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Intergenerational Community-Based Research and Creative Practice: Promoting Environmental Sustainability in Jinja, Uganda

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ABSTRACT

This article critically reflects on the methodological approach developed for a recent project based in Jinja, Uganda, that sought to generate new forms of environmental knowledge and action utilizing diverse forms of creative intergenerational practice embedded within a broader framework of community-based participatory research. This approach provided new opportunities for intergenerational dialogue in Jinja, generated increased civic environmental engagement, and resulted in a participant-led campaign to share knowledge regarding sustainable biomass consumption. We term this approach *intergenerational community-based research and creative practice*. We discuss the advantages of this model while also reflecting throughout on the challenges of the approach.

KEYWORDS

Community-based research; environment; intergenerational practice; Uganda

Intergenerational creative practice in Uganda

Introduction

This article provides a critical discussion of the methodology of a recent project that sought to understand and generate new forms of environmental knowledge and action utilizing diverse forms of creative intergenerational practice embedded within a broader framework of community-based participatory research (CBPR). The project, based in Jinja, Uganda, formed one component of a larger, cross-national program of research entitled INTERSECTION (Intergenerational Justice, Consumption, and Sustainability in Comparative Perspective). We seek to extend the growing discussion of how social scientists can benefit from engaging more closely with the field of intergenerational practice as a means of enhancing their

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research endeavors while contributing to addressing significant social and environmental challenges (Vanderbeck & Worth, 2015). Social scientists have utilized forms of intergenerational practice to enrich their ethnographic understanding of particular contexts (Nordström, 2016), to creatively disseminate their research findings (Richardson, 2015), to foster behavior change (Kaplan & Haider, 2015), and to promote public engagement and understanding of scientific issues that affect human health and well-being (Sullivan & Lloyd, 2006). The approach developed in Jinja sought to combine insights from research on community-based intergenerational projects, which increasingly recognizes the value of sustained programs of activity over short-term engagements (Murphy, 2012), with those from the field of CBPR, Katz (2004, p. 1) defined as “a collaborative approach to research that equitably involves all partners in the research process and recognizes the unique strengths that each brings.” Specifically, our approach combined techniques of intergenerational interviewing designed and conducted by participants with diverse forms of creative intergenerational practice influenced by traditions of theater for development (Plastow, 2015). The approach has been sought simultaneously to generate new insights into the state of contemporary age relations in Jinja and to provide opportunities for increased intergenerational engagement (Kaplan & Haider, 2015) around environmental issues. The project ultimately resulted in forms of environmental action in the form of a campaign to promote sustainable biomass consumption, an issue of pressing local concern given the contribution of household charcoal consumption to deforestation in the region. We argue that this approach to *intergenerational community-based research and creative practice* offers potentially significant advantages for promoting intergenerational environmental engagement, while also posing practical, ethical, and epistemological challenges that require careful consideration.

We begin by setting out the need for intergenerational research and practice on issues of environmental sustainability in Uganda. This is followed by an exploration of Jinja’s urban context and the broader program of research and practice developed there through INTERSECTION. We then turn to a discussion of the model of intergenerational research and practice developed in Jinja, which consisted of two broad phases. During Phase I, participants engaged in intergenerational interviewing and environmental knowledge sharing and then critically reflected upon and disseminated their findings through creative performance. During Phase II, participants responded to the lessons learned in the first phase, developing their own forms of creative performance to promote sustainable biomass consumption. We demonstrate how embedding the development of intergenerational practice within a wider program of CBPR served as an effective research tool while facilitating an improvement in the quality of intergenerational interactions and encounters. The model ultimately extended beyond developing “intra-group and inter-group relationships” that “create

synergy and provide cohesiveness, trust and solidarity” (Newman & Hattan-Yeo, 2008, p. 33) to enable a community group to engage in creative practice as a way to unite across generational boundaries in addressing environmental and other concerns.

Approaching intergenerational research and practice in the context of Uganda

In this section we outline the state of contemporary intergenerational relations and research in Uganda and sub-Saharan Africa more widely, while examining the environmental and urban contexts of Jinja Municipality. Evans (2015, p. 199) argues that debates about age relations and intergenerational practice have, to date, disproportionately reflected “the interests of research and policy in the global North.” Although the literature on intergenerational practice in sub-Saharan Africa is still emerging (Ashton & Dickson, 2003; Cox & Chesek, 2012; Hoffman, 2003; Moller, 2010; Oduaran, 2014; Nyesigomwe, 2006; Roos, Hoffman, & Van Der Westhuizen, 2013; Vander Ven & Schneider-Munoz, 2012; Van Vliet, 2011), there remain considerable need and scope to develop intergenerational research, practice and policy in sub-Saharan African contexts in ways that reflect local realities and priorities, including in Uganda, where research points toward an entrenching gap between older and younger generations. Although often described as increasingly gerontocratic (Harris, 2012), Uganda has one of the youngest age structures in the world. Issues affecting children and youth are recognized as major development priorities, with elected officials regularly championing policies attractive to young people (e.g., tackling unemployment through job creation), fueling a sense of political marginalization among the older generation. While rates of poverty are high throughout Uganda, deprivation and marginalization are seemingly becoming particularly acute for many older people (see Golaz, Ojiambo Wandera, & Rutaremwa, 2015; Nankwanga, Neema, & Phillips, 2013; Nyanzi, 2011; Nzabona, Ntozi, & Rutaremwa, 2016; Seeley et al., 2010; Ssengonzi, 2009). Issues affecting older people—including ill health, hunger, and loneliness—are growing concerns for a range of stakeholders. The breakdown of community resource systems has contributed to isolation of older persons and, as a result, there is evidence of growing stigma, physical and mental abuse, discrimination, and neglect (MoGLSD, 2009). Gush (2002, p. 243) reports that within sub-Saharan African societies more broadly, a growing decline in need and value for older people’s traditional knowledge and skills among younger people.

Uganda is simultaneously facing a number of significant sustainable development challenges, including those posed by climate change and declining

environmental resources. Climate change is likely to impact cities across Africa through increased droughts, floods, fires, heat waves, and reduced ecosystem services (IPCC 2014; Lwasa et al., 2015; UNFCCC, 2007), with impacts unevenly distributed as the most impoverished urban residents suffer the greatest effects (Adejuwon, 2006; Adelekan, 2010). There is growing recognition of how even small climate shocks can have significant implications for the livelihoods of urban poor (Mearns & Norton, 2010; Roy, Hulme, Hordijk, & Cawood, 2016). One issue of related concern in Jinja is the sustainability and the cost of biomass fuels—charcoal in particular. Biomass is the most important source of energy for the majority of the Ugandan population, accounting for 94% of the country's total energy consumption (MEMD, 2013, p. 101).¹ Approximately four million metric tons of wood (15% of the total) are consumed to meet the annual demand for charcoal (Ferguson, 2012, p. 2), which provides fuel for household consumption. Between 1990 and 2010, more than 39% of existing forest had disappeared and the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) predicted in 2008 that this deficit would lead to complete depletion of Uganda's forests by 2050. Furthermore, between 2005 and 2008 the charcoal price rose at an enormous nominal rate of 14% per year (MEMD, 2014, p. 38), representing a major expenditure for an urban population living amidst poverty and rising household costs.²

Jinja Municipality, in Uganda's eastern region, is situated at the source of the Nile and on the northern shore of Lake Victoria. A formal industrial center, it has since lapsed into urban decay (Byerley, 2011, p. 486) due in part to the tumultuous regimes of Milton Obote and Idi Amin Dada, the expulsion of the Asian community in 1972, deterioration of regional urban labor markets, and endemic corruption. Jinja hosts a population of approximately 76,000, with a large reported daily inflow (JMC, 2009; UBOS, 2016), exerting pressure on already stressed services and infrastructure. Although a modest industrial renaissance is taking place with new factories opening under a slow-growing stream of foreign investment, the jobs this provides in reality are typically poorly paid (characterized by 12-hour shifts for the equivalent of circa £1 per day), lacking in both security and in health and safety protections. A substantial proportion of Jinja's population lives in poverty, particularly within Walukuba/Masese division, an area of former workers' estates that now constitutes an expanding slum belt. It is in this division of Jinja where our inter-generational community-based research and creative practice was focused.

Drawing on Kuyken's (2012) proposal that generations could be viewed as "communities of knowledge," and in response to significant local biomass concerns, we endeavored to develop a model for intergenerational practice to facilitate environmental learning and knowledge sharing between older and younger generations in Jinja, given the often substantially different kinds of environmental knowledge and experiences possessed by these generations.

Most older residents of Jinja have experience of a more rural, subsistence-based way of life, with the great majority having experience of living in rural areas. In contrast, many members of the younger generations have primarily experienced urban living, although their livelihoods and futures are nevertheless directly affected by deforestation, urban climate change, and other dimensions of environmental degradation, not least due to the importance of urban and peri-urban agriculture in Jinja (see McQuaid et al. 2018). We aimed to bring younger and older adults together on equal and reciprocal terms to develop local interventions to address sustainability challenges.

Previous research has highlighted the potential of intergenerational environmental projects to broaden awareness and increase participation among new audiences; to add meaning to environmental information by showing environmental health risks to families and communities; to provide a focal point for strengthening relationships across the generations; and to build community capacity (Kaplan & Liu, 2004). Steinig & Butts (2009) demonstrate how “older adults can serve as mentors and guides for younger people” and “younger people can support older people in a number of ways, from building raised gardening beds at a senior residence to assessing environmental hazards in the home.” In a project designed to connect youth, adults, and elders in an Alaskan native community, Wexler (2011) adopted a CBPR approach to address community issues, build local research capacity, and disseminate findings into a practical realm so that communities could benefit from the knowledge produced (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2003; Wexler, 2011, p. 250). While these projects represent productive examples of intergenerational practice, there is, however, a risk of inadvertently reinforcing characterizations of older people as repositories of knowledge and youth as receptacles. Tempest (2003) suggests that achieving reciprocity in intergenerational learning requires an egalitarian and fluid approach to learning in practice (see also Bjursell, 2015; Mannion & Gilbert, 2015). As we explore subsequently, while our project seeks to foreground equality and reciprocity between generations, this practice can pose significant challenges due to the powerful normativities associated with age and other social positions.

The formation of “We are Walukuba”

In this section, we outline the particular approach to *intergenerational community-based research and creative practice* that we developed in Jinja. This approach formed a component of INTERSECTION’s wider research program across the whole of Jinja, which also involved a range of more-conventional social science research techniques (ethnographic observation, over 200 qualitative interviews with local people and key stakeholders, 12 focus group discussions, and a social survey of 750 residents) to investigate local perspectives on consumption, sustainability, and intergenerational justice.

Fieldwork was conducted by the first author between January and November 2015 and between March and April 2016. A key component of this fieldwork was a period of 10 months' community theater work and intergenerational dialogue groups involving a group of 60 people drawn from a variety of ages, ethnicities, and educational backgrounds in the neighborhood of Walukuba. We used a Freirean-inspired approach to community participatory theater—engaging members of a community in a process of dialogic circular action and reflection to achieve a “plenitude of praxis” (Freire, 1970) with the goal of strengthening and promoting local capacity to recognize social injustices and challenge these through community-led interventions. Workshops were organized each week with older and younger generations in an attempt to create an alternative social space designed to confront and disaggregate traditional hierarchies of power. We repeatedly emphasized, and designed workshops to demonstrate, that all participants should have an equal voice irrespective of age, gender, ethnicity, educational background, or other markers of identity. By attempting to employ discussion practices that eschewed leadership and social hierarchies, we sought to foster a sense that every opinion was valuable and all knowledge was valid, and to help those who usually struggle to begin developing the confidence to participate. Embedding this project within a longer-term engagement with both participants and the wider social and urban landscape helped mitigate potential negative outcomes outlined by Sullivan and Lloyd (2006, p. 643), including “dialogic disconnect, distrust and rejection,” or reinforcement of a poor community's status as an outsider “colony of victims” (Wright, 2003, p. 125). This was a time- and resource-intensive process that aimed to build trust and confidence among members, many of whom had little prior experience of group-based critical reflection, intergenerational work, or creative expression. Collectively, participants came to refer to themselves as “We are Walukuba” (WAW).

At the onset of the project, participants became involved in one of three groups: a younger women's group (ages 15–35), a younger men's group (ages 14–32) and an older group of mixed gender (ages 30–60). There was a small amount of overlap in age boundaries between younger and older groups due to processes of self-selection, such that, some people—those who were unmarried for example—identified more with the younger group (there was little sense of “middle age” as a generational category in this context). After 5 months, we brought the younger and older groups together to develop and present two intergenerational-knowledge-exchange events in 2015, and one in 2016, using multiple forms of creative expression to engage communities and stakeholders on key environmental and social issues. The first, in June 2015, presented eight sections of a promenade performance to a community audience of over 400; the second, in August 2015, presented three short plays to an audience of over 80 key stakeholders, policy-makers,

and leaders drawn from across Jinja and the capital city, Kampala (one of these included a performance called “We Are the Foundations” that emerged from the intergenerational model we outline in greater detail below); the third, in April 2016, presented a play and facilitated intergenerational community dialogue around environmental responsibility. In November 2015, participants in WAW drew up a written constitution based on principles of intergenerational and gender inclusivity and registered as a community-based organization.² Since the closure of fieldwork, WAW has continued to advocate for intergenerational dialogue and empowerment of community voices as a means for local sustainable development.

Phase I: Intergenerational interviewing and environmental knowledge sharing

Building upon this approach, the model of *intergenerational community-based research and creative practice* we developed consisted of two broad phases. In this section we outline the first phase, during which a group of 11 participants (aged 19–56) from within the WAW group volunteered to develop and conduct an intergenerational research project before critically reflecting upon and disseminating their findings through creative performance. Our aim was to understand and share local knowledge about environmental sustainability while seeking to develop a model for facilitating intergenerational knowledge exchange that did not reinforce established social hierarchies of knowledge transmission from older to younger generations.

Phase I began with a series of discussions in which older and younger participants questioned how the environment had transformed over the generations. A wide range of environmental concerns were evoked in this process, ranging from the rising cost of land—the most emotive subject, eliciting the strongest responses from all ages—and fish; the increase in destructive storms; increasing political rivalry and instability; unity and surplus of food in previous generations; memories of previous wars; decline in governmental services; increase in corruption and land-grabbing; and deforestation. Out of these discussions, the lead author and participants co-designed a short interview questionnaire with the four questions, shown in [Table 1](#).

Participants received basic training in qualitative research skills over several workshops, using a combination of discussion, role-play, and practice interviews to cover the value of qualitative research and to develop a shared group understanding of the research project and guidelines for sampling and conducting ethical research. Participants agreed to interview someone previously unknown to them who belonged to a different generation (circa 30 years different in age to themselves, with some flexibility). Over the course of a week, the participants conducted 27 interviews in total: 17 younger-to-older generation interviews and 10 older-to-younger generation interviews.

Table 1. Intergenerational interviews.

To ask the older generation	To ask the younger generation
1 What did you learn about protecting the natural environment when you were growing up? And who taught you?	
2 What role should the older generation play in conserving the natural environment for future generations?	What role should the younger generation play in conserving the natural environment for future generations?
3 What stories did your grandparents tell you about how their generation protected the natural environment?	What would you like to tell your parents about what they can do to protect the natural environment?
4 What skills would you like to share with the younger generation about how to protect the natural environment?	What skills would you like to share with the older generation about how to protect the natural environment?

This imbalance reflected both the difficulties older participants encountered when attempting to interview younger people, and the more widespread marginalization of older people's voices (a point we return to in a subsequent section). These were all conducted in local languages with responses recorded in notebooks that were subsequently transcribed collectively into English onto questionnaire sheets by the participants most confident writing in English. This phase concluded with discussion workshops on the process of conducting intergenerational research before presenting these and their findings to the wider "We are Walukuba" group.

At the same time, WAW had been developing a creative arts and research-led dissemination event, which participants agreed presented an opportunity to disseminate the findings and experiences of their intergenerational environmental interviewing project. As Leavy (2009, p. 135) argues, "Perhaps more than anything else, performance-based methods can bring research findings to life, adding dimensionality and exposing that which is otherwise impossible to authentically (re)present." Retaining the narrative authority of participants was important to us, particularly in relation to "whose voices get heard and which stories get told" (Maines & Bridger, 1992; Mattingley, 2001, p. 44; Nordstrom, 2016; Richardson, 2015). The first author thus worked in collaboration with the group to develop a performance in which, in response to the marginalization of older voices experienced by participants, it was decided to script a poem to "raise" the voices of older respondents to the stakeholder audience. We thus worked alongside two younger participants to draw on the questionnaire responses of older respondents, supplemented by some wider INTERSECTION interview data, to compose a verbatim poem (see Appendix 1).

Narrative storytelling—in this context in the form of a poem—can be an affective and embodied practice creating transgressive possibilities through performance (Rogers, 2012). Here an elected member among the younger participants would speak the words of multiple elders from their community, voicing their environmental knowledges and reflections. This event was

attended by council officials; school principals; church leaders; local government; police; representatives from the Ministry of Land and Ministry of Gender, Labour and Development; media; theater and gender academics from Makerere University; and local CBOs and NGOs.

The poem was performed by Samson³ (age 26), a breakdance artist, in a hip-hop poetry style, while a group of six men and women (ages 19–56) embodied the piece in a series of intergenerational image theater scenes (Figure 1). Participants began with visually arresting static images of an older and younger generation starkly divided and in conflict before slowly adding in actions to symbolize a coming together in pursuit of common environmental goals as the poem continued. The images were all designed with participants to reflect the personal experiences of what was being spoken. After the performance, key stakeholders were invited to engage in roundtable discussions with participants and other members of WAW, using the performance to draft recommendations for “strategies for creating a sustainable society for all ages,” and our youngest participant (age 19) invited stakeholders to come up with “interventions on how to bridge the intergenerational gap.”

The performance generated substantive discussion around recommendations that ranged from the personal (building mutual respect, improving parenting skills) to the collective (volunteering, social clubs, radio talk shows, and community dialogues to develop mutual understanding to “promote environmental care”). Political and religious leaders were encouraged to lead by example, and many reflected on the demonstrated potential of creative practice to unite people of different ages. Recurring emphasis was placed on



Figure 1. Intergenerational poem and image theatre performance.

community building. As one stakeholder reported: “We looked at communal responsibility and you see that long time ago, before today, the community was so concerned with each and everybody, which is not there today.”

Phase II: Promoting sustainable biomass fuel through creative practice

In this section we outline the second phase of the project, during which participants responded to the lessons learned in Phase I and developed their own forms of creative practice to promote sustainable biomass consumption. Following our performance and dissemination event, WAW began to discuss a new direction for the intergenerational environmental project that hopefully would not reproduce the same hierarchies encountered in Phase I, which we discuss below. All members of WAW met to discuss a key environmental concern on which to focus Phase II. While all identified deforestation as the most significant environmental problem, a few suggested learning about alternative household biomass fuels, given that the use of alternative fuels would reduce the demand for deforestation to produce charcoal. This suggestion received general agreement. Participants thus elected to develop a performance-led intervention aimed at combatting the impending biomass crisis looming in Uganda by bringing generations together in a common cause. Building on previous successful events in WAW, participants recognized the performative potential of embodying their intergenerational work in creative expression. As argued by Daniels and Lorimer (2012, p. 5), “a form of place-based performance and public engagement storytelling” can be usefully deployed “as a practice to propel cross-generational interest in local, community-centred initiatives and as a way to re-learn forms of civic attachment.” Participants sought to use creative practice as a vehicle for taking their knowledge to their own communities where they could generate discussion and lead by example. “Creative practice” in this context involved live, performative, and collaborative storytelling in which participants work together “to find aesthetic solutions to creative problems emerging in the production process” (Snyder-Young, 2013, p. 4). By presenting a “united front” to their communities, they also aimed to limit any potential for using traditional generational (or gendered) roles to marginalize any particular social group.

We located an expert in Kampala who travelled to Jinja to train members of WAW in making handmade briquettes. Briquettes provide a more environmentally sustainable source of fuel than charcoal. Tests have shown that they can be more efficient than charcoal with a longer burn-time, reaching higher temperatures faster and producing less smoke (Ferguson, 2012; Nyenga et al., 2009). In this case briquettes were handmade of sun-dried organic matter that was carbonized, mixed with charcoal dust (waste from household stoves) and clay as the binding agent. The briquettes then needed to be dried in the sun for several days before it could be used as an alternative form of biomass for household consumption.

Participants were split into three intergenerational groups to reflect an even mix of age, gender, and educational background. To maximize ownership of the project and narrative authority, each group worked independently of any facilitator input to develop their scripts. The only external input came in the form of training on how to facilitate a community discussion. All three groups designed different workshop formats using performance to promote community briquette training with two objectives: to advocate for intergenerational cooperation and practice and to promote conservation of trees as an environmental resource for future generations. All three groups chose comedy as their genre, aiming to entertain audiences while making them think critically.

The most successful of the three pieces involved a staged piece of street theater in one village in Walukuba and reflected intergenerational equity both among the performers and between the performers and their intended audience. The performance opened with a scene of a middle-aged couple making their living from supplying firewood to a local factory that uses biomass for energy. One day a group of their neighbors protested, blocking the couple. With the couple annoyed at being prevented from selling the trees from their own land, a dramatic—and farcical—conflict ensued. Three characters—a young woman, an older woman, and an older man—intervened to suggest an alternative to “prevent the high demand of charcoal.” They encouraged the factory owner to use electricity and then invited young and old audience members to stand together to learn “the skill of the briquette, you will even see small children and like youths doing the actual work!” They had planted two younger participants in the crowd who theatrically refused to engage in the work, crying: “We are so modern, it is too dirty!” They were encouraged by the older characters “who convinced us and gave us the skills, then we worked together.” Already armed with necessary ingredients, the group then carried out a demonstration on how to make the briquettes, inviting young and old to take part, generating significant community interest. As one participant reported: “They were so eager to learn because they were pouring [throwing away] most of the rubbish, they didn’t know they could actually get something out of rubbish!” Another young man explained:

In the process people were wondering, were amazed and excited, they got interested in what was going on, then people were crowding, adding on each other, the old and the young, the youth and children, all were there as we presented.

Once briquettes had been made and shared among the crowd, WAW participants facilitated a discussion about the local environment, encouraging the community to share ideas for environmental protection and building intergenerational connections. Buoyed by the success of their first workshop, this group continued on to conduct several more performances in different villages. As one participant reported: “We just became creative and we said we wish we could continue with that activity and then we gain the boldness and confidence to organise another event, so we felt that we could do it again.”

By contrast, in the group least successful in terms of community engagement and positive feedback of participants, an older male participant dominated the performance and hectored the assembled audience, rather than creatively engaging them, and continually rebutted contributions from younger participants. Such experiences are a reminder of the challenges of surmounting the multiple, intersecting and competing social hierarchies alive in local contexts. This older male participant's actions, while obstructing inclusivity, did, however, provide a productive opportunity to facilitate more-focused discussion among participants about hierarchical power relations.

In a "final" workshop, all participants were brought together to reflect on the workshops they had facilitated and on the process in general. Discussion concentrated on the power of intergenerational creative practice to do more than promote good relations but as a means for uniting a community in the pursuit of mutual social justice outcomes:

Our people in Walukuba are suffering too much, but we do certain activities which will help and raise the voices of Walukuba. We do activities like the play for women and making of the briquettes to conserve the environment, people we teach are now use those briquettes instead of cutting the trees. We do this [...] slowly by slowly, we do this by acting, we really send a message to those who can help us. (Constance, age 44)

We tackled many issues affecting people down here. We speak in acting. And the other thing, we are intergenerational. This group was formed, usually you hear of those groups of youth, elderly, women, but this combines the young and old, and all genders, we don't discriminate. (Patience, age 27)

The group has really empowered us. The workshops help us to learn essential life skills like self-esteem and confidence. We do community outreaches and team-building. Theatre and poetry helped us to express ourselves and the key messages in an interesting way. Through fun people get to learn what is taking part in the community. It is an open organization and a movement that keeps growing, growing and spreading. And we do not stay with our skills, we are sharing and we teach them out and they teach other people. (Samson, age 26)

Since the completion of Phase II, six members of WAW have formed an intergenerational women's cooperative making briquettes. The wider group source organic waste individually and during WAW community-service cleanups of Walukuba's commercial sites, while the women produce briquettes using a manual press for sale to local residents and businesses. Profits are used to fund wider WAW activities.

The practical and ethical challenges of confronting age normativities

In this section, we reflect on some of the particular practical and ethical challenges posed by the model of *intergenerational community-based research and creative practice* developed in Jinja. In particular, we focus on the

difficulties that result from the powerful age normativities that operate in Jinja (and many other contexts). In Phase I, both the process of recruiting potential interviewees and the actual responses to the intergenerational interviews generated particular insights into the complex positions of those perceived to be “older” within the context of Jinja. Across the interviews, older respondents constructed themselves as “the foundations” for environmental knowledge and action. In one interview the respondent argued: “The two generations must understand that their [grandparents] also lived and passed on, so they are living on their foundations and they also must implement on it for the future generations to find it” (53-year-old man interviewed by 25-year-old man). In others:

The older generation should teach the young ones the values of the environment since it's the generation that is taking over. (67-year-old woman interviewed by 25-year-old man)

The older generation can play the role of educating the young generation about the importance of protecting the environment. (58-year-old man interviewed by 25-year-old woman)

When interviewed by younger people, older respondents consistently reacted favorably to the opportunity to “teach you [younger people] our methods” (68-year-old man interviewed by 25-year-old woman). Yet, older respondents, although seemingly delighted at the chance to share their environmental knowledge, were also open to opportunities for new learning, precisely because they held so much experience. As one 63-year-old woman responded:

Old people like me should be versatile being that they have seen more times, heard more times and tried more times so that they can welcome ideas about how to conserve the natural environment for future generations. (Interviewed by 22-year-old man)

All the younger participants reported enjoying and being surprised by the experience, collecting meaningful responses from the older respondents they interviewed: “I learnt we don't know a lot of things. I felt so good, impressed and impacted, to learn a lot of things” (Samson, age 26). Tony (age 19) explained how productive these encounters were for the elderly respondents: “They liked it, they say, ‘It's very inspiring to see the youth taking part in conserving the environment for future generations,’ they liked it most.” Ruth (age 25) was similarly inspired by the connection opened up by the process:

Speaking to the elderly was really awesome! They were so appreciative to see those young people coming to help them to save the environment for future generations. They ask us to continue with this research and continue co-operating with the elderly. There used to be no unity so the old could not

speaking, the young will say “your period is out-dated, you are primitive!” We could not give them time, you can’t listen to their stories of how they had so much land! But it was so interesting speaking to them, what they did to protect the environment, they must teach us their methods! I got confidence of talking to these people, I got to know what they want from us. They want their views to be heard, to give them the chance to speak.

However, respondents all identified a distinct contemporary gap between younger and older people such that communication channels for sharing such “methods” and information were steadily eroding, both within families and across the wider community. As one older man interviewed noted:

The older generation cannot teach the younger generation since they refer to them as being primitive, and that if the younger generation can agree and consult the older generation then they can play a big role of advising them. (68-year-old man interviewed by 25-year-old woman).

In discussion workshops, participants highlighted a widening intergenerational gap both in the immediate context of Jinja and in Uganda more broadly. They reflected on their respondents’ and their own belief in the declining opportunities for intergenerational solidarities to emerge, especially as a majority of community groups (such as those for community savings or religious groups) are usually formed around age and/or gender.

With one exception, most of the younger participants described the project as “easy and interesting” (Mohammed, 29). Besides learning about environmental practices, the process itself left a mark on younger participants who were confronted by, and later reflected on, their own assumed knowledge and behavior toward the older generation. The learning experienced by the participants in Phase I was thus not only about the natural environment but about the value of intergenerational practice for “responding to a particular other in a present, that carries traces of the past, as well as opening up to future” (Ahmed, 2002, p. 558). The data collection process was, in itself, “meaningful to and beneficial for participants” (Wexler, 2011, p. 249) and for the respondents. It opened up a transformative intergenerational encounter, which younger participants perceived on the whole to be productive:

This has opened my mind and heart, these older people have good stories they can really tell us, and we can really learn from them, but we don’t give them time. (Mohammed, age 29).

It was interesting to hear those stories of our parents. I couldn’t believe what the old did in their time to protect the environment, the knowledge they used. I didn’t have time to meet the older people, but now I have spent good time, I liked it. We talk, really freely. It was very cool, I liked it! (Tony, age 19).

However, the project opened up an unanticipated space for rejection in the encounters older participants had with those they approached to interview.

Older participants reported being belittled and mocked by the young people they approached. This was true for both older uneducated female participants, accustomed to a lower social status, and older men who held more prestigious local administrative political positions. In the end, they conducted many fewer interviews than expected, struggling to engage those younger than themselves. The questionnaires, when shared, revealed short, abrupt responses, an artefact of their lack of success. Elders were thus alternately constructed as repositories of knowledge (facilitating success for the younger researchers in recruiting respondents) and objects of ridicule (resulting in failure for older researchers to do so).

Joy (age 54) explained how young people would laugh her away, dismissing her authority or interest in the project: “They ask me, ‘you go back to school, you old one?’ They cannot allow us.” David (age 56), a member of local government, who used to his authority, commanding respect in the community, had a similar experience, explaining: “They give you very small time, they find we are inconveniencing them.” Arnold (age 46) was repeatedly turned away: “They say ‘we don’t have time for you,’ it takes long to convince them.” This was even experienced by Flavia, who was only 42 years old, who described how young people “don’t give time to the grands [grandparents]. They don’t recognise the existence of the older generation.” These negative experiences, and the potential distress it caused to participants as it served to reinforce preexisting notions of marginalization regardless of status, highlights the importance of ethical considerations in developing and conducting intergenerational practice.

In response, we made time to explicitly discuss these experiences, with younger and older participants reflecting on what had happened over a number of workshops. These experiences served to unite older and younger participants in a common cause as they spoke with urgency of the critical need to develop future intergenerational interventions in their community. As Arnold (age 46) argued in one workshop: “There is a wide experience of a generational gap, we need to build a link, how to work together.” Mohammed (age 29) agreed:

We need to accept yes, there is a gap. First we have to admit there is this gap, we should think of interaction, you realise what generations think of each other. First is respect, people need to know, we need to bridge that gap.

Yet the project had exposed participants to the kinds of experiences against which researchers seek to protect them, including disrespect and potential emotional harm.⁴ Prior to this project, we had sought to ensure that WAW represented a “safe space,” a term “used to connote metaphorical safety: that is, a space bordered by temporal dimensions (such as a workshop or rehearsal time/space) in which discriminatory activities, expressions of intolerance or policies of inequity are barred” (Hunter, 2008, p. 8). In seeking to encourage intergenerational knowledge exchange outside of the relative

“safety” of WAW, this project exposed participants to an un-“safe space,” a risk that projects incur when intergenerational practice seeks to expand outward into the wider community.

Although designed to enable and encourage reciprocal practices of intergenerational knowledge exchange, the project’s implementation highlighted the rootedness of normative understandings of the generational flow of knowledge and the marginalization experienced by elders engaging with youth. Here we can use the notion of “restrictive interpellation” (Farrier, 2015) to highlight how normative roles and identities (such as those based on age, status, class, and other factors) can sometimes be reproduced rather than challenged in intergenerational practice. Aspects of Phase I in some ways reproduced for respondents a notion of elders as repositories of (traditional) knowledge, rather than as potential partners standing alongside youth in driving change or environmental innovation. Such normativities simultaneously intersected with class and gender. Despite discussions focused on the perceived marginalization of older participants, at least one of the older male participants who held a relatively prestigious job continued seeking to dominate debate, speaking over younger participants and older women who were forced to acquiesce before the facilitator intervened. His attitude contrasted with other older male participants who lacked his educational background and relative status. Thus, although generating transformative encounters for younger participants and building tentative connection and trust among the intergenerational group, in developing the second phase, it was necessary to consider how to develop the project in ways that avoided some of the pitfalls encountered in the first. Although African elders are often constructed by researchers and in popular rhetoric as repositories of knowledge, Mbele (2004, pp. 55–57) argues that “in the past [...] African societies had a complex and therefore more sophisticated view of the elders,” seeing them as not just custodians of old knowledge but also having critical capacities to act as “a catalyst for change.” One of the hopes for Phase II was thus to develop forms of practice that would help reclaim a more dynamic sense of the capacity of older people—regardless of gender, status, or class—to contribute to social and environmental change.

Conclusion

In this article we have examined the prospects and challenges associated with an approach we developed in Jinja, Uganda, that we have termed *intergenerational community-based research and creative practice*. This approach sought to simultaneously generate new forms of both environmental knowledge and action within the context of urban Uganda. At its inception, the project instigated an intensive form of intergenerational practice as a research tool for gaining insight into generational attitudes to environmental problems and

sustainability in Jinja. However, the approach also moved beyond the production of research data toward a complex and processual form of creative intergenerational practice that not only promoted improved intergenerational connections but also facilitated meaningful environmental action. Within the wider scope of our work in Walukuba, and against a backdrop of intersecting urban vulnerabilities, participants in WAW have forged a new community-based organization active in efforts to produce “community-based environmental science” (Sullivan & Lloyd, 2006) and community activism promoting intergenerational inclusivity, environmental responsibility, and sustainable biomass consumption across the wider community.

Through investigating and sharing grounded and experiential environmental knowledges in a reciprocal process, all participants, including the facilitators, gained insight into local perspectives and lived experiences of (inter)generationality, recognizing and critically reflecting on (insidious) everyday generational hierarchies and how they intersect with other markers such as class and gender. This generated productive new frames of engagement that demonstrated the power of intergenerationality in pursuit of common social and environmental justice outcomes. Creative intergenerational learning and practice combined to make significant gains in generating a Freirean “plentitude of praxis.” The use of creative expression and the development of research-informed performances that combined cycles of action and reflection strengthened participants’ capacity to unite across social barriers to challenge local inequalities and environmental issues through grassroots intergenerational interventions. As this methodological discussion has demonstrated, however, forging new forms of creative intergenerational practice demands, in the process, a dialogic and flexible approach, open and responsive to the significant ethical and epistemological challenges posed when encountering—and attempting to reimagine—the complex and entrenched power relations based on generation, gender, status, and other forms of difference.

Notes

1. Electricity currently contributes only 1.4% to the national energy balance, while oil products, which are mainly used for vehicles and thermal power plants, account for the remaining 9.7%.
2. See www.wearewalukuba.com.
3. All names have been changed to protect the anonymity of participants.
4. See also Roos et al. (2013) on the ethical challenges of intergenerational interviewing in a South African context.

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Appendix 1 “We are the foundations”: A verbatim poem to bridge the generations, written by young people using the words of the older generation

They don't care about us
 Neither do they respect us
 Taking us to be worn out in the society
 Having no patience to leave the tree standing,
 Not caring about the future generations
 Because they realized making money from charcoal.
 Children have forgotten their parents
 We, trying to link them back together.
 The elderly are the foundation, especially for knowledge.
 This current generation has never tasted war,
 We have; and still living, they too know where to find us.
 We can help the government without being paid.
 We are the foundations, with the history of our country
 With the knowledge that can help the youth
 And build our nation.
 African youth used to live in harmony with the environment.
 The water bodies represented gods,
 People were afraid to tamper with lakes, rivers and swamps,
 Trees were protected
 In the belief they were inhabited by ancestors
 And if tampered with, demons would run,
 And the place would soon become deserted.
 The young generation must first learn
 On how to love and respect where they live
 For, that is where the environment starts

Us the creator, producers, own no land in our culture
That land is for the clan.
We advise the young generations
Never to sell land if you have.
You are not a person without land in Uganda here.
Our children, please control the land!
This is our duty, to tell this generation
To use properly what we have,
How to use the small land we have.
This is how we can encourage people out of poverty.
Trees were planted alongside plantations
They acted as windbreakers
They too acted as land boundaries
As well used for harvesting herbs.
The young should plant productive trees
Like mangoes, guavas, apple and orange
Planting long-lasting trees like *mvule*,
Which can benefit two generations.
The older generations should guide and demonstrate
On how to conserve the environment naturally,
Like using cow-dung as fertilisers,
Wells made in swamps for water conservation,
They would help during drought and combat famine.
They should not clear ground completely when digging,
Should plant pasparum grass, on well-levelled ground.
The young generations should also improvise
To use other methods of cooking like briquettes and gas cookers.
We need to fight corruption
By sensitising the government
To prevent corrupt leaders
From selling the wetlands to foreign investors
On which they construct their companies.
Because we have sons, children,
It is our duty to tell them and others
To have discipline,
Do not have greed for money!
There is too much congestion,
Land fragmentation,
It's we ourselves with the power to do!
We have seen more times, tried more times
And heard more times.
The two generations should work together
To be an example to the coming one.
Planting trees, land and water body protection
We should be united!
Our grands also lived and passed on
You must understand that YOU are living on their foundations.