NELSON MANDELA

UNIVERSITY

PROJECT REPORT

2019-2021

HoC
Hubs of Convergence

Contents

Our Vision

We envision the HoC to be a collaborative multi-stakeholder space of exploration for the positioning and re-positioning of the engagement and transformation interface, as a feasible and doable option for reimagining our institution as a University in service to society.

Our Mission

Our mission is to strengthen the positioning of engagement and transformation as a strategic priority for the University to respond to the grand challenges of society by complementing, facilitating, supporting, and developing engagement related work, research and learning and teaching.

Our Principles

Convergence

Reciprocity

Multiple forms of output
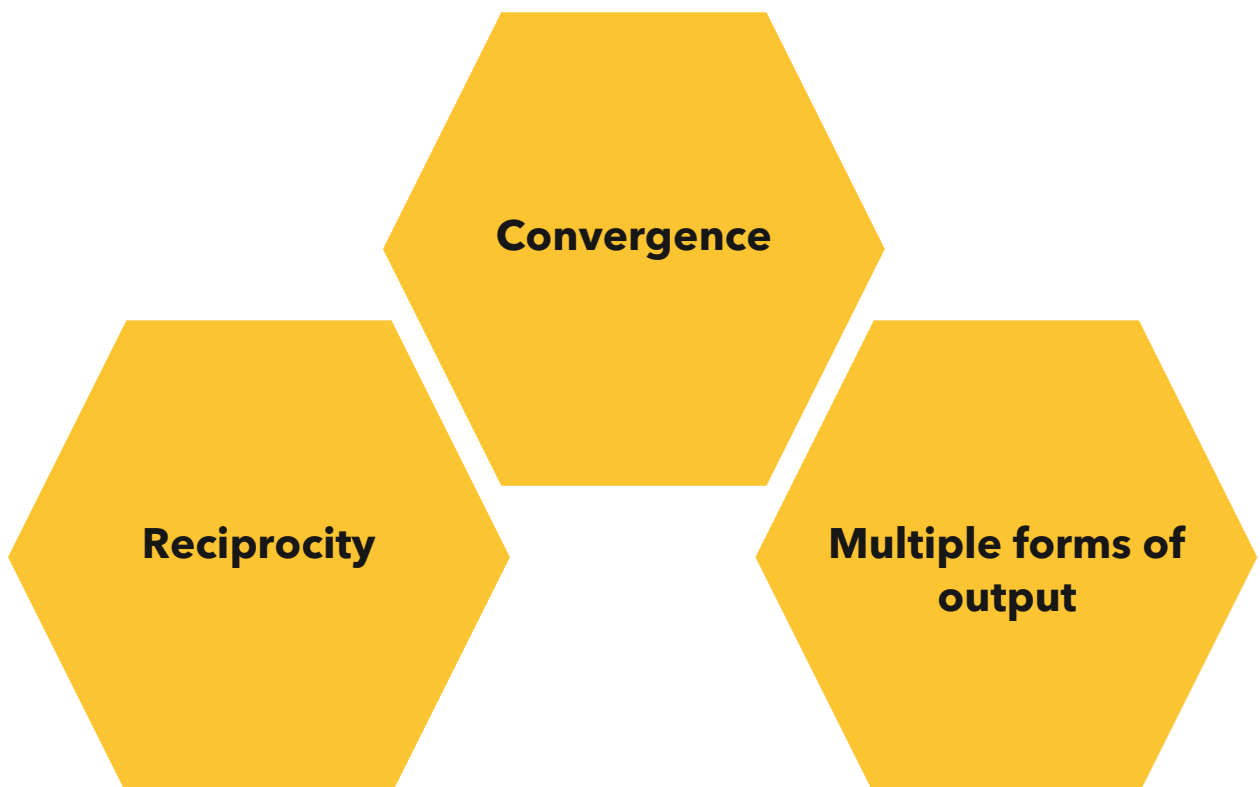
We, The People

The HoC space offers members of the team, and the various communities it engages with, the space to be creative and own their ideas; and to operate within flexible hierarchies which are natural and dynamic, based on the individual's talents and not their title or tenure. The HoC supports diversity of thought, background and culture, where every voice matters.

Dr Bruce Damons - Project Manager
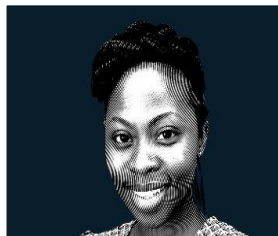
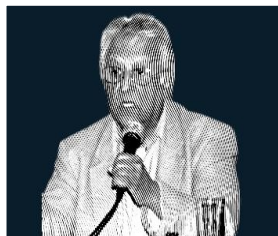Nandipha Ntengenyana - Project Administrator

Ntombovuyo Linda - Project Coordinator

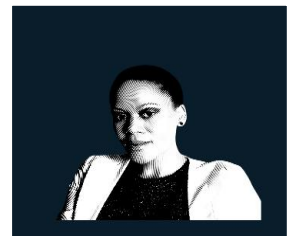Nicole Collier-Naidoo - CCW Coordinator

Khanyi Manzini - Engagement Support

Enver Motala - Research Advisor

Chanel van der Merwe - Research Assistant

Dr Tinyiko Chauke - Research Assistant

Rodney Boezacht - CCW Support

Oyama Mkaza - CCW Support

Geniene Sharrock - Admin Support

Amy De Raedt - Graphic Designer

Introduction

Hubs of Convergence

Aligned to one of the Nelson Mandela University's Vision 2030 Strategic Intention, to achieve "transformative engagement"[1] the Hubs of Convergence (HoC) is a project located within the Engagement and Transformation Portfolio (ETP). The HoC as a project endeavours to co-create "physical spaces where the University meets the community to engage on common platforms to find solutions to problems that affect our immediate communities," Muthwa (2018)[2]. Currently, the HoC as part of its extended mandate leads and manages the Community Convergence Workstream (CCW) as an institutional response to Covid-19[3].

The HoC presents multiple exciting opportunities for the institution to deliver on its broader operational mandates while reimagining how to become a truly engaged space responding to the complexities facing our world - starting with our immediate communities.

By experimenting with how best to converge the university and various communities, the HoC provides options for inter and transdisciplinary collaboration which will enable the university to give effect to its vision, mission, and strategic priorities and re-create itself in service of society[4].

[1] Nelson Mandela University Vision 2030 Strategy (2021)
[2] Vice Chancellor Inaugural Speech (2018)
[3] HoC Repurposing (2020)
[4] Nelson Mandela University Vision 2030 Strategy (2021)

Catalytic Moment

The 2018 inaugural speech by the Vice-Chancellor was the catalytic moment for the establishment of the HoC. Subsequently, this provided more impetus for the University to reposition itself as a transformative, responsive university; in service of society. Various iterative engagements with internal and external stakeholders have since followed. Part of these conceptual engagements included a multi-stakeholder convergence - *Indibano Ngezimvo* on the 3rd May 2019 which invited the voices of society into the thinking around the HoC.

Engagement and Transformation Portfolio

To achieve its ambition of co-creating a socially just world, the University established a portfolio rooted in the interplay between engagement and transformation and their interlinkages with research, learning and teaching. This newly established portfolio aspires to offer intellectual and strategic leadership to oversee engagement and transformation in support of the vision and strategic objectives of the University. The HoC is now located in the ETP and is mandated to lead and manage the Community Convergence Workstream as an institutional response to Covid-19

Vision 2030

Figure: V2030 Strategic Framework

The HoC's strategic intent is aligned to the University's Vision 2030 and ETP strategic objectives[5]. Through its programmatic work, the HoC is starting to demonstrate how the interlinkages between the strategic focus areas of Vision 2030 are possible.

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[5] The HoC end of November 2021 strategic retreat will finalise the strategic plan, guided by the institutional planning template

Strategic Objectives (2021-2025)

Institutional Transformative Engagement Goals (TEG)	HoC Strategic Objectives (HSO)
TEG1 **To conceptually and programmatically anchor the strategic goals of engagement and transformation within and beyond the University.**	**HSO1** 1(a) To position the Hubs of Convergence within the Engagement and Transformation Portfolio as a physical and intellectual space of exploration to support the core purpose and outcome of Vision 2030. 1(b) To critically support the interface of the four strategic focus areas to enable the University's positioning/re-positioning around its engagement and transformation agenda in service of society.
TEG2 **To position engagement and transformation as an institutional orientation that supports the aspiration of excellence in learning, teaching, and research.**	**HSO 2** To expand our understanding and clarification of knowledge co-construction through engagement and research by actively engaging with university faculties, centres, and units, as well as 'community'[6] groupings about the implications of research for supporting the development of university and 'community' programmes and actions that respond meaningfully to the historical and contextual challenges of our time.
TEG3 **To lead creative and pioneering engagement and transformation projects that differentiate Mandela University within the national, continental, and global higher education sector.**	**HSO3** To facilitate the integration of teaching and learning and engagement into university and 'community' programmes and actions, producing innovative, socially useful knowledge that introduces local knowledge systems and solutions to the global conversation.
TEG4 **To cultivate a vibrant intellectual culture that promotes critical consciousness socially just and responsible knowledge democracy and creates spaces for the open sharing of diverse knowledge paradigms and ideas.**	**HSO4** To develop the conceptualisation, methodology and activities that facilitate the co-construction of knowledge through engagement to support, enhance, and demonstrate the attributes of a transformative, responsive university.
TEG5 **To develop and implement institutional policies, systems, and processes to promote social inclusion and decisively eliminate all forms of discrimination, micro-aggressions, and gender-based violence.**	

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[6] HoC Concept Note

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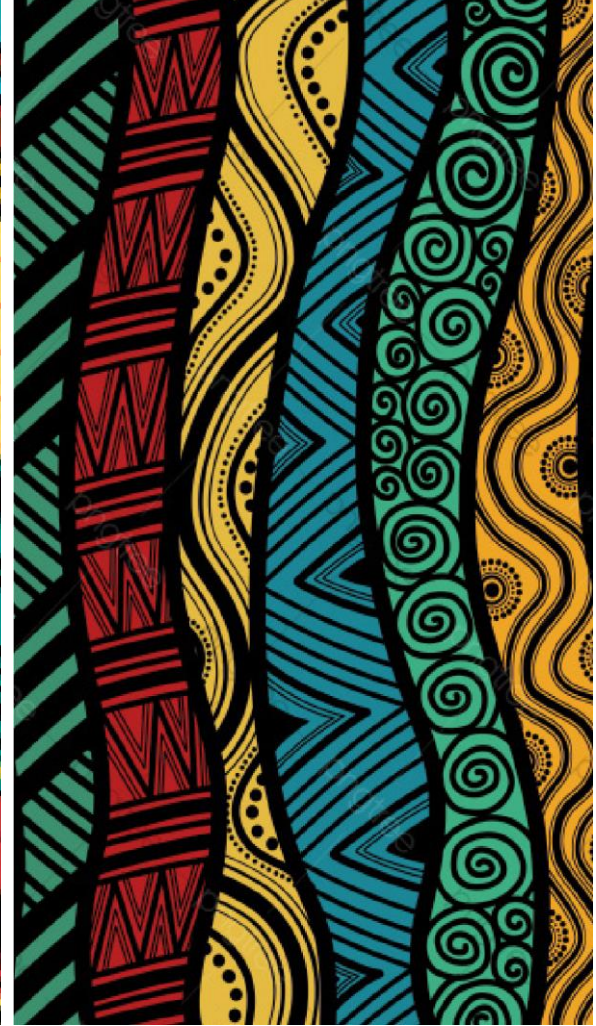
Our Work

Methodological Approach: The HoC Process
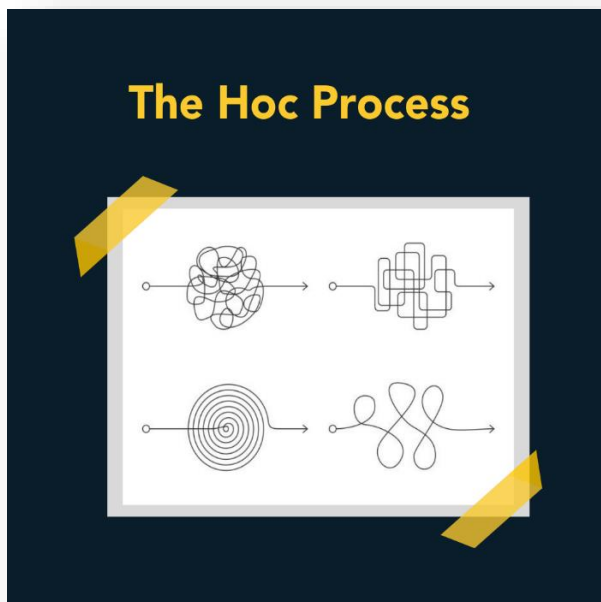
A critical participatory action learning and action research approach is being followed to conceptualise the HoC. This approach lends itself to the exploration of the phenomena of engagement and its modalities while at the same time being responsive to present-day challenges.

It is through a critical evaluation of the many forms of engagement and their useful applications that we will be able to produce 'cutting edge knowledge,' which will inform our engagement praxis in the metro, province, country, continent and globally.

The process of the HoC conceptualisation is iterative, non-linear, messy, contested, and human and material resource intensive. But it is through these processes, that knowledge will be generated to help us better understand how to be responsive to the societal challenges of the 21st century. A key part of this understanding is ensuring that all voices are heard, honoured, recognised, and validated and that an opportunity is presented for their critical examination and use.

Mandate Development

Between 2019 and 2020, we explored with various stakeholders, through different forms of engagement, their understanding of what the key characteristics should inform the establishment, work, and operationalisation of a contextually relevant HoC. The HoC's exploration took the form of many moments of engagement between stakeholders from the University and those from 'communities[7],' developing a pathway towards a signature project based on recommendations stemming from careful research. However, the unanticipated Covid-19 pandemic presented the HoC and the University with an opportunity to take forward its work in a direction that it could not have predicted. The urgency dictated by the pandemic required the HOC to prioritize its participation in the University's response of the to the pandemic.

It was at this point that the HoC was mandated to organize and facilitate the coordination and management of the work of the Community Convergence Work Stream (CCW) while simultaneously engaging in research relating to how the University's mandate of community engagement is taken forward in response to COVID-19.

The Beehive Model

The evolution from the initial proposition Beehive 1.0 to the present Beehive 2.0 is informed by the repurposing of the HoC as part of Nelson Mandela's University's response to the pandemic. The HoC responsiveness buttressed by the exploratory work done in 2019 allows us to understand how the HoC can articulate into the Vision 2030 strategic framework. Beehive 2.0 has emerged as an expression of the HoC's transdisciplinary collaboration and multi-stakeholder environment. The Model encapsulates the convergence of the University with the community through the

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[7] The word community is placed within inverted commas because until its proper identification in practice, i.e., for practical purposes and relative to a project within an identified community, the 'community' referred to will always be provisional. The very nature of the HoC research exploration (objectives 1 and 2) here is about this issue.

HoC's thematic hubs. The structure represents the project work of the HoC together with its related institutional nodes as a closely packed group of hexagonal cells as a modality of university-community engagement.

The Beehive Model demonstrates the unique and elaborate disposition of the HoC as an apparatus of translating ways in which the University can become responsive to societal challenges. Like a beehive, the HoC provides an architecture for co-creation, participatory action and a philosophy of relationality.
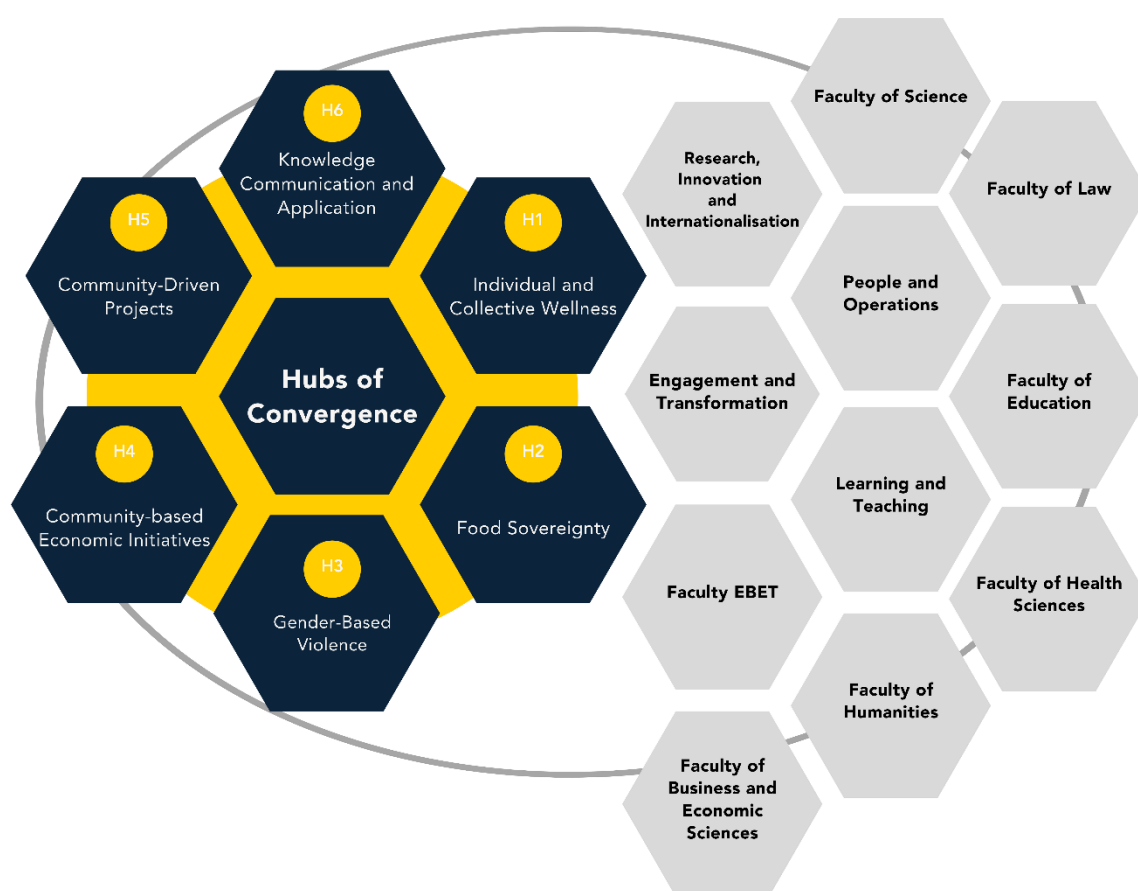

Figure: Beehive Model 2.0

The navy areas are the HoC's *thematic hubs*, which have been co-constructed with various internal and external stakeholder communities. The *thematic hubs* through hybrid praxes of engagement are demonstrating how the key strategic focus areas (Vision 2030) can interface in service of society. The *thematic hubs* further offer an

experimental space for us to clarify, understand and proposition how the interfacing of the strategic focus areas could support inclusive student access and success. The grey areas represent the four operational portfolios of the University including staff, faculties, entities, units etc. We have multi-forms of expression of convergence across these various spaces at our University. The HoC continues to support these various forms of engagement as part of its sense-making process in support of the transforming, engaged University. Our work is informed by the emergence of multiple forms of socially useful outputs including among others, scholarly outputs, webinars, and documentation from the various engagement processes. The importance of grounding this endeavour in scholarly and intellectual work is represented by the area shaded in yellow.

The Emerging Principles of Converged Engagement

The emerging lessons around our work advocate for an approach in which the following principles are crucial if the University is to be in service of society:

Convergence - the conscious effort of drawing together internal and external stakeholders to unlock the knowledge and praxis that enable us to better engage on grander issues that affect our society. The drawing together of these stakeholder communities recognises the voice and agency of all those involved in the engagement, which forms a vital element of a Humanising Pedagogy.

Reciprocity - the exchanging of co-created knowledge and resources through the principles of generosity, solidarity, co-creation, responsiveness, and inclusion for the mutual benefit of all stakeholders.

Multiple forms of outputs - mindful that socially engaged scholarship is best derived from an authentic process of learning with others in practice; that it embraces the uncertainty embedded in 'not knowing'; and is supportive of multiple forms of knowledge output to drive social inclusion and cohesion.

Demonstration in Theory, Principle and Practice

The pandemic certainly shifted the HoC into high gear, making it impossible to follow an informed course of action. The CCW has evolved significantly since its conceptualization, yielding a plethora of lessons about university and community partnerships. Moreover, the sense-making space driven by the Research Team through its *community of practice*, as well as the ongoing dialogue with the Research Project itself, have proven vital to this process.

Conceptually, the CCW has repositioned the various transdisciplinary projects into *thematic hubs*. One could understand these hubs as spaces in which the HoC, along with other ETP Units (such as CIPSET, the Transformation Office, the HIV-AIDS Unit, and CANRAD) have been co-constructing programmes in collaboration with communities, centres and faculties across the University, as well as stakeholders across civil society at large. The CCW has played a key role in assisting these projects to secure funding, developing proposals, deepening conceptual development, connecting to other organizations, organizing and facilitating meetings and workshops and reporting to the COVID-19 Coordinating Committee (CCC).

The Research Project, titled "The University, Community Engagement and COVID19", is informed by the work of the CCW and aims to explore how the University's mandate of community engagement is taken forward in response to COVID-19. The value of our research is supported by an increasing need for understanding community engagement outside of elitist notions of university interventions. In 2021, the Research Project welcomed more members, becoming a multi-disciplinary space of collective learning about how *engagement* is understood and practiced in the University sphere. We are also learning about the challenges, limitations, and of new possibilities that this work presents. Following Ethics Approval and completion of the desktop component of the study, the Research Team has undertaken several focus group interviews, which are set to continue into 2022.

Operational Areas

1 Administration

- Administrative setup: Develop internal linkages and administrative support systems.
- Institutional policy: understand and identify policy gaps for engagement work.
- Financial management: ensuring access and maintaining accountability.

2 Research

- Complete desktop research
- Receive Ethics Approval
- Institutional Permissions
- Begin fieldwork research
- Establish CoP
- Produce written outputs
- Participate in conferences and forums

3 Transversal Linkages and Oversight

- Position HoC as physical and intellectual space of exploration, supporting V2030.
- Expand understanding and clarification of knowledge co-construction through engagement and research.
- Facilitate the integration of T&L and engagement into university and community programmes.
- Enhance and demonstrate the attributes of a transformative, responsive university.

4 Thematic Hubs

- Support and strengthen the University's response to the COVID - 19 pandemic through the coordination and management of the CCW projects:
  - Individual and Collective Wellness
  - Food Sovereignty
  - HIV-AIDS Unit
  - Community-based Economic Initiatives
  - Community-driven projects
  - Knowledge Communication and Application

Programmatic Work

Hub 1: Individual and Collective Wellness

Area Assemblies: knowledge-sharing and problem solving, Kariega (L), Wells Estate (top right), Booysens Park & Dwesi Ext (bottom right)

Hub 1 – Individual and Collective Wellness, is where we situated the *Tele-Counselling Project* operational in 2020. The network of volunteer counsellors offering debriefing to Community Healthcare Workers on the frontlines of the Covid crisis flourished under the coordination of the Transformation Unit alongside staff from the Psychology Department and Emthonjeni Student Wellness. As the academic programme resumed and the demand for debriefing tapered off, the project drew to a close. The need for collaborative thinking towards psycho-social support has not declined, however, and the Hub thus awaits revitalization from transdisciplinary University and community collaborators. In 2022, a new project has emerged that straddles this hub as well as Hub 5 (Community-driven Projects). It is a community-based response to substance abuse, led by national organization, Hope Revolution Vision.

Hub 2: Food Sovereignty

Hub 2 – Food Sovereignty – has been a hive of activity. Within this hub, the *Community-Based Food Systems* project, held by Siyabulela Mama and the CIPSET team, has offered multiple   forms of support for urban food farmers across

Gqeberha and Kariega. This has consisted of various material inputs such as seedlings and tools, alongside workshops, training sessions, area assemblies, educational materials, a comprehensive webinar series, booklets, videos and an SLP in progress. These have provided numerous opportunities for multi-directional learning around issues key to building food sovereignty, from understanding how the dominant food system operates to tapping into local traditional knowledge around seed saving and food growing, and making sense of the water crisis our region is facing. As the water crisis deepens and our water sources are revealed as contaminated, community organizing to find solutions for access to water in an increasingly dry environment becomes even more necessary.

A collaboration between one of the urban food farming groups, Sibanye, and Northern Lights School has since emerged. They have invited the HoC to work together with community farmers and teachers to shape an educational programme that offers opportunities to differently-abled learners to develop post-school vocational pathways, and builds connections between learners and communities, while developing possibilities for alternative food systems.

Members of Moeggesukkel Community Kitchen in front of their garden, holding FireKilla units [Picture by Photography third year, Dion Nonyane]

Also located in Hub 2, the *Sustainable Food Relief* project has entered its second iteration, building on the foundation of the material support offered to soup kitchens in 2020 and the beginnings of the development of the concept of the Community Kitchen. Ikhala Trust, a local NGO, leads as Implementing Partner and key link between communities and the University. This year, the project received further funding from the Mandela University Convergence Fund (MUCF), to expand material support and capacity-building with six community groupings. This project has enabled collaborating members to explore what a Community Kitchen could look like and whether it may

be a useful vehicle for building more solidaristic and sustainable solutions to the problems our most marginalised communities face.

Linked to this is the *FireKilla Pilot Project*: *Masixhobe Siwulwe Umlilo*. In 2020 eNtsa tested an alternative fire extinguisher developed by local small enterprise, FireKilla, that is both cheaper, easier to use and non-toxic. Funding from Mandela Convergence Fund thereafter made it possible to provide 8 units and 8 refills each to 6 Community Kitchens with which we were working alongside Ikhala Trust. A workshop taking place mid-November will gather feedback on the use of the units thus far, and provide basic fire safety training, the latter provided by the university's Emergency Medical Services Department.

Hub 3: HIV/AIDS Unit

In Hub 3, the HIV-AIDS Unit and a handful of local organisations have expanded their network, and been joined by the Transformation Unit, forming a GBV Forum whose members span Gqeberha, Kariega and beyond. Funding from the MUCF has supported the activities of four-member organisations, strengthening their particular contributions towards ending the scourge of Gender-Based Violence. The Forum fosters collaboration between fellow member organisations, an understanding of one another's work, and a supportive environment for

GBV Forum members, I Protect Me, whose MUCF-funded programme included self-protection training at schools and centres across the Northern Areas of Gqeberha

organizational development. The Forum is currently preparing a collective proposal for the UN Democracy Fund.

Hub 4: Community-based Economic Initiatives
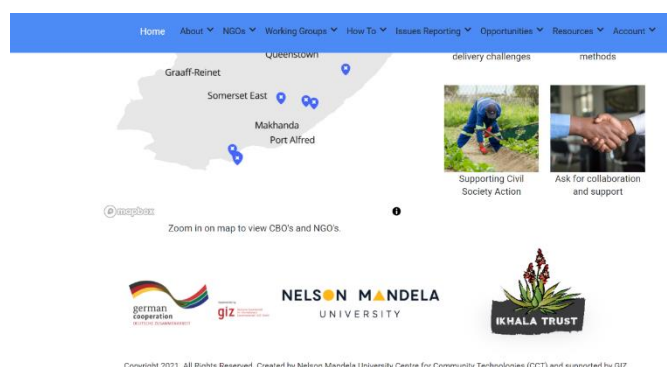
Civil Society Engagement Tool: website

In Hub 4, Community-based Economic Initiatives, the *Sewing Project* has evolved out of the erstwhile Masks Project which endeavoured through 2020 to source and distribute masks, with the long-term goal of developing economic initiatives within local, marginalised communities. In 2021, possibilities have emerged for the CCS-CANRAD-HoC team to build small sewing enterprises or cooperatives along with stakeholder communities, through collaboration with Manyano Schools and the Association for People with Physical Disabilities, alongside conceptual support from the University's Business School. Extended stakeholder engagement has led to the development of a foundation-building proposal, sponsored by funding from CANRAD, with which to cultivate a supportive network or ecosystem that will provide the best chance for the cooperatives we are working towards to thrive. This foundation will also prepare the grounds for a larger funding proposal covering sewing training and establishing of the cooperatives in 2022. As 2022 kicks off, interest from multiple quarters has brought the issue of Ending Period Poverty onto the agenda, and we are working with the Sewing Project stakeholders as well as funders and a small local business to develop the possibilities for connecting this project to that goal.

Hub 5: Community-Driven Projects

In Hub 5, two community-driven projects are continuing their work. The *Civil Society Engagement Platform* was initiated in response to requests from local organizations within the C19 People's Coalition for a space that would enable these organisations and movements to collaborate and support another in strengthening their work. Taking up the request, Mandela University's Centre for Community Technologies found a supportive partner in GIZ, and developed the offering through various

stages of focus group interviews and feedback sessions. The platform has been launched and is now available to be populated.

Ubuso Bethu developed organically out of the groundwork done by Wara Fana in the development of the Takasele website. It was spurred into action by initial seed funding from the Community Convergence Workstream, allowing for a number of community journalists to be paid for work they prepared under the mentorship of the Ubuso Bethu team, which was then published on the [website](). The project also undertook workshops to assist aspiring community journalists and held a well-attended webinar with a number of speakers on the topic of media ethics. Tragically, Wara lost his life to Covid in June 2021. In the wake of his passing a number of tributes appeared, and recognition for Wara's contribution to platforming and prioritising African languages was received by the likes of the great Ngugi wa Thiong'o. In order to carry forward the powerful vision and legacy of Wara Fana; Heather Fana will step into the role played by her husband and she and Louise Vale have committed to continuing with the work of Ubuso Bethu. Further funding has been received from the HoC and *Cri*SHET to continue and expand this work.

Wara Fana 1976-2021: activist-journalist and Mandela Uni alumnus

Hub 6: Knowledge Communication and Application

In Hub 6, Knowledge Communication and Application, we have located the Research Project discussed above, as well as the CCW Webinar Series held at the end of 2020. In 2021, this has included the development of a Communication Strategy, an HoC Instagram account, and the development of a template Organizational Profile alongside a community partner organization. Our collaboration with the School of Visual and Performing Arts connecting Photography and Graphic Design curricula to the Community Kitchens we are working with in the *Sustainable Food Relief* project. The latter collaboration provides a pilot exploration

of possibilities for connecting the work of teaching and learning to that of engagement, with multiple outputs including high-quality images, logos and visual designs for the Community Kitchens to use in any proposals or media moving forward. In 2022, the collaboration with Graphic Design and Photography will link students with another of the HoC projects – the Community-based Food Systems project. We are exploring the initiation of a possible new hub, an After-school Hub, led by The Learning Trust, which intends to engage stakeholders around support for the centres and projects that seek to provide a safe and engaging environment for kids during the afternoons after school.

Towards V2030

The strategic focus areas of Vision 2030 resonate deeply with the HoC, forming an ever-present lens through which we may understand and measure our work. In supporting projects within and outside of the University space, our contribution is often to translate this vision into pathways and activities appropriate to a particular collaborative context. At times this may mean making space for participants to connect deeply on a human level, understanding that this is key to cultivating the kinds of moments that awaken one's consciousness and bring about transformative learning. Or it could mean subtle adjustments made to 'balance' voices so that co-creation of socially just solutions is not thwarted by the unequal power dynamics that define our society. It often means listening to critiques from stakeholders, or the research team, whose difficult questions force us to re-examine assumptions, and in turn, drive innovative and impactful problem-solving within our research and programmatic work. And increasingly, it means looking for opportunities to invite students in to think and to participate with us, shaping and being shaped by our praxis – and not as individual volunteers, but as part of their curriculum. This makes possible multiple outputs that simultaneously supply life-changing learning experiences for all participants while completing a component of a curriculum, producing something meaningful to our community stakeholders, and informing the research underpinning this work to help us understand what it might mean to be a University in service of society.

4

Learnings

Context: Great care must be taken to avoid preconceived ideas of how community systems and groups are likely to respond. These are often contextual and are constructed on historical, cultural, political, social and economic inferences.

Time: Further lessons for our work indicate that time must be given for complex responses to develop, and a wide range of approaches must be considered to ensure that all possible (maybe not all but relevant) key methods have been explored.

Operational: Institutional policies on engagement need to be developed and integrated to simplify administrative processes, tools and support. Often bureaucratic instruments are a barrier more than they are an enabler of CE. *How do we reconcile communities' need for immediate responses, relief and university check and balances?*

Resources: Management, distribution, usage and exchange of human and material university and community resources is a layered exercise because i) power is not always shared, ii) capacity is varied, iii) trust is built over time, iv) CE is not always prioritized as a significant university output.

Relationships: Relationships are not easy to establish, maintain and nurture where values, expectations, needs and interests diverge. *How do we reconcile differences in meaningfully constructive ways (not just at the metalevels, but with everyday interpersonal relationships)?*

Co-construction of Knowledge: Language is not innocent; knowledge is not neutral, and systems are not apolitical. All these are relational to a set of historical, cultural, political social and economic environments. *How do we produce socially useful knowledge (in and for) a constantly changing society?*

Communication: Universities need to articulate a rethink on the role of text, media and other forms of expression in communicating engagement work in universities.
How do we connect various communities across multiple platforms, in socially conscious and creative ways?

Change the World

mandela.ac.za