language with the ability to unite across lines of race, gender, age, ability, religion and culture. That sport teaches essential life skills including teamwork, goal-setting, leadership, commitment, and the ability to win and lose with grace. That a growing body of research demonstrates that youth who are active in sport perform better academically, are less likely to engage in drug or alcohol abuse, and will delay sexual activity. There are many factors that explain why sport is understood as an innovative tool for development. While people were generally satisfied with this answer, I was perhaps a little more hesitant, wondering exactly what this would look like. I assumed that upon arriving in Lesotho, the LNOC would have more specific tasks laid out for me to take on.

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1 More information can be found at: http://www.commonwealthgames.ca
In reality upon arriving in Lesotho I discovered that while there was great enthusiasm at my presence, there was little in the way of a solid work plan. In an NGO run almost entirely by volunteers, there was little time or energy available to offer full-time guidance to a Canadian intern. Rather, the LNOC left it largely to me to decide on what my role would be in their organization. While the opportunity to have influence on my work eventually turned out to be positive, in the beginning I was simply overwhelmed.

After one week in Lesotho, I was at a loss. Adjusting to a foreign landscape, in an unfamiliar culture, whose native language I did not speak, I did not know where to begin. Had I read development theorist, Bill Cooke’s, “Rules of Thumb”, I might have balked at the fact that my challenges presented arguments for turning around and returning home (Cooke, 2004). My instincts made me equally wary of forging ahead, perhaps lacking what I perceived to be a range of cultural sensitivities necessary for a successful project. Compounding these factors was my relative isolation; living by myself on the edge of town without a vehicle meant that after dark (5pm), I was resigned to my house. This provided little in the way of networking and general acclimatization necessary in order to be both confident and productive.

My first few months in Lesotho were difficult. I was desperate to contribute and nervous about imposing my values on people. I lived with a constant awareness of the vast power differentials and my unmistakable ‘whiteness.’ Often times I felt paralysed by my own fear of accidentally engaging in some type of exploitative action. I was also alone with few accessible ‘sounding boards’ with whom I could discuss my concerns. It has been noted that researchers must be aware of their own emotional well-being while engaged in research with youth (Laws & Mann, 2004); upon reflection I am aware that I often sacrificed my emotional health for the sake of the project.

In my preparation to leave for Lesotho, I worked hard at not creating any significant expectations. There were two components to this: firstly, I could not picture exactly what Lesotho or Southern Africa would look like. Having travelled extensively I had become aware that no matter what you picture in your mind, it is most often entirely different. Having never travelled to Africa, I had limited knowledge based largely on sensationalist commercials and representations in mainstream North American media. These images
were of starving children and open savannahs, which I assumed to be a limited view of 'Africa.' Yet I was not entirely sure what I should replace these images with.

Secondly, I worked at maintaining a certain level of cynicism regarding the development planning experience. Having become interested in my last year of university I had done some critical readings on development theory (e.g., Leftwich 1994; Parpart & Veltmeyer 2004; Randall & Theobald 1998) and was wary of entering the field "bright-eyed and bushy tailed", ready to change the world. I considered the idea that simply by entering Lesotho as a white westerner I might inflict harm on the community, cementing inequitable power dynamics despite my intent to empower people by equipping them with skills to challenge those dynamics. I was also conscious of the fact that it would be difficult to make any kind of impact given the short length of my eight-month internship. I was extremely conscious of having realistic expectations for what this internship would achieve and I did not want to appear naïve about my role in Lesotho.

I decided to formulate personal and professional goals in order to approach my internship with a clear focus. Personally I wanted to challenge myself in a new setting, to build relationships in a cross-cultural context, and to remain self-reflexive throughout my experience. Professionally I hoped to gain insight into working in international development, develop necessary skills, build professional relationships in the region, and ideally develop a programme for youth in Lesotho. If fact I would have liked to make the programme development my priority however I continually repeated to myself that it would be virtually impossible to 'make a visible difference.' Despite my efforts, I was not being honest with myself in denying that expectation. I was not okay with making the internship simply about my benefit; I needed to feel that it was bigger than me, that in some way I was contributing to the community where I was trying to make an impact rather than just taking. This proved very difficult in practice.

The LNOC's main focus was to have me conduct research in primary schools in order to determine barriers towards teaching physical education. They wanted to improve physical education programming in schools in order to build up the sports programmes in the country; a notable goal. Unfortunately the project had a shaky framework and my limited research experience did not lend itself to developing a project independently. The project took several months to organize and begin, and in the end the research
project was not completed due to a lack of support, time and resources. It did however serve as a springboard for exploring my real interests which proved more successful.

Ultimately my primary project became the Olympafrica\textsuperscript{2} Youth Ambassador Programme (OYAP). It is only upon reflection that I realized that the process surrounding the development of this project would be defined as PAR. The first time I was in Lesotho I had never heard of PAR. Having no familiarity with the philosophy underlying this methodology, I did not intentionally adhere to a specific methodology. I did however have a genuine concern about my approach to working with the youth in Lesotho; underlying every decision that I made was an emphasis on collaborative, open, honest partnerships with the youth whose situation I was interested in improving. For me the priority has always been the process.

The Process

Coming back to the University of British Columbia (UBC) to do further course work, I immersed myself in learning more about PAR as a philosophy, epistemology, and research methodology. After gauging the interest of the CGC and the LNOC, I developed a thesis-related project proposal to conduct a SIA of OYAP. In my proposal I outlined two research trips. The first trip would take place in June and July of 2005 where I planned on undertaking the majority of the data collection. During the second trip in January of 2006, I planned on returning with a preliminary report to be reviewed with the researchers. This would allow for crucial feedback sessions, data gaps to be filled, and final edits prior to producing the end product.

In preparation for my first research trip, I was careful not to make any significant decisions that would further compromise the participatory emphasis of the research. The methodology appealed to me because of its alternative and counter-culture associations – it also provided good flexibility for working with youth. However I was also wary of how idealistic it sounded; I had difficulty accepting that by simply following PAR guidelines I would achieve transformation in the community - my past experiences proved otherwise. Yet PAR provided the soundest approach that I could find for working directly with the local community while challenging power dynamics. I decided to

\textsuperscript{2}Originally known as the Olympic Youth Ambassador Programme (OYAP).
approach the methodology with open eyes and I discuss the challenges encountered in chapter 4.

In Canada, I prepared by creating a loose framework and timeline for how to complete the research. Conscious of not making decisions, I decided to provide some options for the youth, inevitably limited by the realities of time and resources. This was especially challenging not knowing exactly where the research was headed. I focused on preparing the necessary tools and gaining relevant knowledge in order to facilitate a process that would lead us to a coherent and informative final product. This included a solid understanding of PAR, identifying potential research methods, collecting various games and activities helpful in facilitating youth, identifying relevant stakeholders, and an awareness of different communication strategies to be used. Then it was necessary to travel to Lesotho to progress forward.

Upon arriving for the second time in Lesotho, June 2005, I was struck with a mix of emotions. The sights, sounds, and smells immediately infiltrated my senses and within 24 hours it seemed as though I had never left. Once again I found myself excited, nervous and eager to contribute, similar to my first experience in the country. My first order of business was to visit the LNOC. Having communicated directly with only 2 people in the organization, I was unclear as to who knew I was returning. As it turned out, very few people were aware that I was coming back, typical of the communication problems within OYAP.

Walking into the LNOC office I was greeted warmly, hugged, and welcomed back into the fold. Immediately one of the OYAP ambassadors was on the phone and within the next few hours I managed to see almost all of the youth that I had worked with originally. This was the beginning of the research project as the communication network in Lesotho is very informal (one of the factors that weakens communication). In order to spread the word, it is vital that you speak to a few key 'informants' who will then pass on the information throughout the relevant community. I made sure to brief the ambassadors on the project and in doing so was able to gauge interest at the same time. It seemed that youth were excited about my return and interested in participating. As I soon learned, many of the original youth believed the programme had deteriorated from its
origins; perhaps my return renewed hope that change would be instigated to improve OYAP.

The next step was to approach the official 'leaders' of the programme in order to earn their support of the project. Having met with the coordinator, an executive meeting was called where I presented the research project. A process was determined between the executive and myself as to how to recruit youth researchers to participate in the project. In the interests of having a diverse group, we did not consider literacy or language skills, not wanting to preclude those without a formal education. We agreed that it should be an open, self-selected process, and anticipating the possibility of too many volunteers, decided it would function on a first-come, first-serve basis. This way everyone would be invited to join and those who were most interested would ensure that they were at the office when the sign-up sheet was posted. Integral to this approach was that we notify as many people as possible when the sign-up sheet would be posted in order to ensure equal opportunity.

In addition to participating as a volunteer researcher, I also advertised for 2 paid Research Assistants (RA). The RAs would receive $50 CAD every two weeks over a period of 2 months. In Canadian terms this is a small honourarium, but for youth in Lesotho with little to no access to employment, this was a lucrative opportunity. Terms of reference for the RAs were publicly posted and all of the ambassadors were eligible to apply. While the RA positions provided an opportunity for two of the youth to have a small income and created some accountability in the project, I had concerns this might create competition, jealousy, or conflict among the youth. It also reinforced the power I held, a position that I was uncomfortable with and doing my best to diffuse. At the time I decided that the benefits outweighed the concerns.

In the end, I had 10 of a potential 50 active ambassadors, sign up to participate as volunteer researchers in the research project, 7 of whom also applied to be an RA. Of the 10 youth there were 5 men and 5 women ranging from ages 17 - 24. 1 of the youth was in university, 3 had/were attending a post-secondary programme, 4 were attending high school, and 2 were out of school. The youth came from varying socio-economic backgrounds ranging from low income to middle income, however all of the youth had consistent food and shelter. The youth were all urban based.
As 10 was a good number to move forward with, I confirmed their availability and held a one-day workshop on the research process. I also took this opportunity to outline the rights and responsibilities of a volunteer researcher. At the end of the day, all of the participants were invited to sign a contract confirming their interest and commitment to the entirety of the 6-week project. All 10 youth signed enthusiastically, rushing over to the contract and jostling to find space on the paper. Unfortunately 2 of the researchers were unable to continue to participate due to school commitments; therefore the total number of researchers was 8. The following day I conducted interviews with the RA applicants, hiring 2 of the 10 based on previous involvement in OYAP, enthusiasm, commitment to the project, knowledge of issues in OYAP, and their ability to articulate themselves. This criterion was determined in consultation with the OYAP executive and the LNOC.

As mentioned previously, one of my fears was that by hiring 2 RAs I would create a power differential among the youth that would breed bitterness or resentment. Yet I felt the RA positions were important for two reasons: (1) I was eager to provide some sort of paid opportunity to the youth who have little opportunity for income, (2) I felt it was important to have two of the youth directly accountable for the research, something that is difficult to do with volunteers. Thankfully the other researchers appeared to be happy to work with the RAs, and there was no obvious animosity in the group. However in the future I would ensure that either everyone is paid or alternatively, have the youth decide collectively how to distribute the money. While the money did not seem to overtly influence the project, I believe I accidentally reinforced the power structures I strove to dismantle.

From this point forward we met as a research group 3 times a week for the following six weeks. During these sessions we began by conceiving a research question, discussing and evaluating various research methods, collecting the data, designing indicators, collating the data, analysing the data and writing up the findings. My role was that of an expert facilitator versed in research and writing, guiding them in the process and sharing skills, however ultimately all of the final decisions were made collaboratively among the group. Decisions were achieved through consensus however my faith in their
willingness to challenge my authority was complicated by factors which I address in chapter 4.

I was deliberate in my effort to simultaneously impart skills while creating a fun work environment. Most meetings were opened with a short workshop on a new skill, followed by discussion and practice. One of the most animated sessions was our workshop on group facilitation using role play. The youth clearly enjoyed themselves, laughing and commenting freely, and they provided very positive feedback on the learning outcomes from the session. Respecting the fact that the researchers were volunteering their time, I also opened each session with games or exercises designed to both teach and entertain. Emphasizing the importance of open communication I built into each of the workshops time for comments and feedback from the researchers. It was important to me that the youth felt they were benefiting from the sessions, and if they were not, I made my best effort to amend that.

I used a variety of formats for the meetings among the youth in order to address various learning styles and comfort levels; these included meeting with them as a whole, in small groups, and frequently speaking to the youth individually. We used various settings for our meetings, determined largely by what was accessible to us. I began by hosting the meetings in my rented bungalow, but upon leaving the hotel was forced into more creative solutions, including outside in the local park. The youth accustomed to ad hoc planning, were very accommodating.

In writing the final report we began by brainstorming around what structure it would take. The youth, unfamiliar with writing a report, looked largely to me for direction on how to approach the paper. They also expressed their frustration at having to put their research into writing. In the end the RAs took the lead and the other researchers were invited to contribute at will. My final contribution as facilitator was to synthesize, format and edit eight different voices while providing technical writing expertise. This was no small task as the writing ability among the youth varied significantly. Also, conscious of authenticating their voices, I was careful not to edit too liberally, so as to erase their distinctive style. The editing became a fine balance between creating a polished and consistent piece while maintaining the 'feel' of having been composed by a group of
Basotho youth. As a result, the writing in the final report is dominated by the voices of the youth themselves.

In light of the challenges in pursuing a SIA using PAR, I decided to write a thesis that addresses the question, "What are the opportunities and constraints of using PAR as a methodology?" I intend to address this question by providing documentation of my case study, using both my experiences and the feedback from the youth researchers to explore this question. Hence, my objective is not to conduct a social impact assessment of OYAP and its projects using PAR; nor is my intention to analyze how PAR can be used for youth empowerment through sport. Rather this study is intended to systematically reflect on the opportunities and challenges of using PAR in youth empowerment projects. My intention is to contribute empirical evidence gained through experience, observation, and reflection, on a methodology that demands further exploration but that offers significant potential as an ethical and empowering tool.

The following four chapters of this thesis provide a background description of the research context, a review of the literature on PAR, a discussion of the opportunities and challenges that arose during the project, an analysis of PAR in the context of problems raised, and a reflection on my own role in the project. Through this thesis I will demonstrate that PAR is a methodology that lies largely in the hands of those who wield it. Documented processes can enhance ethical research strategies and the researcher can be instructed to adhere to certain principles; however the ability to genuinely connect with people is more difficult to teach or measure. For this reason no two PAR experiences will ever be the same; a strength and a weakness. Attached as Appendix 1 is a report that 8 youth and I produced collaboratively as a result of this research project.
Lesotho

I have often heard people remark that they would “like to go to Africa.” While I myself might have shared this sentiment at one point, the thought now seems naïve and almost offensive, given the incredible diversity of such a large continent. Nonetheless I too once held a deep-rooted curiosity around “Africa”, this seemingly beautiful, mysterious, and profoundly afflicted continent. This curiosity in part led me towards my journey to Lesotho.

Lesotho is not well known. When explaining my work, I generally refer to having lived in Southern Africa. Most people nod knowingly being able to place me geographically at this point, many assuming I mean South Africa. The discerning listener will ask me where in Southern Africa I was, at which point I proceed to mention Lesotho by name. An even smaller number of people have a look of vague recognition on their face generally accompanied by a mispronunciation of the country (pronounced correctly Le-sue-too). Most have never heard of it.

Prior to having lived in Lesotho, I also knew very little when it came to the mountain kingdom, and I certainly did not know how to pronounce Lesotho. The Kingdom of Lesotho is populated by the Basotho, the singular of which is Mosotho and the local language is Sesotho. I was located in the capital city, Maseru, the single urban centre in the country. Being a small country of approximately 30,000 square kilometres with just over 2 million people (CIA, 2005), the country does not receive a lot of international media attention. Lesotho is an enclave of South Africa landlocked in the southeast quadrant of the country. Given its unique geographical location, many assume that it is

Figure 1. Map of Lesotho. Source: http://www.infoplease.com/atlas/country/lesotho.html
part of South Africa itself. In fact, Lesotho has a distinct and interesting history of its own.

In 1966 the kingdom received independence from the UK and the country is currently ruled by a parliamentary constitutional monarchy. It is currently ranked 149th on the Human Development Index (UNDP, 2005) and has an official HIV infection rate of 29% (CIA, 2005; UNDP, 2005), though many estimate a higher number. With 80% of the country being mountainous, the country has few natural resources and suffers from widespread poverty.

The Caledon River Valley in the eastern Free State marks the Lesotho-South African border. The Basotho call the river “Mohokare”, which means, “that which lies amidst” (Coplan, 2001, p. 83). This local name is an indication of the fact that the Caledon border is a political rather than an organic boundary. Lesotho shares many cultural similarities with South Africa and there are more Basotho who live on the South African side of the border than within Lesotho (Cobbe, 2004). For the last hundred years this border has been characterized by the flow of commodities, trade, labour and contraband. It has never served as a real or effective divide between the Basotho that exist on both sides of the border. It is impossible to examine the history of Lesotho without looking at the history of South Africa.

Lesotho first became a nation in the 1820s, defined largely by a homogenous population of ethnic Basotho. In 1865 the first of three wars took place between the Afrikaners and the Basotho, forcing the Basotho into the mountains. The Afrikaners were fighting for prime agricultural land, which they claimed as their own, forcibly removing the Basotho with arms when they refused to cooperate. This eventually led to King Moshoeshoe, the highly respected Chief of the Basotho, to sign the Treaty of Thaba Boisu in 1866 (Pule & Thabane, 2004). The treaty officially recognized the Free State conquests on the part of the white South Africans, but the Basotho did not.

This political boundary did not hold credibility with the Basotho who continued to inhabit the lowlands. This political instability marked by bloodshed eventually led to British involvement. The British were also warring with Afrikaners and therefore had a stake in securing the Basotho territory. Moshoeshoe agreed to cooperate believing that it was in
the interests of his people to collaborate with the British in order to secure their eventual autonomy.

In 1869 a second treaty designed by the British and the Free State, was signed (Pule & Thabane, 2004). This treaty succeeded in pushing back the boundary to the Caledon River, to roughly where it stands today. In 1884 direct rule by the British Crown was re-established (Pule & Thabane, 2004). While Moshoeshoe's intention was to form a loose partnership with Britain, remaining a sovereign nation, the British had different plans and enforced direct rule on the territory that became known as Basutoland, a British protectorate.

Despite having lost the territory politically, the Basotho remained spiritually connected to the land. Moshoeshoe developed a saying for his people, "sechaba se le seng, mafatsa a mabeli"; translated into English it means, "one nation, two countries" (Coplan, 2001, p. 87). This speaks to the heart of the sentiment of the Basotho. Even with imposed legalities, the land was still theirs and the Basotho continued to live on both sides of the boundary, living and working in both countries with no real distinction between the two territories.

The difference between the two countries was one of social experience, developed through gradual consciousness of white settlers. Despite the increased politicization of the border, the Basotho never came to see themselves as foreign in South Africa (Coplan, 2001). South African Sesotho speakers grew up in fundamentally different social and political circumstances while simultaneously identifying as Basotho and often maintaining familial connections in Lesotho.

Until 1963 (two years after South Africa became a Republic), there were no border controls, gates or identification documents controlling the flow of people across the border (Akokpari, 2005). This was in large part due to illegal activities taking place that the Free State had no desire to regulate (e.g. prostitution, contraband trade and trafficking). Similarly the Basotho had little to gain from regulation preferring to take advantage of the economic benefits of trade.
With the introduction of a regulated border in 1963, things quickly began to change. In Basutoland the British prioritized South African development over their own protectorate. This meant that agriculture and trade were curtailed through legislation, crippling the local economy (Coplan, 2001). Financial hardship paved the way for labour migration to South Africa’s mines, factories, kitchens and farms. Soon crossing the border to work became a way of life for all of the Basotho, save a small aristocratic, commercial and professional elite.

In 1966 Basutoland gained independence from Britain and changed its name to Lesotho. With development occurring much more rapidly in South Africa many citizens in Lesotho began to drift across the border. While the education system in Lesotho was stronger, there were less employment opportunities available and as such trained Basotho found a market for their skills across the border. Lesotho became a typical story of quiet colonial underdevelopment based on labour migration. Despite the waves of immigration to South Africa the Basotho maintained the ties to their land, assets and communities (Cobbe, 2004; Pule & Thabane, 2004).

Tense, unfriendly relations between white South Africa and Lesotho characterized the '70s and '80s. Fuelled by Prime Minister Leabua, a man who took power through military means when not re-elected, the border became more and more contentious. It was obvious that, “neither central government seem[ed] to recognize the mutual dependency that exists along the border or to support its integrated way of life” (Coplan, 2001, p. 106). The relationship was a tenuous balance between South Africa holding the purse strings but Lesotho being backed by the international community. Meanwhile Lesotho continued to lose the majority of their able-bodied work force to South Africa.

The main source of labour migration was the mines. Mineworkers suffered under the apartheid bosses that ran the mines. For the Basotho internal immigrants, this was a new form of discrimination not having grown up in an apartheid system. The South African government used the border to their advantage, bringing in mineworkers to fill the need for cheap labour and expelling them when necessary to divide and conquer (Coplan, 2001).
Over the last twenty years the number of Basotho miners in South Africa has decreased. In 1989 there were 120,000 and in 1999 there were less than 75,000 (Coplan, 2001, p. 96). As a result of the forced evictions, many ex-mine workers were left with no compensation or employment/support from the country they helped build. With the end of apartheid and the election of the African National Congress (ANC), the first black government, ex-mine workers had great hopes for more recognition for their work.

In 1995 the South African Department of Home Affairs granted mine workers from Lesotho who had worked there for at least five years, the opportunity to apply for permanent status, though they were not permitted to bring their families. Among those who applied for permanent status, approximately 33,000 people, most maintained land and connections in Lesotho, using South African citizenship purely for the social benefits (Coplan, 2001, p. 99).

While the majority of Basotho believe that they should be able to work freely in South Africa, Lesotho remains strict on immigration and will not allow foreigners to own property or run a business without a Mosotho as an equal partner (Akokpari, 2005). Similarly while the Basotho expect full rights in South Africa they are reluctant to share those same rights with South Africans. At the Lesotho Highlands Water Project (LHWP) Basotho workers protested South Africans being paid higher wages regardless of skill or experience (Coplan, 2001). Labour migration continues to create problems as Lesotho seeks autonomy in a very dependent relationship with their neighbour.

Prior to 1994, Lesotho's advantage was that in spite of its geographical proximity to South Africa, it was not part of that country. In this way the citizens were able to benefit from employment opportunities and remittances, without suffering directly under the repression of the apartheid regime. Equally important, the country received significant international aid and support from the international community; benefited from tourism by South Africans opposed to the apartheid regime; and received investments from those crippled by South African sanctions (Cobbe, 2004). In the post-apartheid era, from political, economic, and social points of view, Lesotho's geography has become a huge disadvantage. This has left the country developing at an inverse rate to South Africa's growing success. Left with this legacy it is not surprising that the youth in Lesotho are overwhelmed with social issues.
Youth in Lesotho

Youth studies has become an important and growing sub-field within the social sciences and the applied fields, including planning. Besides the publication of the specialized Journal of Youth Studies, there are also trendy interdisciplinary research topics such as youth civic engagement, youth planning, and demographic studies analysing Generation X and Generation Y, among others. In this section, I will explain the category of ‘youth’ in the context of Lesotho’s social institutions and cultural issues. I will also address why youth concerns and participation are critical to the development of OYAP.

‘Youth’ as a category is not easy to define. Generally referred to as the period between childhood and adulthood, the concept of youth often varies between cultures and societies. Most southern African countries follow the commonwealth secretariat and the United Nations in placing age limits on youth (15-24 years), however individual countries vary (Mufune, 1999). In many ways the youth of Lesotho seem to carry responsibilities far beyond those of Canadian youth. Often they are cooking, cleaning, and raising siblings prior to adolescence. In other ways youth appear much less mature, a result of low education levels and little experience outside the home.

In Lesotho youth is not defined by age so much as status. Upon gaining employment or marrying, youth graduate to adulthood. Usually this status coincides with leaving home thereby demonstrating economic independence as well. Therefore while 15-24 serves as a rough guide, it is by no means a concrete definition. It is also important to acknowledge the diversity among youth. In ignoring factors such as gender, class, marital status, age, level of education, and residence, we mistakenly homogenize a group of people with very different realities.

After spending a few months in Lesotho, travelling around the country and speaking to young people, I was quickly disheartened by the lack of activities available for the majority of youth. There is both a lack of physical infrastructure and social infrastructure, especially with regards to recreation. As one small example, in the entire country there is only one public park accessible to young people. With little to no public space to call

3 In this paper I use the words “youth” and “young people” interchangeably.
their own, youth are particularly vulnerable to many of the problems that plague a country built on the legacy of colonisation.

The national HIV infection rate is 28.9%; between the ages of 15-49 the number increases to 31.7%, and youth are the highest risk group for new infections (UNDP, 2005, p. 248). HIV/AIDS is the most overt threat facing youth in the country; however this complex disease cannot be separated from other pressing issues including sexual health, reproduction, and drug and alcohol abuse (Mturi & Hennink, 2005). For youth in Lesotho, the consequence of poor choices, or for many the lack of choice altogether, is ultimately death.

Education is often cited as an effective method for curbing negative behaviour in young people (Manyeli, 2005; Mturi & Hennink, 2005). In Lesotho the literacy rate among youth is quite high at 87.2% (UNDP, 2005, p. 260). The literacy rate among adult women (ages 15 and above) is 90.3% and the adult male literacy rate of 73.7% (UNDP, 2005, p. 260). While at first glance this is an encouraging statistic, it does not tell the whole story. While the percentage of youth enrolled in primary school is 86%, that number quickly drops in secondary schools where only 23% of youth are enrolled (UNDP, 2005, p. 260). For many young people, graduating from secondary school is only a dream.

Since the year 2000 primary education in Lesotho has been free. This has significantly increased the number of youth attending primary school, however user-fees continue to prohibit the majority of youth from moving on to secondary school. Approximately 50% of youth begin secondary school but only a minority are able to finish (Ansell, 2004, p. 186). Of the students that are of secondary school age, 1.54 females to every 1 male constitute net enrolment (UNDP, 2005, p. 260). Youth are left frustrated, disillusioned, and with a significant amount of free time on their hands.

Compounding this is the fact that youth have little opportunity to have a voice in Lesotho. In a society marked by hierarchical relations, young people are expected to “be seen and not heard.” It is not customary to consult youth, even on issues directly affecting them. Rather it is more likely that youth will be blamed for social ills in society, without ever conceiving that they could be part of the solution.
Young people are limited by the lack of opportunity to demonstrate leadership. In Lesotho there are few opportunities for young people to give back to their community, few opportunities for youth to prove themselves as anything but 'trouble.' The combination of free time, negative environmental factors, and lack of leadership opportunities is a recipe for disaster. It is a self-fulfilling prophecy that perpetuates negative images of youth in Lesotho.

Unhealthy habits are often formed during adolescence. Adolescents across the world are more likely to engage in behaviour that will compromise their health (Mufune, 1999). Surrounded by peer pressure and aggressive media, it is challenging for youth to make positive decisions regarding sexual activity, drug and alcohol abuse and education in the best of circumstances. For youth who must also face rampant disease, poverty and hunger, the challenge is that much greater.

In surveying the problems young people in Lesotho face, sport appears an obvious opportunity to channel what is often a waste of youthful energy and spirit. Sport also provides an outlet for the frustration and hopelessness that many young people in Lesotho feel. With an abundance of time and energy yet no outlet in which to dispense it, this human capital is dwindling away and being wasted. In designing a youth volunteer programme around sport, the goal was two-fold: (1) to encourage youth to get involved in sport as a positive outlet, (2) to provide leadership opportunities for youth in the community with the goal of empowerment. It is with this motivation that OYAP, as it has become affectionately known, was born.

**OYAP: Youth Empowerment and Community Development Through Sport**

It is commonly understood that sport and physical activity contribute towards good physical health, specifically for the development of youth. It is also well acknowledged that the benefits of sport extend beyond physical health to include psychosocial health and general well being. It has been demonstrated that sport provides high self-esteem, the ability to cope, positive mood, enhanced motivation, better concentration and good judgement; all essential life skills (Burnett, 2001, Reid, Dyck, McKay, & Frisby, 1999). In Burnett's relevant study conducted in South Africa she found that a 'sport-for-all' philosophy translated into opportunities for increased participation, leadership and
upward mobility (Burnett, 2001). Research also indicates that sports involvement facilitates the attainment of important life skills and attitudes in children that can generalize beyond sports to other important areas of their lives (Siegel, 2006). Through sport youth are not only becoming physically and mentally healthy, they are also learning essential life skills to be transferred beyond sport.

Further research indicates a correlation between participation in sport and personal empowerment:

Personal empowerment results when feelings of powerlessness are reduced through the acquisition of skills and self-perceptions that encourage individuals to become causal agents in daily events. The development of qualities such as positive self-esteem, perceived competence, self-efficacy, and an internal locus of control facilitate empowerment at the personal level. (Blinde & Taub, 1999 p. 182)

It stands to reason that with increased psychological health and empowered consciousnesses, young people are better poised to make good decisions regarding their lives. It is this connection that has driven the concept of development through sport.

The universality of sport posits games and physical activities as a language capable of cutting across barriers of race, language, gender, ability and culture. However critics argue that sport can also propagate negative developments, including exclusion, social inequalities and injury. Like any tool, success is dependent on how it is delivered. The belief that sport has the potential for more positive than negative is endorsed by the support of governments and civil society across the world. Following the Salt Lake City Olympics in February 2002, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan proclaimed:

Sport can play a role in improving the lives of individuals, not only individuals, I might add, but whole communities. I am convinced that the time is right to build on that understanding, to encourage governments, development agencies and communities to think how sport can be included more systematically in the plans to help children, particularly those living in the midst of poverty, disease and conflict (United Nations, 2005).
Subsequently the United Nations created an Inter-Agency Task Force on *Sport for Development and Peace*; the Task Force was constituted in November 2002. In 2005 the UN declared the *International Year of Sport and Physical Education*, encouraging member nations to use sport as a tool to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

In 2005, Stephen Owen (then Minister for Sport) highlighted Canada’s position as a world leader in development through sport, noting:

> Canada has participated for more than a decade in programs that promote sport as a tool for peace and development. Partnerships between Sport Canada and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) have brought together expertise in both sport and development to implement programs that have changed the lives of individuals in sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean.

With significant international organizations such as the United Nations, Commonwealth Games Canada, and Right To Play pursuing the concept of development through sport, it is incumbent upon researchers to provide more data to fill the current gap in recorded knowledge.

The ability to participate in sport and physical activity has also been argued to be a basic human right based on the connection to positive youth development (Kidd & Donnelly, 2000). Unfortunately there is little documented evidence of using sport for development, particularly in the global South. Recently Siegel’s study argued while sports have the potential to promote youth development, simple involvement does not emerge as closely associated with definite beneficial outcomes (Siegel, 2006). There is great enthusiasm for the concept of development through sport, however further exploration and documented analysis is required in order to demonstrate what many practitioners know to be true; sport is a community development tool that provides positive opportunities for youth empowerment.

After several months in Lesotho I sat down with the president of the LNOC with a proposal. Based on the interests of the youth in the community, I suggested developing a youth volunteer programme specific to the LNOC whose mandate embodied my own mission, to empower youth through sport. Knowing that my time in Lesotho was limited
my priority was to design a sustainable programme to ensure that I was not "parachuting" into the community. My goal was to train young people to initiate their own empowerment projects, thereby transferring the power into their hands. The programme would have two main functions: (1) to train youth to organize sport activities for other youth, and (2) to use these activities as a platform for peer education on relevant social issues. These goals would serve to teach youth identified life-skills (e.g. teamwork, leadership, commitment), and also use sport as a tool for education on important topics such as HIV/AIDS and drug and alcohol abuse. Volunteers would also be available to participate in various sporting events around the country, as opportunities arose.

The president of the LNOC was enthusiastic about the idea and suggested that we partner with the Lesotho National Volunteer Commission (LNVC) to create the programme. With this support the Olympic Youth Ambassador Programme (later renamed Olympafrique) was born. For several months we researched and planned, taking care not to rush into the project without a vision. Out of these efforts we created a framework for our programme whose slogan read, "youth empowering youth through sport." Volunteer recruitment was the next crucial step.

In Southern Africa there exists what is known as 't-shirt syndrome.' There is often a great willingness to take part in special events or programmes, most often initiated by foreign development workers. Unfortunately there is seldom incentive to remain beyond the free t-shirt. This can be frustrating for development workers who are genuinely attempting to effect positive change and who look for participation from the community in order to avoid top-down approaches; yet the explanations are complex. For southern Africans living in poverty, an event often means free food and clothes they would not normally have. Additionally, southern Africans have been subjected to foreign "development" programming for many years with few direct improvements to their living conditions. Should there be residual cynicism on their parts regarding their commitment to programming, it is understandable.

The challenge for me was overcoming these barriers, creating a programme that youth would want to return to beyond the 't-shirt.' I took calculated steps towards having a sustainable programme and thus created a two-step selection process for potential volunteers. Firstly, youth were required to fill out a written application, demonstrating
their level of commitment to the programme. While it is easy to show up to a free event, it takes effort to source out an application, fill it out, and return it. Secondly, all of the youth who submitted a completed application were subsequently interviewed. For most youth, this would be the first interview of their life.

I did this intentionally, not to intimidate the youth, but to convey the seriousness of the programme while simultaneously providing them with an important life skill for the future. While these strategies could be critiqued as Western or exclusionary, the reality is that in a rapidly westernized world, without these skills the youth are handicapped. My solution was not to ignore cultural practices, but rather merge the two. I also learned that youth have similarities across the world. In my overt attempts to be sensitive to local culture, I anticipated far more differences between my experiences with Canadian youth and the Basotho youth; in reality they were separated by very little. Despite their very real material differences, both groups were concerned about school, love, music and family. This realization motivated me to pursue strategies that I had used successfully with Canadian youth, and to a large extent they succeeded.

From over 65 applications we selected 19 youth between the ages of 13 and 21, from a range of socio-economic backgrounds, through a rigorous interview process. The youth proved themselves to be worthy candidates committed to the programme, and the first training conference was a resounding success. The LNOC, the participating youth, the guest speakers and the facilitators, all delivered unparalleled praise for the logistics, the content, the facilitators and the enthusiasm of the youth. The speed in which a group of 19 strangers quickly morphed into a solid team was a clear indicator that the conference had achieved its goals. Trained in topics ranging from volunteerism to project planning, the two-day conference served as much more than simple skill development; the conference provided an opportunity for the youth to develop solid relationships among themselves while becoming empowered with the possibilities of being able to take action to make a positive impact on their community. At the end of two days 19 intelligent, motivated and committed youth had joined as a cohesive body and were ready to take on the world.

Currently the programme hosts over 150 youth ambassadors having expanded across all ten districts of Lesotho. All of the ambassadors complete a training course that
tackles relevant social issues such as: HIV/AIDS, drug and alcohol abuse, sexual and reproductive health, and family issues. Additionally the training addresses relevant management topics such as: volunteerism, leadership, project planning, fundraising, social styles, peer mentoring, the LNOC, sport in Lesotho, associations and resources, development through sport, life skills, and the Special Olympics. Following the training ambassadors initiate projects relevant to their interests and the perceived needs of youth in Lesotho. I explain more fully the types, characteristics and accomplishments of some of these projects in the next section.

**OYAP Projects**

The first initiative started by the OYAP volunteers is a project with the Maseru City Council, referred to as the *Central Park Project*. This project is two-fold: (1) the volunteers rehabilitate the physical appearance of the park by painting and repairing rusted and unused equipment, (2) OYAP provides free sport activities on Saturdays for local youth. The response to this project has been incredible. Local urban youth from various socio-economic backgrounds will be found on the newly painted equipment throughout the day and the park is continually being reformed into a safe, reliable atmosphere where youth can come to play in a secure and comfortable environment. Youth are able to learn new movement activities and sports with OYAP ambassadors initiating and leading the activities, simultaneously developing their own leadership skills. This first project led to further OYAP initiatives.

One of the most popular projects, *Girls On The Move*, is a programme designed to target 10 to 14 year old girls in order to promote sport for women at an early age. Every week girls are exposed to a new sport facilitated by OYAP volunteers. The girls are provided with free transportation to and from the local soccer arena where there are expert coaches teaching a new sport each week, ranging from basketball and soccer to local traditional games. The sports training is combined with general life skills information designed to facilitate personal growth and learning. After the girls have gone through the year long programme they are rewarded with a graduation ceremony that showcases the new skills the girls have learned in front of friends and family.

OYAP ambassadors are also actively involved in a project called *Mafube*, which roughly translated means “the breaking of dawn.” This project focuses on street youth who are
located in various areas of the city, whose days consist primarily of begging. OYAP ambassadors have been trained in Kicking AIDS Out, a programme that teaches youth how to use sport as a tool for disseminating important information about HIV/AIDS. Through Mafube OYAP volunteers gather street youth and bring them to the Central Park where they work with them using various sports and games as a platform for teaching life skills including leadership, decision-making and the value of commitment. The street youth have responded enthusiastically to the programme and as a result have also participated in other OYAP activities.

In addition to their own projects, OYAP also participates in various special events that take place across the country. For the past two years OYAP has participated in the National Cultural Festival in Morija. The ambassadors proudly dress in traditional clothing while demonstrating customary dances and games to the large crowd. OYAP has also been a significant component of the annual Olympic Day Run/Tree Planting event and recently played a large role in the international Queen's Baton Relay event leading towards the Commonwealth Games.

OYAP ambassadors are also trained in a powerful initiative called Kicking AIDS Out (KAO). Targeting youth, girls and women, KAO is an international network of organizations working together using sport and physical activity to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS and motivate behavioural change. Through educational games and activities, ambassadors are encouraged to discuss issues that affect their lives and their communities. The program integrates sport and life skills through games, role-playing, drama and other cultural and recreational activities, embodying the spirit of OYAP.

Lastly, OYAP has strong relationships with various organizations in Lesotho such as Lesotho Planned Parenthood, Habitat For Humanity, Special Olympics and the various sports associations. They continue to work in collaboration with their partners on events ranging from socio-dramas and construction, to fundraising for multiple initiatives. Overall OYAP has initiated a range of programmes while establishing relationships with a host of organizations in Lesotho.

The impact of OYAP in relation to youth empowerment is difficult to measure without falling prey to the limits of reductionism, a method that significantly negates qualitative
change. While the literature supports the role of sport in positive youth development, the indicators vary for each individual. Having worked with OYAP over a period of three years, I have been privileged to witness first-hand the effect that the programme has had on many of the youth; ambassadors have been motivated to pursue post-secondary options, found paid employment, and developed strong networks within their communities.

More difficult to quantify but equally powerful has been the effect on youth who now stand straighter, speak with more confidence, and have a new and improved sense of meaning and purpose. There is no single outcome for the youth who participate, however I have repeatedly observed the empowerment process occur as a result of becoming involved with OYAP. Youth have consistently told me that OYAP has changed their lives, and in some cases, is central in their life. In fostering a generation of active young people who believe in themselves and others, we are ensuring that the future generation is inspired and capable of instigating positive change in the world.

OYAP and PAR

Having developed OYAP using a PAR approach, it is interesting to reflect on how the projects facilitated by OYAP are developed. In my experience working with OYAP the projects have primarily been developed through traditional means; ideas are proposed among the ambassadors and discussed with the LNOC who then choose to approve or disapprove a project. While many of the projects are intended to reach a demographic represented among the ambassadors, there is little consultation with intended target groups who are not represented (e.g. street youth, 10-14 year old girls, etc.). Rather there is an identified need and the youth strategize on how to best serve these populations. Perhaps in doing so these sometimes 'privileged' youth are replicating the same errors made by northern development practitioners over the years.

In analysing the non-participatory approach OYAP has taken there are several factors to take into account. To begin, PAR is not something I discussed with the youth during my first experience, given the fact that I was not yet aware of the methodology myself. Therefore the youth did not have any formal knowledge of the PAR approach when they instigated the projects and most probably did not recognize my own approach as participatory. If they did, I suspect they might have made the same mistake that many
people do, that is to homogenize their own population, forgetting about the distinctive hegemonic influences that divide people.

However more importantly, the ultimate deciding factor on projects often becomes a matter of political will on the part of the funders; the youth are extremely aware that a project will be funded if it meets the priorities of the donor. During one conversation one of the youth complained in exasperation that the only projects that get funded are those that have a focus on women's issues. This comment relayed both an understanding and a frustration at the influence of the global North on development. As a result, projects are shaped in order to meet criteria determined outside of the community, a situation all too familiar for non-profit organisations. An interesting question would be whether OYAP would endear themselves to funders by using a PAR approach without the presence of foreign development practitioners? Perhaps upon using this approach collaboratively, the youth will be inspired to carry successful tenets of the methodology into their independent projects. If not, is this an indication of the failure of the approach?
PAR Origins

Participatory development research emerged from Tanzania in the '60s and '70s as a backlash to community development policies and practices that had been found to oppress and marginalize the very people whose lives they were intended to improve (Wright & Nelson, 1995). Frustrated with established development theory, practitioners began to call for an alternative to traditional top-down, euro-centric, patriarchal approaches that furthered systemic discrimination of society's most vulnerable. During the '80s and '90s participation began to dominate planning theory, moving quickly into the mainstream. Once perceived as a radical movement (Mosse, 2001), over the last fifty years participation has become the prevailing orthodoxy in 'development speak.'

The concerns prompting the participation movement have a history rooted in social science. While the face of the struggle has changed, participatory practices continue to be painted in a dichotomist light with more positivist traditions. Even as modes of thinking continue to shift, the world remains firmly entrenched in the 'scientific tradition' sprouted by the age of enlightenment (Sandercock, 1998). Those who wish for a more tangible world to measure continue to undermine participatory methodologies and their outputs; outside of community development participation holds less credibility and critics of PAR continue to look for more quantifiable results. Fortunately there is a growing camp that not only embraces, but also emphasizes the necessity of alternative ways of knowing. Notable among this group are feminist scholars who have long expressed the value of alternative forms of knowledge.

PAR was largely inspired by the work of Paulo Freire and his seminal book Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970). Freire's book sought to empower the oppressed; he believed that poor and exploited people can and should be enabled to analyse their own reality. PAR was proposed as an alternative approach through which oppressed people could achieve conscientization, thereby enabling themselves to ameliorate their own lives (Wright & Nelson, 1995). Freire is well known for his concept of conscientization, the method by which one learns to perceive social, political and economic contradictions and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality (Freire, 2003). Conscientization
is founded in the theory that in order to be liberated people must engage in a cycle of "reflection and action" (Freire, 2003, p. 51), a model built into the PAR philosophy.

Freire challenges the notion of education whereby a teacher deposits knowledge in students, arguing that we are all teachers and all students, and that to think of knowledge as a banking system is to further the power differentials that maintain oppression. PAR functions on the premise that by awakening the common people through having them generate their own knowledge about their condition, they can mobilize social and economic change and become empowered while doing so (Chambers, 1997). Freire’s work is served as the pre-cursor to formal participatory methodologies.

Participation is generally understood as an active effort to involve people in decision-making about issues that affect them in their communities. In 1969 Sherry Arnstein’s seminal work, *A Ladder of Citizen Participation*, changed people’s approach to community involvement; the article remains frequently cited in writings on participation to this day. Arnstein argues that through democratization, citizen participation works towards the redistribution of power and enables those who have been previously excluded to be ensured a role in the future (Arnstein, 1969).

In the article, Arnstein outlines eight levels of participation that range from non-participation to degrees of tokenism, and finally degrees of citizen power. Arnstein chronicles the range of participatory efforts, noting "... a critical difference between going through the empty ritual of participation and having the real power needed to affect the outcome of the process" (Arnstein, 1969, p. 216). Importantly she notes that participation without the redistribution of power is futile (Arnstein, 1969). Parallel to this ladder of participation is Jules Pretty’s eight-point “typology of participation” ranging from manipulation to self-mobilization (Pretty, Guijt, Scoones, & Thompson, 1995, p. 61). Planners are charged with the mission of promoting true citizen control and self-mobilization (participation) as a vehicle for empowerment and democratization; key facets towards sustainable community development.

Participatory methodologies have been developed over 25 years in response to modernist planning regimes. It has now become generally accepted that participation is
inherently more equitable and thus promotes greater social justice when attempting to
effect social change. To the exasperation of critics, participation is simply assumed to
be a good thing, "an act of faith in development, something we believe in and rarely
question" (Cleaver, 2001, p. 36). As the primary purpose of participatory techniques is to
reach out to those individuals or groups who are marginalized in their communities, it is
assumed to be of a moral and ethical nature.

In my yearning to do something worthwhile, it is with some embarrassment that I admit
having fallen prey to this type of thinking, without perhaps having gone through a more
rigorous appraisal. By facilitating a participatory evaluation I aspired to put the power in
the hands of the Basotho youth, a group with very little power to do more then resist.
PAR is advocated as a means by which power can be practiced by participants during all
aspects of the research process; "effective participation implies involvement not only in
information collection, but in analysis, decision-making and implementation - implying
devolution of the power to decide" (Pretty & Scoones 1995, p. 160). Participatory
methodologies have now become so mainstream that it appears development workers
working in Lesotho have little credibility among their peers without at a minimum
attempting to involve the local people.

PAR was first promoted by social scientists committed to contributing outside of the
confines of their own institutions. Championed by academics anxious to move beyond
the ivory tower and do work that was more politically engaged and relevant, PAR
connects academia with social activism (Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991). Throughout the
years PAR has evolved and mutated; there are various interpretations and PAR often
serves as a gloss for a variety of participatory research methods (Hagey, 1997). Its
many historical roots have evolved from and drawn on multiple sources and traditions
(Chambers, 1997) and PAR is now used in a variety of fields ranging from agriculture to
community development.

As participatory methods grow in popularity there have even been claims that
participatory development, or the integration of bottom-up participation in development
work, constitutes a new paradigm of development. Leading proponent of PAR, Robert
Chambers argues that participation "draws on, resonates with, and contributes to" a
wider new paradigm that challenges traditional positivist top-down models and that
emphasizes action where "multiple, local and individual realities are recognized, accepted, enhanced and celebrated" (Chambers, 1997, p. 188). Reading about participatory methods I understood PAR to promote alternative knowledge, challenging the dominant elitist system that caters to those in positions of power. I was immediately attracted to what appeared a rogue methodology that champions the oppressed and is focused on the process over product.

PAR Principles and Process
PAR is a research methodology that rejects the role of the outside researcher as expert; rather it positions local people as authorities and uses their expertise in all aspects of the research process. The key strategies that PAR embodies are participatory decision-making, a learning-by-doing approach, local empowerment, and a focus on action rather than what Rebecca Hagey terms, "dead reports on dusty shelves" (Hagey, 1997, p. 1). This approach rejects the traditional so-called 'scientific' research model that attempts to carry out objective research using a standardized, top-down approach. PAR adheres to the principles of trust, openness, equity, sincerity, respect, justice, and commitment (Chambers, 1995, 1997; Wright & Nelson, 1995). These principles resonated with my intentions to conduct ethical research in Lesotho.

PAR is commonly defined as encouraging intervention and change within community and groups (Slocum & Thomas-Slayter, 1995). Often used in community development projects, PAR is a methodology that "employs group process to generate and utilize research" (Hagey, 1997, p. 4). The group progression plays a significant role as the focus of PAR is on the process rather than the product. PAR is used to comprise approaches and methods that combine participation, action and research.

In contrast to traditional research, "participatory research is a means of putting research capabilities in the hands of the deprived and disenfranchised people so that they can transform their lives for themselves" (Park, 1993, p. 1). PAR promotes local people undertaking independent investigations into their living conditions in order to determine change and development (Rahman, 1995). Integral to the PAR approach is to move beyond superficial or token participation that remains cosmetic, where the public is consulted while external agents remain the primary decision makers. The primary principle of PAR is that "people become agents rather than objects of research" (Wright
& Nelson, 1995, p. 51). In order to be true to PAR principles local stakeholders need to be in control of the research from the outset.

Moving away from traditional reliance on positivist criteria and concepts, PAR redefines the key processes of observation, reflection and implementation (Winter, 1989). This process is known as an experiential learning, a model reflected in the action-reflection diagram. Figure 2 depicts the four key components in developing the action-reflection cycle: concrete experience; observation and reflection; the formation of abstract concepts; and testing new situations. Integral to understanding the process is observing the intersection of the different phases. The model should be viewed as a holistic, dynamic process that is inextricably linked. It has been suggested that this model can be traced back to the famous dictum of Confucius around 450 BC, "Tell me, and I will forget. Show me, and I may remember. Involve me, and I will understand."

![Figure 2. Action-Reflection Diagram](http://squareone-learning.com/sq1learningintro.html)

The distinctive viewpoint of PAR is that domination of the oppressed lies in knowledge production, including the power to be able to determine which knowledge is useful (Rahman, 1995). Traditionally elites have been seen as the sole stakeholders with the power to initiate social change, due to an assumed superiority of formal knowledge
(Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991). Elites have maintained a monopoly on this type of knowledge as opposed to the undervalued but more pervasive popular knowledge (Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991). In using external agencies to conduct evaluations, local communities are prevented from gaining formal knowledge that lends credibility to those who provide resources.

Freire's concept of conscientization was built on the foundation that empowerment is achieved through knowledge creation. PAR facilitates the empowerment process by enabling local people to bring their knowledge to the table. One of the primary objectives of PAR is to promote people's collectives and their systematic praxis (Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991). By using local knowledge to make decisions, the people are not only empowered but also able to contribute necessary information and understanding towards successful project implementation and goal achievement.

Disquiet with traditional research methodologies is founded in the accusation that too often research projects neglect the very communities researchers are supposedly aiming to assist. Research in marginalized communities or groups has a history of gathering data on oppressed people without benefiting the communities at hand (Hagey, 1997). According to participatory theory, the subject/object relationship must be transformed into a subject/subject relationship (Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991). Participation means to voluntarily break up the submissive relationship of researcher/researched (Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991), practicing more ethical relations. Rather than researching on the community the idea is to research with the community, thereby creating an equal partnership.

In this vein, an important element to consider is who controls the project. PAR principles espouse a total relinquishing of decision-making on the part of the external agency.

The basic ideology of PAR is that a self-conscious people, those who are currently poor and oppressed, will progressively transform their environment by their own praxis. In this process others may play a catalytic and supportive role but will not dominate" (Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991, p. 13).

In this vein it is important to emphasize that PAR requires a shared understanding of the authority and power relations of all the stakeholders involved, individually or as
bureaucratic offices (Hagey, 1997). The fact that PAR is used with oppressed communities indicates that there are immediate power differentials that are difficult to negate, despite good intentions. While this does not preclude outside involvement, external agencies must be extremely conscious of their role in the research.

In contrast with the romantic ideal of communities initiating action research projects, it is common for an outside agency to facilitate PAR. In reality it is those with privilege that are able to access the information that precipitates project development. The role of the agency is to help guide the local community with ways in which to affect their research goals. Participatory research provides a framework for oppressed people to understand the forces of their oppression and gain strength to act collectively (Park, 1993). Collective action does not imply exclusivity among the affected community; rather it is a window into a diverse collaboration of partners. PAR becomes a means for allowing those who are deprived or disenfranchised to be capable of conducting the research that can transform their lives (Park, 1993). So long as external agencies relinquish control, they can play a valuable role in a partnership.

Lastly an important element in the PAR process is what is known as appreciative inquiry. This stance asks the researchers to set aside their critical distance from the 'subject' of the research, and to appreciate and learn from the 'subject.' The method has been proven to be effective in that it encourages people to share their learnings more fully (Finegold & Holland & Lingham, 2002). Evaluation researchers using this stance have demonstrated that the participants of a project which is being evaluated will be very self-critical, and share their learnings about the events or development of the project much more openly if they do not feel that the evaluation researcher is criticizing them, but rather appreciating their accomplishments and their successes (Finegold & Holland & Lingham, 2002). When using an appreciative inquiry approach a facilitator avoids verbalizing "weaknesses" or "problems" and does not use words with negative connotations of this sort. Appreciative inquiry is a complementary technique to the principles and process of PAR.

**PAR Applications: Combining Participation and Social Impact Assessment**

PAR can be applied in a variety of contexts; practitioners have employed PAR to do community planning, policy assessment and impact assessment. I was interested in
conducting an evaluation of OYAP in order to assess the impact of the programme.
Upon reading about SIA I concluded that conducting a SIA presents an ideal
circumstance for promoting participation. SIA and PAR share similar principles as both
methodologies have evolved out of an effort to address people-centred concerns and
social justice issues in the field. While there are limited examples of projects that have
combined SIA and PAR, the rationale to do so is strong.

The concept of SIA evolved out of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) model,
established in 1969 through the National Environmental Policy Act of the USA (Becker,
1997). This was arguably the most significant decision in the environmental movement
today. The decision signalled a new consciousness on the part of policy makers to
consider the long-term impacts of development projects. Interestingly enough, this time
period also marked the early rumblings of the participation movement triggered by the
Western cultural revolution (Becker, 1997), perhaps an interesting coincidence.

Originally focused on the biophysical impacts, EIAs quickly expanded to include socio­
economic factors in their analysis, in an effort to be more comprehensive. The rise of
socially responsive planning challenges policy makers to build social criteria into policies
and projects rather than simply developing alternative projects (Paget, 1979); the result
was what came to be known as SIA. For the most part SIA developed as a separate
discipline using distinctive methodological frameworks and language, though the two
assessments remain connected (Vanclay, 2001).

While many countries have an EIA system that is backed by legislation, SIA remains
undervalued and therefore often neglected (Vanclay, 2001). In contrast, EIA has
become a powerful tool in public policy, while the social consequences of decision
making remain largely ignored. The majority of practitioners agree that SIA is a key
component of successful policy development and project implementation (Burdge,
2003), however this is not reflected in public policy. SIA continues to seek legitimacy in
the eyes of both decision-makers and the public, in order to generate the political will to
enforce SIA based decisions.

One of the proposed solutions to validate SIA results is to employ participatory
techniques when conducting SIA. Since the late 1970s one of the debates among SIA
practitioners has been over whether the approach should be technocratic or participative (Burdge, 2003). By increasing the involvement of direct stakeholders, SIA practitioners are not only change agents securing local buy-in, they are also putting pressure on decision makers to implement decisions on behalf of the affected community. As the role of SIAs becomes more pervasive, it is important to consider how to incorporate participation.

While the examples are limited there are instances where participatory SIA has been practiced. Participatory SIA encompasses a variety of interpretations ranging from citizens being consulted on the process (considered manipulation on Arnstein's ladder), to being directly involved in the assessment process (full citizen engagement). Moving beyond traditional notions of SIA, "participatory SIA is not only about identifying social impacts, but about sharing information and building community awareness" (Burdge, 2003, p. 226), goals affiliated with PAR. Often there is resistance to public involvement for fear of compromising the analytical value of the research; planners also consider the process less efficient (Burdge, 2003). However there are numerous rationales for using a participatory approach to conduct a SIA.

One argument for involving the public directly in the development and production of the study is that it provides for a better process and will contribute to greater buy-in on behalf of stakeholders (Roberts, 2003). If a project begins by involving the local community directly in designing, planning and implementing the study, they will better understand the results of the research and any recommendations that are to come out of it (Roberts, 2003). For the agencies that are implementing the project, if the work is acceptable to the public that is invested in the outcome it provides greater stability, avoiding potential backlash from the community.

Another benefit resulting from participatory SIA is that social learning takes place by the proponent, agency planners and community (Burdge, 2003). This in turn contributes to the successful implementation of the project. It is a means by which to balance the technocratic bias with social learning while placing the affected community at the forefront of the project. In this instance everyone wins as the external agents also gain insight into how to be effective in a foreign community.
As a result of the numerous accolades surrounding participatory techniques, it is now common for funding agencies to require a participatory component in projects. From a cynical perspective, often planners take a participatory approach in order to obtain project approval (Burdge, 2003). It is understood that participatory language is required in order to secure funding and resources. However as SIA continues to evolve PAR provides a complementary component to a useful assessment tool when delivered genuinely. The potential for facilitating local assessment will strengthen the authenticity of the results and further relations in the community where projects are developing. As agencies and governments increasingly mandate project assessments, using participatory techniques is an obvious step towards a greater democratization of planning.

PAR Critiques

The literature reveals a significant amount of criticism regarding PAR, chiefly suggesting that PAR requires more deliberate analysis and explanation as a methodology before it can be acknowledged as successful (Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Mosse, 2001). In Cooke and Kothari’s edited collection of essays entitled Participation: The new tyranny? the editors suggest through their title, that participation should not be considered inherently positive. However when surveying the criticisms, it is important to acknowledge that research conducted in the name of PAR is often not what the methodological architects intended. Having developed a reputation for being an ethical and successful methodology, PAR sometimes suffers from people conducting research under the name of PAR while not adhering to good practice.

As the leading proponents of PAR note, participatory research methodologies have been co-opted by those aspiring to apply a cosmetic label of good standing without truly adhering to PAR principles (Chambers, 1995; Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991). Common problems associated with PAR are superficial attempts to involve the community, the participants being unrepresentative of the affected community, and a focus on research and a lack of action (Chambers, 1995; Cooke, 2001; Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991). Equally dangerous, participation is sometimes used in order to mobilize local labour and reduce costs (Chambers, 1995). Yet the problems posed by practitioners should not poison the methodology itself. In analysing the effectiveness of PAR as a methodology, it is important to continually return to the root definition of the theory itself.
A continuous concern raised by the critics is the role of the facilitator. It has been suggested that development agencies often have to rely on the individual personalities of practitioners rather than methodological tools (Cernea, 1991). This observation highlights the fact that facilitators operate largely independently during the process. Chambers explains the individualistic approach of the facilitator by centering the “primacy of the personal” in the choices made; he argues there are no rules or regulations to be followed, only individual judgment (Chambers, 1994, p. 1450). For critics this conclusion questions PAR’s credibility as a thoroughly theorized methodology with proven and transferable results.

It is true that only cursory directives are provided; PAR practitioners are encouraged to “unlearn” the professional attitudes that stem from traditional top-down research that objectifies those participating. Critics suggest that beyond these instructions there has been a gap in the literature concerning exactly how the facilitator should implement PAR (Cernea, 1991; Cooke & Kothari, 2001). Suggesting that only those with a certain charisma can practice PAR is a dangerous trend; for PAR to remain a reputable theory, it is essential to have a systematic body of knowledge that can be operationalised by other practitioners.

In preparing to go to Lesotho I struggled with knowing precisely what my role would be and whether or not I was adequately prepared. At times I wished for a formulaic how-to guide on what to do. Realistically, such formulas inherently clash with the PAR philosophy. By encouraging individual judgement and an adherence to specific principles, it is possible to provide practical advice, based on experiences, to new practitioners. Actions, attitudes and resources have been compiled and are easily transferable to those wishing to undertake PAR, unfortunately critics are correct in observing that more are required.

Another significant component of PAR that is often overlooked is the “action”. Given that much of the well-disseminated writings on PAR have emerged from academia, it comes as no surprise that practitioners are most challenged by the action aspect. Rebecca Hagey (1997) warns against the common error of concentrating on the research and leaving out the action. The PAR cycle involves the creation of knowledge that leads to
action and, through reflection, to new knowledge and new action. In my own project I felt safeguarded by the fact that I was building on a programme that was very much alive and happening. Ironically this happened as a result of being unaware of PAR when I began; perhaps that is why I focused on the action over the research.

The last critique highly debated in the literature is the ability of PAR to empower those who are marginalized, thereby creating false expectations. Practitioners are warned that the more participatory a process becomes the more likely that differences of power and opinion will be cloaked under the guise of joint knowledge; the result of a process that encourages consensus (Mosse, 1994; Cooke & Kothari, 2001). Critics argue that the emphasis on empowerment contradicts the opportunities and constraints of participation and that participatory research has lost the radical edge that created space for empowerment to take place (Cleaver, 2001). Another criticism of public participation is that it often serves a small elite segment of the population who has the economic mobility to be heard (Becker, 1997). It is not uncommon for practitioners to return to those who are most easily accessible in order to facilitate participation, a pattern which I found myself falling victim to.

Emerging from these noted critiques is a body of evidence this decade that suggests that participation has actually deepened and extended its role in development (Hickey & Mohan, 2004). With the critiques have come a new range of approaches to participation emerging across theory, policy and practice. Importantly, people in the global South are actively engaged in developing new strategies for expressing their agency in development arenas (Hickey & Mohan, 2004). Following the publication of Participation: The new tyranny?, a new book emerged entitled From tyranny to transformation? (Hickey & Mohan, 2004); the book challenges practitioners to (re)establish participation as a legitimate and genuinely transformative approach to development.

Accepting the criticisms made of participation over recent years, Hickey and Mohan point out that the problems of power and politics have in some cases been addressed, and that where they have not participatory approaches may still have considerable advantages over the alternatives. The editors call for a "greater level of honesty and clarity from both critics and proponents" in order to truly evaluate its potential to transform power relations that dominate community development (Hickey & Mohan, 2004, p. 21). In conclusion the editors defend participatory based development as one
of the most sound alternatives that exists because it recognizes alternative knowledges, the agency of local community members, and the inevitable imbalance of power relations. By working with the community while acknowledging the barriers, we are slowly chipping away at powerful systems that are impossible to dismantle overnight.

Conclusion

My attempt to employ PAR in the SIA of OYAP was an experiential learning process. Having reviewed the literature I felt well versed in the principles of PAR and I set out to build upon the lessons learned from my first experience in Lesotho, thereby engaging in the action-reflection cycle. Conscious of Chambers illustration of “handing over the stick” (Chambers, 1995, 1997), I did not decide on a research question, data collection methods or analytical tools prior to arriving in the country; I waited to make contact with the youth in Lesotho in order to make collaborative decisions. My goal was to enable the youth to improve their programme thereby by facilitating a process that would allow them to build on their existent knowledge while generating new knowledge (Freire, 2003).

Upon arriving in Lesotho I emphasized my intentions to have the youth take charge of the process through consensual decision-making. I began the process by consulting with all of the relevant stakeholders and informing them of the research project possibilities. I qualified these sentiments by defining my role as a facilitator in the process, not the leader. Importantly I returned to these fundamental beliefs at all of our meetings throughout the research project; through both formal and informal feedback sessions I made efforts to hear and understand what the youth were thinking about the project. Upon hearing concerns regarding our process I brought back issues to the research team who then collectively brainstormed on solutions to address these problems.

Over the course of six weeks I met a minimum of 3 times a week with the youth to discuss progress, determine next steps, build group cohesion and troubleshoot difficult issues. Group meetings varied in terms of foci, ranging from research design to content analysis; other meetings served as a platform for personal venting on the part of the researchers, an equally important element in the process. Undertaking an investigation into the impact of OYAP provided the researchers space to articulate their individual
issues and concerns, allowing them to validate their feelings. In hearing the views of other ambassadors, community members and partners, the researchers recognized that they were not alone in their feelings and this created a newfound sense of authority among the youth.

Another key component of our PAR process was running mini-workshops on research topics; these sessions were key to empowering the youth with confidence and new skills. I also offered to work individually with any of the youth who sought my assistance writing resumes, cover letters, or seeking employment opportunities. Many of the researchers took me up on this offer and expressed their enthusiasm for having learned new skills while participating in the project. I wrote letters of recommendation for all of the researchers and provided them with a certificate that stated that they were a researcher in the OYAP research project; this carries significant weight in Lesotho.

While the degree to which the youth felt empowered during the PAR process is difficult to measure, certain indicators were very clear to me. Upon returning with a draft report of our project I decided to thank the researchers by taking them all out to lunch in a popular restaurant in Lesotho. There I presented them each with a bound, colour copy of the report that would later be shared with stakeholders identified collectively among the researchers; the youth were visibly excited and proud to see their efforts presented professionally. No one spoke as they flipped through the pages, quickly pointing each other out in the colour photographs. More importantly perhaps, they returned to me later in the week to discuss concerns with content, formatting, and even spelling errors. To me this was a clear indication of the investment they held in the research project; to read 30 single space pages of text carefully enough to find errors, proved that the researchers saw this report as their own and wanted it to be accurate. This was important validation for a methodology intent on relinquishing power and control in order to empower those who do not have a voice.
Key Findings

In my findings I will address the relevance of PAR to youth planning practice and community development work. I draw on specific incidents to illustrate issues discussed in the methodology while focusing on general challenges and opportunities presented during my field research, including: accountability; quality of participation; temporal dimensions; local power dynamics; language; and voice. I also explore the influence of the facilitator in the PAR process, a factor I conclude to be of great significance.

As PAR is often touted as the ultimate ethical methodology in diverse social science and applied field research, including community planning, my interest was in exploring whether it is able to live up to these expectations, and determining how PAR affects the outcome of the research. My own experiences of using it both unintentionally and intentionally offer insight into the complexities and constraints of a methodology that remains for many, nebulous at best (Cleaver, 2001; Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Mosse, 2001). Having engaged in PAR both accidentally and intentionally, I believe I can contribute a unique perspective as a result of reflecting and contrasting these similar yet distinctive experiences.

In preparing to leave for Lesotho in June 2005, I conducted a thorough literature review of PAR in an attempt to understand the process I would be implementing upon arriving. However, PAR does not provide a 'how-to' guide; instead it is up to the individual practitioner to use her best judgement when making decisions (Chambers, 1994). This is a note of contention among PAR critics (Cernea, 1991; Cooke & Kothari, 2001) and one that played out differently during my two projects. During my first experience in Lesotho I went solely by instinct, driven largely by my personal moral code. The literature reinforces this decision-making model, however the practice became more troubling once I became conscious of the methodology. Simply knowing that there was a theory behind the project paralyzed my decision-making; my own consciousness of the process infiltrated the work and left an aura of plasticity. The research project felt more restrictive and as a result the work began to feel forced or superficial.
In recognizing this I am not suggesting that PAR be guided by pure instinct-based
intuitive intelligence; to do so would be dangerous as it would validate everyone who
believed their actions were appropriate without providing necessary checks and
balances. Yet like other situations, when employing PAR "a little knowledge can be a
dangerous thing." Perhaps my hesitation was exacerbated by a lack of confidence in my
own comprehension of the material. Given the lack of formal rules I tended to doubt my
own interpretation of the PAR guidelines rather than trusting my instincts. This had a
serious impact on the research leading me to explore why institutional and personal
pressures, restrictions and expectations, can get in the way of PAR practice, and why
considering the personal journey of the planning practitioner in encountering and
implementing PAR is imperative.

In my conscious undertaking of PAR I also experienced new challenges with regards to
expectations. Bound by the reins of academia, I felt obligated to maintain a certain
protocol in my work in order to produce high-quality data. Unlike my first experience in
Lesotho where no concrete outcomes were required, I knew I was responsible for
delivering a tangible outcome and had both my client (the funding agency) and the
university to answer to. Nervous and unsure of exactly what 'product' I would be able to
deliver, I felt enormous pressure to be both clever and efficient. In contrast, during my
first trip to Lesotho I knew that there would be no direct consequences should I be
unable to deliver a final product. While I still felt pressure to develop something
meaningful during that time, the pressure was largely self-inflicted. I was also not
consciously employing a strategy that I knew to have been tried and tested by other
practitioners who had achieved positive results (Chambers, 1995; Fals-Borda &
Rahman, 1991). This knowledge heightened my anxiety surrounding the project.

Similarly, I was conscious of being responsible for accounting for all my actions in a
master's thesis, and then challenged in a public thesis defense. Despite understanding
theoretically that I was not expected to be perfect, at times I felt paralysed for fear of
making a mistake. My genuine dedication to the PAR philosophy left me wary of
committing an unethical act, the antithesis to the project. While my intentions were
honourable, I felt constantly challenged with ethical debates in my work in Lesotho. With
heightened power differentials and widespread poverty, the decisions I make carry more
weight in these extreme circumstances and thus I take none of them lightly.
One example of such a decision arose with one of my RAs, halfway through the project. He nervously approached me while I was in the LNOC office and asked if he could speak to me privately. In the hallway he told me a long story about his aunt, eventually leading to a request to receive his paycheque in advance so that he could pay her electricity bill. I immediately felt uncomfortable, as I had explicitly laid out the terms of employment with both RAs. They understood and had signed contracts that they would be paid upon satisfactory completion of their work at the end of every other week. However the request appeared genuine and I was touched by my RAs willingness to pay a family member’s electricity bill. I was reminded of the sharply contrasting realities between the experiences of youth growing up in Lesotho and my own. As a teenager in Canada, no adult had ever asked me to provide them with money to pay household bills for what we consider a basic necessity and a parent’s responsibility.

On the other hand I considered that I was being manipulated and lied to in the face of monetary resources. As a white Canadian, I am constantly asked for money and favours in Lesotho. It is an inevitable though challenging component of the work, and it makes it difficult to discern what the level of need is; there is always need, but it is not always a matter of life and death. While the question was not (and never is) whether I could afford to take a chance on what was a relatively small sum of money, it was about setting the right precedent that would be both just and equitable. Faced with an immediate decision I quickly weighed my options and decided to extend my trust to my RA by forwarding him the money. I concluded that it was a small risk to take with a potentially large gain in forwarding our relationship and trust level, a core principle of PAR (Chambers, 1997). To convey a sense of protocol and responsibility I asked my RA to sign a contract stating that he had received an advance which would be deducted from the following paycheque, and subsequently this was carried out without issue.

While I have faced challenges in all my experiences in Lesotho, during my ‘intentional’ PAR project as I mentioned, I felt responsible to people other than myself and the youth. Perhaps this was a positive distinction, however often times I felt a sense of panic at being unable to justify a decision properly. Ultimately I fear that my preoccupation with delivering a final product interfered with my priorities. Truthfully, I was also conscious of needing to collect quality data in order to write my master’s thesis. This was especially
true at the beginning of the project when I thought I would be conducting a SIA. While I in no way blame the methodology, the personal journey and reflexivity of the PAR practitioner is important to note when exploring the challenges that arose during the process.

Throughout the research project I was confronted with challenges that cut across all stages of the research process. As noted, virtually every day in the field I was faced with a moral dilemma. Some are bigger or smaller than others and sometimes they have nothing to do with my project directly, however the constant internal questioning appears unavoidable. In part it feels this way because the stakes seem so high. The need in Lesotho is obvious, and charged with trying to make a difference can be an overwhelming task. PAR embodies the ethical guidelines that direct even the smallest of decisions making every aspect of the project emotionally taxing.

Challenges of Accountability in doing PAR with Volunteers

One of the immediate challenges in using a participatory methodology to conduct an evaluation is the fact that for the most part the researchers are volunteers. Working in one of the least developed countries in the world (UNDP, 2005) the concept of volunteering is a complicated one. To ask someone who struggles for basic necessities to donate their time seems almost insulting, yet the opportunity to volunteer is often a springboard to activities that the individual would otherwise have no access to. My experience is that the Basotho do not understand ‘volunteering’ in the western sense of the word. To volunteer is to do work and be compensated, though not necessarily monetarily. However, not everyone shares this definition; many of the youth I work with are adamant about not being paid for volunteering with OYAP and it is often a source of pride. This pride was one of the clearest indicators that PAR was empowering; the youth were taking ownership of their own activities and challenging popular opinion.

However, in my mind volunteering is not and should not be a purely altruistic activity. In designing OYAP I intended to provide opportunities for education, growth, and socializing; I heeded Freire’s warning against traditional researchers who go into communities and simply ‘extract’ (Freire, 2003). I see volunteering as an opportunity for youth to actively work towards individual goals while giving back to the community, thereby fostering a sense of independence from the outside agency. It is in this vein that
I presented the research project, thus “handing over the stick” to the community (Chambers, 1995, 1997). Similarly I wanted participants to gain knowledge and skills while forging relationships with their peers and enjoying themselves.

Having begun the project by gauging enthusiasm among the ambassadors, I felt confident in recruiting volunteers to proceed with the project. If anything I feared that there would be too much interest and I would not be able to accommodate everyone. As the participants were self-selected, I had no qualms about coercive volunteer recruitment; youth expressed their excitement at the project and their desire to participate. After the initial group had signed up and participated in the introductory training workshop, I presented them with an opportunity to decline participating with no questions asked. I made a special effort to emphasize that I would harbour no negative feelings towards them if they decided not to participate at this stage. All 10 participants signed a volunteer contract committing them to the 6-week project.

Having ensured that volunteers were not only willing but also enthusiastic, I mistakenly assumed an easy commitment on the part of the youth. Given my previous experience working in Lesotho this was perhaps naïve of me. Ultimately the fact that the researchers were volunteers meant that it was difficult to hold them accountable to the work they took on. At the end of the day, if they did not follow through on a meeting, interview, or write-up, there was nothing I could do except show disappointment. This presented an inherent conflict in a community-driven PAR project; I wondered whether this was an indication that they were perhaps not as interested in the project as they professed?

My immediate reaction was to talk to them about the commitment in an attempt to dialogue around solutions that would be amenable to both of us. Unfortunately this often felt like I was an ‘employer’ who was chastising an ‘employee’, rather than an equal partner in a collaborative project. This reinforced the very power differentials which I was so desperately trying to minimize; yet ultimately I wanted to push forward with the project. Not only was I personally invested in the results, but seemingly so were the youth themselves, complicating matters even further. While the youth actively recognized the need for change in the programme, there seemed to be a disconnect between their desire and their willingness to work towards their goal. Perhaps in a
community where there is so much need, a project with few tangible outcomes leaves little motivation to fully commit. Expecting accountability, commitment and sustained effort from even the most hardworking and dedicated volunteers is often unrealistic when their own physical and emotional care needs are not met.

In this vein it was much easier to hold my RAs accountable, however having created a two-tiered volunteer group I solved some problems while creating others. By paying two of the researchers I felt much more comfortable putting demands on their time and requiring that products be delivered. Unfortunately this may have compromised the participatory spirit of the process; yet I would offer that without this mechanism in place it would have proved difficult to accomplish the written component of the work which provided a crucial tangible component. Additionally there was the issue of having created a hierarchy of power among the volunteers. While I observed that the youth treated each other with equality and respect, perhaps there were subtle discriminations to which I was not privy. Ultimately I believe the monetary compensation was necessary for moving the project forward, obviously benefiting the two RAs.

**Challenges in Ensuring the Quality of Participation**

Closely related to the issue of accountability in PAR is the issue of quality of participation. I deliberately chose not to have criteria regarding who could participate, in order to create an open and inclusive process, therefore the participants were self-selected. I encouraged youth with little formal education or research opportunities to join the project, intent on breaking down traditional barriers to participation. As a result the researchers had varying levels of education, experience, and ability. While these factors can be mitigated by a skilled facilitator, ultimately the standard of work is likely to be influenced by the lack of formal skills and experience. Compounding this issue were the varying levels of commitment demonstrated by the researchers; all in all the quality of the project often seems compromised.

Another significant factor of note was the influence of gender relations on the project. Initially we had an organic split of five women and five men; however two of the women were unable to continue leaving a dominant male presence in the group. Lesotho has a very masculine culture and traditionally women have taken a back seat to men when it comes to power. Being particularly sensitive to gender issues, I was conscious of
creating an environment that would encourage strong female voices. In hiring one male RA and one female RA I established this protocol from the beginning. Additionally I challenged male-centric remarks by questioning the rationale behind statements. In doing so I was met with resistance among the men, however the women appeared to be bolstered by these discussions.

In one instance one of the male researchers remarked that all men are smarter than women, though he qualified that they must be provided with equal education opportunities. A discussion ensued and while the women in the room all dismissed his comment as absurd, including the female president of the LNOC, the sentiment reinforced that gender inevitably has influence in the research process. If this was a sentiment he was willing to express verbally, I wondered what else he believed that he was not sharing. Personally it was very frustrating to observe the persona of the ‘male sexual predator’ infuse itself into the interactions between genders, permeating our group dynamics. The young men who I enjoyed working with so much often treated the women in ways I found unacceptable; facilitating the group was a fine line between challenging prevailing attitudes while not alienating the youth as a whole. Gender relations affected our research process however the female researchers were key contributors whose voices can clearly be heard in the final report.

Many of the challenges associated with the quality of participation are related to the challenge of capacity building. If local volunteers lack the capacity to engage, mobilize, do basic research, and negotiate more equitable partnerships, the quality of the final product is likely to be compromised. While the research is intended to impart these skills, it is difficult to teach all of them simultaneously. This is especially true when faced with limited resources, tight timelines and cultural barriers. The requirement to deliver a final product can potentially trump the quality of the process and as a result capacity building takes a back seat. Integral to the PAR process is a sound participation design.

Challenges in Dealing with the Temporal Dimension of PAR
One of the challenges compounding the issue of volunteer commitment is the issue of ‘African time.’ Working in Lesotho it is immediately apparent that time is a cultural construct. Time moves at a much slower pace in Lesotho, a fact that I found endlessly frustrating as I tried to adapt to this cultural mindset. Having been warned prior to
working in southern Africa, I was theoretically familiar with the concept of African time. In my head I was prepared to relax, slow down, and do my best to assimilate, or at least integrate into this different culture. In practice it proved extremely difficult.

Coming from a Canadian mindset, I was used to people setting up meeting times and generally adhering to them. In Lesotho my experience is that the majority of meetings scheduled, the person I am supposed to meet either (1) calls to let me know they will be anywhere from 1 to 3 hours late; (2) is anywhere from 1 to 3 hours late, (3) calls to cancel, (4) does not show up altogether. After several months of working in this climate I was completely overwhelmed. I kept asking myself how to accomplish anything if I could not even meet with people on a schedule made at their discretion? This issue pervaded all of my experiences while working in Lesotho.

As I spent more time in the country I began to realize that it was more than time that was making the meetings difficult, it was the schedule itself. In Lesotho, people do not make appointments with any certainty. Rather people spend a large part of the day waiting in offices for other people they aspire to speak with. I came to learn that when an appointment is made, it is an approximation, to be confirmed at a later time. Of course the question remains, how does anything get accomplished in this system? Through my observation, with varying success and varying quality, it is a constant challenge.

Knowing all of this I set out to address the issue of time with my youth from the outset. I explained the importance of being punctual and adhering to a schedule, and the personal value I placed on this time commitment. I talked about respect, and the fact that when people are late or cancel that I feel disrespected. I attempted to initiate a discussion around the topic seeking their views on respect, hoping to negotiate boundaries that everyone would be happy with. Surprisingly while most of the youth acknowledged the lack of scheduling among their people, they too expressed frustration at the constant lateness. With great confidence they all pledged to be punctual during the project.

This was not the case. Out of the 8 researchers with whom I worked, only one of them was always on time. In every other case the researchers were either late or absent on numerous occasions. This is not to say that they are without reason. Working in
Lesotho there are many factors that play into why someone might be late or unable to attend. Often the youth do not have the taxi fare (50 cents) necessary to get into the city. Other times there are family obligations requiring them to stay at home. More often than not, the youth themselves are subjected to the African time system, and required to wait in offices in order to fill out applications for post-secondary loans, or employment opportunities. The difficulty becomes discerning which reasons are valid and which are not.

The youth I worked with are very aware of the cultural differences when it comes to time. While they may not understand why I am so stringent, they certainly recognize it, in no small part due to my overt attempts at discussion. Laughing, one of my youth volunteers remarked to me, “Dara, when God made time, he gave it to the Africans… but he gave Europeans the watch.” In many ways, this sums up my experiences around the ‘time’ issue; everyone acknowledges it, but generally to laugh it off.

While I feel as though my attention to this issue must grate on those I work with, in reality it impedes every component of the project. It is difficult to move forward in a collaborative manner when the very people intended to make decisions are not there. More importantly, by asking (forcing) them to attend, am I contravening the participatory spirit of the process? If I am, then how does one facilitate PAR and produce results, while keeping in mind local cultural interpretations of time, time usage, and time allocation? Perhaps this is the crux of the issue.

**Challenges of Using PAR to Address Local Power Dynamics**

PAR is intended to reverse the power dynamic, putting power in the hands of those who normally do not have any. This is a nice aspiration, and one I very much believe in, yet have difficulty implementing in practice. As genuinely committed as I was to having the youth lead the research process, it proved to be very challenging in day-to-day tasks. To begin, I had the means by which to organize the logistics of the workshops, meetings and communication tools. While I sought input and asked the youth to make these decisions or initiate activities, they refused to do so without my permission. This was inevitably the case in most situations.
Having established strong relationships with the youth, I believe that they trusted me enough to communicate openly and honestly. Scholars have emphasized the facilitator's role in developing a safe and trusting environment, and process of balanced relationships for research participants (Salazar 1991; Hailey 2001). During our discussions they would offer opinions that challenged my own, an indication of their level of comfort in speaking freely in the group. That being said, I could see the influence I wielded, despite having the opposite of intentions. No matter how much I tried to put myself in the background of the project, almost always the group would defer to my opinion. It felt as if there was always more weight attached to the words I spoke than I had ever intended. Ironically this reinforces the need to build capacity among the youth so that they are able to challenge power imbalances that they encounter.

In this research project the alternative was to stay completely silent, and not contribute questions or ideas during discussions. This not only seems to defeat the purpose of a collaborative project, it also would have effectively rendered me obsolete. This did not seem like an appealing option because I recognize that I have knowledge and skills that are necessary to facilitate the project. During my first experience in Lesotho I often undervalued my own skills for the sake of valuing others; I now recognize that they are not mutually exclusive. In this case, none of the youth I was working with had the experience necessary to take the lead on the research project, thus by default I became the necessary lead. However, I had to walk the fine line of providing appropriate feedback and interventions, while not sounding paternalistic, and deferring my own suggestions until the youth were able to demonstrate their own initiatives.

*Challenges Posed by Language Barriers*

Another factor forcing me to lead the project was language. In Lesotho language is a tricky issue, and not one whose complexities are immediately obvious. As a bilingual country, almost everyone speaks both Sesotho and English fluently. While Sesotho is the native language and the language spoken with family and friends, English is the language of instruction in schools and the working language in the public and private sectors. Very few of the Basotho read and write in Sesotho, though the literacy rate is 87.2% (UNDP, 2005, p. 260). However most of the youth that I work with are much more comfortable speaking in Sesotho than they are in English. What is misleading is that they appear to be comfortable in English.
Working in a country where English is a second language, telling signs such as grammatical structure reveal a lack of conversational, not necessarily cognitive, fluency. In Lesotho everyone has excellent grammar, which has the deceptive effect of making it seem as though everyone understands everything I say; in fact this is not the case. To begin, despite the solid grammar in conversations, the English comprehension level among youth varies according to where they attained their education. Usually this is associated along lines of class as the more expensive the school, the higher the level of English. Thus the elite youth speak as fluently as any native English speaker, while those with less affluence do not.

In reflecting on the language barrier I am again reminded of Cooke's “Rules of thumb for participatory change agents” - rule IV: “work only in languages you understand as well as your first” (Cooke, 2004, p. 48). Despite the fact that we were working in English (my first language), the language barrier often led to misinterpretation. Often times I could see that the youth would struggle to express themselves accurately and my pathetic attempts to learn Sesotho were no help. This meant that they offered a stilted version of their thoughts. Other times the English of Lesotho would get in the way. It has been noted that there is a form of English spoken only in Lesotho, “... with idioms that arise from literal translation of Sesotho expressions, with a vocabulary peppered with Sesotho words, with a rhythm and with inflections all its own” (Nthunya, 1996, p. 167). In this way a word understood one way in Canadian English might have an entirely different meaning in the English of Lesotho. All of this further complicated the collaborative process.

Challenges of Ownership and Voice

Perhaps the most challenging task of all came when we attempted to produce our final report. Up until this point it was simple enough to have the youth be involved in all aspects of the research. When it came to writing the report, it proved much more difficult. To begin any collaborative writing in my experience is a challenge. Attempting to synthesize different voices and writing styles takes a skilled editor and significant effort. This is even truer when the writers have various levels of communication and no experience with this type of writing.
The RAs took the lead on the writing as this proved to be the most labourious task and the task that inspired the least enthusiasm. As the RAs were the most articulate among the group, I assumed a similar level of competence would translate on paper. Having completed a group analysis of the data in a one-day workshop, the youth were each asked to go away and write up the results of their analysis. The youth noted that they would prefer to just "tell people" the results of their findings. I discussed the rationale behind creating a final report and everyone agreed to contribute what he or she could.

Upon receiving the first pieces of writing I became immediately dismayed. One of my RAs was quite a good writer and her contributions provided a solid foundation on which to build. The other RA seemed to be effectively illiterate. His sentence structure made his writing incomprehensible and he had little idea on how to structure his thoughts. A typical sentence read like this, "The research prevailed with that were set up mainly organized for organizations" (final report draft, 2005). This came as a surprise as verbally he expressed himself very clearly.

It was clear that in order to produce a fluid and coherent final product, extensive editing would be required. The problem in doing so is that I would effectively be taking the words of the youth and replacing them with my own. In my mind this constituted too great a departure from the participatory spirit of the project. Given the drastic editing required, essentially I would be writing the final report. Seeing as the report was the showcase of our collective efforts, I worried that my voice would dominate those of the youth who were truly responsible for the research. I struggled with how to create a cohesive final product that would translate to an international audience while maintaining the voice of the youth themselves.

Equally problematic was submitting a report that was sub-par. I questioned the possibility that by not editing the writing I would be doing the youth an injustice in not facilitating a process that allowed them to best present their work to those in decision-making positions. Broaching this issue with the youth, they seemed to have none of the anxiety that I did with me editing their work. They all happily agreed to give me free license to take their writing and edit it into the report. While this reflects positively on the relationships I formed with the youth researchers, I was still not comfortable with the
process. Again I understood that the youth would automatically defer to my abilities given my status among them as a white, educated, Canadian.

In the end I found no easy solution, except to take the lesson learned and approach the problem differently next time (something I will discuss in my reflections). I worked very hard at editing the final report so that it maintained the voices of the youth, but also had a polished feel. I corrected obvious grammatical and spelling errors, yet left a Lesotho English flavour. I also contributed a forward in my own voice in order to explain the process used to arrive at the final product.

As a crucial last step, on my second research trip I returned with a draft of the final report and presented it to the youth. I asked them to take it away over the week, read it, and return to a one-day workshop for comments and queries. This allowed for an opportunity to have them edit my writing. The feedback was very positive and several changes were made as a result. Reassuringly the youth told me that I had effectively captured their voices in the report and that they were proud of their efforts. This opportunity to receive feedback directly from the youth was crucial in authenticating the voice and having the youth take ownership of their work.

Opportunities for Transformation Through PAR
Despite the many challenges that PAR presents, there are still various opportunities for transformation through PAR. Through this research project I tested the idea that PAR is a useful alternative to traditional top-down, modernist, technocratic, prescriptive solutions. The key point stressed repeatedly in the literature is that PAR provides a transformative approach to development (Hickey & Mohan, 2004), and I believe this to be true. PAR provides philosophical guidelines that succeed in challenging elitist and unethical research processes; in turn this leads to greater solutions to some of the world’s most pressing problems.

In focusing on people-centred, humanistic approaches PAR generates local buy-in for proposed planning solutions. This is a point that has been overlooked by traditional researchers who remain cemented in the notion that solutions come in neat packages that can simply be transported and implemented with success. After fifty years of modernist development, practitioners began to realize that involving the local community
provided benefit beyond paying lip-service to good practice; in doing so community members were likely to support new plans and therefore the solutions were more likely to succeed. PAR is a process whereby practitioners are able to work with the community to develop solutions that will ultimately be supported because the community has been fully involved from the beginning.

Beyond generating local buy-in PAR acknowledges local expertise and challenges the concept of formal knowledge. Through genuinely open relationship building a mutual learning process takes place that allows strengths and weaknesses to come forth. Rather than imposing pre-fabricated prescriptive answers, PAR empowers the local community to create their own knowledge in order to generate action-oriented solutions. By acknowledging the unique nuances of the community, once again people are empowered to recognize their own strengths and develop context specific community plans that speak to specific community issues.

Most importantly, PAR challenges traditional power hierarchies enabling oppressed peoples to become change agents rather than depending on those in positions of power to change things for them. This is the most powerful aspect of PAR because it builds capacity within the community to permanently affect the power structures. Working with the youth in OYAP they repeatedly told me how important this programme was and how much they believed in it. In reality OYAP will probably offer very little tangible improvement in the quality of the lives of the youth when it comes to food, shelter, and disease. Yet the youth have begun to recognize their worth, and to believe that they can make a difference in the face of power. This confidence is not to be undervalued; the ability to affect change begins by believing it is a possibility and then by knowing how to negotiate systems that prevent it from happening. PAR provides this opportunity and in doing so plants the seeds for transformative community development.
5.0 Reflections on the Opportunities and Constraints of PAR

Lessons Learned from a Personal Journey

This research project and my experience as a whole in Lesotho has been a formative journey in my life. Despite having been engaged in a variety of projects centred on social justice issues, I have never been so personally invested in a project as I am with the work in Lesotho. Living and working in one of the least developed countries in the world, I was face to face with the enormity of the issues that challenge youth every single day. It is difficult to describe the experience of living in a country where in addition to widespread poverty, over a third of the people are HIV positive, and early death is normalized. For this reason the choices I make weigh heavily on me and I sit with them long after the project is over. In this chapter I will review the lessons learned, opportunities and challenges of conducting PAR with youth in Lesotho, and my own role in the research.

PAR emphasizes reflection as a central tenet of the process (Burkey, 1993; Freire, 2003; Winter, 1989). In fact I would venture that it is the reflective process that defines the future of the project. Upon returning from Lesotho after my first internship, I was conscious of taking the time necessary to process what had been undoubtedly the most challenging and rewarding experience of my life. Feelings of frustration, guilt and uselessness threatened to become overwhelming if not channelled appropriately; I came away with a strong sense that I had a responsibility to take the lessons I learned and use them in my future work as a planning practitioner. I concluded that if I did not translate my reflection into action, then the experience had been for nought. Interestingly I came to this conclusion unaware of any of the literature on the reflection-action cycle, another accidental adherence to the PAR principles. My conclusion in large part inspired my vision for this research project, an opportunity to carry on my original work while applying the knowledge gained during and after my first experience. As it happens, I learned many more lessons along the way.

One of the principal mistakes I made was defaulting to the medium of print for our final report. As noted, my struggle over language, voice and ownership were paramount during the process; despite clearly articulating their results aloud, the youth seemed
unable to translate their thoughts onto paper. Doing so resulted in a loss of the fluidity, passion and unique colour that came through so clearly when the youth spoke. Unfortunately my lack of creativity combined with the pressure I felt to achieve academic graduate standards (however misguided my interpretations may have been), prohibited me from exploring different possible mediums and I automatically assumed a written report was the most appropriate, effective and efficient way of communicating our findings and results. I was also tied to the idea of an output in the form of a report as this was a promise I made to the organisation that funded the project.

Lesotho has a culture based in oral story telling and in contrast to the Canadian context, where everyone spends countless hours composing emails on a computer, there is little technological access in the country; the youth are accustomed to communicating verbally. In fact, verbal communication is one of their greatest strengths. The Basotho are very expressive both physically and vocally and it is a treat to watch them tell a story. In facilitating various warm-up exercises with the youth I was constantly amazed at the ease with which the youth embraced the dramatic components of the games. The youth had no trouble making themselves vulnerable, demonstrating total comfort in manipulating their voices and bodies while showing few signs of embarrassment. Having run countless warm-up exercises in the Canadian context, I know that this is not the case with youth in Canada. Halfway through the project I realized that I should have considered alternative mediums for our final product that would have utilized these obvious strengths and assets of the youth.

Having completed the process it is obvious to me now that producing a video for the final report would have been much more conducive to showcasing the strengths of the group. While I toyed with the possibility of filming the researchers at the end of the project, time and resources prevented us from realizing this ambition. Interestingly, despite general frustration with the writing process, none of the youth proposed an alternative medium in which to report our results. I speculate that the youth made the same assumptions I did, falling prey to an all-pervasive western corporate culture that denies creativity in the search for validity. For future reference, it is an important reminder to examine all biases thoroughly when formulating a project; in this instance I allowed my own cultural background and institutional expectations to place limitations on the project.
The second lesson I learned is something I hesitate to call a “lesson” for fear of trivializing what occurred; this experience was of a much more personal and tragic nature. I left Lesotho in August 2005 after the completion of my first research trip. In November 2005 I was informed through email that one of my RAs had committed suicide in his home. This information came both as a shock, and a disappointment. According to his family, friends and OYAP colleagues, they too were in shock. Rethabile was a promising young man who at 18 had his whole life in front of him. About to graduate high school he had spoken to me numerous times of his plans to attend university and study medicine. Unlike many of his peers, he seemed well positioned to do so.

Upon hearing of his death, I realized that I did not know very many details about Rethabile’s home life. I knew only that his father worked in South Africa during the week and that he lived with his mother and sisters, one of whom I knew personally. Rumours were flying in the community as to why he would have taken his own life. People speculated several possibilities including that he had participated in a crime, or that he was having trouble with his parents; in the end nobody will know why he did it. For me it was a sobering moment in the project. I inevitably questioned my own relationship with Rethabile; should I have seen signs leading towards this decision? What could I have done to reach out to what was obviously a troubled young man?

I look back to the group dynamics of our research team wondering how I could not have anticipated such a drastic outcome in this young man’s life. In reflecting on our meetings I remember observing that perhaps Rethabile did not gel with the other youth. The group would often tease him in what to me appeared to be a good-natured manner. At the time it seemed that Rethabile was able to hold his own in the group and I suspected that any interference on my part would make matters worse. Inevitably I now wonder if this was an indication of something deeper, though conscious of the fact that hindsight is always 20/20.

I am not sure if there is a lesson in what appears a troubling and senseless loss. I am not sure if there were signs there for me to see. I know that I cared about Rethabile greatly and spent time getting to know a bit about him. I am incredibly saddened by his loss and while I cannot blame myself, I wish I had been able to help. If anything I hope that he felt valued and capable participating in our project, having been hired out of 7
applicants to be an RA. Losing Rethabile is a reminder of the complexity of people. Having spent almost every day for two months with Rethabile only months prior to his death, I had no idea of the turmoil inside of him.

While it would be nice to be able to make sense of Rethabile's death with some sort of lesson or insight, death is not that tidy. It is a messy and painful process and cannot be book ended with a message. Rethabile's death affected the other youth in various ways; some were angry with him for "wasting his life", others were visibly upset and unable to talk about it. When I returned in January 2006 I decided to organize a day of tribute facilitated by a local counsellor where the youth would be able to discuss Rethabile's death. Afterwards they spent the afternoon playing sports in rented facilities, an effort on the part of CGC and myself to rebuild the team after this loss. Surprisingly, I found that his death did not visibly affect people as much as I had anticipated. Perhaps their grieving was private, or perhaps death is so commonplace in Lesotho that it has become normalized.

Yet it sits with me and I am conscious of the role that Rethabile played in this research project, both before and after his death. In writing up the experience of conducting PAR with youth, I wonder what our project meant to Rethabile. While he was participating I observed that he was learning and benefiting from his involvement; this was affirmed through personal conversations with Rethabile where he told me that he was acquiring new skills. Perhaps he did not feel comfortable revealing the truth to me, or perhaps the project was incidental to whatever was happening that made him believe he had no choice but to take his own life. Rethabile's death is a difficult aspect of our project, one that cannot be easily reconciled. I hope to honour his life and his contribution by ensuring that through our research his voice is heard.

Opportunities and Challenges of Using PAR in Youth Empowerment

In community development practice in order to be successful it is vital that the people are fully engaged in the process. Practitioners learned long ago that parachuting into a community and imposing 'grand' ideas can render even the strongest plans defunct. Community development planning has a slow progression that requires relationship building, understanding local and international customs, and committing to a flexible and iterative process. Rubber-stamping programmes across communities is ineffective and
potentially destructive as it ignores these key building blocks. PAR's approach recognizes these factors and provides a solid set of principles by which to achieve collaborative community development, specifically with youth.

PAR is at its most powerful when genuine connections take place between individuals. In order to build trust and earn respect, practitioners and youth must come together in an open, safe and neutral playing field; a practice easier said than done. Yet PAR provides sound rationale and instructive guidelines on how to do just this. The result was that upon returning to Lesotho to begin this research project I met with the youth with whom I worked during my first experience. Speaking to them almost two years after first meeting them, I was surprised and delighted by their enthusiasm at my return. I was genuinely welcomed and almost immediately confided in by many of the youth on both personal and professional issues. This indicated that I had achieved the critical rapport necessary to move forward with the research project.

In addition to being warmed by the welcome I received from the youth, I was humbled by the personal growth that they attributed to OYAP. Confident, articulate, and inspired, the youth were eager to share with me their accomplishments as well as their frustrations. While there were many problems with how OYAP was operating, the impact of the programme on the youth was undeniable. Over and over again the youth approached me and proudly identified as an OYAP volunteer, eager to talk about their programme. Inspiringly, the youth looked upon me as a stakeholder in OYAP rather than a leader, an indication that they had truly taken ownership of the programme. The fact that I approached the youth as both equals and decision makers from the outset of the project, allowed this transition to take place.

Through the foundational relationships created in the beginning, I also became sensitized to the local customs relevant to our research. As a foreigner in Lesotho the opportunity to learn from the local community was crucial in the development of OYAP. The youth were able to share appropriate modes of approach, communication and provide local knowledge necessary. Equally those of us with international experience were able to provide crucial links in order to move the project beyond the borders of the local community; this was a necessary action that allowed for vital resources and structural support. PAR acknowledges the importance of listening and facilitates this
process by providing the opportunity to listen. This step is often sacrificed in the interests of time and money yet remains crucial for successful community development practice.

Lastly, PAR provides leeway to allow for the messy reality of community development planning. Brainstorming, consulting, drafting and presenting what appear to be the tightest of plans, can never account for the breadth of potential stumbling blocks encountered. At the centre of community development are people, and people do not conform themselves to plans. During my research project our planning took several turns along the way due to unforeseen obstacles. Instead of hindering our research this empowered the youth to take control and develop creative solutions. Community development is an inherently iterative process and plans must be adjusted throughout the project. PAR acknowledges this process and rather than imposing strict guidelines that signal inevitable failure, uses change as an opportunity for youth empowerment. To this end, PAR served us well.

In addition to opportunities there were considerable challenges in employing PAR, many of which I have previously outlined in detail. My attempt to use PAR was successful to varying degrees, however during periods of frustration I became sceptical of this so-called ethical methodology. I wondered at why I was unable to develop a smooth process in my thorough efforts to remain true to the principles. Having been able to step away from the research and return to the literature, I become less frustrated and more resigned to what I feel is the true answer, though perhaps not the most palatable.

PAR, much like anything else, is not the answer; it is one step towards the answer, because there is no single methodology that will be able to independently achieve successful community development planning. PAR evolved out of a backlash against top-down, technocratic, macro planning, and rightfully so. Yet to have the pendulum swing over to the other side and stay there negates the important lessons that spurred PAR. A grass roots movement must drive community development, however if it is not complemented by actions from those in decision-making positions, it will never succeed. We need to practice both bottom-up and top-down planning in order to effect real change that will move us toward our goals.
Another key challenge in practicing PAR is that the success rate depends largely on the personality of the individual practitioner. As there is no specific 'training' prior to entering the field the practitioner comes equipped with skills they have developed in other arenas. Essential PAR skills such as relationship building and communication can be improved upon, however to some degree people are either good or bad at it. These skills can also fluctuate depending on the context; personalities vary and are likely to click in some situations and clash in others. While I am not suggesting the creation of a uniform PAR preparation course, which would be impossible to design, it is important to encourage practitioners to constantly be practicing and upgrading their skills if they intend to engage in PAR.

Overall PAR strengths are also PAR weaknesses. The emphasis on people, the collaborative thrust and the iterative processes all make PAR a potentially powerful methodology; they also open PAR to uncertainty and vagueness. PAR presents opportunities for youth empowerment and provides a solid alternative to traditional research methodology, however PAR can also be an emotionally exhausting and somewhat nebulous approach. As Ute Kelly notes in Participation, from tyranny to transformation, “transformatory approaches are much more likely to be painful and difficult than safe and enjoyable” (Kelly, 2004, p. 216). In order to employ PAR effectively it requires a skilled and committed practitioner to do so.

Is This the Question: To PAR or Not to PAR?
Ultimately when faced with the question of my role in a developing country full of inevitable power differentials and moral dilemmas, I return to my belief in the importance of cross-cultural collaboration. Lilla Watson, an Australian Aboriginal educator and activist once said, “If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together” (Stringer, 1999, p. 193). Engaged in the PAR process as a white, educated Canadian, I am eternally conscious of the weight of my privilege and association with colonial projects. In truth I do not feel equal to the youth with who I am working because ultimately I realize that I possess more mobility than the majority of them will ever have. While I have made every effort to understand their realities and sometimes live them, at the end of the day I am able to return to Canada and make different choices. I have questioned whether I am able to practice PAR conscious of these inequalities, and I
always come to the same answer. In life we do not have the same choices, yet I extend
my respect to the youth with whom I work and this puts us on as level a playing field as
possible. Change will not happen if we ignore each other’s realities, change can only
come about by addressing these realities directly.

I sometimes joke that I am a default optimist because I do not see any choice but to
continue to try to make a difference. The option of turning away from the work,
paralysed by fear of power differentials or other deterrents, is unpalatable. While it
appears to be human nature to seek out difference among ourselves, the more we learn
about each other, the more we cultivate acceptance, compassion, and cooperation.
Without these essential qualities our global community has a bleak future ahead of itself.
I return to Lilla Watson’s sentiments, that our liberation is bound together; we must
challenge the barriers that make this work uncomfortable, for it is not only the youth of
Lesotho who stand to benefit, it is the world. If those of us with power hold up our hands
helpless, we are simply making excuses in order to turn a blind eye to a system that is
inherently inequitable. In this case silence is agreement.

PAR encompasses a philosophy that offers tools to offset the inevitable power
differentials and moral dilemmas. It is by no means a foolproof methodology and like
most tools, success depends largely on the person wielding the tool. The question to be
asked is when applied appropriately, does PAR achieve its intended goals? In my
experience, working cross-culturally with communities who are oppressed will always be
fraught with difficulties; it is impossible to completely reverse the power structures that
exist. However I do believe that practitioners should do their best to challenge these
systems that prioritize certain types of knowledge, and PAR provides a guide for those
wishing to do so. Building on the work of theorists Sam Hickey and Giles Mohan, I am
inspired to continue to think critically about participatory approaches while constantly
working towards the empowerment of citizens (Hickey & Mohan, 2004). I believe that
PAR has value as a starting point for those who wish to make ethical choices in their
work, the rest is up to the individual.

My experiences using PAR in Lesotho, both intentionally and unintentionally, have had a
significant impact on my life. I do not think that a practitioner can choose to use PAR
while adhering to the principles and not become emotionally involved in the work they
are doing. For some this may strengthen their process, for others it can become a barrier for moving forward in the work. I anticipate employing PAR in future projects that I undertake, however I am now finished with my work in Lesotho.

The End of the Journey
Finishing this research project I am acutely aware that I have come to the end of my journey in Lesotho. This is not to say that everything has been accomplished, that OYAP requires no further guidance, or that my interest in the programme has disappeared. Rather I feel strongly that I am no longer able to contribute in an effective manner. My own emotional attachment and previous experiences have weighed me down to the point where I feel that if anything I am a hindrance to OYAP. To understand how I came to the end of my journey with OYAP I must start at the beginning.

During my first internship in Lesotho I was excited and eager to learn more about myself both personally and professionally. I held a genuine desire to contribute and though I would not admit it aloud, I was concerned about 'making a difference.' The internship provided solid territory to explore these goals, but I quickly learned it was not going to be an easy experience. By the time I left Lesotho in October of 2003 I felt thoroughly defeated. Emerging from my internship I was frustrated and at a loss; when asked by friends and family what the internship was like, I responded by describing my experience as hitting my head against a brick wall every day. In truth, often times I felt exactly that. While I recognized positive outcomes from my experience, they were generally overshadowed by the many challenges I faced. There were daily frustrations and setbacks and the work never seemed to move forward. Despite my eventual success in launching OYAP, I could not see beyond the hopelessness of the big picture. I was dubious about what impact OYAP could make on life-threatening issues such as poverty and HIV/AIDS. When I left I reminded myself not to forget how little I had accomplished.

Upon returning to Canada I was fortunate to attend a debriefing session with other returning interns, facilitated by the Department of Foreign Affairs. The facilitator, who specialized in re-entry for workers abroad, was excellent; she created safe space where we were able to vent, boast, and generally explore what for most had been a very intense experience. Most importantly she spoke at length about the various processes
that people go through in returning from the field. Her emphasis on the importance of taking time to acknowledge a generally difficult transition remains invaluable to this day.

By consciously processing my experience upon leaving, I permitted myself the necessary time to think, feel and discuss with family and friends my intense experience. Following the debriefing I was able to recognize and validate my emotions, allowing me to channel my frustrations into more positive avenues. With time and distance I allowed myself to transition from being angry, sad, and disillusioned and I was able to see positive outcomes that eventually led to some qualified pride. In due course, I was able to be more at peace with my role in Lesotho. Removed from the experience and having engaged in serious reflection, I began to see my experience in a different light. The fact that OYAP continued to grow and expand beyond my presence reinforced my more positive outlook. I felt a serious responsibility to take the knowledge I had gained and use it to further the work being done in international development.

Starting my master's degree, I did not anticipate returning to Lesotho to write my thesis. My attempts to stay in touch with the people I worked with in Lesotho were limited by technology and access. The programme had been taken over by a local youth coordinator and I was proud of this progression; I had no intentions of undermining the local leadership. Yet, as I explored possible research topics, I became more and more interested in what was happening with OYAP on the ground. I wondered if perhaps I could contribute in a different manner. Upon proposing the idea of returning to conduct a participatory internal evaluation to the CGC and the LNOC, I was received enthusiastically. With the support of the University of British Columbia I began to see potential for implementing the reflection-action cycle; it seemed fitting to return to Lesotho and work with OYAP as my journey in the country was clearly not over.

In preparing to return I was very conscious of the emotional state I was in when I left the country. My first trip to Lesotho was the hardest thing I have ever done and when I left I was not a very happy person. I was wary of the effect that returning might have on my emotional health knowing that if I regressed to my previous state I would be of no use to anyone. However my overall outlook remained optimistic; in addition to my own personal growth since my first trip, there were several key factors that would make this research project different from my first experience.
To begin with I would not be as physically isolated as I was during my first experience. At that time I lived on the edge of town and not owning a car I was severely isolated. During the day I was able to take local taxis, however after dark (5pm) there are no taxis and I was unable to walk due to security concerns. During the research project I planned to stay in the centre of town at a small hotel where I would be within easy walking distance of all necessary facilities during the day and where people would be happy to drive to at night. I believed this would negate any feelings of isolation I had first experienced. Similarly Lesotho being a small community there is a small expatriate community with who I could easily relate. Ideally I could be friends with the Basotho, however practically many barriers (e.g., gender, economics, language) complicated this possibility. Therefore having very few friends made the difficult experiences even harder as there were few people with whom I could talk to and relate. Returning I felt confident having already established relationships, knowing more people and generally feeling comfortable with my social circle.

Secondly, I was not walking blindly into a culture or an organization. Having lived in Lesotho and having worked with the LNOC, I felt prepared to enter the country and move forward immediately with the project. During my first experience, I felt that it took several months to acclimatize into the culture, a necessary step prior to moving forward with the work. Upon returning I was familiar with many of the cultural nuances and working styles and would not be as hesitant to state my opinion for fear of offending someone. I also knew the geography, bits of the local language and was able to negotiate my way through local dealings. For these reasons I believed my return to Lesotho would negate some of the difficulties I negotiated the first time.

Yet despite all of these advantages within 24 hours of landing in Lesotho I began to feel overwhelmed by panic. The feelings of anxiety, fear, depression and guilt that had dominated my first experience began to creep up on me again. I worried that I did not know what I was doing, that I would not complete the project successfully, that I had no place in the country and that I was wasting time. In an attempt to maintain control, I worked hard at stifling these feelings with varying degrees of success. Inevitably they affected my concentration and my motivation would wane according to the day. Overall I
was extremely frustrated that I was once again experiencing feelings I had hoped to overcome.

At the end of my two month research trip I felt relief at having produced significant amounts of data that indicated I was on my way to completing the project. Holding tangible product reassured me that I had accomplished something; ironic given that personally I felt this was probably the least important part of our PAR project. Despite my low points the entire trip was not negative. Similar to my first experience there were many high points, most notably while interacting directly with the youth. After most meetings and workshops I would come away on a high, completely regenerated of mind and spirit. However, later I would find myself falling back into feelings of helplessness similar to what I experienced during my first visit. This in turn made me feel guilty for not taking advantage of what I felt was an incredible opportunity for both the youth and me.

I spent five months in Canada between my first and second research trips, and once again it appeared to provide the necessary distance to gain fresh perspective on returning. Returning to Canada the weight of the trip began to dissipate and it became difficult to remember why I had found it so challenging. With the exception of hearing about Rethabile’s death, I was excited to return and present the preliminary report to the youth. As my second research trip was less than three weeks in total, I assumed it would be the easiest of them all and that I would avoid all of the emotion that I had encountered in my previous experiences.

Within 24 hours of landing in Lesotho I once again felt weighed down by the country. While this might sound extreme, I realize it is true. As much as I wish it were not, I was unable to extricate myself from the weight of my combined experiences that were accumulatively very challenging. Despite my personal growth and the lessons learned along the way, I was unable to apply this knowledge within the context of Lesotho. While I had changed quite a bit the country had not changed nearly as quickly; upon returning I soon fell into the same negative patterns that had made my first experience so difficult. My personal growth and insight will serve me well with a fresh slate, however the imprint of my first experience stays with me and always will. In my last trip I decided that I have to close the door on Lesotho.
This is not to say that I will cut off contact with my dear partners in the field, nor will I lose interest in the progression of OYAP. Rather I recognize that I am unable to contribute any further towards the strengthening of this programme. My emotional investment and the challenges faced have made me a stronger person, and I am thankful for the opportunities I have been afforded, however I am unable to function on a positive level in the country. As I acknowledged earlier, if I am not in a positive state of mind, I am unable to contribute in any effective manner, something I recognize clearly now. In order for us to be successful practitioners, we must recognize our own limitations.

I am content with this decision. It has been a long, fantastic, colourful journey, and I am happy and thankful to have been so intimately involved with the development of OYAP. I am proud of the work accomplished and I know it has made a difference in the lives of the youth I have worked with. I look forward to staying in touch with these incredible young people who inspire me to continue fighting for social justice. My work will always centre around enabling those who have traditionally been marginalized to effect positive change for themselves, and for us all. It has been my privilege to facilitate a group of youth who clearly can speak for themselves.
6.0 References


Appendix A
OYAP Final Report
Development Through Sport
The Olympafrica Youth Ambassador Program

A Social Impact Assessment
This project has been made possible through the generous support of

Commonwealth Games Canada

A research report submitted by:

Dara Parker  Mamosetse Moteletsane  Rethabile Pelesana
Doreen Sakwa  Prince Kolane  Taole Ramarikhoane
Hape Polaki  Relebohile Makhaba  Thaisa Hlapane
Two years ago this month I lay in bed anxiously anticipating what the following two days might bring. July 15, 2003 marked the first day of the inaugural Olympic Youth Ambassador Program (OYAP) training conference; after months of preparation I was a kaleidoscope of emotions. Nervous, excited, worried that it all might fall apart, I was about to embark on an adventure, the ending of which I could not anticipate.

2003 was my first time in Africa and I began my experience unfamiliar with local customs and lifestyles. Sounds, smells and greetings constantly played with my senses as I was introduced to a new world different from anything I had previously experienced. Despite the immediate unfamiliarity, my feelings of bewilderment soon changed and four months into living in Lesotho I was slowly falling in love with the beautiful landscape, the passionate people, and the music of daily life.

Yet I was frustrated. Hired by Commonwealth Games Canada (CGC) to work with the Lesotho National Olympic Committee (LNOC), my mandate was to use sport as a tool for youth development. With a background in youth leadership and development, I found little opportunity for youth to contribute as leaders in Lesotho. With youth being the highest risk group for issues such as HIV/AIDS and drug and alcohol abuse, youth were not being provided the opportunity to prove themselves as solutions rather than problems.

The answer seemed simple enough. Why not train young people to take on the mandate that I had been given, providing them with a platform to not only develop leadership skills, but to share those skills with other youth? With little opportunity for part-time employment and virtually no facilities for youth in the country, young people possess a valuable asset, free time, yet few positive activities to invest in. By designing a youth volunteer program with the slogan “Youth Empowering Youth Through Sport”, I hoped to create an outlet for the positive energy youth can provide. And so OYAP was born.

The first training conference was a resounding success. Having selected 19 participants from over 65 applications through a rigorous interview process, the youth proved themselves to be worthy candidates. Trained in topics ranging from voluntarism to project planning, the two-day conference served as much more than simple skill development. The conference provided an opportunity for the youth to develop solid relationships among themselves while becoming empowered with the possibilities of being able to take action to make a positive impact on their community. At the end of two days 19 intelligent, motivated and committed youth were ready to take on the world, and have fun while doing it.

4 In 2005 the program changed its name to the Olympafrika Youth Ambassador Program, herein referred to as OYAP.
Two years later I have returned to Lesotho to re-visit the program that has stayed close to my heart since I left three months following the first conference. Since that time there have been two subsequent coordinators and OYAP has trained an additional 57 volunteers in Maseru and approximately 10 volunteers in each of the 10 districts. In addition to expanding to become a truly national structure, OYAP has initiated numerous programs unique within the country.

The first initiative started by the OYAP volunteers is an ongoing project with the Maseru City Council, referred to as the Central Park Project. This project is two-fold: (1) the volunteers are rehabilitating the physical appearance of the park by painting and repairing rusted and unused equipment, (2) OYAP is providing free sport activities on Saturdays for local youth. The response to this project has been incredible. Local youth will be found on the newly painted equipment throughout the day and the park is continually being reformed into a safe, reliable atmosphere where youth can come and play in a secure and comfortable environment. Youth are able to learn new movement activities and sports with OYAP ambassadors initiating and leading the activities, simultaneously developing their own leadership skills. This first project led to further OYAP initiatives.

One of the most popular projects, Girls On The Move, is a program designed to target 10 to 14 year old girls in order to promote sport for women at an early age. Every week girls are exposed to a new sport facilitated by OYAP volunteers. The girls are provided with free transportation to and from the local soccer arena where there are expert coaches teaching a new sport each week. The sports training is combined with general life skills information designed to facilitate personal growth and learning. After the girls have gone through the year long program they are rewarded with a graduation ceremony that showcases the new skills the girls have learned in front of friends and family.

OYAP ambassadors are also actively involved in a project called Mafube, which roughly translated means “the breaking of dawn.” This project focuses on street youth who are located in various areas of the city, whose days consist primarily of begging. OYAP ambassadors have been trained in Kicking AIDS Out, a program that teaches youth how to use sport as a tool for disseminating important information about HIV/AIDS. Through Mafube OYAP volunteers gather street youth and bring them to the Central Park where they work with them using various sports and games as a platform for teaching life skills. The street youth have responded enthusiastically to the program and as a result have also participated in other OYAP activities.

OYAP ambassadors are also trained in a powerful initiative called Kicking AIDS Out (KAO). Targeting youth, girls and women, KAO is an international network of organizations working together using sport and physical activity to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS and motivate behavioural change. Through educational games and activities, ambassadors are encouraged to discuss
issues that affect their lives and their communities. The program integrates sport and life skills through games, role playing, drama and other cultural and recreational activities, embodying the spirit of OYAP.

In addition to their own projects, OYAP also participates in various special events that take place across the country. For the past two years OYAP has participated in the National Cultural Festival in Morija. The ambassadors proudly dress in traditional clothing while demonstrating customary dances and games to the large crowd. OYAP has also been a significant component of the annual Olympic Day Run/Tree Planting event and recently played a large role in the international Queen’s Baton Relay event.

Lastly OYAP has strong relationships with various organizations in Lesotho such as Lesotho Planned Parenthood, Habitat For Humanity, Special Olympics and the various sports organizations. They continue to work in collaboration with their partners on events ranging from socio-dramas and construction, to fundraising for multiple initiatives.

At home in Canada I was excited to hear about the progress that our small, grass roots program had made in just over two years. It sounded impressive, so impressive in fact that I was eager to return to see for myself exactly how the program had grown and what was happening on the ground. One of the most exciting results was the fact that the program was now being managed entirely by local youth, with support from the LNOC. My original intention in creating OYAP was to render myself (and any international presence) unnecessary, and despite my desire to remain involved, I felt it was crucial that the Basotho youth have ownership of the program. I did however see an opportunity to return in a different capacity.

Currently undertaking my master's degree in Planning, with a focus on community development, I explored the possibility of returning to Lesotho to conduct a Social Impact Assessment (SIA) of OYAP. I was interested in using Participatory Action Research (PAR) in order to conduct the SIA; meaning that I would facilitate the assessment training the youth to be researchers, rather than acting as the outside expert. I contacted the LNOC and OYAP to gauge whether there was interest on their end in collaborating on the project. Upon being received enthusiastically I began to prepare for a summer research trip to Lesotho.

I spent June and July of 2005 in Lesotho, working with OYAP to facilitate the undertaking of an SIA. A self-selected group of 8 youth researchers volunteered to take the lead in the project, under the guidance of two youth research assistants that were hired. Integral to PAR is that the local community involved be completely in charge of the research project. In this vein the research team led every aspect of the assessment, from research design to data collection, to data analysis and the final report. One of the key components was determining
indicators which the group did as a collective through an iterative process. Decisions regarding the project were made collectively and my role was to facilitate the process leading to our final product.

In January of 2006 I returned to Lesotho with a polished draft of our final report, compiled from the written reports of the youth researchers. The youth had an opportunity to read and discuss the report in order to assess whether or not the completed product was representative of our research efforts. Feedback from the researchers resulted in critical changes prior to the final distribution increasing the credibility of the work. This final step was imperative in order to ensure that the work be accurate from both an ethical and a professional point of view.

The following is a summary of our collective findings in the words of the youth researchers themselves. My contribution has been to synthesize, format and edit eight different voices while providing technical writing expertise. However the writing is the voices of the youth themselves.

This project would not have been possible without the dedicated support of Commonwealth Games Canada (CGC). The staff at CGC are a committed, impassioned, and talented group of individuals who are making a difference in the lives of many. Their genuine commitment to local empowerment, combined with their willingness to take risks, has allowed the youth in Lesotho to find their own voices. Working in the field the sometimes intangible changes become glaringly obvious and I am deeply appreciative of the opportunity afforded to me by CGC. As any researcher working cross-culturally knows, financial support is only one of the necessary ingredients; personal support is equally important. I was fortunate enough to have both.

This project has been an informative and motivating experience. The highlight of my work with OYAP has always been the direct contact with the youth. The young people of Lesotho continue to impress me, while inspiring me to continue fighting to make their voices heard. Mahatma Gandhi once said, "If we are to reach real peace in this world... we shall have to begin with children." OYAP has proven this again and again over the last two years. This project is dedicated to future generations of OYAP ambassadors who will make a difference in the world if only presented with an opportunity to do so.

Thank you.

Dara Parker
B.A.H., M.A. (candidate)
2.0 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Rationale
The Olympafrica Youth Ambassador Program (OYAP) has been very active since it was formed in 2003. As the founder Ms. Dara Parker saw a need to look back and evaluate on what impact the projects have had on participants. This will help OYAP to improve or re-evaluate its structures and activities to ensure efficient and successful running of the programme. This research also aims to give OYAP sponsors an idea on how much work OYAP has done so far.

2.2 Background
The Olympafrica Youth Ambassador Programme, referred to as OYAP, was initiated in July 2003. It is a project of the Lesotho National Olympic Committee (LNOC) in cooperation with the Lesotho National Volunteer Commission (LNVC). The mission and mandate of OYAP is “Youth Empowering Youth Through Sport.”

OYAP has two main goals: (1) OYAP trains youth on organizing sports activities in order to use these sports activities as a platform to address social issues such as peer pressure, HIV/AIDS, drug and alcohol abuse and reproductive health, (2) OYAP activities also train volunteers on life skills, sports administration, project planning, volunteerism and leadership skills. The goal is that OYAP ambassadors will be able to organize various OYAP activities throughout the country and initiate their own projects.

Currently OYAP has 76 volunteers in Maseru and approximately 15 in each district of Lesotho. OYAP currently hosts a number of international programmes listed below:

- **Girls On The Move** (targets girls 10-14 years old introducing them to new sports weekly)
- **Kicking Aids Out** (uses sport and physical activity to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS)

OYAP has also initiated its own projects listed below:

- **Mafube** (engages street youth in sport and games, teaching life skills)
- **Meraka** (engages herd boys in sport and games, teaching life skills)
- **Orphan Charity Project** (collecting clothes and equipment for orphans)
- **Environmental Clean-up Project** (community clean-up initiatives)
- **Central Park Project** (rehabilitation of a public park and free drop-in sports programming)

Additionally OYAP participates in various activities and events around the country:

- **Habitat For Humanity volunteer days** (constructing houses)
- **Morija Arts and Cultural Festival** (demonstrating traditional games and dances)
- **Capacity building workshops** (facilitating peer learning on life skills)
• **Various sports initiatives** (assisting with games and tournaments)

These activities have been successfully carried out in Maseru and are currently being implemented in the other districts.

2.3 **Researchers**

A group of eight dedicated young OYAP volunteer researchers took part in the research project, facilitated by Dara Parker. The group was self-selected responding to an open call for participants. Two of the eight researchers (listed below) were hired to lead the project, holding the title of Research Assistant (RA). They were responsible for project design, data collection, data compilation and analysis, and writing the final report.

Rethabile Pelesana
Doreen Sakwa

The following six researchers were responsible for project design, data collection, data compilation and analysis. They contributed to the final report on a voluntary basis.

Thaisa Hlapane
Prince Kolane
Relebohile Makhaba
Mamosetse Moteletsane
Hape Polaki
Taole Ramarikhoane

2.4 **Acknowledgements**

Throughout this research process we worked with a countless number of people. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who sacrificed their time to speak with us and provide us with the information we needed. The researchers would like to acknowledge and extend their gratitude to the following organizations and people for their valued assistance in the completion of this project.

Commonwealth Games Canada
Canadian Consulate
Caesars Travel
Lesotho Sport and Recreation Commission
LNOC administrators
LNOC executive
Ministry of Gender, Youth, Sports and Recreation
OYAP executive
OYAP ambassadors in all the districts
OYAP program participants (Mafube, Girls On The Move)
Peace Corps
An idea was brought forward to design and conduct a research project in order to measure the impact of OYAP. Through the project the researchers hoped to have a realistic impression of what OYAP has done over the last two years in order to create suggestions for the future direction of the program.

In order to initiate the project a sign up sheet was posted in the LNOC office for members to volunteer to participate in the research. On June 27th, 2005 a one-day workshop took place in order to train the youth researchers in how to design a research project. There were ten participants originally involved in the project however 2 members were forced to withdraw due to school commitments.

The workshop resulted in creating a research question and strategies necessary for the research project. Various data collection methods were discussed and it was decided among the participants to use interviews and focus groups. The researchers were broken into two Youth Action Teams named YAT 1 and 2 respectively. Each team was to be led by an RA to be hired following the workshop. The researchers were extremely motivated to begin following the workshop. For the next six weeks they would explore the question: What is the impact that OYAP has had on their members and their communities?

The researchers proceeded to meet 3 times a week for the following 6 weeks in order to finalize the research design, arrange data collection, and complete the data compilation and analysis. The meetings provided space for feedback and assessment in order to modify the project as necessary. The regular meetings also provided a chance for the researchers to connect and share common problems or concerns.

One of the first tasks was to create a series of categories and indicators that would help determine the data collection and create a framework by which to assess the data collected. Dara began by holding an introductory workshop on the concept of using indicators. The researchers then brainstormed collectively to determine what kind of categories and criteria would be appropriate to measure our goals. After brainstorming each RA took the lead on compiling a draft list of indicators. These were brought back to the research team for discussion, facilitated by Dara. At the end of this process a final draft was compiled which the research team approved for use.

In attempting to assess the impact of OYAP the researchers decided to focus primarily on amassing data from the LNOC, OYAP ambassadors (both in Maseru and the outer districts), partner organizations, OYAP parents, the Ministry of

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5 Acronyms are listed at the end of the report.
6 The list of categories and indicators is located in the index.
Gender, Youth, Sports and Recreation, and OYAP project participants. These data points would assist in discovering what sort of relationships have been established with partner organizations, what the impression of OYAP is, and how OYAP is affecting the people they work for and with. The data collection was achieved through interviews, focus groups and questionnaires.

Following the successful completion of data collection the data was analysed by the researchers. The researchers used the previously determined categories of analysis and indicators to assess the data. The data was divided into informant groups (e.g. organizations, OYAP ambassadors) in order to be easily read and understood. All of the researchers were presented with unidentified data that they read and coded in order to assess it. The researchers were provided with a one-day training workshop in which to achieve this. The group worked together to achieve final statements through group consensus on each category presented.

The RA's and the facilitator Dara Parker were responsible for the writing in the final report. Those researchers who were willing and able contributed sections to the final report as well, however the ideas reflected are a product of six weeks of collaborative research across the country.

4.1 Projects and their Results

Since the inception of OYAP in 2003, the program has initiated numerous activities and projects, predominantly in Maseru. We therefore wanted to assess how the projects have impacted on the volunteers and project participants. We wanted to find out how often volunteers attended activities, whether they enjoyed taking part in them, personal gains achieved through the projects and what opportunities to facilitate activities were like.

**Strengths**

The majority of youth involved with the program expressed positive thoughts in regard to OYAP projects. Youth recognize that they have learned new skills such as leadership, communication, teamwork, event coordination, and fundraising, gaining professional experience. Youth learned more about HIV/AIDS leading them to instigate behavioural changes. Youth also acknowledged making new friends, decreasing drug and alcohol use as a result of having fun through alternative means, increasing personal creativity and self-esteem, and becoming more motivated to play sports. Youth enjoy travelling throughout Lesotho to participate in special events and meeting other youth throughout the country. Children involved in the projects described feelings of empowerment; girls specifically through gender focused projects. The concept of voluntarism is well received by the youth. Youth enjoy partnering with other organizations on projects.
Weaknesses

More resources are necessary for the projects, specifically sports equipment that has been promised but not delivered. Projects involving travel must be distributed among OYAP ambassadors equally. All ambassadors must have an opportunity to participate, as some ambassadors have not benefited as a result of not being involved. It is necessary to target both urban and rural areas. Some sports organizations are threatened by the projects infringing on their territory and drawing their volunteers to OYAP. Timing and attendance need to be improved for projects. Projects should be decentralized to all the districts. There is a lack of consistency as many projects never get off the ground.

4.2 Personal Growth and Enjoyment

In this category we aim to assess the impact that OYAP has had on the participants lifestyle, work or school, and whether they had gained any responsibilities. We also wanted to find out about attendance for activities and if ambassadors have created friendships or relationships through OYAP.

Strengths

OYAP has helped youth to grow physically, mentally, emotionally and intellectually while creating opportunities for personal achievements. This has been the most powerful impact of the program. OYAP ambassador’s behaviour and lifestyle have changed as a result of being involved in the program. Youth are now able to tackle different challenges that come along and make well-informed decisions. Youth are more educated and have chosen to help other youth abstain from destructive behaviour related to HIV/AIDS including sexual relations, alcohol and crime.

OYAP helps youth develop respect for their families and provides opportunities to meet important people. OYAP ambassadors have pride in their community. Their self-confidence, self-esteem is boosted. They have developed basic life skills and help each other in terms of living expenses. They know how to bring people together and make them happy. Most importantly, most entertainments are free of charge so OYAP and other members participate fully. There is too much fun in OYAP and this is good because youth understand messages which are important to them through fun and play. Ambassadors recognize that OYAP is important to its members.

Weaknesses

OYAP should be involved in many areas beyond sports. For twice more enjoyment there should be an OYAP office in order to increase attendance. Some ambassadors are unable to participate fully because of school commitments. In the outer districts there is interest in OYAP however ambassadors end up disinterested because they have nothing to do as a result of a lack of equipment to carry out their projects.
4.3 Accountability and Transparency

In this category we want to evaluate how leaders deal with volunteers and how people with responsibilities carry out their tasks and responsibilities. We also want to find out how informed the ambassadors are on activities, projects and general information about OYAP.

Strengths

OYAP leaders have a good understanding of the tasks and responsibilities at hand. Leaders are able to accomplish their work on time and they have created a good image for themselves. OYAP ambassadors have respect, honour, and are bringing awareness about OYAP to the schools. Some ambassadors say the leaders are doing their job very well.

Weaknesses

Ambassadors are not informed and the executive resolves issues independently without input from the program members, exuding a sense of superiority. Favouritism has created limited opportunities for ambassadors to facilitate workshops or access information. OYAP members discriminate on the basis of race, gender (e.g. older boys discriminated against) or class, providing opportunities to those who are from higher classes and misusing volunteers. Additionally there is stigma attached to other volunteer organizations that needs to be dismantled; OYAP needs to acknowledge the work of others.

Ambassadors report that they do not know about the OYAP leadership (e.g. committee members), noting that things should be made more transparent. There is no transparency in OYAP as members who are volunteers are getting paid yet there was no public disclosure of this information. Some ambassadors say people in positions of leadership do nothing. It is reported that OYAP is disorganised as the committees do not know their responsibilities and do not give out monthly reports on things that they do. OYAP leaders do not prepare things in time, especially the coordinator.

OYAP needs more accountability (e.g. constitution) in order to regulate funds. In the districts OYAP claims that their fundraising money was overused by the executive committee for its own travelling and food expenses. OYAP Maseru makes empty promises and does not treat the outer districts well. There was no election held for the National Executive Committee and other plans are not yet honoured as promised. Outer districts want to be provided with food when they come to any activity at Maseru. They complain that at OYAP gatherings some members engage in sexual relations, use exclusive language, drink alcohol and that disagreements could lead to fights.
4.4 Resources

In this category we want to discover what equipment is available, whether participants had access to learning opportunities and whether the projects had financial support. Additionally we want to learn about how well informed the ambassadors are about OYAP resources.

**Strengths**

Some ambassadors think resources are used well while noting that OYAP has a lot of money relative to other volunteer organizations. Some ambassadors say OYAP is good at acquiring resources from sponsors because of our projects, providing strong financial support. Some ambassadors report that the volunteers are being used properly and that the LNOC is not spending as much thanks to OYAP volunteers.

**Weaknesses**

When it comes to resources many members have no idea how they are used, though some suggest that they are used poorly. Resources exist but are not being maximized. Some say OYAP funds are still in the bank and are not benefiting the projects and the money has to benefit OYAP Community (Lesotho) also. To date no equipment has been bought, potentially spurring the sponsors to lose interest in funding OYAP. There should be more equipment available to be used by the participants.

Ambassadors emphasized the importance of OYAP having its own office. Ambassadors from the outer districts said they would like to be involved in the budget making. There is need for equipment for agricultural projects, items such as soccer balls, and equipment for other projects. Ambassadors require transport for Girls On The Move (TY); they also need ID's to identify membership in OYAP, T-shirts, certificates and condoms to distribute. Money must be allocated equally according to each district's needs. There should also be clear guidelines for the use of funds and resources as OYAP is being sponsored by different associations and organisations.

4.5 Awareness

In this category we want to measure how widespread OYAP is through both name recognition and demonstrated understanding of OYAP's mandate. We are also interested in discovering the general knowledge that exists surrounding projects run by OYAP.

**Strengths**

OYAP is known nationwide and globally because of its positive impact on the community and the ambassadors. Ambassadors are also known by other non-governmental organizations. OYAP projects such as Mafube and Girls On The Move are also recognized by the parents. Most ambassadors learned about
OYAP when it started and knew it dealt with sports. Other youth also want to join OYAP because it is still new. Town centres in the districts say OYAP is well known (though not necessarily in surrounding villages).

**Weaknesses**

Most associations and organisations know OYAP but only the name, not what it does and its objectives. OYAP still has to disseminate information to other associations on how it works. Many organizations have worked with Girls On The Move but not with OYAP directly, so they do not know exactly what is going on in OYAP. Some know only the founder of OYAP.

**4.6 Relationships with Associations/Organizations**

Here we choose to examine the existing relationships between the various sports organizations and NGO's that OYAP works with. In assessing the relationships we look at the general impression made by OYAP, the contribution towards activities run by OYAP partners, and the willingness to work with OYAP in the future.

**Strengths**

Almost every association and organization is willing to strengthen their relationship with OYAP. Those organizations who have not worked directly with OYAP but instead its projects are interested in learning about OYAP's work plan so that they can make use of OYAP. OYAP has worked with different organizations in terms of sponsorship and other activities. OYAP has had workshops with non-governmental organizations and subsequently collaborated to facilitate different sports events. The LNOC has been supporting OYAP with material needs.

The sports associations have provided fields for different sports, especially for Mafube kids so that they are able to play. Some ambassadors say OYAP has a great relationship with Habitat for Humanity. Organizations express that they are being provided with good help from OYAP ambassadors. Associations say that through their relationship with OYAP they have been able to implement different sports activities, including soccer. Some decided to work with OYAP because OYAP is able to organize food and transport for the ambassadors, even though they have invited us (Habitat For Humanity). Organizations say that OYAP members are hard workers.

**Weaknesses**

When working with organizations time scheduling and structural plans need to be improved. There is a lack of communication between the Ministry of Gender, Youth, Sports and Recreation and OYAP. Some organizations express that they would like OYAP to strengthen their relationship with them. Specific organizations have suggested that despite their formal relationship with OYAP,
ambassadors discriminate against them (Lesotho Planned Parenthood Association).

4.7 Social Issues

Given OYAP's mandate to use sport as a tool for peer education on social issues, it is important to examine whether or not youth are gaining knowledge surrounding issues such as HIV/AIDS, sexuality, and drug or alcohol abuse. It is also important to measure whether youth are increasing their general life skills through their involvement with OYAP.

Strengths

OYAP ambassadors are comfortable gaining knowledge about sensitive issues and are learning good behaviour. Some say that OYAP has changed the bad behaviour practised by the ambassadors because it occupies their time. Youth are able to deal with issues affecting their lives. Most ambassadors said they had met and learned to appreciate diversity in both sports and people's characters. Ambassadors said they are now well informed on HIV and are able to tackle the pandemic. It was suggested that OYAP is helping youth escape HIV/AIDS by keeping youth well informed about sexual behaviour.

Youth have gained hope about their futures having been provided a chance through OYAP. OYAP helps make young people strong so that they can avoid the pitfalls of adolescence that have affected others. Members who take part in activities have gained more skills and they are now free to express their needs. Some youth say that OYAP has a strong volunteer ethic that addresses the social issues that affect youth. In the outer districts the communities encourage youth to initiate projects for streetkids so that theft is reduced. Generally the youth in the districts are no longer committing steady crimes, instead they use OYAP effectively to bring about positive change to their villages.

Weaknesses

One ambassador suggested that volunteers join OYAP with different expectations and goals and that it creates problems.

4.8 Leadership and Equity

OYAP is headed by a paid coordinator and run through a national executive comprised of volunteers. Additionally there are local executives for each of the ten districts. This category seeks to measure the ability of the leaders to run the program and work with the volunteers successfully. Equity refers to the structures within the program that provide equal opportunities for the volunteers and project participants. It also refers to the treatment of the volunteers measuring mutual respect and equality.
Strengths

OYAP has provided the participants opportunity to learn life skills, enjoy sports and generally participate. Leaders are good motivators. Most ambassadors from the outer districts said the leadership is good but that the leaders should visit the districts more often. OYAP members are good leaders as they are available for everyone who would like to make use of them. OYAP ambassadors are considered dedicated and do things in accordance with plans and deadlines, meeting targets. OYAP is known for how they treat the ambassadors and they do not overuse them while reaching all goals and objectives.

Weaknesses

Some people said ambassadors are not treated well and that there is too much favouritism, that the leaders make poor decisions. Ambassadors suggested that the coordinator does not respect them and is bossy. Some people suggest that not all the volunteers are being given an opportunity to participate in projects or provided access to the resources, including the executive committee. Not all ambassadors are provided with opportunities to participate in high profile events. OYAP still needs to practise gender equality providing women with an equal chance to partake in projects and activities.

Most ambassadors said they would like to be more involved in decision-making. It was suggested that the leaders improve on team spirit. OYAP leaders need to improve their involvement in decisions happening in their own country. Many ambassadors said that the OYAP coordinator is not doing his job properly because of a lack of leadership qualities. Ambassadors are frustrated that no project can be carried out without his presence. Some ambassadors suggested he be trained so that he can be more focused.

It was suggested that leaders are not trustworthy and that they have different views or stories about OYAP. A leadership rotation should be introduced so that people are not permanently on the executive. There should be more leadership training so that the leadership is decentralized to all the 10 districts. The structure of OYAP needs to be revisited and restructured by the present leaders. The leaders should introduce one consistent mode of communication between the leaders and the ambassadors. This could be achieved either by writing letters or talking by telephone in order to improve communication, as ambassadors are not informed about activities. In order to improve the projects there must be follow-up from the leaders.

4.9 Outer Districts

Recently OYAP decentralized from Maseru into all ten districts in Lesotho. This category intends to measure the process of decentralization and the progress that individual districts have made providing insight into various barriers experienced by the districts.
Strengths

The ambassadors express enthusiasm over OYAP moving to the outer districts.

Weaknesses

The major problem concerning OYAP districts is that there has been significant difficulty concerning communication and little information is passed on to the districts. Most Maseru ambassadors know nothing about OYAP in other districts. Poor communication has left the districts feeling hurt and left out because they do not know how things are being run. The districts would like feedback on the reports being sent to Maseru. OYAP districts are still growing so they need regular visits in order to be provided with assistance. The outer districts need to be included when the budget is being drawn and they want them to have a permanent office so that thing will run smoothly. Information about the upcoming activities should be disseminated in all 10 districts and participants should take part.

Ambassadors from other districts said OYAP Maseru made empty promises and did not answer their proposals. OYAP Maseru needs to initiate projects in all the districts and should share resources (e.g. equipment, games) equally so as to prove its sustainability. The outer districts want to be involved in budget planning and want t-shirts. They did not get funds because they heard that funds were frozen due to lack of reporting, they have lost morale, they need assistance for office equipment, and they need to be trained about conflict management. The outer districts would like to be involved in the election of the National Executive committee. The outer districts need OYAP Maseru to introduce them formally to the district administrator and sports organizers. Some suggest that OYAP must be expanded to rural areas and not just the district town centres.

4.10 Communication

Communication refers to the dissemination of information within OYAP itself. This includes between the leaders of the program, the volunteers, the LNOC administration, and the project participants.

Strengths

It was suggested that OYAP ambassadors have good relationships with the LNOC leaders and the participants of OYAP projects.

Weaknesses

Most ambassadors said communication is not good and should be improved. Volunteers from other districts said there has been bad communication with Maseru and that messages are not delivered on time to them regarding activities. Communication is a very big problem in OYAP as members are not informed on
time, and sometimes they end up completely uninformed. Some suggested that OYAP in the districts does not communicate with other associations in the districts. People generally asked for access to the OYAP work plan.

5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Having compiled and analysed the data collected, the researchers brainstormed collectively to generate recommendations regarding some of the challenges that OYAP faces. The following recommendations are sorted according to the categories of analysis created by the researchers, though it should be noted that they are not listed in order of priority.

5.1 Projects and their Results
1. OYAP projects such as Girls On The Move, Mafube, Drama Project and Meraka should be introduced and implemented in the outer districts.
2. The projects should be introduced in the schools, creating a solid partnership in order to facilitate the projects.
3. The National Executive in cooperation with Lesotho project coordinator should oversee the implementation of projects in the districts working with the district Executives.
4. Each district should elect a project coordinator who will work with the executive committee. The project coordinator will be responsible for ensuring that there are consistent volunteers to work on each project.
5. All OYAP ambassadors in each district should be trained on the different projects and activities in order to play an active role in the projects.
6. Ambassadors should be provided with the opportunity to come up with a monthly routine on running the projects so that every single member is given the opportunity to take part in all projects.
7. The project coordinator will provide a monthly report to the Executive committee that will in turn be delivered to the OYAP Lesotho project coordinator and OYAP National Executive Committee.
8. Districts should also be encouraged to create their own projects and activities that are unique to their district.

5.2 Personal Growth and Enjoyment
1. OYAP should continue to provide opportunities for youth leadership and empowerment, building on their previous good work.
2. The most important thing that should be done is to encourage teamwork among the ambassadors in order to promote participation in OYAP programs.
3. Sports teams/tournaments between the districts should be encouraged as a regular team-building activity.
4. Mini-teams should be created for graduates of Girls On The Move.
5. Team building events should take part every three months during school holidays. In the past events have included: car washes, treasure hunting and shoe shining, however new ideas should be encouraged.
5.3 Accountability and Transparency

1. All ambassadors should be provided with opportunities to be involved in decision-making in order to have ownership over the direction of the program.

2. The officially elected positions including the National Executive Committee, the Maseru Executive Committee, and the district Executive Committees should be listed in the office so that all the ambassadors are aware of who the officers are.

3. Given that the majority of volunteers are at school during the year, meetings should be done every three months during the holidays, in order to increase attendance.

4. There has been concern in the districts over not being involved in the election and therefore lacking representation for their districts. In order to accommodate the OYAP districts, the OYAP National Executive committee should be elected at the next Annual General Meeting (AGM).

5. Upon electing a proper National Executive Committee, the committee should work with the other district Executives and ambassadors to write an OYAP constitution.

6. Ambassadors who have taken on responsibilities to run projects and programs should provide monthly reports on their activities. This will ensure that programs run effectively.

7. If for any reason ambassadors are not able to carry out their duties, they must report to their respective Executives or face disciplinary action by the National Executive.

8. A monthly work plan should be established in order to provide all the ambassadors with opportunities to carry responsibility. This will provide ambassadors with experience in running activities so that they feel part of OYAP and so that leaders do not remain in positions permanently while other competent volunteers are available.

9. Rules and regulations relating to OYAP matters should be decided upon by all members at the AGM so that all districts and their volunteers are clear on what is expected of them.

5.4 Resources

1. The AGM should be used as an opportunity for ambassadors from all the districts to create the yearly budget.

2. The Executive members in each district will be responsible for making sure that their component of the budget is carried out successfully.

3. Each district should submit monthly reports so that the OYAP Coordinator and National Executive can oversee the proper implementation of the budget. Failure to do so will result in a disciplinary meeting held by the OYAP National Executive where disciplinary action can be decided on.

4. Each district must be encouraged not to depend wholly on funds that OYAP has but should also create their own income generating projects.
that can help sustain their activities. Examples of projects include: agriculture or fishing projects that require basic equipment but not funds.

5. In order to manage these projects the districts are required to send monthly reports on their income generating activities and clearly state how they are using their income to benefit OYAP projects and themselves.

6. Ambassadors from other districts need to be trained on how to approach sponsors in their districts. Training should be done separately after ambassadors have become members of OYAP. The training could potentially be combined with training on projects.

5.5 Awareness

1. OYAP should make more of an effort to explain their mandate to their partner organizations, in order to increase public awareness.

2. Districts should be provided with training on how to create awareness in their region. One example would be to use traditional village meetings with the chief to speak to residents about OYAP objectives and plans.

3. OYAP should collaborate with local media, making use of local radio programming to promote the programme.

4. OYAP should encourage parent involvement to gain their support and participation in events.

5.6 Relationships with Associations/Organizations

1. Partner associations and organizations should be provided with a copy of the OYAP work plan in order to facilitate better implementation of projects.

2. OYAP should take the initiative to host various sporting events in order to strengthen the relationships with sports associations and organizations.

5.7 Social Issues

1. OYAP should continue to provide opportunities for youth to increase their knowledge (especially on HIV/AIDS) and expose them to diversity.

2. OYAP should continue to hold workshops that introduce ambassadors to new topics providing information and networking opportunities.

5.8 Leadership and Equity

1. All reports written by elected leaders should be made available to the ambassadors in order to ensure strong leadership.

2. A structure must be created in order to ensure that opportunities are distributed amidst the volunteers in an equal manner.

3. A logbook of ambassador volunteer hours should be created in order to reward ambassadors with opportunities according to how many hours they have contributed, thus creating an unbiased standard.

4. Information must be passed to all the districts in a timely and consistent manner in order to ensure equal opportunity.

5. A workshop should be held for the coordinator and the leaders in the program on who to work with the ambassadors to create positive relationships.
6. OYAP leaders should make an effort to get to know the ambassadors and their families personally, in order to increase participation.

7. A suggestion box should be placed in the OYAP office for anonymous comments.

8. Ongoing recruitment of new ambassadors should take place to promote volunteer motivation.

5.9 Outer Districts
1. Facilitators who first trained OYAP districts should be made responsible for staying in touch with district Executives. Alternatively a representative in Maseru should be named for each district.

2. Regular visits to the districts should be implemented every 3 months in order to discuss relevant issues face to face. Formal reports from the visiting representatives will follow the visits.

3. The districts should be awarded budgets in order to carry out the successful implementation of OYAP projects.

4. The districts should be provided with sports equipment in order to implement projects. The equipment will be the responsibility of the district Executive who should create a system of accountability.

5. Districts should be rewarded upon successfully implementing projects.

6. Through the funding there should be a professional drawing up of how the money will be used for buying of equipments.

5.10 Communication
1. Volunteers should be well informed about activities with at least two weeks advance notice in order to ensure that they have time to prepare and notify and receive permission from their parents in order to participate.

2. For all events there should be letters sent home to the parent in order to notify them of official events taking place.

3. OYAP should have a three-month work plan that lists all the activities and details of events taking place. This work plan should be displayed at all times in the office so that all volunteers who visit the office will have an opportunity to learn about OYAP activities.

4. The National Executive should be responsible for notifying the outer districts every month about what is happening in OYAP.

5. Given that the majority of ambassadors attend school there should be school representatives elected that are responsible for disseminating information among their OYAP peers. This could happen through monthly meetings at school, with the flexibility of the group to decide what works best.

6. The annual OYAP outing for volunteers should be planned in advance so that volunteers can prepare themselves financially. The outing should rotate throughout the districts every year so that the host district can decide on the venue for the outing.
6.0 CONCLUSION

OYAP is only two years old yet it has already successfully achieved its goals. The program has grown from a group of 19 people based in Maseru to over 150 ambassadors across the country proving not only its sustainability but also its popularity. It has also gained recognition from other organisations such as the Ministry of Gender, Youth, Sport and Recreation; most importantly it has been recognized by the youth of Lesotho.

Through the successes of the last two years it has not always been easy trying to get youth from different backgrounds, with different goals and expectations, to work together. It has also not been easy to establish OYAP in all 10 districts of Lesotho. It is because of OYAP’s unique concept of ‘youth empowering youth through sport’ that it has gained the respect and support of many communities in Lesotho. The research was intended to measure the impact of the program on the people involved and their communities.

OYAP has indeed impacted positively on the lives of the majority of ambassadors who have gained life skills, leadership qualities, project planning abilities and unique opportunities to connect with other youth across the country. Ambassadors have expressed their willingness to continue taking part in OYAP activities as long as progress is made on suggested recommendations.

The mistakes and problems that have been highlighted throughout the research indicate that some improvements should be made. In order to achieve this it will require positive attitudes and cooperation from both the ambassadors and their leaders to make OYAP an even better program for the youth of Lesotho. We hope that this research will be a testament to the various successes achieved by OYAP while simultaneously working to increase awareness about the program.

7.0 FACILITATOR’S NOTE

Upon beginning this project in May of 2005, I did not know what our final product would look like. Choosing to use PAR as a methodology when conducting evaluations is considered a risky venture. However by not only involving the OYAP youth, but by having them control every aspect of the research project, the result is by all means a much more accurate, genuine and influential document.

I am extremely proud of what was generated from a group of researchers with experience varying from none at all, to very minimal. Once again the youth of Lesotho have proved that if given opportunity, they will not only rise to the challenge, but supersede all expectations. It is our hope that this report will not be shelved alongside other dusty piles of information, but rather be used to strengthen and improve OYAP, a program central to the lives of many Basotho youth.
From our research it is clear that the strongest aspects of the programme are the personal growth, enjoyment, and increased awareness of social issues that the ambassadors experience. Ambassadors repeatedly told the researchers that OYAP had changed their lives, teaching them new skills and increasing their confidence. This is no small point, as all of us working for social justice understand, half the battle is believing in the possibility of change.

Yet OYAP is currently facing challenges that will require a concentrated effort to overcome. With the creativity and perseverance that exists in OYAP, this should not prove to be a complicated task. The researchers collectively agreed that the 3 priorities for OYAP should be:

1. Communication
2. Leadership (accountability)
3. Decentralization

In tackling these three large tasks, OYAP will be able to improve the legitimacy that it holds not only among the ambassadors, but also in Lesotho itself. To do so will not require drastic changes on the part of the program; rather it will require dedication, perseverance and commitment on the part of the leaders. Positive change does not come easily, it must be worked at. The recommendations generated by the researchers are not groundbreaking, however they are solid, rational suggestions that can be implemented immediately.

OYAP needs to improve on communication within the program, developing structures and systems that will ensure information is widely available. Ambassadors need to be held accountable for their activities in order to promote responsibility and to ensure legitimacy for future projects. Lastly OYAP needs to continue to support the outer districts to build upon the solid foundation in Maseru.

OYAP is a unique program that deserves to be commended for the innovative and powerful work they are doing in Lesotho. It is now time to take the program to the next level to ensure its long-term sustainability. Upon implementing the recommendations detailed in this report, OYAP will further strengthen an already fantastic community development program. OYAP will continue to serve as a strong national platform for youth across Lesotho.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORIES</th>
<th>INDICATORS</th>
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| Awareness                        | • Recognition of name  
• Are members well known  
• Knowledge of projects |
| Results with projects            | • People participating in projects  
• Demonstrated learning  
• Personal enjoyment |
| Relationships with Associations/Organizations | • Willingness to work with OYAP  
• General impression of OYAP  
• Resources contributed |
| Social Issues                    | • Volunteer increased knowledge  
• Comfortable with diversity  
• Behavioural changes |
| Transparency                     | • Volunteers are informed  
• Accountability of responsibilities |
| Leadership                       | • Shared decision making  
• Acknowledgement of members contributions  
• Supportive and motivational |
| Personal Growth                  | • Behavioural changes in lifestyle  
• Personal advancement in work or school  
• Demonstrated responsibility |
| Outer Districts                  | • Communication with OYAP Maseru  
• Resources from office  
• Initiation of projects |
| Resources                        | • Participants access to learning opportunities  
• Financial support for projects  
• Equipment available |
| Projects                         | • Equal opportunity to facilitate  
• Consistent attendance/participation  
• Self-identified personal gain  
• Communication between participants/facilitators |
| Personal Enjoyment               | • Attendance  
• Friendships/relationships developed  
• Willingness to participate |
| Accountability                   | • Respect of leaders  
• Understanding of responsibilities  
• Tasks accomplished |
| Communication                    | • Awareness of OYAP events/projects  
• Comfort speaking to leaders  
• Equipment available |
| Equity                           | • Equal opportunity to participate  
• Open communication  
• Mutual respect |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CGC</td>
<td>Commonwealth Games Canada</td>
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<tr>
<td>GOTM</td>
<td>Girls On The Move</td>
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<tr>
<td>HIV/AIDS</td>
<td>Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome</td>
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<td>KAO</td>
<td>Kicking Aids Out</td>
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<td>LNOC</td>
<td>Lesotho National Olympic Committee</td>
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<td>Lesotho National Volunteer Commission</td>
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<td>LEFA</td>
<td>Lesotho Football Association</td>
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<td>LEDASA</td>
<td>Lesotho Dancesport Association</td>
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<td>LGA</td>
<td>Lesotho Gymnastics Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>OYAP</td>
<td>Olympafrica Youth Ambassador Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAR</td>
<td>Participatory Action Research</td>
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<td>SOL</td>
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<tr>
<td>RA</td>
<td>Research Assistant</td>
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<td>YAT</td>
<td>Youth Action Team</td>
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