

Community-building through political cartoons in Kenya, South Africa and Côte d'Ivoire

Project background

This paper arises from a research project at the University of Leicester, led by Dr Fransiska Louwagie and Dr Di Levine, in collaboration with a broader team of research associates, in particular Drs James Illingworth and Sarah Weidman. The project built on external partnerships with Cartooning for Peace, an international organisation of press cartoonists, and Shout Out UK, an award-winning platform for political and media literacy. The project was funded by the University of Leicester's Global Challenges Research Fund. It aimed to examine how political cartoons can foster dialogue and exchange in conflict or post-conflict contexts, particularly amongst young people. As a visual medium relying on humour, cartooning has the power to present critical questions in an open and non-threatening manner, triggering dialogue and meaning-making. In line with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 the project therefore set out to investigate how political cartoons can help to negotiate local and global tensions and how they engage audiences with conceptions and definitions of community and humanity. It aimed to shed new light on the question of how political cartooning can help to address challenges in (post-)conflict societies, where there is a recognised need for community-driven resilience building. Relating to this, through its focus on press cartoons, it sought to raise awareness of the need for access and freedom of information (SDG 16.10). Following an open call for projects, a commission was made for four series of workshops by external partners working in conflict-and post-conflict situations, in Kenya, Côte d'Ivoire and South Africa (see appendix for detailed aims of the call).

Seed initiatives

The four successful applications emanated both from cartoonist organisations and academics. Partnerships were set up with Africartoons, a South-African association promoting editorial cartoons as a tool for democracy, within South Africa and more broadly within the African continent and diaspora; with Tache d'Encre, the association of press cartoonists in Côte d'Ivoire; and with researchers from the Universities of Nairobi (Kenya) and KwaZulu Natal (South Africa). The two academic projects also featured active involvement of cartoonists alongside non-academic partnerships with local organisations. The four projects all engaged young people from challenging circumstances to work on political cartooning as a tool for dialogue, social cohesion and resilience. This is apparent from the titles of the four submissions: (1) Cartooning the Youth in South Africa in times of Covid-19: Community-building through Political Cartoons (KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa); (2) We want a better Tomorrow: A Plea by the Youth of Mathare Valley, Nairobi, Kenya; (3) Social cohesion with a pencil stroke (Tache d'Encre, Côte d'Ivoire); (4) Young Cartoonists' Challenge: Cartoons for social justice (Africartoons, South Africa), and will also be illustrated via the project descriptions below. All projects were aimed at young adults, though in the case of Africartoons the focus was specifically on aspirant cartoonists who were offered a dedicated mentoring programme by professional cartoonists. The different projects all included critical discussions about political cartooning alongside the

production of creative outputs¹. All projects conducted pre- and post-surveys with participants, on which the sociodemographic details for the project descriptions below are based.

The first project, led by Africartoons director John Curtis,² political cartoonist with Daily Maverick, proceeded with an open call to recruit South African aspirant cartoonists. The project initially started off with 14 candidates of which 6 completed the mentorship programme. These participants (ages 17-23 years old) all identified as black, male, and born in South Africa (see appendix for further background on their professional interest and socio-economic circumstances). The participants were mentored by 12 professional cartoonists (2Lani (Thulani Ntsong); Andy Mason (Bethuel); Mangena Brandan (Reynolds); Dr Jack (Swanepoel); Gushwell Brooks; (John) Curtis; Nanda Soobben; Nathi (Ngubane); Qap's Mngadi; (Stacey) Stent; (Themba) Siwela; (Wilson) Mgobhozi; Zapiro (Jonathan Shapiro) (Figure 1).

The mentoring programme ran over 4 weeks in the summer of 2021, combining themed creative challenges, 2 online zoom sessions and an active WhatsApp conversation group bringing together mentors and mentees. The project concluded with a cartooning competition judged by 10 external specialists, adopting criteria relating to resilience, conceptualisation and drawing skills. The overall aims of the project tie in with Africartoons' focus on cartoons as a tool for social justice, driving social change in South Africa.³

The Nairobi (Kenya) project was conducted by a research team consisting of Dr Betty Karimi Mwiti – Principal Investigator and Design Thinking (DT) Expert; Elsardt Amulyoto – Cartoonist and DT Expert; Douglas Logedi – Data Analyst and Communication Lead; Jim Roberto Olang' – Project Analyst. Building on Mwiti's existing networks and contacts, activities took place in Mathare Valley, a settlement with a predominantly young population, that remains a picture of inequality and economic disparity in Kenya's capital Nairobi. The team first conducted a focus



Figure 1. Caricatures by 2Lani of the mentors (with the exception of Gushwell).

¹Outputs available on Covid in Cartoons Figshare (forthcoming)

²Africartoons is an organisation promoting the art of editorial cartooning and championing the rights of cartoonists with an online archive of over 25,000 cartoons. The association has collaborated with The Nelson Mandela Foundation, The Ahmed Kathrada Foundation, Section 27, OUTA, Greenpeace Africa, Citizen Maverick and The People's Vaccine Campaign.

³On this approach and the collaboration for the project presented here, see John Curtis, Cartoons for social justice: How to draw in the unconverted, Daily Maverick, 24 August 2021,

<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2021-08-24-cartoons-for-social-justice-how-to-draw-in-the-unconverted/>

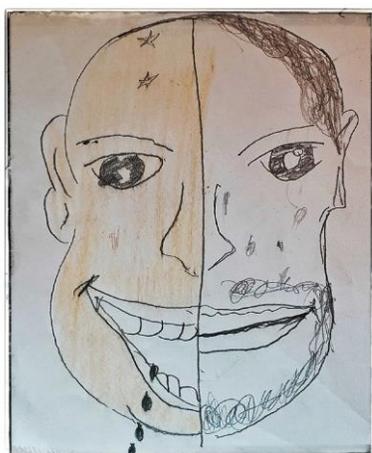
group discussion and thereafter a co-design workshop in two of the Community Social Halls, Kosovo and Mlango Kubwa, respectively within Mathare Valley, in June 2021. The number of project participants was restricted to 11 due to Covid-19 circumstances, with 9 participants completing both workshops. These participants (7 male, 2 female) were between the ages of 22 and 24 years old, and all reported being born in Kenya. Recruited by the local team in collaboration with community gatekeepers, about half of the participants have been described, in the project debrief, as having experience with media like graffiti, whilst the others had some background of political activism (efforts towards bringing social and political change through door-to-door campaigns and social interactions in meetings led by the community elders and leaders commonly known as *Barazas*). During the initial focus group session, Amulyoto introduced political cartoons to the group, with a view to enlightening young people about the potential of political cartooning as a tool for targeted messaging. The co-design workshop consisted of a practical drawing session and an oral presentation, with participant drawings being finalised by Amulyoto for dissemination (Figure 2).



Participant A's illustration of the divide existing between theirs and their leader's lifestyles



The research teams' adaptation of the participant A's illustration on the left



Participant B's illustration of the two faces the leaders have; on the one side showing empathy but on the other showing the greed for wealth



The research teams' adaptation of the Participant B's illustration on the left

Figure 2. Nairobi, Kenya project participant illustrations and research team adaptations

The project in KwaZulu Natal was led by Dr Ingrid Bamberg from the University of KwaZulu Natal via a formal partnership with Alliance Française in Durban. The participants were drawn from mixed economic backgrounds and geographic distributions (rural/urban), with the group from urban areas also including refugees, in an attempt to bring together various perspectives in an effective social mix. The project started with 30 participants across both participant groups, of which 25 were able to complete both sessions, and 21 completed both pre and post surveys. Of these participants (13 male, 7 female, 1 non-binary), 7 came from a rural background and 14 came from an urban background. Participants were between the ages of 16 and 27 years old, with 81% reporting that they were born in South Africa (other countries included Rwanda and DRC).

This programme consisted of two series of workshops in June 2021. At first, the youths took part in the workshops in their respective group. During their first sessions, participants explored analytical tools for reading and drawing cartoons, based on Cartooning for Peace pedagogical toolkits and on the project partner's selection of drawings by South African and African cartoonists, focussing specifically on the youths and Covid-19 in South Africa as an overarching theme, and at gender-related issues, social media, migration, youth and education as sub-themes. In the second stage, participants took part in a follow-up drawing session with political cartoonist Nanda Soobben, where he presented his work and his journey as a South African cartoonist during apartheid and in present days. The youths could appreciate various cartooning styles and put in perspective the theoretical and technical knowledge they had grasped in the first session. They were then grouped in teams according to the above-mentioned sub-themes; this gave them an opportunity to debate and to think critically about the cartoon each of them would draw on the topic, as well as the tools they would choose to convey their message. The project concluded with each thematic team getting together with their rural/urban counterpart to debate, share ideas and draw a collective cartoon on their topic (Figure 3); an exhibition at the Alliance Française in Durban was held as the final project output.



Figure 3. KwaZulu Natal, South Africa project participant illustrations

The project in Côte d'Ivoire was led by Tache d'Encre, the association of press cartoonists in Côte d'Ivoire. The association's objectives are to promote press cartooning and comics and to raise awareness of social questions. As part of a broader programme of interventions, Tache d'Encre focussed their workshops for this project in five educational settings within the district of Yamoussoukro, Cote d'Ivoire. One-off workshops were offered to over 500 participants in May 2021. 335 completed matched surveys were returned. Participants (220 male, 115 female) were between ages of 15 to 23 years old, with 99% reporting that they were born in Côte d'Ivoire. During the workshops, participants were introduced to the profession and to the medium of political cartooning and participants were then invited to work on themes such as democracy, human rights, or elections. A selection of drawings, judged on fit with the theme and expression, were passed on to the research team for analysis. As part of its standard approach, Tache d'Encre usually also has a selection of drawings finalised by a professional cartoonist following their workshops, for public dissemination.⁴

As is clear from the above descriptions, in some cases the projects strengthened existing programmes of interventions (Tache d'encre), or took prior experience with cartoons into new directions (Africartoons, University of Nairobi); in the case of the KwaZulu Natal project, the programme was set up as a new initiative, building on Cartooning for Peace toolkits as well as local partnerships to develop a context-specific intervention, that has since led to an expansion of activities.

Participants across all four projects completed pre- and post-questionnaires (before and after taking part in the respective workshop sessions). The surveys were largely similar for the projects in Côte d'Ivoire, KwaZulu Natal, and Nairobi, but adapted to cater for a more professional participant body in the case of Africartoons. Other data collected below includes report and interview-based workshop observations from the organising partners and participant drawings, discussed below under 'youth perspectives'.

Survey data

Ethical approval for this research was provided by the University of Leicester Research Ethics Committee. All participants were provided with a participant information sheet and signed an informed consent form before taking part in the workshop and completing surveys. All surveys were pseudonymised so that no record of participant details were associated with responses. Participants were also given the option as to whether they wanted to have their name and/or face associated with any drawings developed during the workshop. The surveys assessed four specific constructs at both pre-session and post-session: (1) political cartoon literacy (2) feelings of agency (3) attitude towards humour and (4) attitude towards diversity. Notably, and as mentioned in the appendix, existing validated measures of these constructs were largely not transferable from western contexts to the context of the current project. Therefore, measures

⁴ On the broader work of Tache d'Encre, also see this interview with founder Lassane Zohoré, conducted by Dr James Illingworth as part of the research project presented here: <https://staffblogs.le.ac.uk/covid-in-cartoons/2022/05/11/political-cartooning-in-cote-divoire-interview-with-lassane-zohore/>.

were adapted and/or developed in partnership with workshop leaders to be sensitive to conflict/post-conflict contexts.

As mentioned, questionnaires followed the same general format for three of the four projects, with language adjusted where appropriate (e.g., the questionnaire for the workshop in Côte d'Ivoire was translated into French). As the Tache d'Encre project had a much larger reach than the other projects, the questionnaire results from this project are beyond the reach of this paper, and will be reported in a more detailed future publication, focusing on community and youth perspectives in Côte d'Ivoire specifically⁵. As mentioned above, the Africartoons survey was adapted to reflect the more professionally oriented project goals of the programme. Because of these internal differences between projects and participant bodies, only perceived change in knowledge and workshop feedback will be reported below for the Tache d'Encre and Africartoons projects, with further measures being discussed for the other two projects. Markedly, sample sizes for the surveys differed depending on workshop size: University of Nairobi (Kenya) Project, N= 11; KwaZulu Natal (South Africa) Project, N = 21; Tache d'Encre (Côte d'Ivoire) Project, N = 335; Africartoons (South Africa) Project, N = 6.

In all pre-session questionnaires, participants shared perceptions about their local community and their understanding of political cartooning. In the post-session questionnaire, participants reflected further on this understanding, shared how they perceived the workshops influenced their own knowledge of cartoons, and provided feedback about the workshop.

Political Cartoon Literacy

Three items were used to assess participants' media literacy and understanding of political cartoons before and after taking part in the workshops: (1) *I am confident that I know how to read a press or political cartoon* (2) *I am confident that I can tell the difference between reliable and unreliable news* and (3) *I am confident that I understand the concept of freedom of expression*. Participants responded to all items on a 5-pt scale (5- strongly agree; 1- strongly disagree).

- **University of Nairobi (Kenya) Project:** Prior to taking part in the workshop, participants reported a reasonable level of confidence reading political cartoons; 44% of participants 'strongly agreed' that they were confident reading political cartoons and the remaining 56% 'agreed.' After taking part in the workshop, confidence was even higher, with 89% of participants 'strongly agreeing' that they knew how to read a press or political cartoon. Additionally, before the workshop, only 33% of participants 'strongly agreed' that they could tell the difference between reliable and unreliable news and 67% of participants 'strongly agreed' that they understood the concept of freedom of expression. After the workshop, 78% of participants 'strongly agreed' with these statements (with the remaining participants in all cases 'agreeing').
- **KwaZulu Natal (South Africa) Project:** In this project participants reported a greater range in relation to confidence reading political cartoons; prior to the workshop 32%

⁵Louwagie, Dudley, Weidman, Levine, Loukou, *Cartooning for Peace* (in preparation). *Community-building through Political Cartoons: Youth Perspectives from Côte d'Ivoire*.

‘strongly agreed’ that they knew how to read a political cartoon, while 52% ‘agreed,’ 5% ‘neither agreed nor disagreed,’ and 11% disagreed. After taking part in the workshop, there was a notable increase in understanding, with 37% ‘strongly agreeing’ and 58% ‘agreeing’ that they were confident reading political or press cartoons. Regarding items two and three, only 26% of participants ‘strongly agreed’ that they could tell the difference between reliable and unreliable news and 42% of participants ‘strongly agreed’ that they understood the concept of freedom of expression. After the workshop these percentages did not increase. According to Dr Bamberg, who led this project, these figures corroborate the group discussions during which the youths from both groups expressed their discomfort about news (conventional and social media) in times of Covid-19, their difficulties assessing real from fake news due to much contradictory information, and uncertainties about the virus.

Community Perception

Community perception was assessed using the following item: “*What three words/phrases come to mind when you think about your community?*”

- **University of Nairobi (Kenya) Project:** Overall, participants reported a negative perception of the local community in Mathare. The most common words used to describe Mathare were poverty (4 responses), crime (3 responses), and culture (3 responses). Other terms included ‘love’ and ‘politics.’
- **KwaZulu Natal (South Africa) Project:** There was a noticeable difference between participants’ perception of the local community depending on whether they were from an urban or rural community. For participants from the rural community, the most common words were largely positive, including supportive (3 responses), care (3 responses), kindness (2 responses), and job opportunities (2 responses). On the other hand, for participants from the urban community, the most common words were largely negative, including crime (4 responses), violence (2 responses), and drugs (2 responses). Notably, other terms included ‘unity’ and ‘jobs.’

Feelings of Agency

To assess the influence of the workshops on participants' personal feelings of agency, five items concerning the extent to which individuals felt that they could influence change in different settings were presented. Participants responded on a 5-pt scale (5- strongly agree; 1- strongly disagree) as to whether they felt they could influence change in (a) their local community (b) wider society (c) friendship groups and (d) online groups.

- **University of Nairobi (Kenya) Project:** Prior to the workshops, participants were most confident that they could influence change in their friendship and community groups (88% ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’), followed by wider society and online groups (76% ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’). After the workshops, 100% participants agreed that they could influence change across every group.
- **KwaZulu Natal (South Africa) Project:** Prior to the workshops, participants were most confident that they could influence change in their friendship groups (95% ‘agreed’ or

‘strongly agreed’), followed by community groups, wider society, and lastly online groups (62% ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’). After the workshops, participants felt more confident that they could influence change in their community groups (81% ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ at pre-survey, and 95% ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ at post survey) and wider society (67% ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ at pre-survey and 71% ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ at post-survey), but there was no change in confidence in influencing friendship or online groups.

Attitude Towards Humour

Attitude Towards Humour was assessed with an adapted version of the Coping Humour Scale (Lefcourt, 2001). This scale included three items (1) *I always keep my sense of humour when I am having problems* (2) *It has been my experience that humour is often a very effective way of coping with problems* and (3) *Humorous cartoons make me laugh*. Participants responded on a 5-pt scale (5- strongly agree; 1- strongly disagree) to all items.

- **University of Nairobi (Kenya) Project:** Prior to taking part in the workshop participants reported medium to high agreement with the items on the humour measure, with 67% of participants ‘strongly agreeing’ or ‘agreeing’ that they always keep a sense of humour when having problems and 78% of participants ‘strongly agreeing’ or ‘agreeing’ that humour is an effective way of coping with problems and that humorous cartoons make them laugh. After the workshop there was a notable increase in positive attitude towards the last two items, with 100% of participants agreeing that ‘humour is a very effective way of coping with problems’ and ‘humorous cartoons make me laugh.’ However, there was no difference in response to the first item.
- **KwaZulu Natal (South Africa) Project:** Participants of this project reported similar levels of agreement with items on the humour measure before the workshops. After the workshops, there was no difference in agreement on the item ‘humorous cartoons make me laugh,’ (81% agreed before and after the workshop) and a small decrease in the item ‘I always keep my sense of humour when I am having problems’ (90% agreed before the workshop, and 86% agreed after the workshop). According to Dr Bamberg, this corroborates that the workshops’ process led to greater introspection; the group discussions brought forward difficult subjects like racism, gender discrimination, queer discrimination, and xenophobia —topics that may be limited in relation to the item “I always keeping my sense of humour when having problems”. However, as also indicated by the workshop organiser, the group discussions supported the notion that “humour is a very effective way of coping with problems,” hence the increase in this item from 72% agreeing before the workshop to 90% agreeing after the workshop

Attitude Towards Diversity

Attitude Towards Diversity was assessed with an adapted version of the Miami University Diversity Awareness Scale (Mosley-Howard, 2011). This scale included three items: (1) *“I am comfortable among people of different cultures”* (2) *I view promoting diversity wherever I can as an essential part of my role as a student* and (3) *I have opportunities to talk about my culture*. Participants responded on a 5-pt scale (5- strongly agree; 1- strongly disagree) to all items.

- **University of Nairobi (Kenya) Project:** Participants reported generally positive attitudes towards diversity before the workshop, with 100% agreeing that ‘I view promoting diversity wherever I can as an essential part of my role as a student,’ and 78% agreeing that ‘I am comfortable among people of different cultures’ and ‘I have opportunities to talk about my culture.’ After the workshop there was a notable positive increase in these last two items, with 100% of participants reporting that they ‘strongly agreed’ or ‘agreed.’
- **KwaZulu Natal (South Africa) Project:** Participants in this project also reported positive attitudes towards diversity before the workshop, with 90% agreeing that ‘I view promoting diversity wherever I can as an essential part of my role as a student,’ 100% agreeing that ‘I am comfortable among people of different cultures’ and 75% agreeing that ‘I have opportunities to talk about my culture.’ After the workshop there was no increase in positive attitude towards diversity.

Perceived Change in Knowledge

Participants across all the projects responded to items about how the workshop changed (a) their knowledge of political cartoons and (b) their understanding of their own situation.

- **University of Nairobi (Kenya) Project:** 100% of participants ‘strongly agreed’ or ‘agreed’ that the political cartoons in the workshop improved their understanding of their own situation, helped them understand their country in a different manner, and encouraged them to talk to people about issues. Further, another 88% of participants agreed that the political cartoons in the workshop provided insight into social inequalities or tensions and helped them understand their local community in a different manner
- **KwaZulu Natal (South Africa) Project:** 95% of participants agreed that political cartoons in the workshop helped them understand their country in a different manner, provided insight into social inequalities and tensions, and encouraged them to talk to each other about issues. 90% of participants agreed that the political cartoons in the workshop helped them to understand the local community in a different manner and improved their understanding of their own situation.
- **Tache d’Encre (Côte d’Ivoire) Project:** 93% of participants agreed that political cartoons in the workshop helped them understand their own situation, 91% agreed that political cartoons in the workshop helped them understand their local community in a different manner, and 88% agreed that the political cartoons in the workshop helped them understand their own country in a different manner.
- **Africartoons (South Africa) Project:** 100% of participants agreed that their views on South-African society had changed through taking part in the project, and further, that their hopes and plans for the future had changed as a result of taking part in the project.

The survey data showed an increase in certain indicators across the workshops, with changes notable in understanding of political cartoons (literacy), agency, and humour. Evolutions were less marked in specific areas, such as differentiating news sources. A minor change in ‘positive’ attitude towards diversity was noted in the Nairobi project, and a statistically significant change was noted in the larger participant body in the Côte d’Ivoire project. The evaluation scales for

the projects indicated a strong change in understanding of social situations through the use of political cartooning or the related workshops.

Workshop Feedback

Participants across all the projects were asked to share feedback about what they most enjoyed about the workshops and how these workshops could be improved.

- **Universities of Nairobi (Kenya) Project:** Feedback from participants was markedly positive. Participants responded that the most interesting part of the workshop included the interaction with other participants: (*“Engaging and sharing different opinions on what is currently going on in our community”*) and learning how to interpret and draw political cartoons (*“Learning how to interpret political cartoons”* / *“Expressing my political issues through cartoons”*). When asked to share feedback about how the workshop could be improved, responses were directed at increasing the reach and capacity of the workshops (*“Engage more people in the community for the information to spread faster. Do it more frequently”*). Other responses conveyed appreciation for being a part of the project (*“This project is really a very nice one, bringing youths from different areas with different ideas together”*).
- **KwaZulu Natal (South Africa) Project:** A large majority of participants shared that the most interesting part of the workshop was the opportunity to create their own political cartoon (*“I got to do my own political cartoon and learn the different tools used in cartooning”*). Respondents also shared that they appreciated the opportunity to talk to people from different backgrounds (*“Meeting new people with different experiences on life and how it’s like”* / *“You meet different people with different perspectives”*). When asked what could be improved, participants also responded that that they would like to see the workshop increase in size and frequency (*“To have more people to attend the workshop”* / *“Come again to help youth of South Africa”*) and suggested that they would like even more interaction with other participants (*“Meet with all the other groups so we talk work with people we don't know open and just get to know one other better”* / *“Next time we can try and work in a places with people we don't know so we can learn more”*).
- **Tache d’Encre (Côte d’Ivoire) Project:** Many participants told us that their most important takeaway from the workshop was the opportunity to reflect on political themes and - potentially - effect change (*“Moving debate, Freedom of expression in Côte d’Ivoire”*). However, a minority suggested that the most important opportunity the workshop afforded was more reflective (*“We are different, but we are together”* / *“Building peace!”*). Participants were also asked to explain a change they would like to see in future iterations of the workshop, and here the responses were wider-ranging. For a small number, there was a distinctive need to try and find more consensus or collective action through drawing (*“I want that in the debate we do all we can to reach agreement”* / *“I would have liked to do a cartoon together”*). For most, more time would have been appreciated, particularly to draw (*“In my opinion there wasn't enough time to draw”*).
- **Africartoons (South Africa) Project:** Participants were asked what the most interesting pieces of information were that they took away from the workshop. Responses demonstrated a deep understanding of the functions and nuisances of political cartoons

(“Political cartoons can encapsulate a sentiment that can be spread to an entire movement” / “Political cartoons are poetic visual metaphors” / “Political cartoons always expose the truth and they stand for the little ‘guy’” / “Political cartoons help to communicate and expose the government to the community”). Participants were also asked to comment on how the project had changed their views on South African society. Respondents shared that they had a better understanding of power structures (*“During the workshop I learned about the certain power structures in different fields, like the political institutions and how they deal with matters of social justice/injustice etc.”* / *“Prior to participating, I only had a narrow view of what constitutes as society. It’s more than the politicians & government, the power is the people and should belong to the people”).* Additionally, participants shared how the project had changed their hopes and plans for the future, expressing that the workshop provided them with both motivation and inspiration (*The workshop has been the best propeller to me, the mentors have given me hope and courage that someday I can be like them and produce cartoons that will provide answers to my country and worldwide!*” / *“I for one have never had any experience in cartoons but this workshop has sent me down the rabbit hole revealing a wonderland. A world where everything is translated into humour”*)

Open comments for lay participants also indicate the need for this kind of workshop and the enjoyment of the cartooning activity, and the Africartoons comments, from aspiring cartoonists, add to that a changed worldview and perceptions of society and democracy, as well as a change in understanding of the role of political cartooning, as a defence of the powerless and the people.

Youth perspectives

The workshop observations and drawings produced by participants offer further insight into youth perspectives.

- **University of Nairobi (Kenya) Project:** Dr Mwiti’s analysis of the workshop stressed the need for counter-narratives for young people in Mathare Valley. “First of all, as highlighted in the pre-study survey, participants agreed that diversity is a major aspect of the community and they felt that they should take major steps and critical roles in the promotion of diversity in their communities. Hope is another counter-narrative to some of the hardships experienced amongst the youth in Mathare Valley. A general theme in the prototype sessions - where participants came up with their own cartoon illustrations/drawings - was that politicians often seek to dampen the hopes and dreams of the youth in the area. Therefore, there remains a strong need for positive illustrations - to kill the negativity of Mathare dwellings – visualizing a properly planned Mathare – space planning, housing, greener spaces. Ultimately, this is likely to shift or avoid the resigned worldview held by some of the youth in the study and the wider Mathare area. The study also highlighted that the narrative of marginalisation was and is often used to radicalise the youth in Mathare Valley, especially for political mileage and towards electoral violence. Illustrations / Political Cartoons and graffiti within the study area that promote tolerance and inclusion are essential in countering this narrative” (workshop report, 31 July 2021). The drawings, some of which are reproduced above, focus on social divides

between the community and their leadership, ways in which leadership fails the population, and requests for change, shown in particular through the image of a demonstration.

- **KwaZulu Natal (South Africa) Project:** Drawings from the project illustrate the issues in the area, through an emphasis on poverty. Covid-19 is presented as an intersectional issue that increases job loss and deprivation, particularly in the context of the imposed lockdown, where government guidance and the needs of the population are seen to stand at odds. As a result, the drawings express a sense of helplessness and showcase demands and cries for help. A number of drawings also challenge the media and fake news around the Covid-19 pandemic. Finally, the drawings make a plea for social cohesion, illustrating the tensions between black and white and advocating a need to end the pain caused by discrimination, again through the image of a demonstration, amongst others. As indicated by Dr Bamberg, the youth learned, after some initial confusion about the link between the cartooning toolkit and the workshop content, to successfully apply the cartooning techniques to translate messages into visual images.

Concluding observations

The workshops aimed to use political cartooning as a tool for promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable developments, as defined by Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16. The survey data and drawings illustrate the intersectional issues experienced within local conflict and post-conflict contexts and indicate perceived needs for change.

The project has improved literacy levels, and particularly levels of reading and understanding political cartoons, and has thereby raised awareness of broad societal issues, such as conflict, discrimination, Covid-19, misinformation and poverty. Participant drawings express the interconnected nature of these issues and the way in which they impact on young people's prospects. The cartoons illustrate the gaps with leadership, and include expressions of tiredness and suffering, as well as demands for change. As illustrated in the appendix, this came with a renewed insight into the functioning of cartoons, for the participants as well as academic workshop organisers, who learned that the emphasis is on the toolkit and message rather than the artistic side of political cartooning, and also learned that humour can have restorative and reconciliatory functions, moving beyond some fears around its potentially harmful or divisive effects. As expressed also by John Curtis from Africartoons as part of the post-workshop reporting process, there is a need in the contexts under consideration for cartoons to address tensions, but "the big challenge is that [this] should be done in a manner that seeks to unite, rather than divide people." As mentioned above, the cartoonists taking part in the Africartoons mentoring project also stressed the need for cartoons to stand up for the powerless.

Finally, as a first step towards empowerment and potential further activism, the young people involved in the project have had an opportunity to make some of their drawings public. This includes via an exhibition at the Alliance Française in Durban (KwaZulu Natal project), wall paintings in the public space in Mathare Valley (University of Nairobi project), a competition in collaboration with the *Daily Maverick* (Africartoons Project), and the dissemination of drawings by Tache d'Encre (Tache d'Encre Project).

APPENDIX

Description of the call for projects

The aims of the commissioned workshops were:

- Develop grassroots and interdisciplinary insights into the intersecting functions of political cartooning in contexts of crisis, and its potential in terms of community building and in addressing complex developmental needs
- Raise awareness and understanding of competing (inter)cultural perspectives in conflict and post-conflict contexts, with a view to fortifying the critical thinking skills and (self)-awareness of young people
- Raise aspirations and dialogue amongst young people in conflict and post-conflict zones as a platform for stimulating democratic models and leadership
- Develop future perspectives on civic engagement in local and global peacebuilding processes and related issues
- Examine critical and ethical challenges of political cartooning in conflict and post-conflict situations and raise awareness of the need of access and freedom of information in line with SDG 16.10

The call for workshop proposals was issued in February 2021 and was initially aimed at cartoonists and organisations working in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, South Africa, or Israel, in order to focus on countries involved in different stages of conflict and peace management. In light of the response in other areas, the call was extended to include further conflict and post-conflict situations in countries on the OECD's Official Development Assistance list. Applicants could apply for funding of up to £1,500 to run grassroots workshop creating an interface between cartoonists, cultural and educational stakeholders and academics, and drawing on the medium of political cartoons to stimulate social aspirations amongst young people and to engage them to think about social development issues and community-driven resilience. As a result, we sought to operate in interdisciplinary ways across literary studies, history, sociology, development studies, and psychology, drawing on conceptual and methodological frameworks. Crucially, in working with a range of non-academic organisations we also sought to work in a co-creative way with young people and those working with them in conditions of chronic structural inequalities. The intervention format was deliberately kept open to accommodate various kinds of initiatives and enable co-creation with local practices, perspectives and approaches, but with the common ground of engaging youth through the medium of political cartooning, with a view to exploring and promoting the use of political cartoons as a medium to foster critical thinking skills and bottom-up dialogue within communities.

Additional activities

Ahead of the delivery of local projects, partners took part in two online workshops organised by the University of Leicester research team, in partnership with Cartooning for Peace and Shout Out UK. The sessions included individual project presentations, a presentation on research ethics and a [roundtable](#) with cartoonist panelists, chaired by Peter Vale and featuring political cartoonists Pedro X Molina (Nicaragua) and Alaa Satir (Sudan). The round table raised some key

questions in relation to the role and potential of political cartoons in influencing or changing political opinions and stances and also generated debate on the role of humour, seen as a very important tool for mediating ethnic tensions in Côte d'Ivoire, but as a potential hurdle and cause of conflict in other contexts, for instance South Africa.

In parallel a series of interviews were conducted by young people with cartoonists from conflict zones and ODA zones, for comparative perspectives. Four interviews were conducted through the Shout Out UK Young Writers programme, and two by University of Leicester research interns or associates. Cartoonists interviewed include Vladimir Kazanevsky (Ukraine), Michel Kichka (Israel), Zapiro (South Africa), Willis from Tunis (Tunisia), Yemi (Ethiopia), Lassane Zohoré (Côte d'Ivoire). These interviews with international cartoonists, resulting in [videos](#) and [blog posts](#), have provided useful insight into the function, risks and reception of press cartoons across a range of different cultures and (post-)conflict contexts, and also in the context of the pandemic, where the role of cartoonists tend to vary from information and awareness-raising (including via work with NGO's) to political criticism of leaders and inequalities. The role of the cartoonist was described as one of letting off steam in a tense situation, by Kichka (who opposed his own drawing practice to the possible alternative of activism in the streets) and as working towards reconciliation beyond ethnic divides (by Yemi). Some cartoonists described the future of the profession as more focussed or crucial under political regime where freedom of expression remains an issue (Kazanevsky) and cartoonists also discussed the (inter)national reception of their cartoons, including (non-)acceptance of humour by the population and politicians.

Finally, debrief sessions took place with all project partners involved in the workshops. These reflected on the role of political cartooning in specific contexts, and demonstrated some changes in understanding on the role and function of political cartoons, particularly amongst academic partners. Dr Ingrid Bamberg indicated: "I think I was more thinking about the smart, sharp, humorous side of it, the journalist side of it. The very intellectual side, because it is very intellectual, and this was very clear for me. But I think I never thought of it as a tool to engage debate and to organise any kind of workshop." Dr Mwiti similarly felt that the workshop took the focus away from her own emphasis on humour in cartoons and gave her a different insight into the role of cartooning. She stressed in her debrief with Dr Illingworth that the messaging function of cartoons is not limited to information and awareness raising, but also relates to building solutions, pointing out that the youth identifies a particular need for positive illustrations: "let's start using them as a solution-based intervention" (project debrief, 10/09/2021).

Challenges and opportunities

Due to the limited time scale of the project funding and various research and administrative requirements and processes, all projects selected faced the challenge of short-term interventions, though in the case of Côte d'Ivoire in particular, the workshops were part of an existing programme of activities.

Language was an issue in some cases, including for the questionnaires, as reported by the partner in Kwazulu Natal, and for the production of cartoons, in the case of Africartoons. For the

Africartoons project, further organisational challenges included participant lack of access to basic resources such as phones, data, paper, alongside the hurdle of language skills. In light of these challenging socio-economic circumstances for the participants, the judging for this specific project overlooked language issues or quality issues in relation to paper or photography. While new initiatives (e.g. WhatsApp and Zoom) provided opportunities to resolve some of the issues and to bridge the divides, to the satisfaction of all participants (young cartoonists, mentors and competition judges), the time and resources the team spent on the project far exceeded the original budget in attempting to find solutions, which is a lesson learned for future mentoring programs of this kind.

The need for locally and culturally adapted perspectives also emerged as a challenge, particularly where the work was not part of a pre-existing initiative of interventions, with the need for tailored pedagogical resources and perspectives, as observed by Dr Ingrid Bamberg in her project design for the KwaZulu Natal project. Some of these challenges also return to the issues discussed as part of the project round-table, such as the culturally sensitive use of humour. Furthermore, it ties in with methodological discussions outlined above, linked to the use of validated survey measures, and the need to take into account local sensitivities around matters of diversity, humour and resilience. Preparatory discussions of the survey measures were conducted with Dr Bamberg following the roundtable, to adapt to local contexts and sensitivities. Interestingly, as mentioned above, delivery of the workshops in KwaZulu Natal was felt to shed a new light on this matter, resulting in an enhanced recognition of the potential of political cartoons as a tool for dialogue, beyond its 'sharp' 'intellectual' side, as stated by Dr Bamberg in the project partner debrief. On the other hand, issues arose in relation to some of the Africartoons creative challenges where worldviews expressed in the cartoons would tend to reproduce rather than challenge certain social or gender inequalities; discussions about the role of political cartooning between mentors and mentees resulted here in a changed understanding of the role of cartooning for the participants, as expressed in their end-of-project surveys (see above).

Drs Bamberg and Mwiti and Léon Loukou (Tache d'Encre team lead) raised the further point that participants were initially reticent to engage in drawing, until they realised the broader political remit of cartoons, beyond the aesthetic. Conversely in Africartoons' case, the participants with a more artistic interest dropped out, confirming the emphasis on conceptualisation as a key feature of political cartooning. Whilst the analysis of participant drawings will fall outside the remit of this paper, it is worth noting this change in understanding with regard to the nature and purpose of political cartoons across all projects. It is also worth mentioning that two projects (Kenya and Côte d'Ivoire) made use of enhanced versions of participant cartoons.

Further challenges, arising from the Covid-19 context, included the lack of in-person interaction between the research team at Leicester and local partners, which was flagged up as a challenge in particular for the KwaZulu Natal project, that built less on pre-existing networks and experiences than the other projects, and created some sense of geographical north-south divide. However, the opportunities for connecting online during the preparatory workshops were a highlight for project partners and also offered an opportunity to exchange best practice and connect between

the different sub-projects. The KwaZulu Natal project has also since successfully developed in an autonomous follow-up workshop initiative with the participant body.

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