

NELSON MANDELA
UNIVERSITY



**End Period Poverty
Programme Report**
2022

HoC
Hubs of Convergence



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The Hubs of Convergence

Aligned to one of the Nelson Mandela University's Vision 2030 Strategic Intention, to achieve "transformative engagement"¹ the Hubs of Convergence (HoC) is a project located within the Engagement and Transformation Portfolio (ETP). The HoC as a project endeavours to co-create "physical spaces where the University meets the community to engage on common platforms to find solutions to problems that affect our immediate communities," Muthwa (2018)². Currently, the HoC as part of its extended mandate leads and manages the Community Convergence Workstream (CCW) as an institutional response to Covid-19³.

The HoC presents multiple exciting opportunities for the institution to deliver on its broader operational mandates while reimagining how to become a truly engaged space responding to the complexities facing our world - starting with our immediate communities.

By experimenting with how best to converge the university and various communities, the HoC provides options for inter and transdisciplinary collaboration which will enable the university to give effect to its vision, mission, and strategic priorities and re-create itself in service of society⁴.

Methodological Approach: The HoC Process

A critical participatory action learning and action research approach is being followed to conceptualise the HoC. This approach lends itself to the exploration of the phenomena of engagement and its modalities while at the same time being responsive to present-day challenges.

¹ Nelson Mandela University Vision 2030 Strategy (2021)

² Vice Chancellor Inaugural Speech (2018)

³ HoC Repurposing (2020)

⁴ Nelson Mandela University Vision 2030 Strategy (2021)

It is through a critical evaluation of the many forms of engagement and their useful applications that we will be able to produce 'cutting edge knowledge,' which will inform our engagement praxis in the metro, province, country, continent and globally.

The process of the HoC conceptualisation is iterative, non-linear, messy, contested, and human and material resource intensive. But it is through these processes, that knowledge will be generated to help us better understand how to be responsive to the societal challenges of the 21st century. A key part of this understanding is ensuring that all voices are heard, honoured, recognised, and validated and that an opportunity is presented for their critical examination and use.

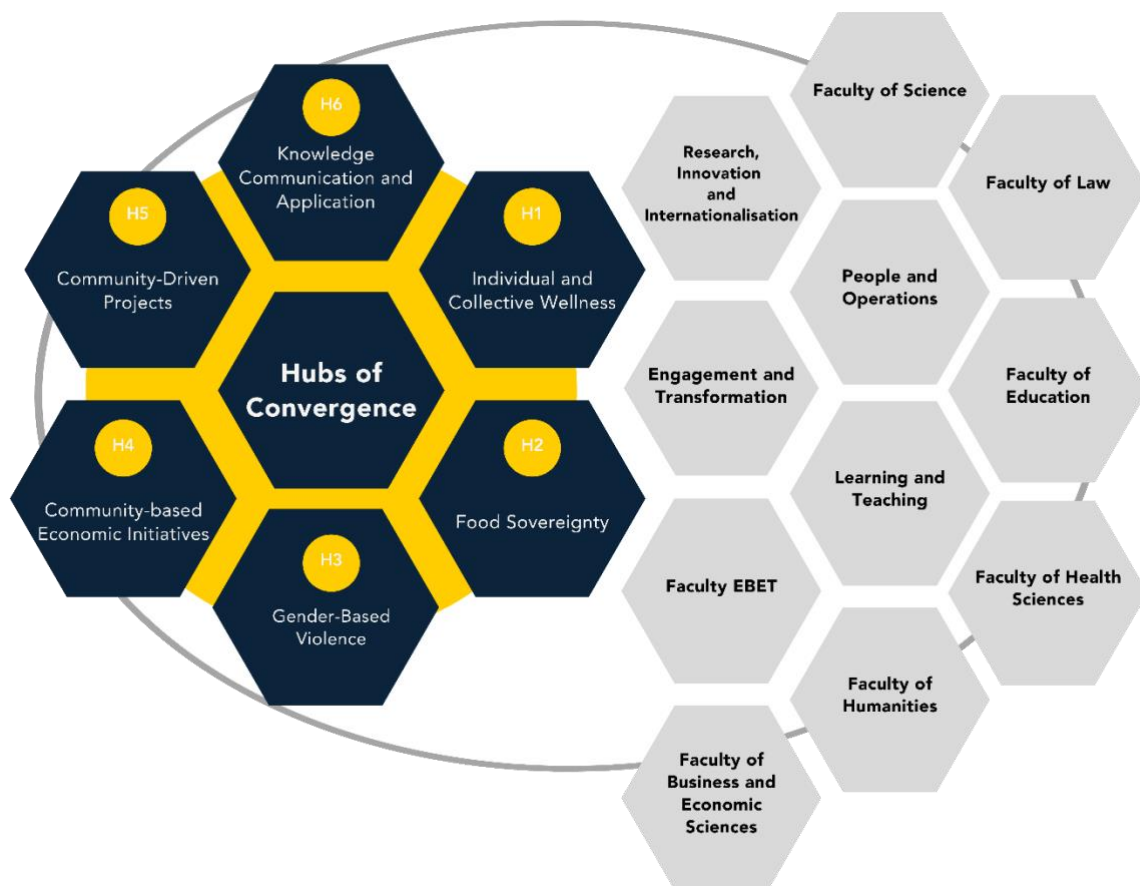
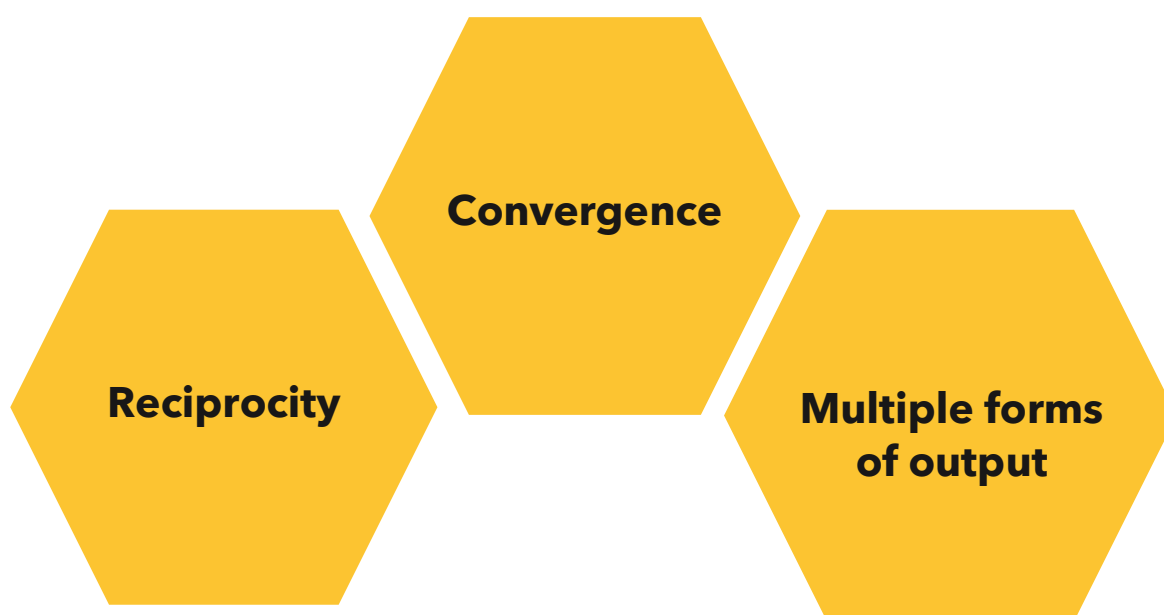


Figure: Beehive Model 2.0

The Emerging Principles of Converged Engagement



The emerging lessons around our work advocate for an approach in which the following principles are crucial if the University is to be in service of society:

Convergence - the conscious effort of drawing together internal and external stakeholders to unlock the knowledge and praxis that enable us to better engage on grander issues that affect our society. The drawing together of these stakeholder communities recognises the voice and agency of all those involved in the engagement, which forms a vital element of a Humanising Pedagogy.

Reciprocity - the exchanging of co-created knowledge and resources through the principles of generosity, solidarity, co-creation, responsiveness, and inclusion for the mutual benefit of all stakeholders.

Multiple forms of outputs - mindful that socially engaged scholarship is best derived from an authentic process of learning with others in practice; that it embraces the uncertainty embedded in 'not knowing'; and is supportive of multiple forms of knowledge output to drive social inclusion and cohesion

Background to End period Poverty

2022

Key Message of Report

End Period Poverty. It sounds simple, yet we as active stakeholders know that this is anything but simple. Eradicating period poverty is part rooted in several the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 2030, namely: Goal 1 (No Poverty); Goal 3 (Good Health and Wellbeing); Goal 4 (Quality Education); Goal 5 (Gender Equality) and Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities). The university, as a custodian of providing an enabling environment for all its students, eradicating period poverty is a necessity.

It should always be recognized that tackling period poverty is not one dimensional nor is it done in one single approach. It's a task in which even the smallest action makes a significant contribution. In this report, the Hubs of Convergence (HOC) shares key insights, learnings and programme tools it found through its Mina Cup Distribution Drive in five (5) Nelson Mandela University student residences. In doing so, the aim of this report is to identify available ways in which collaborations can be established and/or enhanced. Such available ways could include resources, information-sharing and programme support made available to all stakeholders.

Lastly, the report uses a reflective approach and as such, it encourages that those the report is shared with identifies how the position of the HoC can assist in expanding their own distribution drives, programmes, or projects.

A key focus of this hub is to advocate for gender equality within the university and the society in which we find ourselves in. One known argument is that “periods are not a choice” and that menstrual products should be given for free. To support this argument, it is estimated that up to 7 million South African girls do not have access to or afford to buy sanitary products (EPPP Launch Poster, 2022). This, a part definition of period poverty. There is no national statistic for absenteeism due to lack of sanitary products, however- estimates on South African school-going girls that miss school due to their periods is 30%. (EPPP Launch Poster, 2022).

A female endures physical, emotional and mental changes during their menstrual cycle that can be further exacerbated in period poverty (Michel, Mettler, Schönenberger & Gunz, 2022). There are cases of stigmatization surrounding menstruation, which have prevented engaging conversations amongst those impacted by it (Michel et al. 2022). It became clear that part of the Mina Distribution drive and part of what the HOC does would be include conversations on menstrual health and add awareness of it to the drive.

On the 12th of August 2022, a collaboration of the HOC, Mina Foundation and Gift of the Givers launched their End Period Poverty Programme. The Launch was a three-hour event, with the intention to spotlight anchor partners and patrons, including the first black women to hold the position of Chair of Council at the University, Ambassador Nozipho January-Bardill, Community Liaison Officer of the Gift of the Givers, Hlengiwe Nkwanana, Board Member of the Mina Foundation Eusebius Mckaiser. The event aimed to stimulate provocations and raise awareness about the programme, while encouraging support from various corners of the University.

Stakeholder Analysis

MINA FOUNDATION

An organization that was founded by three women, led by Zaakira Mahomed in 2015, with a goal to make a substantial difference in the lives of menstruators and the environment. Key to this goal is to address absenteeism at school by girls due to the lack of access to menstrual products. The team has travelled extensively across the country distributing the Mina Cups in schools whilst offering mentorship whilst imparting menstrual health awareness in their encounters.

THE GIFT OF THE GIVERS

The Gift of the Givers is the largest disaster response non-governmental organisation of African origin on the African continent (The Gift of the Givers, 2022). The assistance provided is unconditional thereby working with all those in need irrespective of race, religion, colour, class, political affiliation, or geographic location. Aims to restore the hope and dignity of the most vulnerable in their time of need, rebuilding prosperous communities and empowering leaders of tomorrow (The Gift of the Givers, 2022).

Summary of Project Implementation

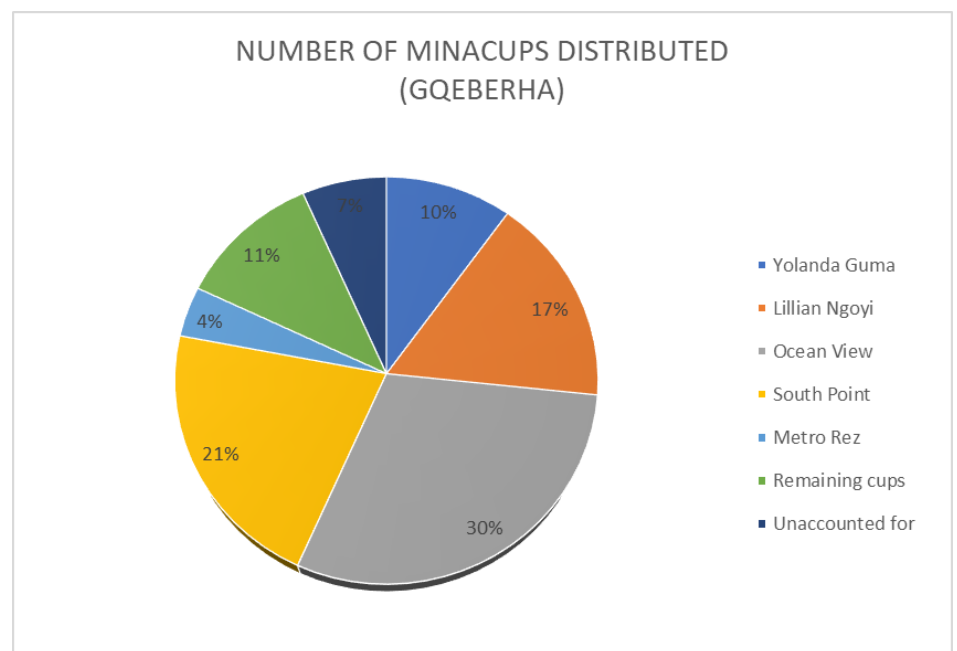
Interactive and focused groups worked well as a tool for implementation. It allowed a safe space to talk broadly & intimately about menstrual health and the various aspects of it. It's a space that needs to be recognized as personal, sensitive & embedded in our upbringings.

Structuring it as a programme allows for several objectives to be met with every cycle: continuity & collaborations amongst stakeholders. It provides each stakeholder independency to implement according to its KPIs AND co-dependency of stakeholders to deliver the objectives of the End Period Poverty Programmes.

TABLE 1: DISTRIBUTION OF MINA CUPS STATISTICS ACROSS 5 QQEBERHA NMU RESIDENCES

NAMES OF RESIDENCES	NUMBER OF MINACUPS DISTRIBUTED
Yolanda Guma	15
Lillian Ngoyi	25
Ocean View	45
South Point	32
Metro Rez	6
Remaining cups	17
Unaccounted for	10
TOTAL	150

DIAGRAM 1: PIE CHART, PERCENTAGE EACH RESIDENCE IS ACCOUNTING FOR MINA CUPS DISTRIBUTED



Taking the information from the pie-chart (diagram 1) and Table 1, we can extract the following:

- Working with a total of 150 Mina cups, 85% of the Mina cups were recorded being taken at the five student residences.
- Less than 10% of the cups are unaccounted for; reasons for this could be that some students did not sign the register form and/or do not form part of the above-mentioned residences.
- Ocean-view residence accounted for 30% of the mina cups distributed, followed by South Point at 21%, whilst the rest of the residence accounted for the rest. As one of the largest student residences in terms of the total

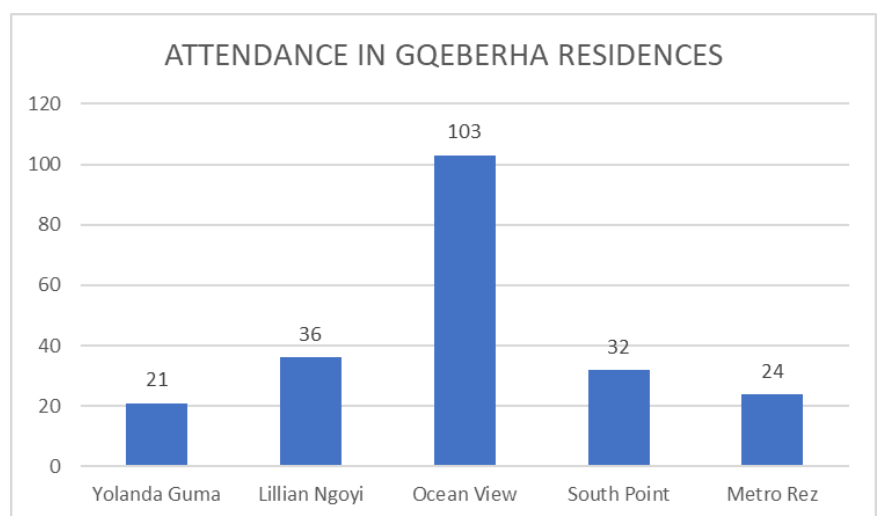
number of students that live there, Ocean-view also had the highest attendance recorded for the drive. As a criterion to identifying the residences for the drives, the size of it must be a determining factor.

- Metro Rez had the lowest percentage of cups distributed and for several reasons worth nothing:
 - During in Q & A session, it became apparent that most of the students have no knowledge and/or used alternative menstrual products, such as tampons or menstrual cups.
 - Although a session was conducted on the Mina cup- many of the students still felt uncomfortable to take a cup and use when they are ready too.

TABLE 2: ATTENDANCE OF STUDENTS FOR THE DRIVES ACROSS 5 QQEBERHA NMU RESIDENCES

RESIDENCE NAMES	STUDENT ATTANDANCE
Yolanda Guma	21
Lillian Ngoyi	36
Ocean View	103
South Point	32
Metro Rez	24
TOTAL	216

DIAGRAM 2: HISTOGRAM, NUMBER EACH RESIDENCE IS ACCOUNTING FOR STUDENT ATTENDANCE DURING DISTRIBUTION DRIVE



The bar graph in diagram 2 is a visual representation that depicts the volume of attendance that we have had from students across the 5 distribution drives in

the institution in 2022 with ocean view accounting for the most (103) and Yolanda Guma, Lillian Ngoyi, South Point and Metro Rez according for 21, 36, 32 and 24 student attendance respectively.

Distribution Drives - Engagement

Q & A Summary

As part of our menstrual health awareness drives hosted at the various student residences, the drives involved interactive Q & A sessions with students, where we would engage and converse with students about menstrual related issues. Some of the key topics we focused on are mentioned below:

Taboos: This included talks with students about any cultural, religious, or traditional taboos they may have known about regarding menstruation. Examples of the taboos mentioned in distribution drives were, “does a menstrual cup or tampon break your virginity?”. Another common taboo includes the idea that women are impure or dirty while on her period.

Sex: These conversations involved sharing thoughts on whether it’s safe to have sex while menstruating. Another interesting topic talked about was the pros and cons of having sex while menstruating.

Sexuality: In terms of sexuality, one of the highlighted discussions was whether students thought transgender individuals are able to menstruate.

Pregnancy: Conversations were held on whether one can one fall pregnant while menstruating. Additionally, we also focused on topics such as differentiating between when a woman is experiencing a miscarriage or a period. We also conferred whether a missed period indicates that one is pregnant and discussed the impact contraceptives may have on some females’ menstrual cycles.

Religion/Culture: This section of the Q&A session talked about religious/cultural beliefs regarding menstruation and the use of certain

menstrual products. For instance, the belief that using a menstrual cup would break one's hymen (virginity) before marriage.

Menstrual health: With regards to menstrual health, we addressed a number of frequently asked questions such as how often a woman menstruates and for how long. Moreover, we addressed questions like whether a woman menstruates EVERY month. We also talked about whether it is normal for menstruation blood to have an odour.

Period Poverty: In terms of period poverty, conversations with students were initiated by asking students whether they ever had to miss a lecture because of menstruation and lack of access to menstrual products.

For more details on how we carried out our EPPP distribution drive sessions, please read through our facilitation guide below:

[EPPP Facilitation Guide.pdf](#)

Limitations and Challenges

Marketing

The Mina-Cup distribution drive was a key activity in the End Period Poverty Programme for the HoC. A series of drives at five student residences- two on campus, and three off-campus were done. This meant that only the students living in those various residences could attend the drives, as they were the only ones with access to the space.

As such, marketing this programme as open to the public was limited. However, the programme was marketed to students living within the five residences through their Residence Managers, RAs, and HKs as the HOC team did not have access to the students prior to the distribution drive. The chosen method of implementation of the drives allowed for the intimate spaces needed where, the HoC team to be comfortable and relaxed for the conversation on Menstrual Health.

Language

The Mina-Cup distribution drives were facilitated by NMU Student Champions, who come from across South Africa and spoke different mother-tongues. Though this is an advantage, it also limited us, because we all had to speak a common language (English) and it posed a challenge of articulation of knowledge and information. There needs to be a training in the vocabulary that is used to speak/talk about menstrual health.

Transportation

Transportation was a major challenge during the Drives. Transport needed to be provided for the Champions & the HOC team from initial pick-up points to drop-offs after. All the drives were done in the afternoons & would end after 5:30 pm.

Transportation can also be thought of as a limitation, because, since we did not have the necessary transportation, it hindered us from taking the Mina Cup distribution drive to residences & communities further away from the University, due to no access to reliable transport.

Training of Champions

In preparation for the Mina Cups Distribution drives, an orientation and induction session was conducted for the Mina Cups Champions. The Champions were well prepared for this and did an excellent job doing the demonstrations, sharing Mina Cup information and answering questions about the cup.

In future, training on how to facilitate a session on Menstrual Health-or any session in general- will need to be done.

In the Menstrual Health Q&A session, the conversations unpacked diverse topics, thoughts, and taboos. This was one of the sessions that was facilitated by the Champions. During their facilitation, we noticed that they sometimes struggled to answer some of the questions the students and had a tendency for citing opinions as facts. There is a sensitivity conversation that needs to take place as well for champions and for HOC/Stakeholders.

Scheduling of Drives/Availability of Champions

The End Period Poverty Distribution Drives began in the middle of September, this was during the time when students started writing Semester tests, so there was conflict between their schedules and that of the Drives.

Student Attendance

Though there were many students at the Drives, there were still a considerable number outstanding. This is because, the Drives were scheduled to happen during the time when students were starting with semester tests. Another factor was that there some students who were still studying online, so not all the students were back at their residences, others were still at home.

Communication

Communication was a challenge, especially with Residence Managers. We met with the Res. Managers, after the launch of the programme to communicate the dates for each drive. Our main struggle was with communicating with the managers closer to the dates of the actual drives.

Another challenge with regards to communication, was with the actual students at the residences, we could not communicate with them directly, and had to go through various channels to relay information to them.

Recommendations

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- A communication strategy created by HOC that is best suited for all the stakeholders involved in the End Period Poverty Programme.
 - The use of Student Champions is key- sufficient training of the students' needs to be done before the start of any cycle
 - Creating an overarching objectives document that is owned by all the stakeholders to be used a guiding document for this programme.
 - Distribution Drive AND Menstrual Health Awareness Drive are two different actions that needs to be taken. With the distribution drives target ALL students on campus, whilst the menstrual health awareness should target Nelson Mandela University Residences.

- Transports need to be arranged for HOC members and the champions to be used during the distribution drives and menstrual health awareness drives.
- Arrange trainings to be done by campus Health for Champions and HOC members.
- Direct communication with the HKs and RAs is important as it would allow us to perform.

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