

Wild Shots Outreach Research Report & Executive Summary

Wild Shots:
Conservation, Education, and Capacity Building
Through Photography

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About the project

This report is based on the research and findings conducted for the purposes of a PhD thesis entitled Wild Shots: Conservation, Educations, and Capacity Building Through Photography. The research findings are outlined here to serve as an executive summary that may be utilised by Wild Shots Outreach to better understand the experiences of its participants and their backgrounds, the impact of capacity building, and the role photography plays in both skills development and conservation education.



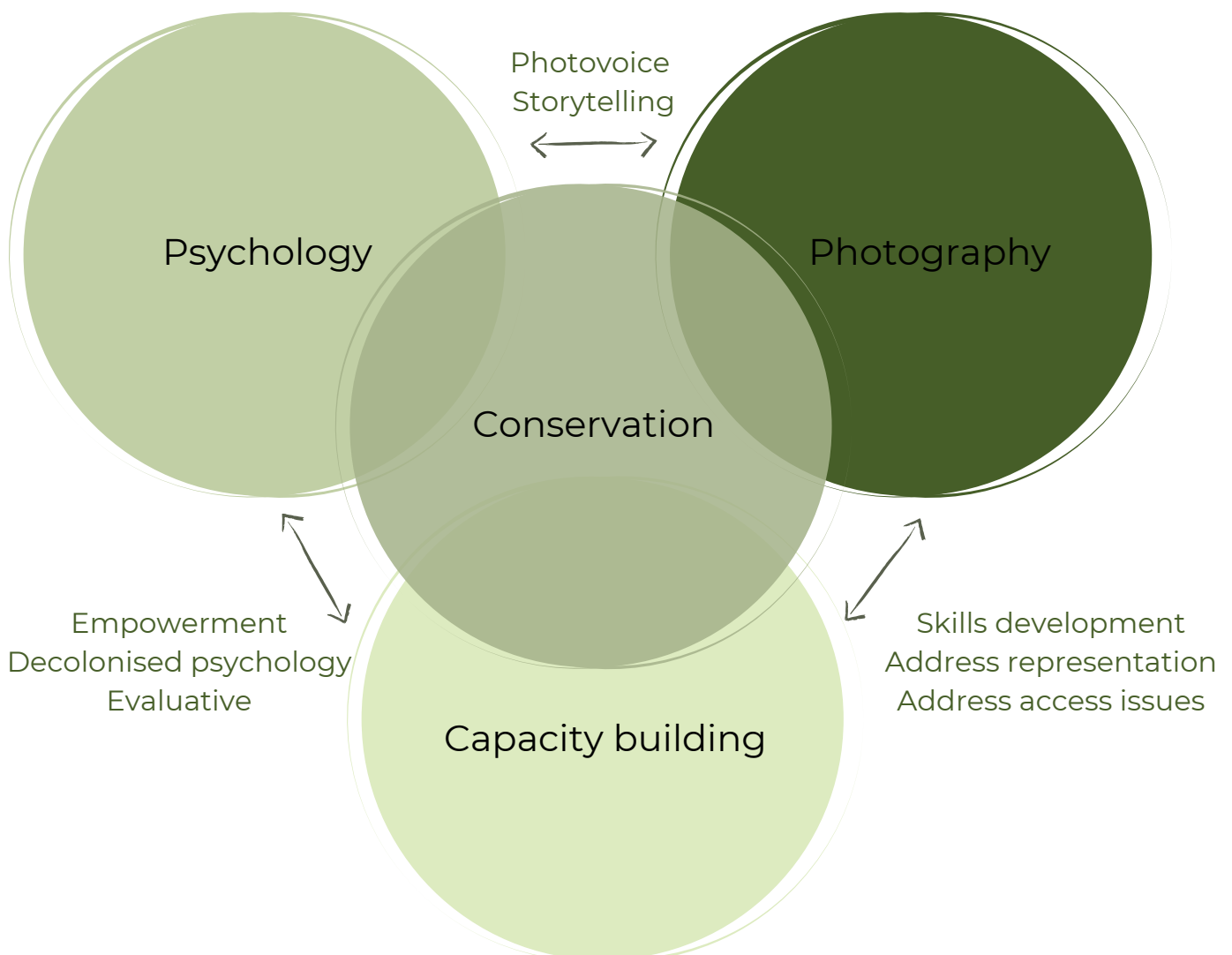
Introduction

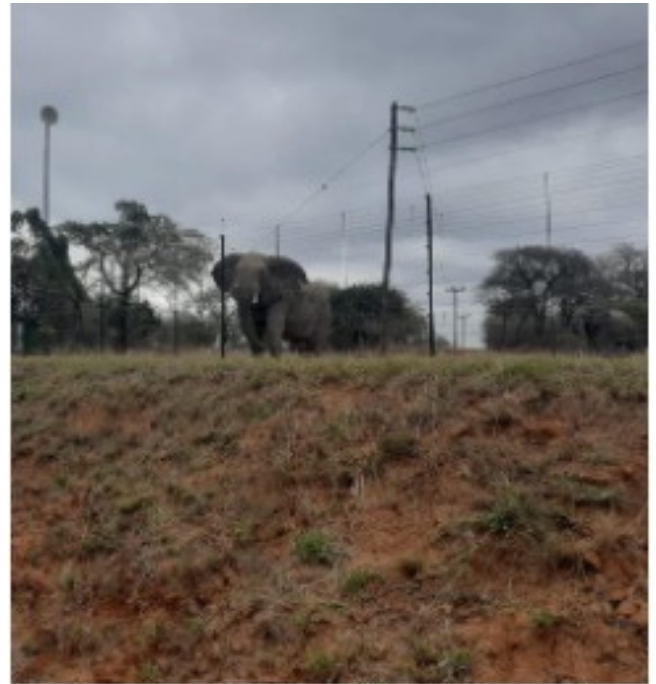
A significant element of the research focused on the importance of environmental and social justice to effectively merge psychology and conservation in such a way that the goals of protecting the environment could be equally aligned with promoting the well-being of vulnerable and marginalized groups of people. It is argued that such equal prioritization will simultaneously benefit both environmental protection and justice issues. Capacity building is positioned as a means of improving the representation of black youth in the fields of conservation and photography.

The intersection between conservation photography, psychology, and environmental justice emerged through my exposure to Wild Shots Outreach operating in one of South Africa's largest protected natural areas. The outreach intends to engage with adolescents and young adults about wildlife and conservation through the medium of photography. In so doing, the youth are taught new skills and opened to opportunities in the conservation and tourism industries.

Self-confidence and the intrinsic value of conservation are fostered while also highlighting job opportunities and the mutual benefits of conservation. This is important given the historical marginalisation of the communities in which Wild Shots Outreach operate and the barriers youth face in accessing employment.

The participants' interviews and photographic tasks covered issues of racial exclusion, gender discrimination, access, and inequality, as well as the importance of empowerment and representation. The participants' stories and photographs demonstrate that a nexus exists between conserving biodiversity, empowering people, and promoting justice and that photography can serve as powerful means of storytelling and representation, as visualised below:





While the Kruger National Park serves an important function in generating revenue for South Africa, many people living in informal settlements and villages on the outskirts of the park have little to no access to wildlife or wild places. It is, therefore, necessary to critically examine the social impact of the national park's colonial beginnings and seek to rectify the marginalisation thus experienced by surrounding communities.

An in-depth understanding of the history of this region through a critical examination of the underlying social and political motivations that occurred before the declaration of South Africa's first national park and what endured for decades thereafter provided the context and background for this study. While the establishment of the Kruger National Park was driven by conservation efforts to protect biodiversity, it also reflects the political and social underpinnings of South Africa under colonial rule pre-democracy.



Methodology

DATA COLLECTION

- 3 qualitative interviews with the WSO Media Team and interns at Conservation South Africa (CSA) during 2020/2021
- 1 qualitative group interview with four female WSO graduates
- 12 qualitative interviews with adolescent and young adult graduates from WSO
- Photovoice tasks completed by 15 participants including graduates and Media Team
- 1 group discussion for all 15 participants of the photovoice tasks

INCLUSION CRITERIA

- Participants completed or were in the process of completing WSO workshops;
- Participants varied in age from high school to young adulthood;
- Participants varied in employment status, including high school student, college, or university student, self-employed, employed, or job seeker;
- Participants were pursuing any jobs or careers, including those related to photography, filmmaking, conservation, or tourism.



Methodology - Photovoice

Photovoice was used as the primary method of inquiry to explore the experiences of the WSO participants to elicit insight into their lived experiences of photography as capacity building, conservation, and issues of justice. This method offered a unique opportunity for the participants to use their skills and creativity to explore their experiences of capacity building, wildlife, conservation, and exclusion.

Photovoice:

Uses photography to gather experiences with strong storytelling component

Participatory research that encourages and promotes participants to actively engage in topics for discussion

Prioritises empowerment, description of needs, catalyst for change

Based on sharing knowledge and acknowledging participants as experts

Communities who have experienced historical marginalisation often approached as means of prioritising voice



Results & Discussion

The historical backgrounds of these young South Africans are indicative of South Africa's apartheid history, its legacy, and how they are now navigating their own experiences of growing up in an area that is both ecologically important and historically divisive. Their experiences illustrate how young South Africans may perceive environmental justice, conservation, and capacity building using a medium that provides a platform for connection, expression, and building a career. Thus, photography skills and conservation are explored in tandem.

An appreciation for the historical context of the communities in which the participants grew up and reside provided insight into the three primary research questions:

1

What does environmentally just conservation look like from a South African perspective in the communities living in the Greater Kruger region of Limpopo and Mpumalanga and how does it address urgent environmental issues and human well-being?

2

How do the historical environmental injustices perpetuated under apartheid influence conservation efforts and how can conservation psychology work towards acknowledging and redressing injustices in the communities living in the Greater Kruger region?

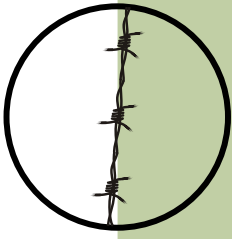
3

How can capacity building (specifically using photography taught in an outreach programme) contribute to moving forward from historical marginalisation for youth in the Greater Kruger region?

- *How can photography be a platform to voice and express topics of importance to youth?*
- *How can photography provide a means to create employment/entrepreneurship and inclusion in the field of conservation/wildlife?*

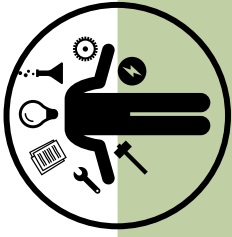
The four overarching themes that were found across the three participant groups are described in more detail as follows:

Final Photovoice Themes



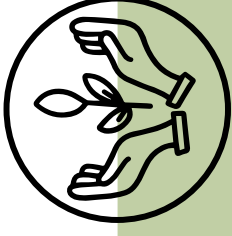
BARRIERS TO NATURE

Lack of representation
Challenges, including financial, transport
Racial exclusion
Paradox of the fence - both protective and exclusionary



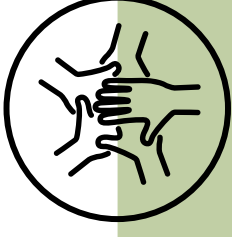
LEARNING NEW SKILLS

A sense of pride
Skills - useful for employment purposes
Self-employment opportunities
Storytelling and photography
Self-expression
Creating connections



MY RELATIONSHIP WITH NATURE

Need to protect for current and future generations
Reciprocal relationship
Healthy environment is necessary for survival



MY OUTREACH EXPERIENCE

Supportive
Family-like bonds
Networking opportunities
Sharing knowledge and skills



Barriers to Nature

A common theme raised across the WSO participants was the issue of access and inequality concerning natural spaces, including national parks and private reserves. The photographers discussed their frustration and disappointment that issues of inequality and access are still perpetuated today. This is primarily based on financial restraints, such as park fees, transport, and food costs that would make a trip to a park extremely difficult to do.



The Barriers theme elicited photographs and stories that addressed both physical and metaphorical barriers to accessing nature. Physical barriers, such as fences and gates, served two seemingly contradictory purposes – that of protection and exclusion. Furthermore, the idea of protection was twofold: some respondents believed fences served to protect people against wildlife while others believed it protected natural spaces and wildlife from people.



“Poverty prevents people from seeing or touching the wild”

Learning a New Skill

As young up-and-coming photographers, the respondents discussed several appealing characteristics of photography, including storytelling, self-expression, creating connections, and earning potential. The photographers enjoy having the ability to creatively engage with a subject and share a story told through their own eyes and experiences. There was a strong sense of pride in creating an artistic piece that required a level of skill, experience, and creativity to execute.



These skills primarily concerned learning about photography, but other relevant skills were learnt along the way, sometimes indirectly. For example, public speaking, teaching, and networking were commonly cited. When discussing the appeal of photography, the participants expressed several common ideas which revolved around the ability to express themselves and creatively tell a story. Additional attractive aspects of photography include the ability to capture a special memory that can be viewed long after and shared with others.

The tangible outcome provided by a photograph and certificate was also expressed positively. Participants could see the results of their skills improving and putting new lessons into practice.



“ I want every image I take or share to inspire someone ”



Relationships with Nature

Closely related to the above theme is the idea of creating connections with the natural environment. This was not discussed only through the use of photography, but rather through a more encompassing attitude towards nature, wild spaces, and wildlife. Protecting nature was linked to the idea of forming close bonds or relationships with it, mostly through exposure or education. In this way, the WSO photographers suggest that relationships with nature are largely absent until one is either exposed to it and/or provided with knowledge about the natural environment and its importance

Once the workshops and game drives were completed, all participants described a significant change in their feelings. Viewing wildlife evoked feelings of empathy and wanting to protect nature based on its value for future generations and our current needs. Nature was viewed through a new lens as something that promotes human well-being, and provides jobs and economic development; as such, co-existing with nature took on renewed importance for the participants. A prominent recurring theme is economic development and job creation. The photographers believe strongly that nature ought to be protected not just for the current generations, but future generations who are also deserving of a thriving environment.



“ We need each other to
survive... We must
conserve nature



My WSO Experience

The WSO Media Team and photographers largely expressed similar feelings regarding the impact of the outreach. This included several themes, including a family-like bond amongst participants; learning exciting new skills, experiences and opportunities; the ability to network with other aspiring and established professionals; empowerment; a desire to share their skills and knowledge; and an appreciation for the long-term commitment the outreach demonstrates towards its current and past participants.

In the individual interviews, most of the participants expressed interest in a career (lawyer, doctor, police, engineer, amongst others) that they have since decided against. Whilst this is certainly to be expected from young adults leaving school, the overall sentiment expressed is that WSO created exposure to other career paths that the participants were unaware of previously.

Direct exposure to photography and conservation also fostered a significant interest in pursuing such opportunities; however, this may not always materialise due to a lack of funds and access to education and equipment.

All participants interviewed initially joined the WSO workshops after seeing their peers and friends engaging in the course while in high school. They expressed a desire to also join and when the opportunity arose, they elected to join the workshops when the outreach director returned to the school. The workshops were overwhelmingly described in positive terms – life-changing, amazing, and a good time were common sentiments. The exposure to new skills and activities was highly welcomed and enjoyed by the participants.

“

We have been exposed to things we thought we never would reach

”



Implications

This section will deal with the implications of the research results and uses the theory of engagement as a framework to understand the successes and opportunities for Wild Shots Outreach.

IMPORTANT RECURRING THEMES:

- Experiences of exclusion in terms of conservation efforts, opportunities, natural spaces
- Issues of access to natural spaces
- Appreciation for new skills and the subsequent opportunities
- Photography seen as a platform for expression, sharing knowledge and stories
- Photography is considered as a desirable opportunity for employment/ entrepreneurship
- WSO seen as a bridge between exclusion and inclusion, representation and access

OVERVIEW OF THE THEORY OF ENGAGEMENT

- Youth are uniquely positioned to transform environmental and sustainability issues
- Adolescence and youth is an ideal period to encourage civic action
- Allows for an examination of initiatives aimed specifically at youth whose historical and situational contexts are integral parts of their experiences of environmental and conservation issues and capacity building

The Framework

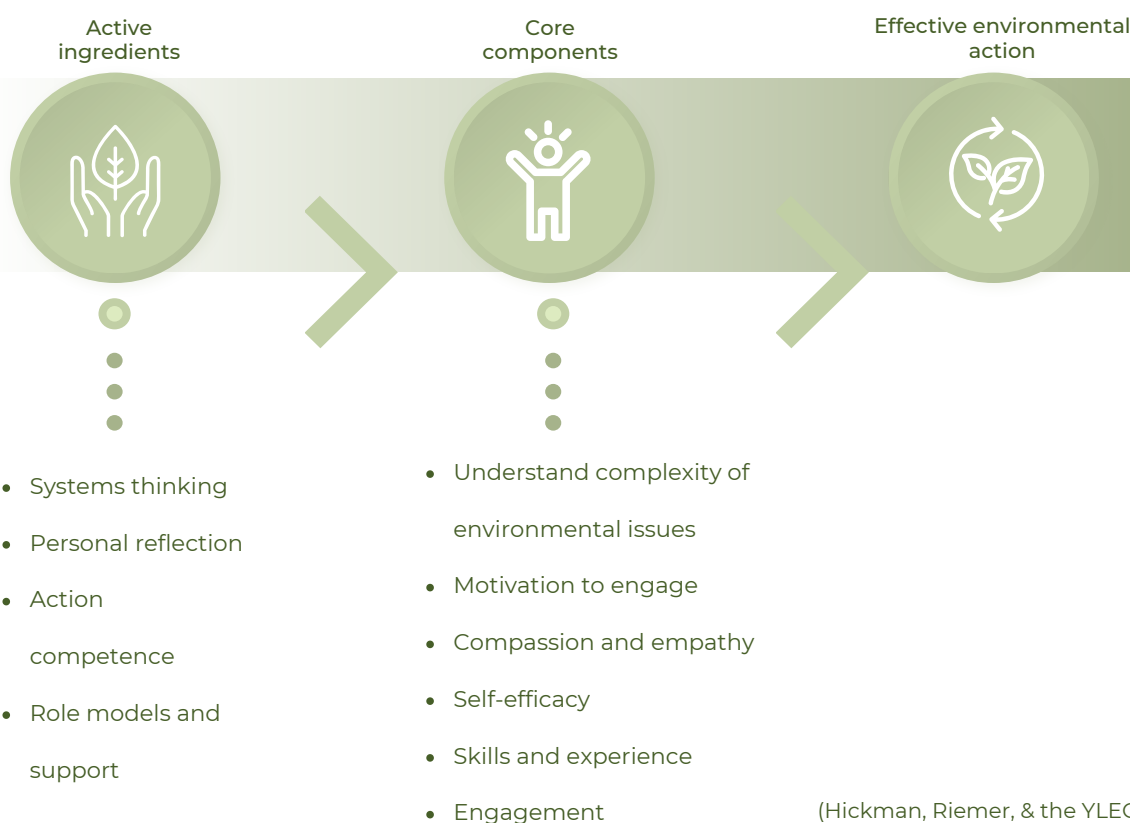
The theory of engagement (Hickman, et al., 2016) recognises the ability of youth to transform environmental and sustainability issues on a cultural and social level. Adolescence and young adulthood is an ideal period in which to encourage civic action and foster necessary skills due to youth being responsive to change, in a period of identity formation, and their readiness to challenge existing social conditions. Civic-level action, therefore, can address the root causes of environmental issues and encourage change in existing social systems.

The theory of engagement offers a comprehensive means of examining an outreach aimed specifically at youth whose historical and situational contexts are integral parts of their experiences of environmental and conservation issues and capacity building.

Integrating community psychology, justice, and youth environmental initiatives, the theory of engagement offers a useful framework to understand how WSO operates in the context of the research aim, namely, to explore the influence of an outreach that works within a historically marginalised community by teaching youth about conservation through building photographic skills. In this way, capacity building, conservation/environmental issues, and justice issues come together in one youth-oriented programme.

The theory comprises several core components and active ingredients to achieve effective environmental action, as illustrated below:

Theory of engagement core components and active ingredients



(Hickman, Riemer, & the YLEC Collective, 2016)

Core Components and Active Ingredients in WSO



Active ingredients

Systems thinking
Personal reflection
Action competence
Role models and
support



Demonstration in WSO

Open discussions regarding representation of black youth. Challenging lack of representation. Acknowledge issues of environmental justice and exclusion.

Reflection seen in raising personal experiences of exclusion or inaccessibility & its impact on families & individuals.

Experiential learning methods foster knowledge, reflection, and provide experiences. Concrete learning activities.

Mentors and peer support considered extremely important and appreciated



Core components



Effective environmental action





Core components

Understand complexity of environmental issues

Motivation to engage

Compassion & empathy

Self-efficacy

Skills & experience

Engagement



Demonstration in WSO

Appreciate nature's contributions to wellbeing, survival, economy
Expressed desire to take responsibility and care for nature
Unique perspectives on race and relationships to land & exclusion.

Expressed desire to improve representation of black youth in conservation & photography.
Emphasise interconnectedness between people and environment

Progression into tertiary studies and courses.

Progression into self-employment and leading courses.

Using knowledge gained from workshops to teach others.
Education coupled with empowerment and capacity building is effective.

Engagement is fostered by working with local schools and youth groups.
Additional learning and experiential opportunities offered to graduates

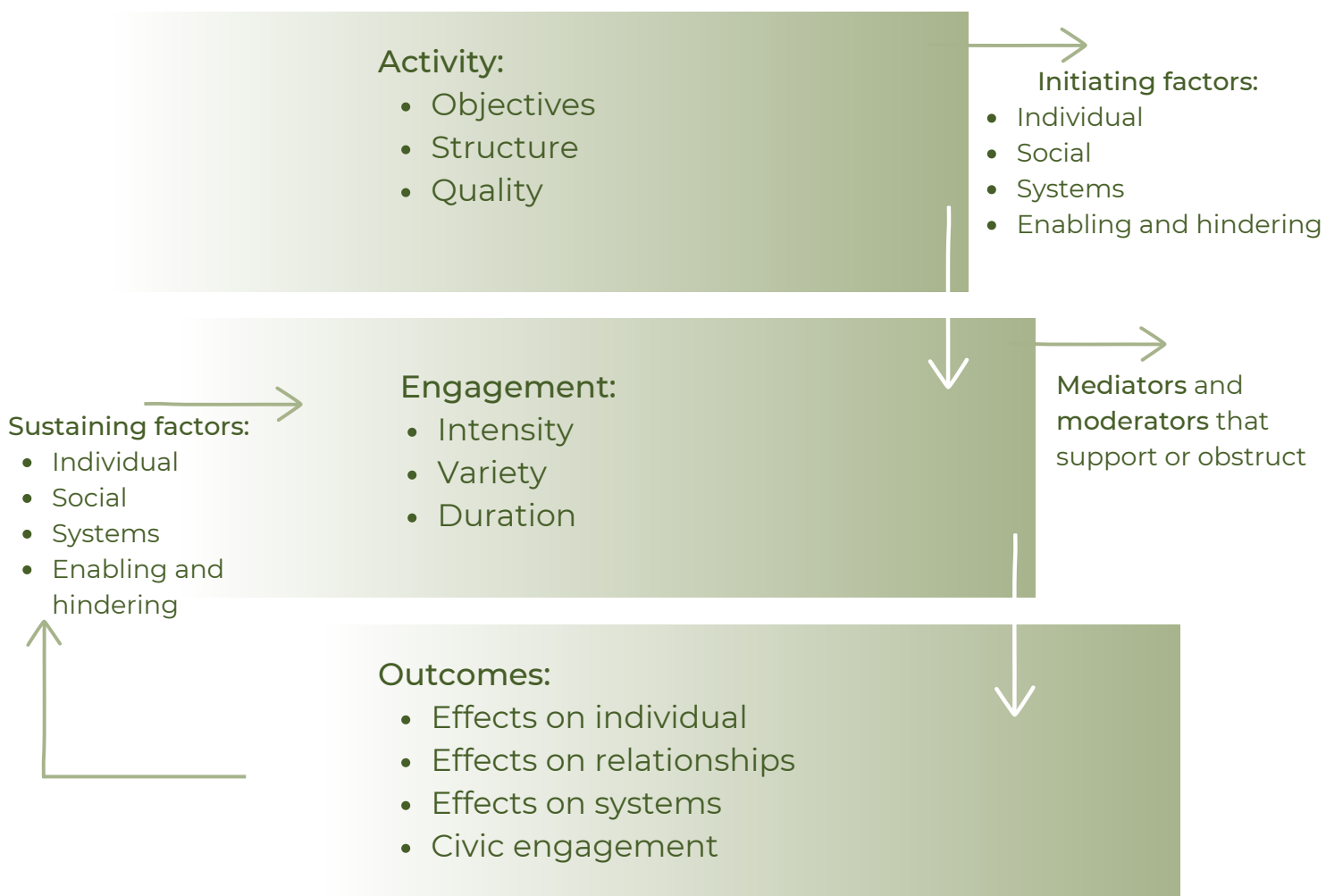


Effective environmental action achieved

The Theory of Engagement Framework

The below graphic demonstrates the framework upon which the theory of engagement has been created. There are three primary components, namely Activity, Engagement, and Outcomes, which will be described in more detail next in relation to how Wild Shots Outreach demonstrates the ways in which these are achieved.

A note regarding initiating and sustaining factors as well as mediators and moderators: These factors require an in-depth exploration in their own right and were beyond the scope of this study; however, future opportunities to explore this in further detail are possible.



(Riemer et al., 2013)

Theory of Engagement Framework

- Applied to WSO

Activity:

- Objectives
- Structure
- Quality

Objectives: teach photography and offer experiential game drives and other conservation activities to young people excluded from protected spaces.

Structure: 1) time - catered to needs of group, usually delivered over several sessions with a game drive to end.

Sustained engagement considered one of WSO's most appealing characteristics.

2) leadership - promising graduates now lead workshops themselves and one graduate has been promoted to director of WSO

Indicative of co-creation and inclusivity.

Quality: culmination of individual workshops, experiences, and a certificate of completion ensures complex goals are broken down into short-term measurable impacts.

Enormous pride found in certificates and hard copy photographs.

Considered a demonstration of skill for employment.

Social support and supportive networking indicative of quality.

Offers to expand skills into videography, field guiding, etc.

Overall, WSO demonstrates positive environmental action with a community-based focus, collaborative leadership, and positive mentorship alongside skills development

Engagement:

- Intensity
- Variety
- Duration

Outcomes:

- Effects on individual
- Effects on relationships
- Effects on systems
- Civic engagement

Engagement:

- Intensity
- Variety
- Duration

Intensity: participants frequently used emotive terminology to describe experiences suggesting a strong emotional response and enjoyment of the workshops. A cognitive component was demonstrated in the participants' enhanced understanding and knowledge of environmental contributions and awareness of poaching and habitat destruction. A behavioural component was evident in the participants' active participation and the resultant photographs a demonstration of the skills practiced.

Variety: the workshops have expanded beyond photography and experiential game drives to include videography workshops, rhino dehorning projects, and photographing events in the surrounding areas. In addition, some participants have been able to pursue tertiary studies and courses. The activities are diverse and likely to appeal to participants with a variety of interests.

Duration: this appears largely dependent on individuals' interests and willingness to engage in activities beyond the outreach workshops, but several opportunities are available for interested participants and graduates.

Outcomes:

- Effects on individual
- Effects on relationships
- Effects on systems
- Civic engagement



Outcomes:

- Effects on individual
- Effects on relationships
- Effects on systems
- Civic engagement



Individual: reported feelings of pride, motivation to improve skills, enjoyment of photography and time in natural spaces, sense of responsibility and wanting to inspire a desire to protect nature.

Relationships: relationships fostered during the workshops compared to that of gaining a new family. Professional networking and relationships were also created through internships, speaking opportunities, and working alongside conservationists.

Systems: a direct measurement of environmental impact in this outreach is not possible, but consideration of the number of graduates pursuing careers and activities related to conservation work is, in part, a measure of ongoing impact of improving representation of black youth entering the conservation fields.

Conclusion

The research participants' achievements are an illustration of the influence of empowerment and capacity building focused on the well-being of the participants. Long-term engagement and supportive structures geared towards growth inside and outside the outreach demonstrate that positive outcomes can be equally achieved for both people and conservation. An exploration of their experiences through photography further illustrates that people and conservation are inextricably linked and that working towards remedying historical injustices can positively influence representation and empowerment of historically marginalised youth.

Overall, Wild Shots Outreach not only promotes skills development through teaching photography but has rather created a supportive social structure within the organisation and envisions creating long-term relationships with the youth who join the workshops.

By embodying a strong culture of inclusivity, mentorship and friendship, and long-term engagement, Wild Shots Outreach demonstrates that acknowledging and challenging historical injustices can be a powerful catalyst for change for the participants.

The choice of using photography as both a means for skills development *and* environmental education is similarly powerful. Photography was deemed a means of voice and representation - the impact of which cannot be understated in a group of youth who have explicitly experienced marginalisation and under-representation post-apartheid. Photography's strong focus on storytelling and communication further allows participants to create connections with their subjects (wildlife, people, nature in general) that allows for relationships to be fostered and shared.





PHOTOVOICE RESEARCH THEMES: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS FOR PARTICIPANT INPUT



01. BARRIERS

- Fences serve to protect, but you felt they also exclude certain people from entering
 - Some of you feel fences protect people from wildlife but also protect wildlife from people
 - Some of you feel unwelcome or unable to go beyond the fence
- Money is a major restriction (access fees, transport, food, etc) which makes it difficult for you to enter or see wild spaces and animals
- Even though many people live in communities next to Kruger, you don't get chances to enter the fenced areas
- Some of you said that 'real' nature is on the other side of these fences, but some of you also bring nature closer to home - like growing gardens and having animals, such as cattle



02. LEARNING NEW SKILLS

- Photography creates the ability to express yourself, share a story, be creative, capture a special memory, all of which helps share your voice
- As WSO graduates you enjoyed seeing your photographs in a hard copy and enjoyed seeing your skills improve with each photo you took
- The WSO workshops also helped you develop indirect skills - like networking, public speaking, attending rhino dehornings, learning something special that is unique to you
- Learning new skills creates new opportunities for you and being able to join various activities with conservationists and photographers, including being able to run your own shoots or pursue further studies and work
- Friendships created in the outreach offer support to you, like cheering you on when you do well or collaborating together on shoots
- Through the workshops you learnt how to teach as well and how to improve yourself
- WSO offered you education about nature and helped improve your wellbeing (through offering inclusion, work opportunities, entrepreneurship) which all helped you become independent outside and inside WSO



03. MY RELATIONSHIP WITH NATURE

- You want to protect nature for current generations and future generations
- Nature helps human wellbeing and survival, so you believe if you care for nature, nature will also care for you
- Many of you believe nature helps job creation and it is good for South Africa's economy through tourism
- It was a dream come true for many of you to see animals in the wild and up close
- Nature also makes you feel good and you enjoy watching it
- Before WSO, some of you said that you did not understand the importance of nature or how to protect it, but now you want to and you also feel you know how



04. MY WSO EXPERIENCE

- Since learning about conservation and photography, some of you have changed your minds about possible future careers
- Some of you saw your friends join the WSO workshops and this made you also keen to join in
- The WSO experience was very positive and even life changing for many of you
- The certificates and photos make you proud of your achievements and make you feel confident about your futures
- WSO helped many of you experience new and exciting things (like flying, game drives, seeing rhino dehornings, etc), sometimes even for the first time in your lives
- WSO workshops and game drives gave you good memories and experiences
- You believe education is important to learn about nature and conservation
- You enjoy sharing your knowledge and photos with friends and family
 - Photographs are also a good way to connect with other people
- WSO has given you opportunities to also teach other young people



