

The Perceived Value of the “More Than” Process for Social Cohesion: A Case Study from Touws River, Western Cape, South Africa

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Abstract

Touws River, a once prosperous town for the rail line between Cape Town and Johannesburg that ran through it, suffered financial and social decline after the railway closed in the 1980s. The MoreThan#MeerAs project, a project aimed at facilitating social cohesion, was started in the town in 2021. The MoreThan#MeerAs NGO reframes perceptions by encouraging connection and creativity through inclusion. The aim of this paper is to describe the reflections of participants in this community development project on the history of the town and hopes for its future. The study was qualitative, adopting a phenomenological design, the sample made up of 23 participants. Semi-structured focus group discussions provided data. The participants, all members of the community, reported struggling with poor service delivery and a lack of jobs. Despite these challenges, they did express hope, longed for community and wanted to make a difference. The MoreThan#MeerAs project gave the participants courage to challenge their circumstances. The findings suggest



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substantial financial, social and structural investment is needed to secure a future for Touws River and similar towns. For this to happen, multiple stakeholders need to be involved.

Keywords: Touws River; social cohesion; community development; inequalities; More Than Process; MoreThan#MeersAs

Introduction

Inequality influences economic growth and the distribution of wealth and feeds into power asymmetries that can jeopardise democratisation, trigger conflict and entrench chronic poverty challenging community development (UNU-WIDER 2021). While global inequality fell towards the end of the twentieth century, inequality within South Africa has been steadily rising since the start of this century to the extent that it has become a prevailing policy concern of many countries and in all multilateral agencies (UNU-WIDER 2021).

Inequalities persist throughout the continent. Some of the most unequal countries are found in this region (The Guardian 2017). South Africa is generally agreed to be the most unequal country in the world (Harmse 2013). Whether measured in terms of income, wealth or living standards, most of the economic benefits of the country are concentrated in the hands of a small proportion of the population (McKeever 2023). Studies show that economic growth has stagnated in South Africa and half the population continues to live in poverty while inflation remains high and the unemployment rate continues to climb (Dagume 2021; Francis and Webster 2019; Gumede 2021).

While the gap between rich and poor is well documented, it is economic inequalities that remain reflected in terms of equality (Makgetla 2020). Non-economic inequalities such as gender bias, variable access and quality of education, access to and provision of healthcare services, prevalence of social inequalities, violence and opportunities for social participation are often overlooked (Ataguba, Akazili and McIntyre 2011).

Many of the inequalities in South Africa were inherited following almost five decades of oppression under the apartheid government (Bhorat and Van der Westhuizen 2012; Ntuli and Kwenda 2013; World Bank 2019a; 2019b). Post-1997 governments have faced the challenge of transforming the economy, but evidence of gross inequality persists 30 years into democracy (Bhorat and Van der Westhuizen 2012; Mdingi and Ho 2023). These inequalities extend beyond the economy: South Africa is listed on the Human Development Index (HDI) as 114 out of 189 (Statista 2022). The HDI measures human development based on income, education and health factors and can serve as an indicator of inequality between various population groups; the closer the value is to one from zero, the bigger the gross inequality. South Africa's HDI value for 2019 is 0.709 (Statista 2022). According to Speer, Jackson and Peterson (2001), when inequality increases, it undermines the social fabric within communities and results in greater

social isolation and reduced participation and trust in the community, which in turn affects social cohesion (Braaten 1991).

The government defines social cohesion as the degree of social integration, inclusion and shared harmony in communities and between individuals (Department of Arts and Culture 2012). Braaten (1991) breaks the relational part of social cohesion into mutual relationships between individuals who can help an individual be who they want to be. Georgi et al. (2016) propose a theoretical framework for social cohesion which, although Western in design, offers a useful lens for exploration along three dimensions: resilient social relations (social networks, trust in people, acceptance of diversity); positive emotional connectedness between the community and its members (identification, trust in institutions, perception of fairness) and a focus on the common good (solidarity and helpfulness, respect for social rules, civic participation).

Many communities in South Africa are experiencing HDI-associated inequalities, including the rural town of Touws River, situated in the Western Cape province. Touws River was established in 1877 along the direct railway line between Cape Town and Johannesburg. In 2011, it had a population of 8 126 people (Census SA). Until the 1980s, the railway was central to the town's economy, and, for a period, Touws River experienced great prosperity (Investec Online 2023). But a risk assessment of its economy by Stellenbosch University reported that the withdrawal of the railway in the 1980s resulted in the decline and then the total collapse of the local economy (Stellenbosch University Risk Assessment 2015). Since then, the community has struggled to revive its economy with extremely limited resources. An estimated 85% of residents do not earn an income (Investec Online 2023), resulting in a high prevalence of socio-economic challenges such as unemployment, poverty, gangsterism and substance abuse (Stellenbosch University Risk Assessment 2015).

MoreThan#MeerAs in Touws River

The MoreThan project (which is MeerAs in Afrikaans, and thus referred to as the MoreThan#MeerAs project) was introduced to the community through a partnership between MoreThanMeerAs, a non-profit company and the Breede Valley Association of and for Persons with Disabilities (BVAPD). BVAPD has provided developmental social work services in the community for about 30 years through the implementation of various programmes aimed at mothers and children. It became clear, however, that the community needed various forms of social support and empowerment that were outside the remit and services offered by BVAPD. After multiple failed business schemes and temporary support programmes run by external organisations that destroyed the trust of the local community, disempowerment of the local community members was evident to the BVAPD. These factors, along with COVID-19 and the declaration of a State of Disaster in South Africa in March 2020, caused added pressure and stressors on the already socially and economically crippled community. Despite the efforts of charities and non-profit organisations, the municipality and tourism department – at the time providing opportunities and resources to the community – there

appeared to be limited buy-in from the community. A creative approach was needed to involve the community in identifying and addressing their needs. It was necessary to rebuild trust gradually by ensuring a reciprocal partnership between the Touws River residents and the MoreThan#MeerAs project team.

The aim of the MoreThan#MeerAs project was to create safe healing spaces where participants might experience and learn that they are more than their past, their illness, their fears, their bank balances, thought patterns, abilities or disabilities. They needed support to confront the marginalisation they had faced. The project aimed to stimulate social cohesion and change by reframing beliefs and breaking down barriers and by developing and encouraging connection, creativity and innovation through the inclusivity of all people, especially vulnerable communities (MoreThan#MeerAs 2018).

Four MoreThan#MeerAs project cycles, lasting four months each, were run in Touws River during 2021 and 2022. Each cycle consisted of two phases. Phase 1 was a five-day face-to-face interactive group process facilitated by Andri Eloff (AE) and Louise Fouche (LF) and Phase 2 was a creative facilitation component lasting three months. The creative part of the project was aimed at group members identifying and developing a project focussing on economic or social innovation. This was facilitated once a week for three weeks and again once a month for the following three months by an occupational therapist (Table 1).

Understanding the value of a community development project aimed at social cohesion cannot be measured without feedback from participants. We needed to explore group members' experiences and the perceived value of the MoreThan#MeerAs project to understand what influence it has in promoting social cohesion. Three articles are planned from the research explained in this paper. This article speaks to the participants' perceptions of their community's history, where they find themselves now and what their hopes for the future are in the context of the project. Research exploring the perceived barriers, facilitators and recommendations for the project will be the subject of a follow-up article.

Table 1: Programme schedule per group: 4 months

Week 1	Time	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
	09:00	Building group cohesion and expectations	I have pain	I am part of my community	I have an impact	Re-visit the process. Introduce creative facilitator. Identify a single achievable innovative group project, timetable and follow-up creative sessions
	10:00	Teatime				
	10:20	Get to know you and me	I forgive	I am #MoreThan	I have value	
	12:20	Lunch				
	13:00-16:00	I am part of a team	We are all connected	I have dreams	Closure	
1 contact session/week for 3 weeks	The creative facilitator met the group once a week for 3 weeks. The group is helped to bring their dream to fruition through a group project. The project must be a project born from within the group. It should also be attainable. The project should address all the elements of the group dream.					
1 contact session/month for 3 months	Progress, conflict, challenges should be addressed. The facilitator met the group once a week for 3 weeks helping them to bring their dream for the community to fruition through a group project. The project must be a project born from within the group. It should also be attainable. The project should address all the elements of the group dream. Celebration and feedback at the end of the 4-month project.					

Methodology

Research Design

This study was qualitative in nature and adopted a phenomenological research design. This describes and interprets people's lived experience by determining the meaning of the experience as perceived by participants (Ary et al. 2010). The researchers wanted to understand the participants' experiences in terms of their specific context, rather than trying to generalise (Ritchie 2003).

Population and Sampling Methods

All MoreThan#MeerAs project participants were invited via WhatsApp by AE who had their details from their engagement in MoreThanMeerAs. The inclusion criteria for the study were that a participant should have attended more than three face-to-face sessions in the first week of the MoreThan#MeerAs project process (Table 1) and been part of the creative process for their group. The research population consisted of four facilitators and 34 participants who were part of any one of the four Touws River MoreThan#MeerAs projects during 2021 and 2022.

A total of 23 participants took part in the focus group interviews, including group facilitators and members of the four project groups during 2022 and 2023. Nineteen MoreThan#MeerAs participants (not group facilitators) attended the focus group discussions, ranging between 38 and 67 years old. Of these 19, only three were men. Eleven participants were unemployed, five were actively employed and the employment status of three participants is unknown. All participants were assigned pseudonyms to ensure anonymity in the presentation of the findings.

Data Collection

AE and LF set up the focus group interviews and introduced independent researcher Mia Duvenage (MD) who handled data collection to ensure the groups understood the value and confidentiality of the information they shared.

MD led semi-structured focus group discussions (FGDs) using an interview guide (Table 2) with written consent from all participants. MD, who had not been involved with the Touws River community or the MoreThan#MeerAs project, conducted all FGDs in Afrikaans (the first language of the participants). The FGDs were held in the same venue where the MoreThan#MeerAs project was conducted, and photographs taken during the creative process were used to stimulate reflection and discussion.

Table 2: Interview questions

• How would you describe the Touws River community?/Hoe sal jy die gemeenskap van Touwsrivier beskryf? • How do you view yourself as part of the community?/Hoe sien jy jouself as deel van die gemeenskap? • How would you describe your MoreThan#MeerAs experience?/Wat was jou ervaring van die MoreThan#MeerAs opleiding? • Were the activities relevant/Was die aktiwiteite relevant en toepaslik? • Which activities meant something, why? Which did not?/Watter aktiwiteite het vir jou iets beteken? Hoekom? Watter aktiwiteite het nie iets beteken nie? Hoekom? • Method of delivery including training material/Hoe het jy die aanbieding van die groepe en die gebruik van die groepsmateriaal ervaar? • Creative component/Hoe het jy die kreatiewe fase ervaar? • What difference did you notice in yourself as a result of the training?/Watter veranderinge merk jy op? • 10 observations after the training/10 opsigte van jouself en ander wat die opleiding bygewoon het? • Your relationship with others as a result of your participation/10 opsigte van jou verhoudings met ander mense na aanleiding waaraan jy deelgeneem het? • Community interaction/10 opsigte van jou interaksie met jou gemeenskap? • How have these experiences brought about change? Dink jy hierdie ervarings het enige verandering te weeg gebring? Can you describe this change? Kan jy die verandering beskryf? Do you think this change is sustainable? Why? Why not? Dink jy die verandering is volhoubaar? Hoekom? Hoekom nie? • What is the outcome of your participation?/Wat is die uitkoms van jou deelname? • What challenges did you experience as a result of your participation?/Watter uitdagings het jy ervaar as gevolg van jou deelname? • Has the experience affected your family? How?/Het die ervaring jou familie beïnvloed? Hoe? How has the experience affected your community?/Hoe het die ervaring jou gemeenskap beïnvloed? • How were the facilitators?/Hoe was jou ervaring van die fasiliteerders? Could you relate to them?/Kon jy aanklank vind by hulle?
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FDGs were audio recorded, transcribed and translated into English by an independent research assistant after signing a non-disclosure agreement. Data were de-identified by the research assistant prior to data analysis.

Data Analysis

A broad sweep inductive thematic analysis based on Braun and Clark (2021 and 2006) was performed independently by AE, LF, Manoko Lediga (ML), Louine Griessel (LG) and Jana Muller (JM) who met to discuss and agree on a list of codes. An in-depth inductive analysis was then done independently by ML and JM using the agreed-upon code list. They extracted quotes and grouped them thematically. ML and JM were not involved in the MoreThan#MeerAs project and had never met the research participants. A comparative analysis of their findings was done in consultation with one another and an agreed-upon set of themes and data shared with the research team. Member checking of the data interpretation was requested from all the participants to strengthen the trustworthiness of the analysis because researchers and participants tend to look at the data through different lenses. This process allowed the researchers to reflect on their biases and assumptions (Korstjens and Moser 2018).

Ethics

AE informed all participants that their consent was voluntary, and they could withdraw from the study at any stage without any negative consequences. Permission to conduct the study was granted by the Stellenbosch University Division of Institutional Research and Planning and the Stellenbosch University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (REC) (REC: SBE-2022-24623, June 23, 2022).

Positionality

Holmes (2020) states that positionality is normally identified by locating the researcher in three areas, namely: the subject under investigation (well known by LG), the research participants (well known by AE and LF) and the research context and process (well known by AE, LG and LF). AE and LF are directly involved with the participants from the MoreThan#MeerAs project and share intimate knowledge of them, the environment and the project outcomes. This enabled a richer understanding of the context of the participants' experiences during the data analysis and writing up of this article. LG has been involved with the Touws River community for more than 13 years.

Findings

Three overarching themes relating to the aim were identified namely: Touws River—the story; contextual challenges; and hope for the future.

Theme 1: Touws River—The story

Participants reflected on Touws River as once being a booming town with employment opportunities and the railway station as the beacon of the town bringing work and a sense of community:

I was born in Touws River. But when I grew up in the town, Touws River ... was a beautiful town. Lots of job opportunities. Because there was a railway here—it was a railway town. (Group 2, Sarie)

We had a better Touws River ... We had, we had a lot of things: dry cleaner, bakery, good shops. (Group 4, Elsie)

One of the facilitators who had a long history with Touws River reflected on the change after the railway line closed:

I think what makes Touws River ... for me so unique is the fact that it was this incredibly buzzing town with very little racial distinction because everybody had work, everybody was encapsulated in the railways, so there wasn't ... even though there was apartheid in other places, it felt like there was really a community, interracial community, but the minute that the railway fell away, it's like they never learnt inside themselves as a community to look after themselves because the railway had, had always done that. (Group facilitator, Anni)

The participants said after the railway closed, the town changed for the worse with fewer job opportunities, disempowered youth and a less cohesive community. Florence reflects:

I see that our town, eh, there is a lot of decline. Um, I would say in terms of work, yes. [The] majority of the places are closed in town. (Group 2)

Mari, one of the group facilitators, said she perceived this to be the time when community members lost hope and felt disempowered.

And all of a sudden, they didn't know how or what to do, they didn't know where to go, and then they started waiting for handouts, and that was so sad to see. As they draw the timeline, this bank closes, that shop closes, everybody starts moving out, um, and kind of that they really, you know [asked], 'Who's going to look after us now?'

This sentiment was mirrored by Charmaine, a long-standing community member.

The people were slow, they would rather sit at home all day than come to see, unless a yellow carrot beckoned to them. (Group 1)

The devastating social and economic impact on the town caused rifts between community members and a lack of trust, as Florence and Naomi reflect.

There isn't really a Spar anymore and, yes, and nowadays most of the people have to go to work in the vineyards in De Doorns to get an income, and that's only for six months. (Group 2, Florence)

Our town's problems are actually work. The unemployment rate is very, very high and that's, I can't say that our people are very close because our people are a bit too dishonest and behind the back, with each other. See, we're not really together because if I don't like you, then I'm not going to look at you...(Group 1, Naomi)

Anni reflected on how discouraged participants in the groups had been because of inconsistencies from various organisations like welfare organisations or opportunistic investors who came to town to offer support, and then left suddenly. One investor had started a pyramid scheme, which left many residents destitute.

Every person comes, even [X] organisation, you know 'we're going to come help you' and then help leaves. And then [investor XX] disappear with their money ... they really believed he was going to come save them all ... it's such a negative cycle because we wait for handouts, we get it, but then we even more disempowered, and then we wait again for the next glimmer of hope and the next thing.

Despite the town's degradation and despite an idea that the community was closed and suspicious, most participants still saw themselves as members of the community if they were born and raised there.

Yes, and because I ... have lived in Touws River for so many years, I am part of the community ... so if you come from another town ... you will always see people looking at you as if you are not part of the place. (Group 2, Florence)

Participants believed they could make Touws River a better place.

But if we walk together, maybe one, two, three, then we will make a difference. (Group 1, Charmaine)

Ja, we have to show Touws River, we can make our town a better place, never mind the drugs. (Group 2, Sarie)

This sentiment was evident across all groups.

Theme 2: Contextual Challenges

Despite participants feeling a conflicting sense of community and wanting to make a difference in their town, there were social ills standing in the way. Participants felt concern for the town's children. They felt that negative social influences had become synonymous with their town, especially substance abuse, gangsterism and petty crimes. They mentioned factors in their community that might be constraining transformation.

Now my child is sitting there at home. My child is going to lapse in the drugs ... in Touws River ... I see when the young people can become despondent and run down. They are decayed. And there's not a support for them. (Group 3, Dina)

But like ... our children can't find work ... We can't even buy bread for our children tomorrow ... Our young children are sitting at home. (Group 2, Sarie)

...Children are young when they finish matric, now they are sitting at home. What are they going to do? Because their parents didn't get a sponsor for them. (Group 3, Dina)

Participants mentioned how political forces influenced their drive to find employment and likelihood of securing a job. Magdalena reflected:

Sometimes you feel that you don't feel part of the community, because if you go to someone for work, then they tell you there is no work, but then the next person gets your job. (Group 2)

Elke, a group facilitator, mentioned a theme that affected some of the groups' creative projects which focussed on economic development such as starting a bakery or improving the grounds around the abandoned railway building.

In terms of who's in charge of the municipality now ... if you do not belong to that party, if you don't belong to it now, then your submission isn't going to work and, so there's such undercurrents around who's in and who's out and who's, who's going to get a job, who's going to get a job and who's not going to.

Florence and Charmaine said job opportunities and guidance could improve the lives of the youth and community and the revival of the railway would be an immediate solution.

...Yes, and we would like to have that which we want to start that we had in our mind and with which we started like the station. We want Touws River's station; we want it again ... even though our town has fallen apart so much and because of drugs and alcohol abuse, I believe our town can get back to where it was, and our children can again ... they can be themselves, to be able to do something for themselves... (Group 2, Florence)

My opinion is that we are a close-knit community and, like in every small town, it is only poverty that plays the main role here, and an allowance ... like getting a pension and disability allowance, but beyond that, our people in the community just need a little push in the right direction, an ear to hear, advice to give someone, just to show them the ropes. As what we learnt here at MoreThan was an eye-opener for me, helped me to heal from the inside. (Group 1, Charmaine)

The possibilities that might evolve from a project like MoreThan#MeerAs stimulated discussion about hope for the future of Touws River and the local community.

Theme 3: Hope for the Future

An overarching theme of hope, which was part of the dreaming aim of the MoreThan#MeerAs project, where each group was asked to dream about a future Touws River, was prevalent across all four groups. Each group envisioned a Touws River with opportunity for all, shared values that ensured a safe and strong community and social cohesion. More than one group envisioned the town as an individual. The third group described Touws River as an angry old man and a new Touws River as an empowered woman named “Sylvia.”

Sylvia ... is the name we gave the town. (Janice) Let's build up Sylvia again. We can't let Sylvia down. We need to build up that bit for Sylvia again for Touws River ... It took a long time to find that name Sylvia. (Pieter) ...She's the girl from Touws River. So, let's build up for Sylvia, man, let's move on, you guys. (Joy)

Group 2 referred to the past Touws River as a grandfather who needed to be put to rest, so a new beginning could take place:

Let's see what we can do. Because Grandpa's dream—Grandpa told us what to do. And that old stuff, that corruption ... that negative stuff is all dead. We now take the positive, and we now look at what we have and what we can do here now. We no longer look at people, what they do and what they don't, and that's when we got our name, “The New Beginnings”. (Sarie)

The participants were hopeful that their town could be restored with some of the insight they had gained during the MoreThan#MeerAs process:

...We can make [it] better, because ... what we learnt from MoreThan is that we can restore Touws River ... We just have to work on it because [it] taught me what you can recover and do something, from the ground up. You're more than that. And it's actually a healthier therapy. A life lesson. So, Touws River can change. (Group 4, Valencia)

It makes me think of a butterfly, when he starts. It's almost like a worm, he's a little worm, and after that he comes, he grows and then he comes out like a pupa, and then he wiggles himself out of his cocoon like that, and when he's out, and then free, and then he's free and then he spreads his wings. Yes (Piet). Now that's how I've experienced as a person what Touws River can be like ... our town. (Group 3, Magda)

Discussion

The study findings highlight the social and political challenges that confront rural communities as well as the need for substantial economic and structural investment to secure the development of these communities. South Africa has a dual economy with prosperous communities living in large cities coexisting with poverty-stricken ones in underdeveloped areas in townships, informal settlements and destitute rural areas (Ngumbela 2023). Both market and government failures in service delivery have been evident (Ngumbela 2023). The study findings suggest Touws River faces similar issues

with poor service delivery and the perpetuation of inequalities. The closure of the railway had massive implications for the town resulting in a community struggling for equal access to opportunities and growth (Stellenbosch University Risk Assessment 2015).

Atkinson (2008, 41) further suggests many small towns in South Africa have become “unemployed wasteland[s] ... dependent on social grants. Nel et al. (2011) have similarly characterised small towns as having declining economic bases, often through the loss of key industries or primary functions, endemic unemployment and growing numbers of poor households. This combination of factors has resulted in a loss of hope for the people who call these towns home (Price 2023).

The findings of this study suggest the struggle to survive by Touws River residents has affected the social cohesion dimension of resilient social relations through an erosion of trust in the system (Dragolov et al. 2016). Participants showed little drive and independent efforts to overcome their circumstances finding it difficult to participate creatively in their community. The years of inequality, marginalisation and lack of trust in outside organisations seems to have affected the connectedness required for social cohesion between the community and its political members (Dragolov et al. 2016). With the many efforts and programmes to alleviate the conditions of those living in poverty which have been introduced by ‘outsiders’ and have been unsustainable, there is a need to find ways to empower local individuals, organisations and communities. These interventions should not be limited to stimulating economic development, but should also focus on the restoration of human dignity and a sense of self-worth to promote community innovation and creativity to further unlock opportunity for social cohesion (Bhorat and Van der Westhuizen 2012). The MoreThan#MeerAs project can be one such intervention and follow-up research exploring the perceived value of the MoreThan#MeerAs project in Touws River is in progress.

Participants embraced the context of “what was” versus “what is” and “what we want to be” using metaphor to describe this process of transformation. Strong ties that hold societies together are not only an important basis for defining legitimate development goals in a society, but also a requirement for tackling challenges (Leininger et al. 2021). Protecting and strengthening social cohesion has become an increasingly central goal for the Touws River community with a growing recognition of the need to focus on the common good (Dragolov et al. 2016).

Organisations working in systems reconfigure power and should focus on putting decision-making and resources in the hands of the primary actors, the community, ensuring that social systems represent the people who live in them (Rayner and Bonnici 2021). The findings suggest that through the reflective spaces created by the MoreThan#MeerAs project, participants felt comfortable to discuss and question power structures in the town which they felt no longer served the community but were focused on individual interest.

The MoreThan#MeerAs project participants were encouraged to become involved in the decision-making process at grassroots level during community meetings. However, it will take strong connections, attention to the idiosyncrasies of context and new types of leadership to ensure the benefits of social work in building cohesion can become a reality (Rayner and Bonnici 2021). The authors recommend funding by external organisations be dedicated to the development of social cohesion. All funding should be driven by a preliminary needs analysis that takes account of the community's identity and values and aims to enhance this. This takes cognisance of the fact that social cohesion makes communities more resilient in the face of crises and facilitates change that benefits everyone (Townshend et al. 2015). Understanding the social dynamics and relational needs of the community may offer rich insights into how to support and uplift communities in the future.

Limitations

The authors acknowledge the limitations of their racial diversity. With five authors being white, limited insight into marginalisation might have presented an unconscious bias during the writing of this paper. Community members who took part in the MoreThan#MeerAs project were asked to check the interpretation of the findings and read and comment on the final paper (Varpio et al. 2017) in an attempt to reduce this bias. The authorship does, however, carry a large diversity of professions, which was useful in the planning and execution of this research.

The absence of feedback from the MoreThan#MeerAs project participants who did not attend the required number of sessions for inclusion into the study is noted. Their feedback may have provided insight into their views on the project and their perceptions of Touws River and the community's future. Translating qualitative data from one language to another by a third party not involved in the interviews and, therefore, unable to capture certain intonations may have limited the depth of analysis and understanding by the researchers involved in the data analysis.

Conclusion

The MoreThan#MeerAs project aimed to guide, support and enable participants to consider that the town and community members of Touws River are more than meets the eye. Participants were provided with a platform to reflect on the old and dream about a new Touws River where they could play a part in creating a cohesive community. The findings suggest the project empowered the participants through the opportunity to reflect on the process of their impoverished rural town affected by the historical changes and past and current socio-political situations. Participants were offered the opportunity to evaluate and challenge their circumstances as residents and consider their involvement in changing their future.

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Disclaimer

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