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Notes From The Field

Becoming a Bright Star Through Human Rights Education: (Re)humanization Through Participation

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Abstract

This essay explores a Human Rights Education (HRE) project that was initiated in the urban slums of Nairobi. The HRE project was combined with photovoice to support participants in the project to become empowered and make lasting change within their communities. The project took place within a program for young mothers called the Bright Star Initiative. Through 12 weeks of training, these young moms learned about human rights principles, how to apply them to their lives, and how to advocate for change utilizing a human rights framework. The project led to multiple interventions that are currently supporting the populations in these areas. The main goal of the project was to disrupt the oppressive forces that continue to subjugate, exploit, and dehumanize these young mothers.

Keywords: Human rights, human rights education, photovoice, Black liberation, critical consciousness

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Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) states that “Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person” (United Nations, 1948). Unfortunately, this article is violated daily around the world. Across the continent of Africa, human rights violations are rife. The legacies of the Arab slave trade, colonialism, the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, neo-colonialism, neoliberalism, and racial capitalism have left Africa in a state of chaos grounded in cultural genocide. The Euro-American footprint can be seen at all levels of government and society in Kenya (Lang’at, 2008). Further, nations like the United States, Russia, and China are trying to occupy the continent for military and economic benefit (Mdoe, 2022). Thus, the subsequent scramble for Africa continues to underdevelop, destroy, and deplete Africa of its natural resources and labor force (Rodney, 1972). As a result, Africa has yet to experience development free from foreign intervention and control.

To counter the Western and Eastern domination of the continent, education grounded in a human rights framework is needed to activate African citizenry to liberate themselves from the lingering control of their colonial masters. This human rights project was a response to the enduring legacy of oppression that remains on the continent. This project was born out of the love and compassion that I have for the land of my ancestors. It is also a part of a larger goal of uniting the entire African Diaspora to counter the effects of anti-Blackness that is now a global pandemic. However, to create an effective human rights education program, two types of learning are required: “learning about human rights and learning for human rights” (Coysh, 2017, p. 55). This essay focuses on the process of learning about human rights and creating a pathway to learn for human rights. Ultimately, by educating people to learn about human rights principles, how to apply those principles to their lives, and eventually facilitating collective action to defend and advance their dignity and social justice, we support people who have been historically marginalized by cultivating a “critical consciousness that helps identify oppressive power structures and leads to actions aimed at changing oppressive or disempowering social conditions” (Wang et al., 1997).

Background

This human rights education project began in Kenya, a country in East Africa that is home to over 48 million people. This project was completed in the largest city in Kenya, Nairobi. Sixty percent (60%) of the 4.4 million people in total living in Nairobi live in informal settlements, otherwise known as urban slums (Lang'at, 2008). There are over 200 slums in Nairobi, which house over 2.5 million residents. These areas lack the critical services that their inhabitants need to survive. There is a lot of crime, poverty, and illness within these areas. The biggest slum in Nairobi is called Kibera, which houses around 250,000 people. The Kenyan government has attempted to support people living in these settlements; however, their interventions don't work because they are generated from the top down rather than from the bottom up (Gulyani & Bassett, 2007).

Researcher positionality

In 2021, I started the Black Mental Health Program at the nonprofit, the International Mental Health Association (IMHA), where I have worked since 2020. The program was designed to promote positive well-being and mental health of Black-identifying individuals worldwide. I created this program to help heal Black trauma, foster positive Black identity development, decolonize the Black mind, and restore the African historical memory that was thought to be lost through slavery to create community and a general sense of unity among the entire African Diaspora. To date, this program has helped to connect folks throughout the Diaspora and is sowing the seeds for social change, Black empowerment, and Black liberation.

The Project

IMHA was established in 2019 by two women mental health clinicians, one being American and the other Bangladeshi. They had a vision to build a healthier world by pursuing mental wellness through an intersectional lens. Their commitment to build capacity for local action and global collaboration that centers mental health, led to the creation of capacity-building projects worldwide that focused on the environment, economy and equity, identity,

justice, education, and peacebuilding. IMHA works with communities around the world who are striving to bring change involving mental health, putting culture first. The goal is to collaborate with communities to build from the greatness in their people and the wisdom in their culture. Social justice is at IMHA core, and it is a non-negotiable value that is centered in all our work.

The Black Mental Health Program has a team on-ground in Kenya. This team consists of three members that provide the support, training, and facilitation of IMHA's East African Programming. Biko, a former journalist, is IMHA's social media manager and creative visionary. He creates beautiful media and supports the young moms in the Bright Star Initiative by facilitating mental wellness activities and exercises. Dorcas is IMHA's social change maker and creator of the Bright Star Initiative. A future social worker in training, Dorcas and her family have supported people in the slum areas all her life. Lastly, Esther serves as a volunteer for Bright Star. She provides support to the team and has a business background which she uses to train the Bright Star participants in entrepreneurship to support their families and earn a sustainable income.

This human rights education project was grounded in the African philosophy of Ubuntu. Ubuntu means "humanity" and it is an African philosophy that values collectivism over individualism (Nabudere, 2005). Further, Ubuntu philosophy emphasizes that "a person is a person through other persons" and "seeks to honor the dignity of each person" through the "development and maintenance of mutually affirming and enhancing relationships" (Nussbaum, 2003, p.1). Since Ubuntu values relationships, we utilized the "relational approach" to human rights education which focuses on "learning of human rights through narratives in relations" (Zembylas & Keet, 2019, p. 42). We wanted a culturally specific program designed and facilitated by folk directly from the communities we serve that supported their cultural values and way of life. The idea for the project's intervention was developed through our commitment to Black unity throughout the African Diaspora by restoring the glory of our African heritage through the dismantling of the vestiges of colonialism in Africa.

The Bright Star Initiative

Social issues and human rights violations permeate Kenyan slum areas. I heard there were numerous nonprofits working in these spaces to alleviate social problems. However, when on the ground, I didn't see any other organizations working in these areas. I found that nonprofits come here to secure funds (Wright, 2012). They round up kids, take pictures, feed them or provide them with a small amount of money, then leave. We investigated the organizations that proclaimed to serve these areas, but none were active or didn't return our calls.

Interestingly, I was at a market one day and there was a young girl who was running at full speed while holding a couple of children. An older woman was chasing her and yelling at her in Kiswahili. I asked my colleagues what was happening, and they told me about the situation. Apparently, the girl was a young mother, and young mothers in Kenya are stigmatized in various ways. They are essentially disowned by their communities and forced to find means to survive. Many turn to sex work, theft, or other activities within the informal economy. They lose all their rights when becoming young moms. They aren't allowed to attend school, some lose their employment, and others take the lives of their children or their own because they can't cope. These young mothers became be the first folx we would support through our organization.

The program the nonprofit I work with now facilitates for young moms (ages 12-19) and is called the Bright Star Initiative. We work with young moms from these informal settlements to provide basic mental health support, educational opportunities, and skill development for obtaining employment. The program also provides a space to co-create community, develop a positive identity, and a safe space to process trauma.

Through the Lens of Human Rights

Although human rights are important, many governments fail to recognize and support these fundamental rights of their citizens. In short, human rights are the basic rights and freedoms that belong to every person in the world, regardless of one's identity, nationality, or social location

(Dembour, 2010; Zembylas & Keet, 2019). These rights protect the dignity and self-worth of a person. However, these rights must be enforced to apply to individuals (Dembour, 2010). Unfortunately, in many countries, the State acts as an oppressive force to prevent people from obtaining their rights (Gibson & Grant, 2013). In Kenya, the stigma surrounding young mothers is often shared publicly by government officials and contributes to the shaming, stigmatization, and isolation of girls who have early pregnancies (Lang'at, 2008).

In Africa, there exist many different cultures, ethnic groups, and tribes that have, at times, held conflicting ideologies and perspectives. Failing to interrogate the forces that have created situations where young girls can become pregnant without having solutions for them to provide for themselves is a legacy of colonialism that the country has endured (Hall et al., 2018). As a result, Africa developed unequal gender roles that have produced oppression (Oyewumi, 2002). In a capitalist system, women face a myriad of challenges, and their oppression is reproduced in the maintenance of global racial capitalism (Lorde, 2000). Further, women's labor is exploited and undervalued. This also extends to domestic work that isn't considered labor within this system. Additionally, these young mothers have been stigmatized through the lenses of religions and ostracized because of the rigid gender roles imported from colonialism, and ultimately, they have experienced social death because of the cultural practices of certain tribes (Fanon, 2004). These sources of stigma compound the already heavy stigma that these girls face within a world obsessed with the concept of creating, reproducing, and maintaining the nuclear family (Oyewumi, 2002).

Human Rights Education

Human rights education is the antidote for oppression, at least in theory. Human rights education is the "training, dissemination and information efforts aimed at the building of a universal culture of human rights" (Human Rights Commission, 1996, as cited in Bajaj, 2008, p. 99). Human rights education provides individuals with education about their human rights and how to promote and defend their own rights and the rights of others. This information can then be utilized to foster a critical consciousness within learners

that can lead to societal transformation (Hantzopoulos & Bajaj, 2021). A human rights education also needs grounding in a critical framework, lest these rights become an act of performance rather than liberation (Zembylas & Keet, 2019). As a result, critical feminism is utilized throughout this project because an intersectional analysis is needed to explore how issues of race, class, gender, etc., contribute to the patriarchal structures of oppression and knowledge that inhibit these girls' growth and independence (Lorde, 2020).

Human rights theory is grounded in the social work framework of empowerment theory. Empowerment theories address the dynamics of discrimination and oppression. In these theories, individuals become aware of their life situation, how it came to be, and how to improve it (Adams, 2008). Rather than blaming themselves for their situation, which is neoliberal logic, individuals are allowed to engage in critical inquiry (Freire, 1970). Much like empowerment theories, human rights education empowers people to realize their full potential while, at the same time, supporting their own healing and the advancement of social justice (Bajaj, 2017; Meintjes, 1997; Robbins et al., 2019). Empowerment then serves as an intervention that provides individuals with the knowledge they need to access resources, address unequal power dynamics, and develop a strong sense of self and community (Robbins et al., 2019). Social stratification is a primary reason for these social inequalities, as they provide the justification for placing individuals and groups in their "correct" place on the social hierarchy (Knight, 2005). Understanding social stratification and how this oppressive system creates the conditions that the young mother currently experiences is how we begin to develop a critical consciousness of their society's organizing structures (Adams, 2008).

The Bright Star Initiative

Ultimately, to support the activation of a critical consciousness, a human rights education project was developed with these young moms within the Bright Star Initiative. The program cohort started with nine participants, but over time, that number dropped to seven moms because the other two had other pressing needs to attend to. Unfortunately, meeting basic needs and having good mental health is a privilege that many people from these

areas don't get to experience. We needed to find a way to support these young moms' mental health and foster their connection with their children and provide them with opportunities to become changemakers within their community.

What Do You Want?

The most important thing that I do before conducting any research, designing a project, or developing a program, is to complete a needs assessment with the community that we will support (Adams, 2008). Unfortunately, this is a part of the work that gets skipped over, especially in Western-dominated settings. The West values "expert" knowledge, which leaves local communities in the lurch. However, empowerment theory shows us that individuals residing within these communities produce knowledge that is informed by their lived experiences, which is just as valid as academic research (Robbins et al., 2019). This process begins with a needs assessment to see what the community truly needs. To make a change, the community must be activated to carry out the transformation project. Otherwise, someone else will decide the fate of these people, and in most cases, it is usually someone from the West who is loyal to the "liberal facade" (Fanon, 2004).

One morning, I interrupted my teammates as they were facilitating a session with these young mothers. The three questions I asked them were:

1. What is the biggest challenge you face in your life?
2. What is one of the biggest issues your community is facing?
3. What is one thing you want people to know about your situation?

Surprisingly, these questions facilitated an engrossing discussion among the young moms. For the first time in their lives, they were positively centered in a conversation. Instead of having insults hurled at them, they were asked one of the most valuable questions they could be asked: "How do you envision your life now that you know that your situation isn't your fault but a part of a bigger system that tries to hold you back?" The conversations were lively and extremely engaging, highlighting the conscious-raising

effects of liberatory education (Freire, 1970). This was the information that I needed to begin my shift back into my role as an educator of human rights.

Facilitator: “What is your biggest regret?”

Participant: “That I had a child as a child.”

Facilitator: “Why do you regret having a child?”

Participant: “Because everyone says it wrong.”

Facilitator: “Do you think it’s wrong?”

Participant: “Yes. *(pause, looks around the room)*. No, because I love my baby *(holds baby close)*. Even though it is very hard, I wouldn’t want to be without her.”

Facilitator: “So, what do you really regret?”

Participant: “Not having the courage to say what I just said to you to everyone who said it was wrong.”

A Locally informed Human Rights Education

Despite the universal claims of human rights, in practice, human rights are impacted by the local context that they are being discussed within (Grant & Gibson, 2013). As a result of this contestation, enforcing human rights can get tricky depending on the setting one resides in. Therefore, a power analysis is one of the most important activities that one can do with their students. No matter their age or literacy level, students should be aware of the forces that affect them throughout life (Adams, 2008; Sumida-Huaman, 2017). Some people have more advantages than others, and these intersections must be critically examined to bring about change. From the young moms’ answers to the questions posed, collectively, we designed a curriculum that would work for them in their local context (Sumida-Huaman, 2017; Zembylas & Keet, 2019).

Lesson #	Content	Activities
	HRE - Human Rights Ed PH - Photovoice Training	
1	HRE: Introduction to HRE	HRE - Identity Interviews
2	HRE: What are Human Rights?	HRE - Review UDHR
3	HRE: Building a Human Rights Community	HRE - Panel discussion
4	HRE: Exploring Human Rights Challenges	HRE - Asset mapping
5	HRE: How to Advocate for your Human Rights PH: Introduction to photovoice & exploring our issues	HRE - <i>Role-playing</i> : Activist Actions PH - Mindmapping our issues
6	HRE: Framing Issues through HR lens PH: Oppression & Social Justice 101	HRE - <i>Role-playing</i> : Framing Issues PH - Mindmapping our issues
7	HRE: Acting through Human Rights PH: Photography 101	HRE - Create HR Strategic Plan PH – Photo Practice
8	HRE: Applying Human Rights to our Photovoice Project PH: Taking Photos & Discussion	HRE - Utilizing the HR Framework PH - Taking photos & analyzing
9	PH: Taking Photos & Discussion	PH - Taking photos & analyzing
10	PH: Analyze Data	PH - Coding/Theme creation
11	PH: Analyze Data	PH - Reflection on themes
12	PH: Write our Report, Decide on Action Plan	PH - Writing results

Figure 1. Human Rights Education & Photovoice Curriculum

Once the curriculum was complete, the young mothers reviewed it to ensure it captured everything they wanted to learn about. At this point in time, I was a bit nervous about teaching human rights, especially in a country that commits so many human rights violations. Would I face legal issues because people think I am trying to incite a revolution? Are we over-inflating how we can support these youth? What if we give them these skills, and it leads to more oppression? I had to get comfortable with these questions before beginning to facilitate. I drew inspiration from civil rights activist and educator Septima Clark’s Citizenship Schools, that stated that they do “one

thing and do it well” (Cotton & Horton, 1976, p. 10). This advice helped me to scale down my training and just focus on the most important lessons for these young moms. What is something that can help them improve their situation right now? The other learnings will come later. Human rights education and advancing social justice is a life-long discipline (Grant & Gibson, 2013).

I led sessions to equip the team to deliver the trainings, and I supported their training sessions by having debriefs and strategy sessions to improve the delivery of our training. The training took place in phases. After the first phase, we discovered we needed an action-oriented component to our work because our participants were excited to create change.

Your Rights, Your Life

The first few weeks of the 12-week HRE training were exciting. The participants learned about their rights as human beings and that these rights could never be taken away (Knight, 2005). Giving someone an education that can lead to their liberation is something that many educators aspire toward. However, liberation looks different in different contexts. When asked what they wanted most of all, the moms mentioned “community.” They lost their communities once they became pregnant. Many of these moms blamed themselves for their situation. They don’t have access to mental health support, so many of them developed mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and panic disorders. Our HRE training gave these young moms the space to name and feel their pain, process it, and heal. It also gave them a space to radically imagine a future without oppression.

I stressed for my baby because his first birthday was in a week, and I had no money to celebrate. I was sad. The other girls, who they [IMHA] call my “sisters,” saw my stress. They used the little money they had to buy us a cake and have a party, not just for my baby but the other babies who never had a birthday party. I was so happy and so was my baby. I didn’t know that people who are not your family can be so caring...Now I understand why they call us sisters. (~Course Participant)

After the first week of HRE classes, one of the moms asked if they could use some of the skills they learned to make change within their community. This was exactly what we were looking for. The training had already activated someone into action. We then decided on what kind of action we would like to take. Many moms wanted to bring awareness to their situations, while others wanted to agitate the government to provide for their needs. As I heard all the ideas that were generated, I thought about a photovoice project that I did one summer with young adults who were experiencing homelessness in the United States. That project was so impactful to those youth and their communities. Eventually, the work was presented to the city's mayor. It was a proud moment, especially when I saw one of my students leading a Black Lives Matter (BLM) protest in the park.

Photovoice

Photovoice “is the process by which people identify, represent, and enhance their community through a specific photographic technique” (Wang et al., 1996, p. 47). Photovoice gives individuals the opportunity to control the narrative about their life situation. It gives participants from the community the ability to share their perspectives on the issues that affect them and their community. This is done through photography, which acts as a radical form of communication that can eventually lead to significant social change (Wang & Burris, 1997). This process is facilitated by documenting the reality of the participants' lived experiences through photos, which are then shared and discussed among the group.

Engaging in a critical dialogue about what the person sees in the presented images centers on critical analysis. Through this analysis, participants can situate their problems within a larger context (Wang & Burris, 1997; Adams, 2008). This is how people become aware of the structural forces of society that created their oppressive situation (Robbins et al., 2019). As a result of the analysis, consciousness-raising occurs, which can lead to the development and enacting of social transformation (Adams, 2008; Freire, 1970). Collective actions such as mutual aid, collective problem-solving, and

community empowerment are outputs of a successful photovoice project (Molloy, 2007).

Photovoice Training

The photovoice project was an eight-week project that we combined with the HRE training. By this time, we had 20 more young moms who were interested in the program, so we took them on. I wanted as many participants for the training as possible because I wanted to create a community that would support one another that wasn't dependent on our team and organization. Robbins et al. (2019) found that the commitment to anti-oppressive work is "too overwhelming for any one individual, and thus, solidarity and involvement with similar others in collective action is crucial" (p. 94). Therefore, creating a community is important for this kind of work because facing systems of oppression alone can be a daunting task that can cause burnout. Our training room was filled with giant sticky notes that explored all the issues that the young moms were facing. Many spoke about the division within their families, how their communities expelled them, and how they felt sad and lonely.



Figure 2. Participant's note from "Identity Interviews" activity

As the weeks passed, the participants learned more about their rights, activism, and advocacy. How does a powerless community generate collective power? What are some things we wish people knew about your situation? The moms came up with some fantastic ideas. We then clumped these ideas into themes, which we then deconstructed. I included some Liberatory

Psychology and Critical Pedagogy within our lessons. I wanted to help activate a critical consciousness within our participants. I kept *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1970) with me wherever I went. It was a great reference because it reminded me that every step of the way, I need to reflect on the power dynamics that I am constantly creating (Adams, 2008). In Africa, my lighter skin privileged me, which is something that I was aware of. However, at times when moving throughout the country, I had to be reminded that not everyone is treated as well as the “cool Black guy from America.”

Additionally, the participants learned about photography and how pictures can tell a story. Many of the moms enjoyed learning about photography. They never thought they would take pictures of something so hideous (their words about the informal settlements) and get paid to do it. I compensated the participants for their “time and burden of participation” to ensure that they weren’t being exploited for their lived experience and because they would share the benefits of this research project (Gelinas et al., 2018). They were also in awe that one could write about their oppression and others would empathize with them and offer support. Rehumanizing these young moms was the first intervention of the training. We gave these young moms the ability to utilize their natural talents without confining them to a box their society created for them because their experience was not in line with the colonized normative African family narrative (Oyewumi, 2002).

Photos & Transformation

After four weeks of photovoice training, we had two weeks of photos to take. We started in the immediate area around the academy where we held our training. The young moms took pictures of the garbage that littered the streets of their community. They captured the pain in the faces of their elders as they tried to care for themselves and their young grandchildren. Many of these elders give up on life. We had an elder who wanted to take her life and the lives of the four kids she cared for. Luckily, we were able to provide her with support and a community of others who could support her. Since our intervention, she has been doing well and has continued to remind us that she wants to live and feels like she got a second chance at life. Additionally,

the young moms created a *chama circle* to help support this elder. A chama circle also known as a *sou-sou lending circle* is an informal money saving club where a

group of individuals meet on a regular basis, placing money in a pot, which is then allocated to a particular group member. The meetings continue, with a different member of the group being selected for the pot at each date, until everyone has received it once. (Levenson & Besley, 1996, p. 41).

Even though they didn't have much themselves, they were able to secure \$50 USD, which provided the elder with an opportunity to start a business for herself, which would support her and her family.



Figure 2. "mwanga" (illumination)



Figure 3. "matumaini" (hope)

This display of compassion came directly from the young moms themselves. I did not influence them to take this action. I noticed that the more training these young women received, their habits and ways of living changed. Instead of just looking out for themselves and their children, they banded together to help one another. They would also use human rights language when discussing their issues. One night around 2 a.m., a young mom was kicked out of her home by an abusive parent. Our organization doesn't have anyone on call, so we couldn't help in the situation immediately. However, instead of a disastrous outcome, two of the moms from the program picked the mom up and invited her to stay with them. They pooled their

money together and created a “safe house” for any of the moms in the program who may be experiencing any issues.



Figure 4. "nakupenda" (I love you)



Figure 5. "The spirit of Ubuntu"

Photovoice in Action

“You have a right not to be abused.” Who does he think he is? Do women have as many rights as men? Why don’t men respect us?” These were some of the questions that came up during the photovoice project. The young moms were changing, and so was the community around them. The number of small acts of kindness they completed during our training was amazing, forming a network of mutual aid and collectivity. More people within the settlement began working together to help one another. Resources were shared, food distributed, and joy cultivated. In a hopeless world, seeing joy is an act of resistance. My teammates shared a video where Black joy was on full display as people spontaneously took to the streets with music blaring to dance and share their happiness with one another, despite enduring daily hardships. Events like these happen more often now. Everyone in the slums we serve is getting to know us. We have so much demand for our program, yet we don’t have the funding to expand. However, I continue to push my team and our service users to think creatively about solutions that we can uncover. We don’t need funding to be empathic or compassionate. Sadly, the “nonprofit industrial complex” (INCITE!, 2017, p. 10) is just as competitive as the for-profit industry. Instead of supporting one another, we battle for

foundation dollars, much of which has come from the blood of the people we serve (Adams, 2008).

Collective Community Knowledge through Photovoice

After the data collection phase, which consisted of reviewing photos and engaging into critical dialogue about them, we coded the data we generated to discover themes. The themes that emerged from our photovoice project were: (1) maintaining good health; (2) access to food; (3) access to resources; (4) discrimination; (5) stigma; and (6) lack of opportunities for social mobility. We then took some time to brainstorm why these issues are a problem and how they affect the community. The participants then decided on a plan of action that they could utilize to solve some of these problems. Although many of the suggestions of how to alleviate the issues that these communities face were designed as low-cost interventions, their implementation will need more monetary support. Throughout this process, the participants learned how to make demands, compromise, and advocate for their needs. By allowing the participants to design the solutions to their problems, we facilitated their agency to create lasting change within their communities (Adams, 2008). They chose to display this data in a table that shows the issue, why it is important and provides practical solutions to solve these issues (see Figure 6).

Overall, the young moms were satisfied with what they discovered during their research. They identified the problem areas within their community and designed solutions to address these issues. We also asked the participants to frame the issues through a human rights lens. We did this because by utilizing human rights language, these young moms are developing collective power grounded in a humanizing framework (Mignolo, 2009). Not only are the young moms (re)claiming their humanity through this project, but they are also transforming the oppressive social conditions that have led to their suffering (Fanon, 2004; Adams, 2008; Asante & Dove, 2021).

Issue	Importance	Ask	UDHR Articles
<i>Maintaining good health</i>	“Conditions in these slums are not livable. There is no fresh air, no clean water, and no nature.”	“We would like to plant two trees monthly in the community (a total of 24 for the year). We found an NGO (non-governmental organization) to provide the trees for free. We want a large-scale community clean-up project. The community will lead this effort, and we need government support to remove the trash.”	Article 3, 16, 25
<i>Access to food</i>	“The majority of the people living in the slums make only \$1.25 USD a day. This isn't enough to feed our families. Food prices have increased, yet wages haven't.”	“We would like the Kenyan government to provide subsidized benefits for baby diapers, formula, and other necessities. The government can create jobs for us to clean up our community or provide additional services to cover the cost of the benefits.”	Article 23, 25
<i>Access to resources</i>	“Since we lack opportunities to obtain money, we cannot afford the necessities we need in life to survive. Medical care is expensive, and the government is not helpful.”	“We would like an initiative at hospitals that provide people with the medicine they need. Hospital visits are free, but we still need to pay for the medication, which many of us cannot afford.”	Articles 3, 21, 25
<i>Discrimination</i>	“It is difficult to obtain work as a young mother. We can only become hairdressers, cooks, and seamstresses. We need more opportunities to provide for our families.”	“Create more career development/skill development opportunities for young moms. These can be in the form of fellowships, internships, or apprenticeships so that we can learn skills that will help us provide for our families.”	Articles 1, 2, 5, 7, 21
<i>Stigma</i>	“The stigma surrounding teen pregnancy is difficult to navigate. People stare, they call us names, and we are denied access to the activities that make humans human.”	“The government needs to create an awareness campaign around the stigma of being a young mom. We are producing a play that will explore the issues that young mothers face in our society.”	Articles 1, 2, 5, 7, 9, 23
<i>Lack of opportunities for social mobility</i>	“There aren't many employment opportunities for us. Education is also not an option, as the policy that was created to allow young moms to return to school six months after giving birth is not enforced. We would like opportunities to obtain an education.”	“Women in Africa are at a disadvantage, especially if they are single mothers. We propose a program that supports young mothers by linking them with elders as mentors and supports. This way, a larger community is being created, and we support one another.”	Articles 13, 23, 26

Figure 6. Table of themes

Each area of concern was critically discussed, and the young moms practiced framing these issues utilizing human rights language. “As ideas from transnational sources travel to small communities, they are typically vernacularized, or adapted to local institutions and meanings” (Merry, 2006, p.39). At first this process was awkward, yet as we continued to practice, they became more comfortable engaging with these frameworks and utilizing human rights vernacular. The actions plan they created were analyzed through the lens of Ubuntu to ensure that African traditions and values were centered. This process ensured that whatever demands the young moms advanced, they would be beneficial for the entire community. After deciding on a plan of action that was framed through human rights language, the next phase of the project involved the young mothers advocating for their rights. Ultimately, they would like to put on a performance that captures the complexities of the issues they and their community are facing. Through this performance, they hope to inspire action towards change and social justice. A creative-arts performance was chosen because these moms wanted to express their bodily autotomy. They felt “restricted” by the external forces that have oppressed them and wanted to release some trauma but also disrupt the colonial logics that produce their marginalization.

Reflections

Unfortunately, without education, money to support themselves, and a strong sense of self, these young moms weren't set up for long-term sustained success. Human rights education could serve as a vehicle for liberation. However, there wasn't enough money for additional programming, so we had to do our best with the little we had. Designing a locally relevant, trauma-informed, and decolonized human rights education curriculum was free, yet the implementation required additional and ongoing funding. Further, it's not enough to educate people on injustices and their rights without an outlet for transformative collective action. An action-orientated intervention that is community-led is required to disrupt the unequal power structures that reproduce social stratification that leads to poverty, oppression, and dehumanization. These thoughts led to the idea of completing a project

with these young moms to ensure that even after we were gone from their lives, they could still resist the forces that continued to dehumanize them (Wang & Burris, 2007).

Additionally, there were some limitations and issues from the project that we can address while we wait for the next cohort. I wish we had additional funding to include some of the elders from the community for the project. This way, they could have earned some money but also made an intergenerational connection, which we feel is extremely important in this hyper-individualist social media age we currently live in. We also would have liked to have more funding to provide our participants with meeting their basic needs. Lastly, we plan on providing skill development training to the next cohort that consists of learning how to cook popular streets foods like samosas and chapati so the young moms can earn money to sustainably support themselves and their children.

Positionality

I'm a cisgendered Black-identifying male who is the executive director of a non-profit and the director of the Black mental health program. I am a highly skilled social worker and licensed therapist, as well as a military veteran, educator, and academic. I had a lot of privileges within the space, and I continuously had to reflect on how I "took up space" within our training. Many questions defaulted to me when people couldn't find an answer they thought I would approve of. I was seen as the "expert," but at the start of the study, I positioned myself as a "helper," seeking to not be paternalistic and to act with cultural humility (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998), who was a part of the community. I had to be fully aware of any ethical clashes that may have occurred during our training. As a social worker, my value system was tested repeatedly as I witnessed oppression, human rights violations, and dehumanization. I had to switch roles often due to some of the issues that my positionality had created. To maintain a participant-led space, at times, I had to remove myself from the training or a session for the day because I felt that my presence was negatively affecting the learning.

Conclusion

I learned a lot over the course of this project. My proudest moment was when a young mother who didn't say a word for weeks was the loudest, most energetic, and most excited to design solutions to address their problems. She took the lead and felt comfortable utilizing human rights language to make a case for herself. The way these participants spoke after receiving this training changed significantly. They became more aware of their own discriminatory and stigmatized behavior, that may have affected others. They learned that "hurt people hurt people," so it is important for all of us to take a moment to reflect on what our thoughts are at the moment. Are these thoughts unifying? Or do they create more division? If your thinking creates division, take a minute to pause and reflect on how you can use this space to support others rather than sharing an uncritical thought. Providing these young moms with a human rights education was a powerful intervention.

Going forward, this curriculum can be utilized in other settings. IMHA does a lot of work in Uganda, which is a very anti-LGBTQ country due to rigid laws that criminalize homosexuality. We plan on rolling out this project with participants there to advocate for legislation to help protect these vulnerable populations. Further, this training would be extremely helpful to our work in Nigeria. We support an area that serves 10,000 school-aged children, many of which have been former child soldiers or have been involved in conflict. Empowering these communities to act through human rights education and photovoice would be a powerful intervention that not only educates for change, but takes action to produce sustainable outcomes (Adams, 2008). In the end, providing opportunities to educate people on their human rights is an act of resistance (Hantzopoulos & Bajaj, 2021; Zembylas, 2017). This project showed us that there are many ways to support oppressed communities, with the most important aspect being allowing them to lead the project and decide on how to enact change. For me, human rights education isn't just about teaching people how to liberate themselves from oppression; it also provides them the opportunity to be human (Asante & Dove, 2021). We have become a colder and more individualistic civilization, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. How do we (re)forge genuine human relationships with one

another? Where can we utilize collective power to help those who aren't protected by the "wages of whiteness" or privilege (Gomez et al., 2022)?

Lastly, as we have seen from this study, by grounding learning about systems of oppression in a human rights, trauma-informed, and strengths-based way, we are providing people with the opportunity to make lasting changes to their own communities. The hegemony of the Western lifestyle is alluring because people have become culturally dislocated from their ancestral ways of being. Through this project, a pathway to liberation was created by cultivating a collective and critical consciousness that is needed to transform the powerless into powerful agents of change who can experience the right to "life, liberty and security of person" (United Nations, 1948).

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