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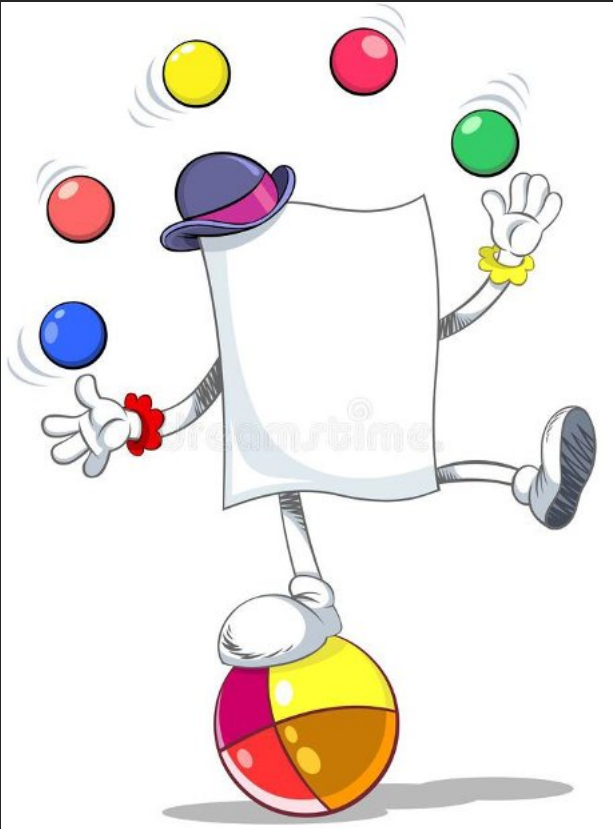
Pilot study NWU Science shop project: Mobilising Unemployed Youth as Community Assets

REDUCING THE EDUCATIONAL DIVIDE IN A SOUTH AFRICAN TOWNSHIP

NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY

Lesley Wood & Bibi Bouwman

Project Overview



- ❑ Led by North-West University with township NGOs, utilizing CBPR

- ❑ Complementary education, youth employability, and social inclusion

Timeframe: February 2023 – December 2025

- ❑ Community-based research (CBR) project mobilising NEET youth as community assets

SDG Alignment

- **SDG 4 (Quality Education)**
- **SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being),**
- ✓ **SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth)**
- ✓ **SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and**
- ✓ **SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals),**
with additional contextual alignment to SDGs 1, 5, and 16.





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Methodology – CBPR / PALAR

Participatory Action Learning and Action Research (PALAR)

Co-creation with NEET youth, NGOs, and researchers

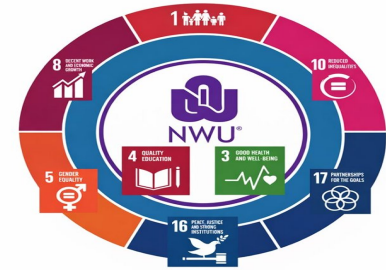
Transformative, inclusive research paradigm

Trust-building and community ownership

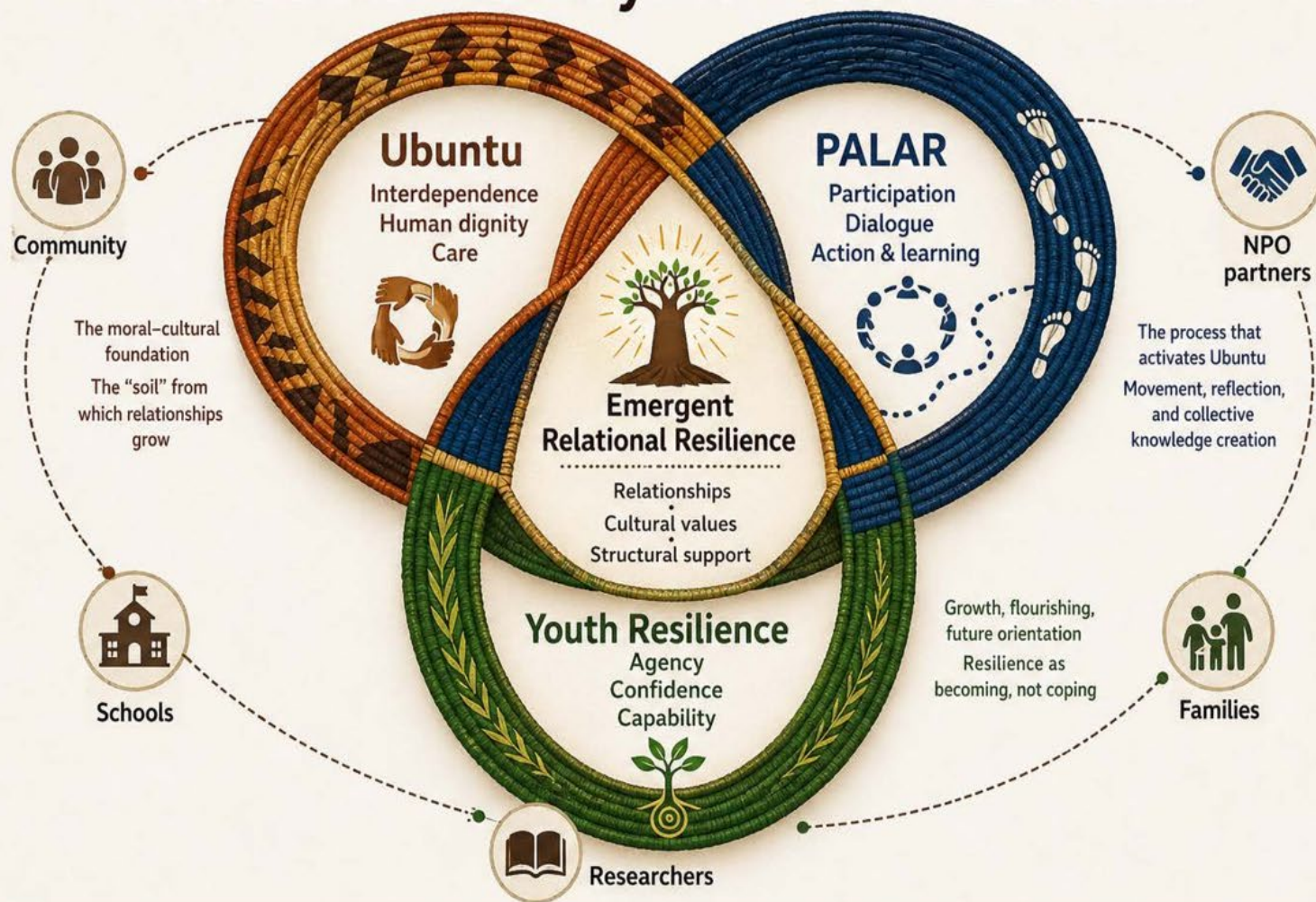


Participatory Tools

- ❑ Workshops and focus groups
- ❑ Digital storytelling , drawing and photovoice
- ❑ Observation and community mapping
- ❑ Skits and dramatization
- ❑ Creative outputs and peer facilitation
- ❑ AI-supported survey tool (SenseMaker)



Relational Pathways to Youth Resilience



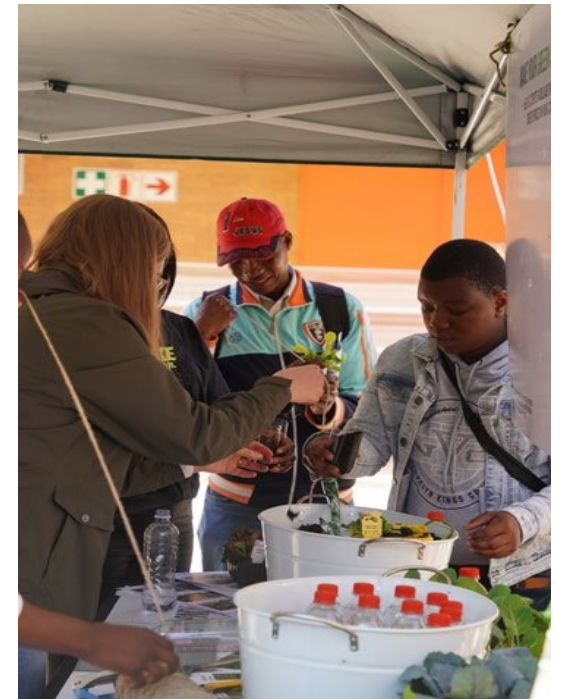
An Ubuntu-informed PALAR process creates relational spaces in which youth resilience emerges through shared dignity, participation, and collective support.



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Trust and Engagement

- **Active ongoing long-term trust-building, honest respectful conversations and partnerships**
- **Open communication channels**
- **Monthly reports and reflection meetings**
- **Ongoing workshops and interventions**



From Learning to Livelihood, co-creation of new strategies	Community engagement standing in their own communities
Financial benefits and employment	Confidence, self-image, hope and agency
Cultural integration	Employment, entrepreneurship, and training uptake Economic revival patterns observed SDGs: 8, 1, 4
Empowerment, formal partnerships and further work with the university	Skills → confidence → action pathway

Navigating systems and creating pathways

Access to services - “Helping people with Home Affairs appointments.”

Employment readiness - “Started receiving interview invitations.”

Career direction - PI2 - My drawing is titled “After Matric.” This picture shows me after finishing matric — I didn’t see the importance of furthering my studies at first. I just wanted to finish school and stay at home. My sister introduced me to the campus and told me that the team there could help me apply to institutions. During the process, I met many people and learned about opportunities I didn’t know existed. I realised that **every person should have goals and be driven.**

What the Data Confirms

- Trust takes time and yields emotional growth
- Youth agency increased through participation
- Skills development links to livelihood action
- CBPR effectiveness empirically validated



Voices from the Community – Youth Quotes

“I didn’t believe in myself before, but now I know I can build my future.”

“This project showed me that my story matters and that I have something to give.”

“I learned how to write my CV and now I’m not scared to apply for jobs.”

“We are helping other young people, so they don’t struggle like we did.”

“I found my purpose here – now I want to help my community grow.”

Change in attitudes as project progressed

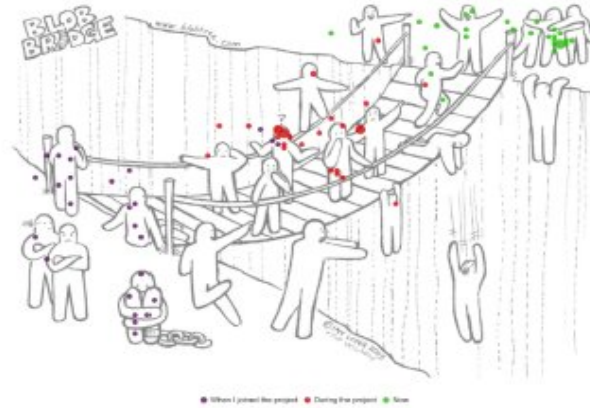


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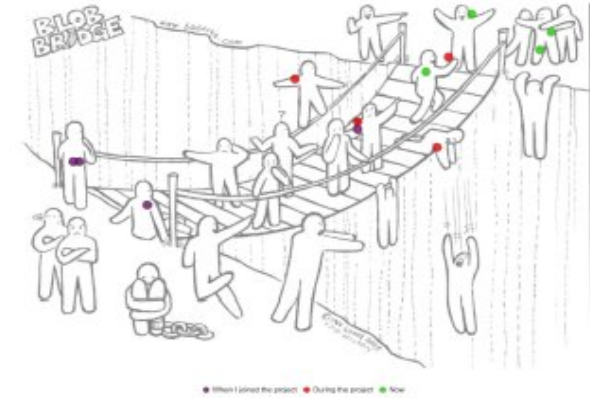
ALL



Participants (NEETs)



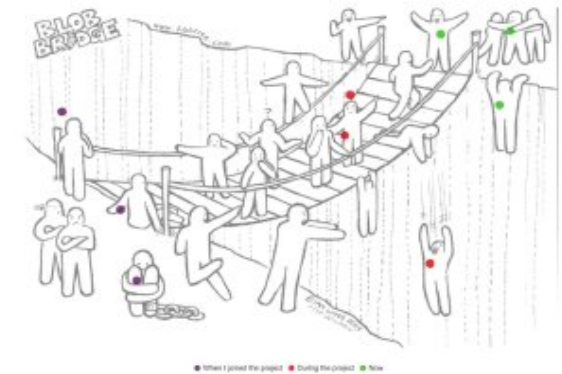
NGO



NWU Academic Staff



NWU Support Staff



SenseMaker Visual Insight – Emotional Journey

**Key Pattern: Shift from
overwhelm to pride and
accomplishment**

**Validation of trust-building and
emotional growth**

**SDGs: 3 (Well-being), 4
(Education)**

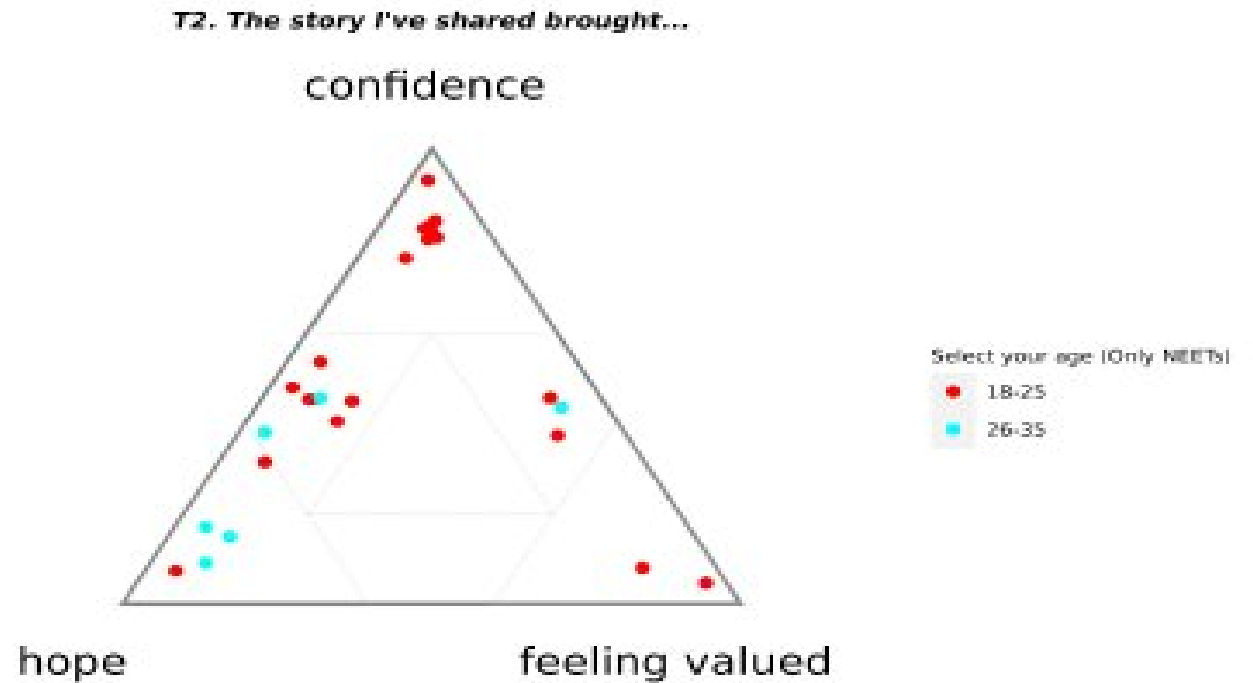
**SenseMaker triads: Confidence vs
Hope vs Feeling Valued, see next
slides.**

Confidence vs Hope vs Feeling Valued

Key Pattern: Shift from overwhelm
to pride and accomplishment

Validation of trust-building and
emotional growth

SDGs: 3 (Well-being), 4 (Education)



6 n/N/A = 3 filter n = 26 %age = 72% filter N/A = 0 μ = L:30 T: 56 R: 14

Agency and Action

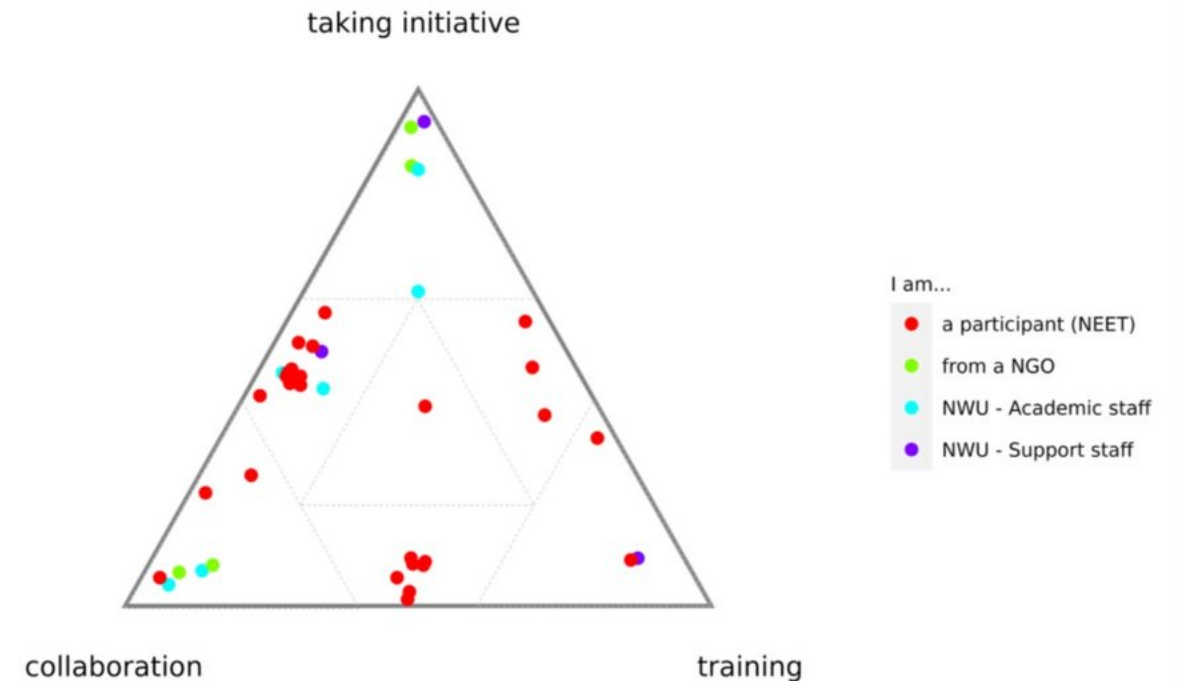
Learning vs Initiative vs Support

Key Pattern: Skills acquisition linked to increased agency

Pathway: Learning → Confidence → Livelihood Action

SDGs: 8 (Decent Work), 1 (No Poverty), 4 (Education)

T5. In your story, ability to act come from...



19 nN/A = 0 filter n = 39 %age = 100% filter N/A = 0 μ = L:48 T: 33 R: 19

Dissolving of researcher- researched boundaries



Participants described a shift from uncertainty and passivity to active, **engaged contributors**. The programme was not something *done to them*, but something they **co-created**. Participants highlight **learning from each other**, not simply from facilitators:

“The moment I got to learn from other people... we have different perspectives” (I2).

Several mentioned transferring skills to others in their communities, positioning them as knowledge holders. **The research enabled fluid roles, where youth became teachers, facilitators, mentors, dissolving the boundary between researcher and researched.**

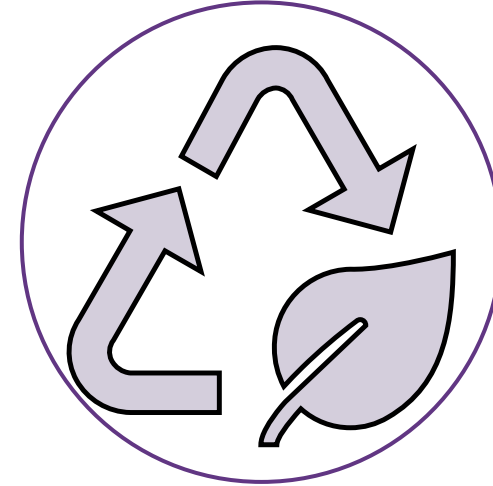
Social and environmental relations



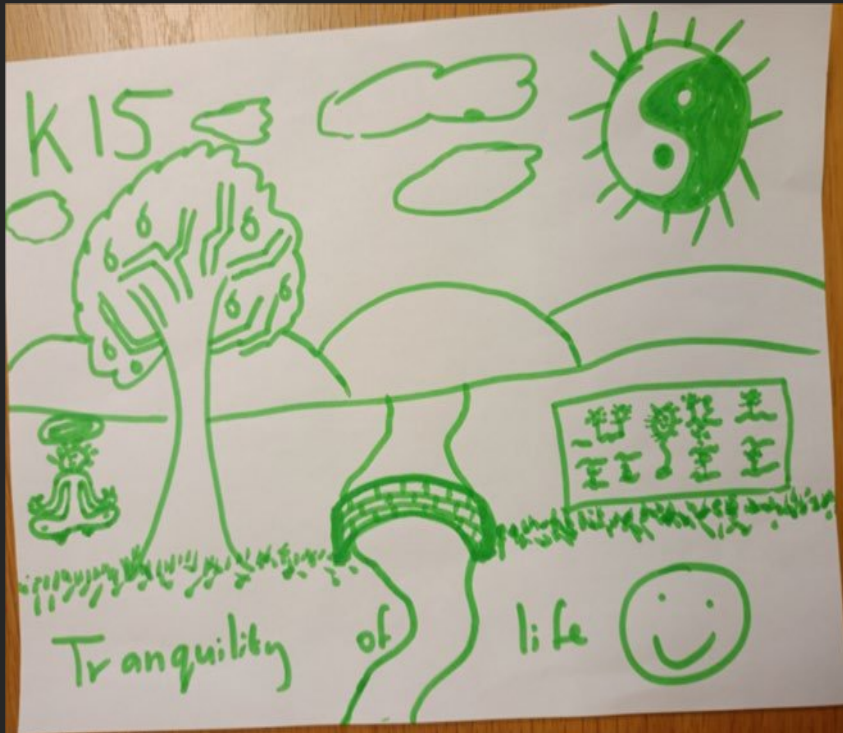
SOCIAL INCLUSION
– “People see us as the ‘angels’ for the youth”



SENSE OF AGENCY
– “We can create change anytime”



ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS
– “When I see litter now, I pick it up”.



Challenges and Lessons Learnt



NGO leadership gaps—irregular communication, inconsistent participation, weak reporting, and one instance of unethical behaviour required adaptive management, stronger vetting, and capacity building.

Youth recruitment and retention fluctuations—participant dropouts often reflected positive progression (employment/study) but required flexible recruitment and ongoing mentorship.

Resource constraints—limited access to devices, connectivity, and robotics kits hindered some training components.

Complexity of multi faculty coordination—while enriching, cross faculty involvement required tighter planning, clearer role definitions, and more consistent alignment.

Dynamics of power and communication—lecture-style sessions and academic language initially alienated NEETs. Simplifying facilitation, using plain language, and **prioritising dialogue** significantly improved engagement

The image displays three hand-drawn posters, each representing a stage in a personal transformation journey. The first poster, titled 'Improvise, Adapt, Overcome', depicts a caterpillar with a segmented body in various colors (yellow, green, orange, blue, red) and a small face, crawling on a branch. The second poster, titled 'Caterpillar to Butterfly', shows a caterpillar on the left and a large, colorful butterfly (yellow, orange, green) on the right, with the text 'Caterpillar is a changed caterpillar' written below. The third poster, titled 'Blossom', features a tree with green leaves and pink blossoms growing out of a pink pot, with the text 'Blossom' written in large pink letters. Each poster is framed by a black border.



Strengthen NGO governance and accountability, including **onboarding** processes, **capacity-building**, and formalised **reporting frameworks**.

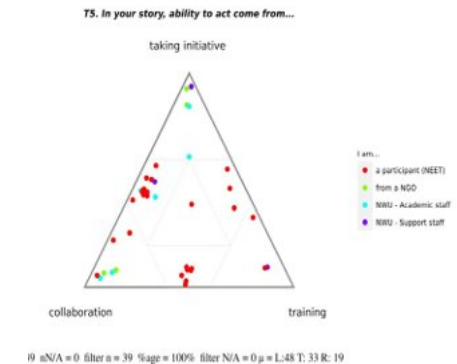
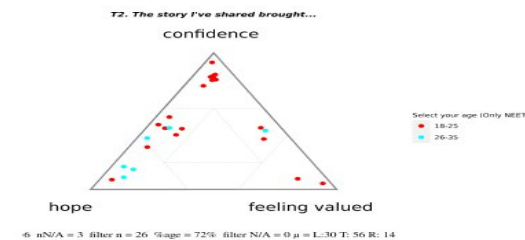
Maintain **flexible recruitment models** that acknowledge the fluid realities of NEET youth pathways.

Continue PALAR-based evaluation and reflection to sustain learning, trust-building, and shared ownership.

Potential Strategy and Conclusion

CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING KEY STRATEGIES:

- Training and workshops beyond the current partners with continued funding - training the trainers, formal training of selected leaders
- Public awareness and capacity building
- Policy and institutional support- at NWU continue with the Science shop as a Living Lab / CBPR
- Capacity building for marginalised groups
- Collaboration and partnerships
- Leadership and governance development
- Integration into education
- Technology and digital literacy
- Trust and cultural sensitivity
- Sustainability and resource mobilisation



Acknowledgements



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SIYAKHULA SIBASHA
SCIENCE SHOP.



**science, technology
& innovation**

Department:
Science, Technology and Innovation
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



SAASTA

South African Agency for Science
and Technology Advancement

Dankie -Thank you-Grazie- Obrigado- Gracias- Merci-Mersi- Natote- Zikomo- Danke-Bedankte-Asante

