

Do young women display more agency after participating in the Stepping Stones Creating Futures intervention?



**Samantha Willan,
Nolwazi Ntini, Andrew
Gibbs, Nwabisa Shai,
Rachel Jewkes**

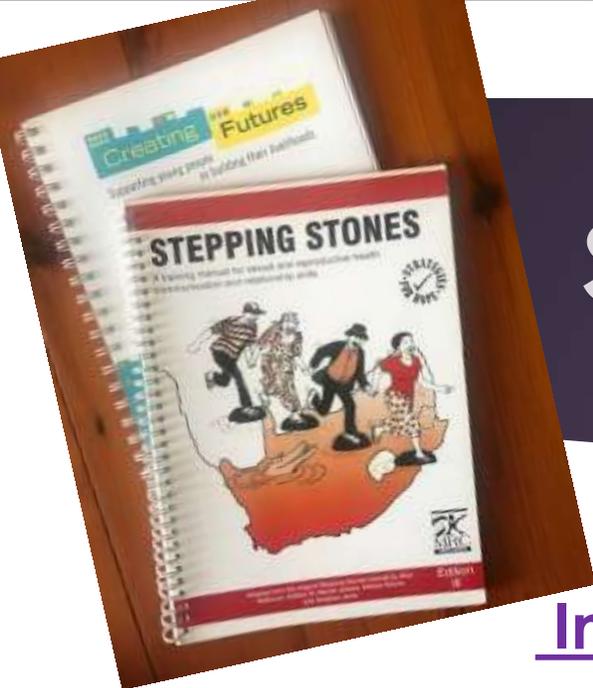
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Stepping Stones Creating Futures Intervention and RCT

Intervention

- ▶ **Stepping Stones Creating Futures**
 - ▶ Gender Transformative and Livelihoods Strengthening – reduce IPV & HIV
 - ▶ Group-based, participatory intervention - critical dialogue and reflection (Freire)
 - ▶ 21, 3 hour sessions, twice weekly, single sex groups of approx. 20 people

Evaluation

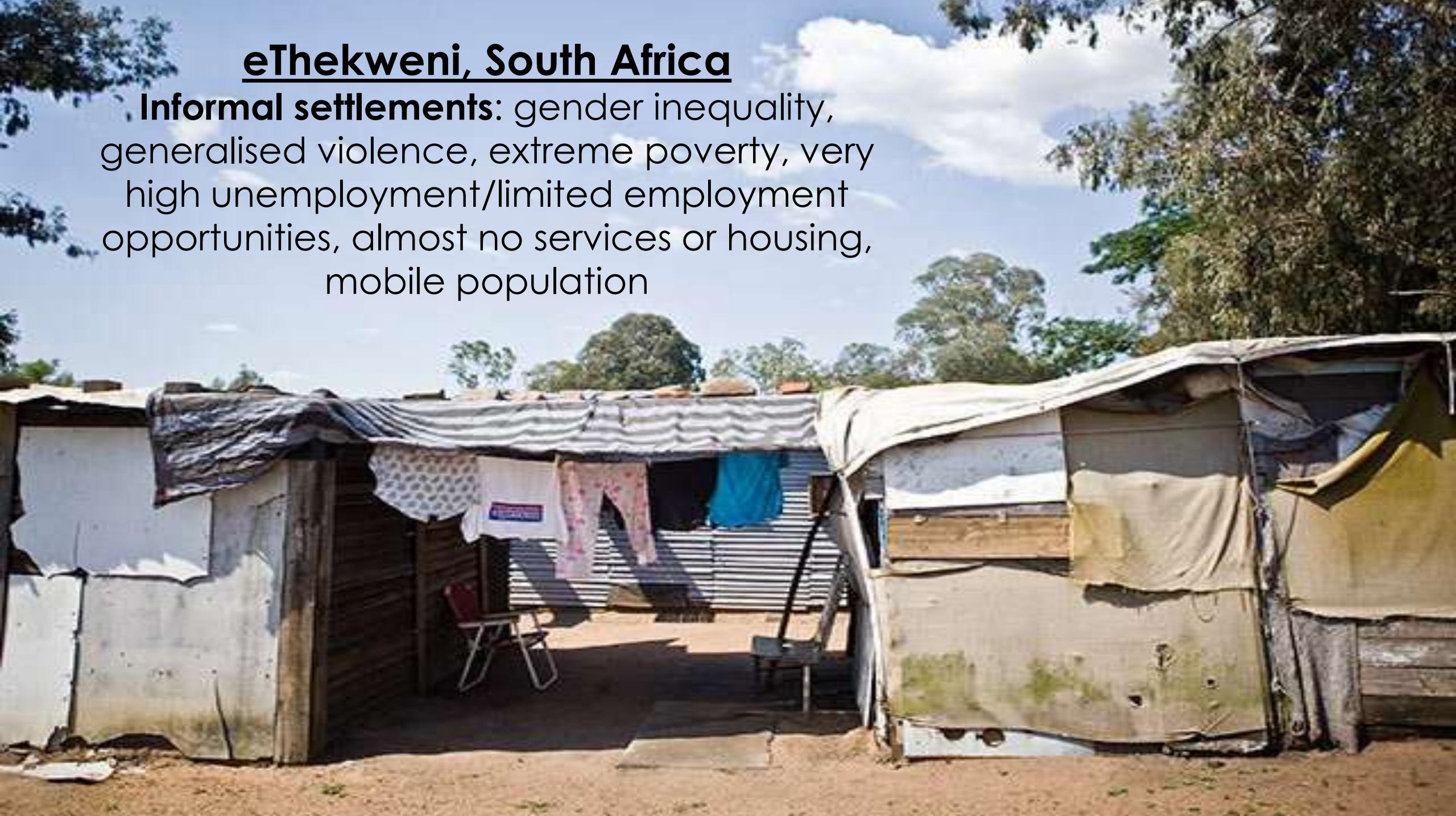
- ▶ RCT – 1360 women & men
- ▶ **Qualitative: 15 women, 3 time points**
 - ▶ IDI's (baseline, 12 and 18 months = **54 IDI**), photo voice (baseline & 18 month) and participant observations
- ▶ Inductive content analysis
- ▶ All 15 women currently in heterosexual relationships, women tended to focus discussions on most significant love-relationships



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eThekweni, South Africa

Informal settlements: gender inequality, generalised violence, extreme poverty, very high unemployment/limited employment opportunities, almost no services or housing, mobile population



The (15) women's lives

- ▶ **19-29 years** (baseline)
- ▶ **None in formal employment** (baseline)
- ▶ Two completed **secondary school** (baseline)
- ▶ **10 were mothers**, 3 miscarried, 2 never pregnant
- ▶ **IPV was widespread**
 - ▶ 11 emotional, physical, economic and/or sexual IPV, and controlling behaviors from male partners were common
 - ▶ Quants (baseline) 65% of women reported physical and/or sexual IPV in past year
- ▶ Excessive **drinking, drug use and partying** common
- ▶ Many were **bored, lonely, depressed**
- ▶ **Challenging childhoods**: neglect, sadness not being raised by mothers, rape and abuse





What is agency? When does a women have “IT”?

- ▶ Agency: radical, bold actions
- ▶ Critique:
 - ▶ “Action bias” Madhok et al (2013)
 - ▶ More nuance; recognise social & economic context & constraints (Mahmood 2001, Madhok et al 2013, Mannell, Jackson and Umutoni 2015)

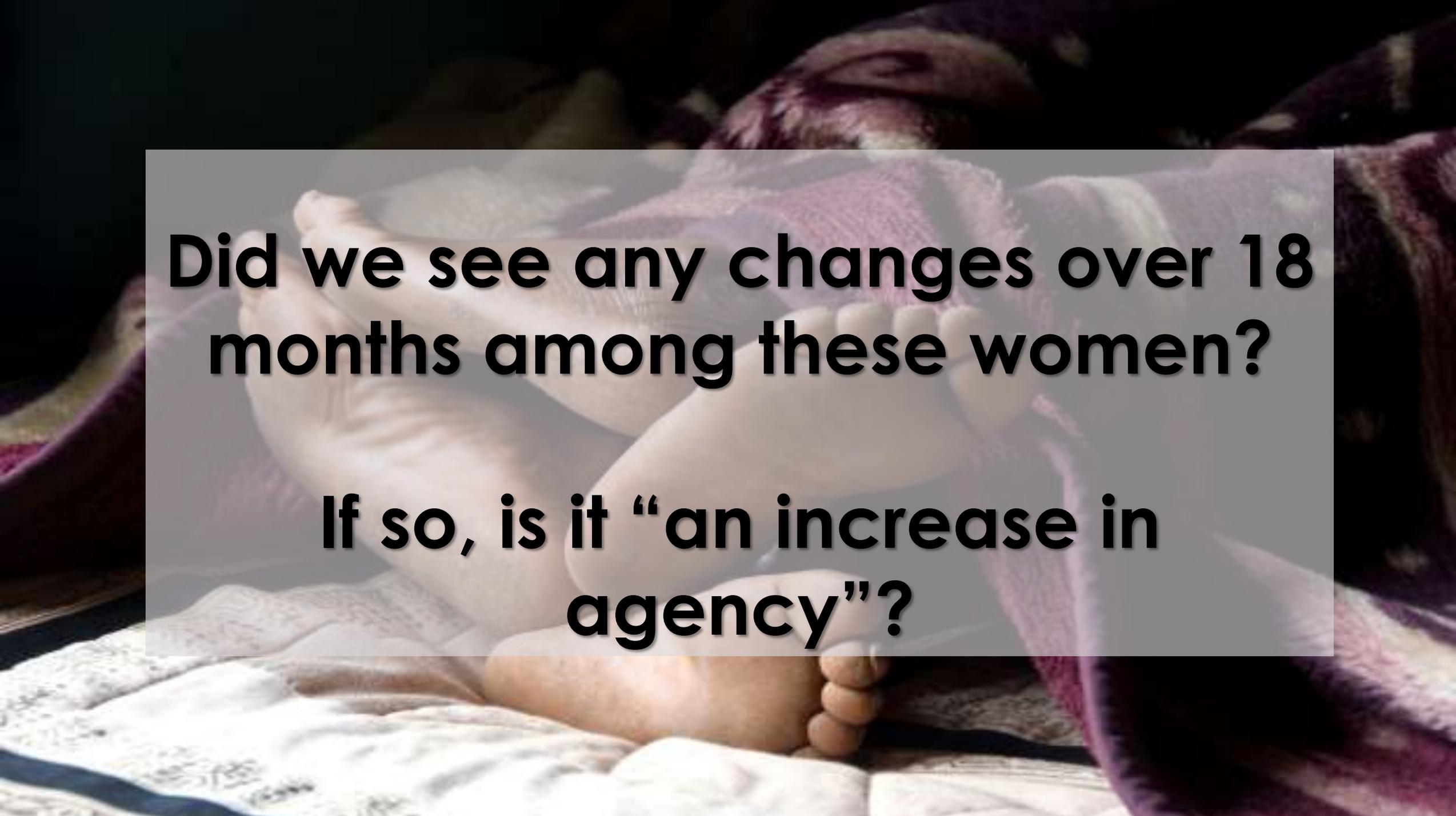
Agency
The power to define
ones goals and act
upon them –
‘the power within’
Kabeer (1999)

Distributed Agency

(Campbell & Mannell, 2016)

- ▶ Women's **opportunities** often **highly constrained**, especially in highly **coercive settings**
- ▶ Building on Madhok et al (2013) recognize acts often **hidden and invisible**
 - ▶ “‘small wins’ that are **realistically achievable** by **real women in real situations**” e.g. adapting behaviors, finding emotional support to reduce violence
- ▶ **Temporal, fluid** – not “**either or**”
- ▶ **Continuum of activism**, acts of survival and coping through to acts of open resistance and acts for radical social change.
- ▶ Acknowledging “**women’s own values and objectives** and their **own understanding** of what would constitute a good life” (Sen and Nussbaum)



A close-up photograph of a woman's hands, one holding a baby's foot, overlaid with a semi-transparent grey box containing text. The woman's hands are positioned in the center of the frame, with her fingers gently cradling the baby's foot. The background is a soft, out-of-focus pattern of purple and white. The text is centered within the grey box and is written in a bold, black, sans-serif font.

Did we see any changes over 18 months among these women?

If so, is it “an increase in agency”?

Over 18 months the women reported...

Improved communication and relationship skills

- ▶ More strategic about when to **communicate** with partners, more effective conversations, avoid challenging partner when he, or she herself, was drunk, rather waiting for a more appropriate moment.
- ▶ **“I learned [during the intervention] that a person can be assertive and have a calm conversation with someone, without it turning into a fight. ...”**

(Thobile, 12 mnth IDI)

Resistance to partner's control & shifting relationship expectations

- ▶ Noulvuyo told us at 18 months...

“He must not tell me what to do.”

- ▶ Attended photovoice against his wishes
- ▶ Wore make-up despite him prohibiting it
- ▶ She was proud of her resistance



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Over 18 months the women reported...

Shifting behaviors, new identities

- ▶ **Less drinking and drug** use, more church-going and schooling
- ▶ A strong desire expressed for **more control over life and achieve goals:** good job, finish school, be an involved mother
- ▶ **Ntombi shifted her behaviors:** previously drank heavily, reduced her drinking significantly, began a new happier relationship

Ntombi's reflections at 18 month IDI

"I hope to continue on my journey forever [less drinking and conflict]... And I want my relationship to continue and prosper... I would like us to be together for a long time... He is a decent man, he's not always out and about at the taverns [bars]... It's nice."



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Over 18 months the women reported...

Improved livelihoods

- ▶ Small increases: **paid work**, **savings** and membership of **savings clubs**
- ▶ New skills: **CV writing** and **interview etiquette**

“Like the writing of the CV and letter, I learnt how it’s done and how to dress for an interview plus which points are important and what to expect from an interview.”

(Olwethu, 12 month IDI)

But... no reduction in IPV

- ▶ Conflict reducing tactics, better communication, increased earnings and savings were insufficient to reduce experiences of IPV and controlling relationships



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Barriers limiting women's ability to shift/change

- ▶ **Difficult to change well-established behaviors and construct new identities**, particularly excessive alcohol use and partying. Lack of alternative identities, or even daily activities
- ▶ **Trauma & depression** – very high levels among the women
- ▶ **Relationships offered women a level of respect** in community, despite IPV, so women often stayed
- ▶ **Structural factors:** poverty & unemployment constrained choices. Childcare responsibilities



Photos from photovoice depicting daily challenges



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Factors supporting the women to act differently (at many levels)

- ▶ Being in an environment supportive of change at many levels (family, friends, partners)
- ▶ Having alternative identities available to them (churchgoer, scholar)
- ▶ Being able to reduce economic dependence on a violent partner

Ntombi changed some habits, but in order to do this she ended old friendships, returned to regular church attendance

“I had been thinking and saying “I would like to stop drinking”, but once you meet up with your friends, you forget all about your intentions and what you wanted to do. So the first thing I did was to stop hanging out with Nomhle, Enhle and them.”

(18 month IDI)



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Did Stepping Stones Creating Futures support women to increase their agency?

- ▶ **Many women remained in violent relationships, yet at the same time nearly half showed changes**
 - ▶ **Shifting expectations** about partners & relationships, **resistance to controlling partners**
 - ▶ **New communication and relationship skills**, reducing conflict
 - ▶ New **intentions to shift behaviors** they believed were negative and set goals and dream about alternative identities
 - ▶ **Improved livelihoods**
- ▶ **Many of the women they had more agency in some areas – actions and changes that were meaningful to them**

Distributed Agency

- ▶ “‘Small wins’ that are realistically achievable by real women in real situations”
- ▶ Fluid and contingent on multiple factors
- ▶ Contested and enacted in many ways





In conclusion...

Yes women gained some agency YET... so much more to do

- ▶ **Intervention could be further enhanced**
 - ▶ More adaptation: local context e.g. focus on trauma, depression, drug and alcohol misuse
 - ▶ Group work often includes challenging dynamics – more facilitator support
- ▶ **Engage with emerging ideas around re-conceptualising agency**
- ▶ **More research** to explore how to reduce IPV in very complex settings
- ▶ **Roll it out** – it works in many ways



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