

The background is a dark blue gradient with a series of concentric, slightly wavy circles that create a tunnel-like effect. In the center-left, there is a faint, stylized globe or sphere with some internal structure.

BECOMING VISUAL STORY TELLERS: STORIES OF UNIVERSITY ACCESS

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ABOUT OUR PHOTOVOICE PROJECT

Even though there is some research on access to higher education in South Africa, most studies neglect student voices and lived experiences and do not pay sufficient attention to higher education choice and decision-making processes. An approach is needed to understand pathways to higher education for diverse students, not least because access to higher education is a matter of the public good and social justice, which we understand as the expansion of students' human capabilities.

Capabilities are freedoms or real opportunities to lead the kind of life that people value. Capabilities are put into practice as functionings, that is actual beings and doings. Agency is important in the process - the ability of the individual to pursue and achieve the objectives they value for their own well-being but also that of others. An agent is then someone who acts and makes change happen.

How students from township and rural schools convert their personal biographies into access under social and education conditions and contexts, and how they give voice to their stories is central to our project.

RESEARCH AIMS

1. To understand – through the voices of young people - how they decide to go to university, what and who influences their decision, what challenges (walls) and opportunities (bridges) they face, and how they get on once at university.
2. To involve young people as co-researchers in a participatory research process.
3. To enhance skills and knowledge and empower the researchers.
4. To share these experiences.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What are the stories that young people tell about getting into university and getting on at university?
How can we tell these stories through a photo-essay?

METHODOLOGY

Eleven undergraduate students, supported by facilitators and with training in photography produced individual photo-essays around an access theme of their own choosing, working over six days. Discussion and participation to encourage student voices was central to our process. Students each selected five to seven photographs from all those they had taken, provided a title for their photo-essay and wrote a caption for each picture. Students as a group decided on how they wished to share the photo-essays and with whom.

We agreed on an e-book; setting up a Facebook page; making contact with a Foundation which supports rural youth in accessing higher education; and a photo exhibition and discussion on the South Campus of the University of the Free State.

We recruited students by telephone and filled out a bio information sheet for each participant.

We held three workshops:

Workshop One: 1) Icebreakers, 2) River of Life, individual and then discussed together, 3) 'World Café' discussion in small groups on access themes 4) Creative individual reports summing up World Café learning

Workshop Two: Photography training and practice. Storyboards. Students had about 10 days to go off and take their photographs

Workshop Three: Photograph selection, writing title and drafting captions, presentation of final story
We also set up a website with project information, photographs and e-book, and a WhatsApp group for regular communication

From the World Café discussions students explained that **funding** is a challenge but it does not put them off. The first aim is to pass matric, then apply (it matters if application is free), then to be accepted, then to register, and then to pay the fees. They choose **UFS** for many reasons: because it is close to home; because it is far from home; because they have heard about the University Preparation Programme which admits students with low AP scores; because they know someone who went there (teacher, relative, friend).

Information about access is tremendously important but not available to all students. The photovoice students were mostly positive about their high schools despite severe resource deficits. Teachers (most but not all) were encouraging, and the learning of discipline and knowledge was useful for higher education. Nonetheless many of their peers did not go to university. (Extended) **Families** encouraged hard work and although most did not help in preparing for university, they did support the decision to come to university. On the other hand, sometimes families may be a barrier if they want students to rather get a job. Most of the students come from communities that are not supportive of their education, particularly higher education; they find discouragement rather than encouragement in their communities where there are social problems which creates a very high wall between high school and university. During their first months at UFS they experienced challenges of funding, language, fitting in and making friends. But they found the South Campus welcoming. These students want to complete their degrees, become tutors, engage with peers, continue to other levels of education, take part in projects, be happy and have a peaceful transition. Once graduated, most of them want to achieve financial stability through employment, help their family, communities and/or others struggling to access higher education.

Tshepo Travolter Masiteng

Getting to university: the importance of teachers



Reamohetse

My high school!



The state of the school

Poor infrastructure discouraging learning



Missing chairs!

The space I had to learn in



Teaching in progress

But enthusiastic teacher making a difference



Going the extra mile

Matric learners on their way home from school in the evening



Passing!

Matriculants looking for their names in the newspaper



The long road.....

Finally, university access!!!

Sheldon Mudau Takalani

A fair student life



Beginnings!

Registering in Callie Human



Funding

Financial assistance from the bank



Living space

Room and resources to learn

Food security

Sufficient good things to eat



Inside the wardrobe

An adequate selection of clothes



Transport

Getting to university safely and on time



Endings and new beginnings

Completion and graduation

Paballo Prescilla Nkete

A long walk to my success



Aspiration

Future planning: It is not my neighbourhood but, it will be



Out of reach- information

The need to move out of a comfort zone to find information



Successfully happy

I made it!



Challenges made me

Obstacles but, light at the end of my steep climb



My everyday learning area

This is where I belong



Looking to the future: my desire

Achievement does not have limitations

Nthabeleng Senkhe

My family, my support, my success!!!



My family

Forever faith, memories, unity, love, loyalty



My mother

Her being absent (death) did not bring me down; it gave me courage



My pillar of strength

My aunt lightens my future; her wisdom gives me direction



Spiritual growth

*There are two rules on the spiritual path, it is to begin and to continue,
so I begin to prosper and continue to preserve*



Acceptance, South campus

My third time applying; South campus, my platform of great educational value.



Focus and determination

Working towards my future. Sharpening my destiny.

Finding my own liberation through education

Neo Tsomela

Self-determination pays!!!



First steps to success

The road to school was long but it motivated me



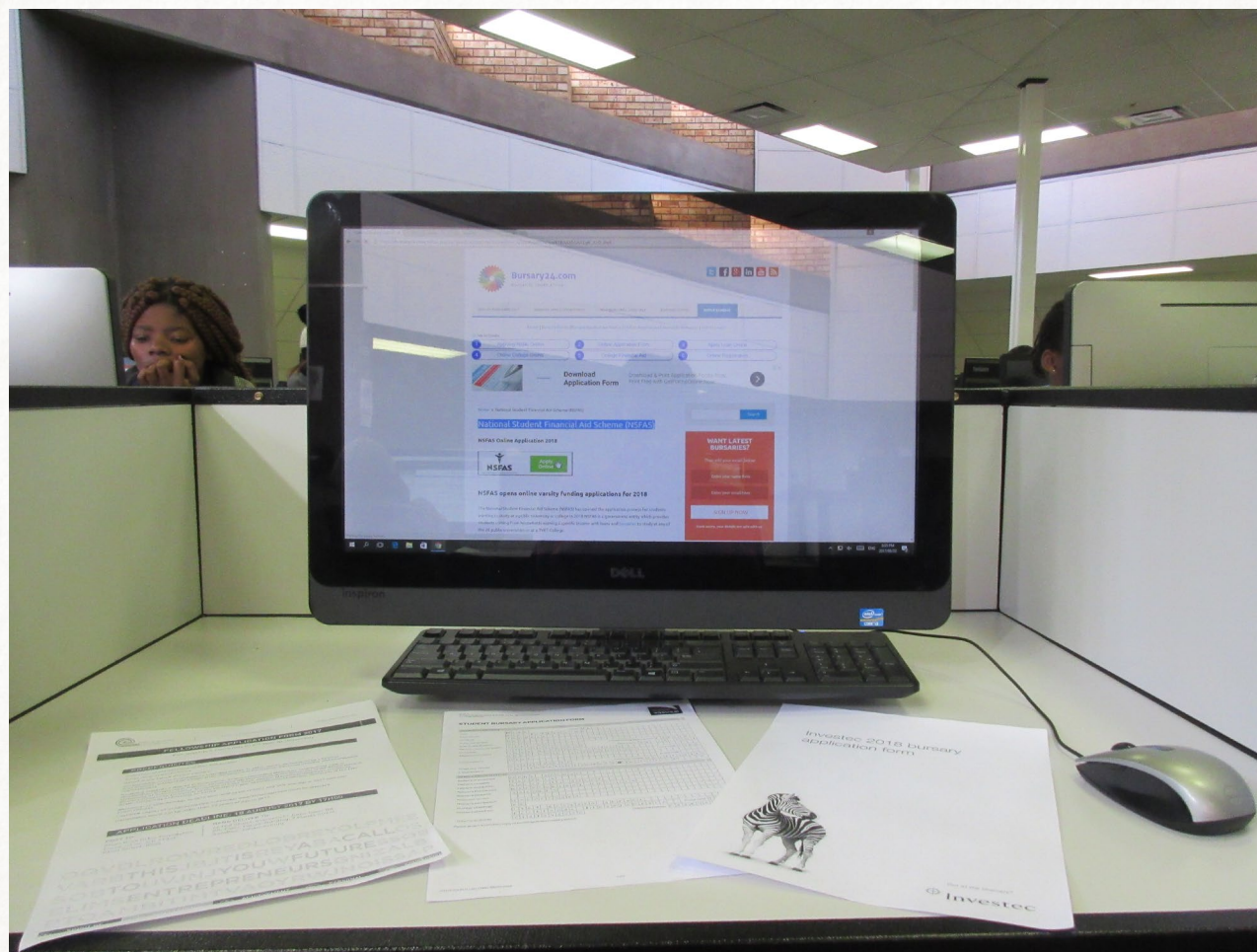
Striving for greener pastures

Taking more steps toward better opportunities



Funding as a tremendous obstacle

Parents wondering how to finance my studies



Breaking out of my comfort zone

Taking a risk to find out more about university and bursaries



Reaching the light at the end of the tunnel

Finally being accepted into university and getting funds



Achieving!

Making it to university against all odds!

Mpho Maxwell Ramaesela

My university life



Access

The joy of getting to varsity



Feeling lonely

Not fitting in is a problem



Pressure

Managing academics is not always easy



Labels, liquor and loafing

Peer pressure and bad influence



Earning success

Doing the right thing



My right path

Taking the right path to greener pastures

Innocentia Stallenberg

My long walk to university



Home: Where it all begins

Encouragement or discouragement?



Travels on the road of education

Miles and miles to school



22/08/2017 16:03

Homework!

A family supporting and working for learning and education



Financial woes

Relying on social grant

**DEAN : FACULTY OF
NATURAL AND AGRICULTURAL SCIENCES**

22/08/2017

Finally, university!

Mandisa Mnyakama

Teenager and pregnant



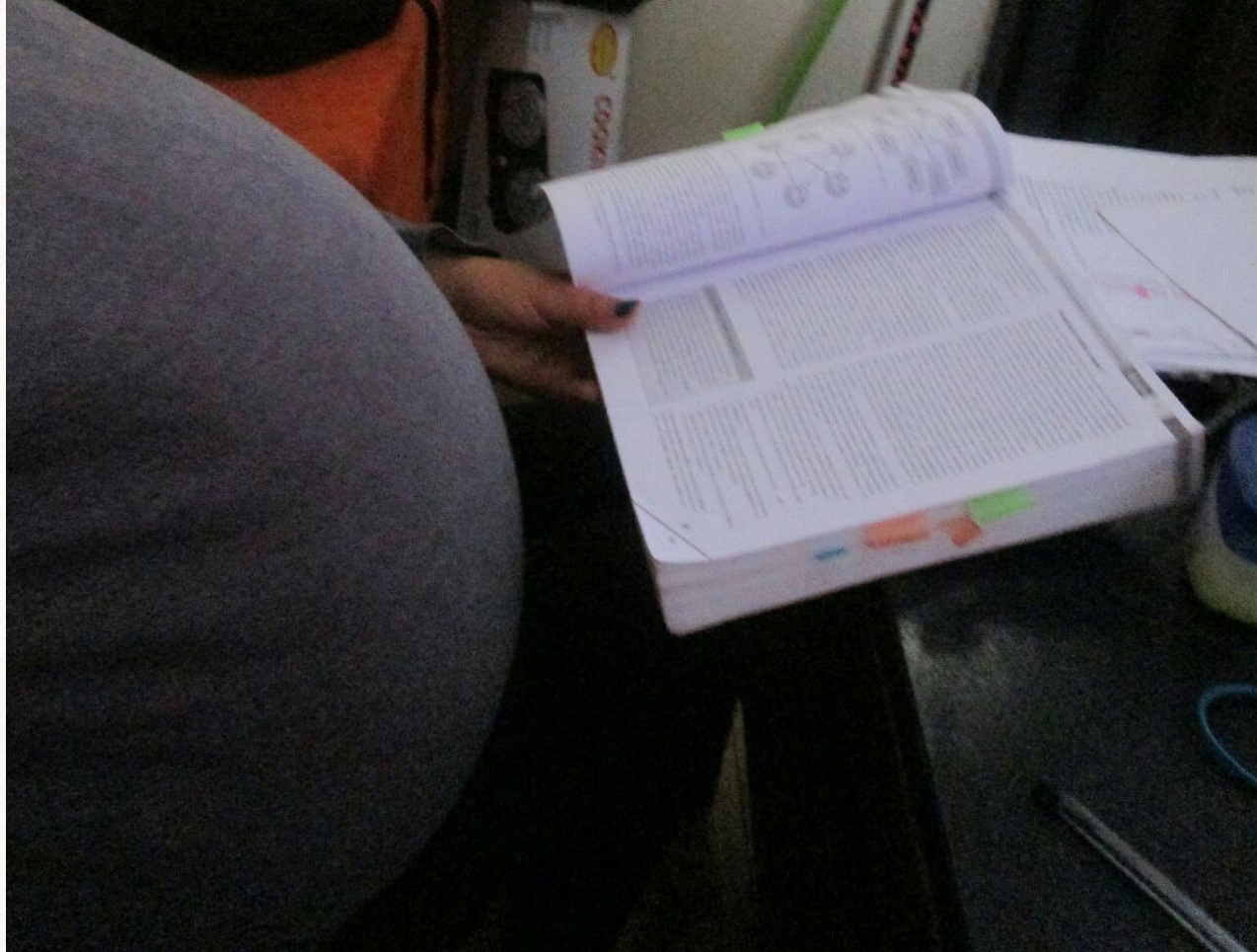
High school

A long journey with unexpected obstacles



Pregnant

Isolated, unsure, and worried



Defying the odds

*Dedication and determination of wanting to achieve more in life,
for me and my child*



Back in class!

Pregnancy was an obstacle but also it became my motivation for learning



Pushing on through high school

Working hard, getting information; making a better future for my daughter



Family support

My mother, supportive, helpful and loving with my daughter



Access to varsity

*Although it was a long way through high school I still managed to get access
to varsity, because of hard work and self-determination;*

Helped by the extended programme

Karabo Leshilo

Walls and bridges



The school

Dilapidated mobile classrooms



Textbooks and space

*Learners are trapped in deprivation and it is extremely
difficult to break free from this trap*



Family support

*Despite all the challenges, my family has been
a pillar of strength towards my success*



Aspiration and achievement

Getting to university



Funding

We push on hopefully with our applications for financial aid



Education is power

*A place for everyone, where minds merge and create a very powerful weapon
to cross the bridges and climb the walls of life and education...*

Andile Mdletshe

A hand to guide me



Information and motivation

Motivation is the key that will guide you to become a better version of yourself



Advice and help

Advising students about varsity and the process of applying



Applying!

The first exciting step to unlocking one's career is through applying to university



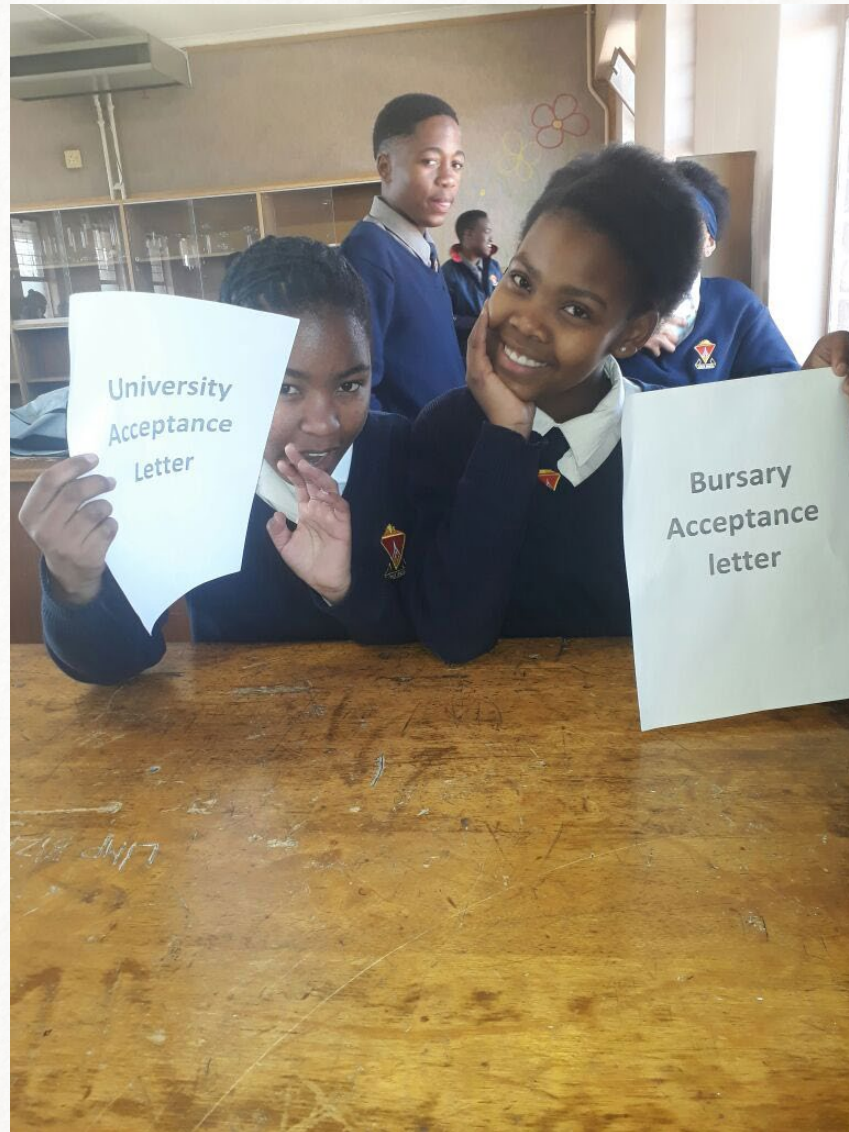
Bursaries

Giving students information about bursaries, how and where to look for them



Technology can help

This student is applying for a bursary making use of technology



We got in!

Students receive varsity and bursary acceptance letters

Pule Mahano

Struggle and perseverance



A new journey

The road to access university: the future looks bright from a distance.



So close yet so far

During the journey, the vision gets blurry, the sky isn't clear;

it's far from my limit.



Experiences

*Despite the living conditions, there is nothing more fulfilling
and sweet like having your own place.*



Better life

Had to study harder to increase my chances of affording better accommodation.



Inspiration

Surrounded by beauty, I'm still in the struggle without any intent to give up.



Looking to the future

I will never reach my peak; my climb is infinite. But the future looks bright.

