

Over the past three years, various Photovoice projects have been conducted in Limpopo, South Africa in conjunction with the Water and Health in Limpopo Project, a collaborative effort between the University of Virginia and the University of Venda. This summer, I had the opportunity to share Photovoice conclusions, take input for future interventions, and discuss areas for improvement with community members in both Tshapasha and Tchibvumo. In the roughly 5 weeks I was in Limpopo, I was able to conduct 4 focus groups centered on these issues and have conversations built around the Photovoice findings.

Like all international research, the experience was not without a variety of complications. When proposing the project, I had been told that all Photovoice data had been collected and coded appropriate to be taken back to the communities. However, just before my departure, I learned that the codings had not been completed. Thus, in order to be able to conduct the focus groups, I spent time looking at the raw interviews, coding the participants' responses, and reformulating focus group questions to reflect the coding summaries. Despite this set back, it made me much more familiar with the communities, their concerns, and the information gathered through Photovoice in previous years.

While the focus group questions were revised according to the Photovoice codings, they were further revised with the University of Venda students with whom I was working. Elly and Khwathiso, two microbiology students, were an invaluable asset to my entire project. In addition to assisting with the focus group questions, they served as interpreters and their community connections opened many opportunities for further discussion. Being the makua, I learned so much from their cultural knowledge and their willingness to discuss life in Venda and the issues faced by the community. Without this connection, I doubt my project would have been nearly as successful, and I certainly would not have learned as much as I did about South Africa, Limpopo, and the two communities.

By the end of the summer through the focus groups in conjunction with home visits and individual interviews, I feel like I have a better understanding of the community concerns out of Photovoice as well as their hopes for the future. The codings from Photovoice revealed five main community concerns: quantity of water, quality of water, nutrition, general sanitation, and personal hygiene. These concerns, according to the participants, led to sickness and disease and ideally should be addressed either by the municipality or through community-based interventions. In keeping with the goals of the WHIL project, focus groups further discussed possible community-based interventions, many of which focused on the educational interventions as well as the construction of water devices whether it be a dam or a pipe system or a better method to store water. The final aspect of the focus groups centered on areas for improvement for the WHIL project. Community members open expressed frustration about the continued water testing without results, the seemingly unfair compensation for some participants, the lack of communication between the communities and UNIVEN/UVA, and the slow nature of the project. These concerns were then shared with Professor Netshandama as well as UVA faculty as a means to facilitate improved relations with both Tshapasha and Tchibvumo throughout future projects.

Having been back for nearly two months, I am still processing my time there and what it means to me. It was a learning experience in so many ways, and I am very grateful for the opportunity I had to travel to South Africa, meet individuals such as Elly and Khwathiso, and work with the communities there.