

# The Maunatlala Times

July 12- July 19, 2025



(clockwise) Kylie, Purva, and Emma are somewhere in the group of kids: can you find them? Youth researcher gathering household info & the team with Maunatlala primary teachers.

## Data Collection Challenges

We have been hard at work with our community-based research, and all of us have completed hours of interviews and focus groups. Data trends are emerging, as is the reality of social desirability biases. Botswana culture emphasizes optimism, politeness and face-saving, and we have had many conversations where participants are hesitant to address difficult topics, or present the harsh realities of inadequate access to menstrual health products and sexual and physical violence in schools and communities.

We are also seeing more no-shows for interviews or focus groups, including the social worker, who continues to evade our attempts to discuss her role in the community. Without her critical voice in our research, we have had to find other ways to understand the role her office plays in GBV in the village. Community-based research demands flexibility and the ability to adapt to changing circumstances. Kylie looked elsewhere to gather information through the local Peace Corps Volunteer and Village Development Officers who provided some insight into the role of the social worker, – as well as where that office falls short. As a team, we continue to adapt and reach out to as many key community members to solidify our findings and conduct honest and ethical work.



A beautiful spread for dinner earlier this week by our amazing chefs!

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# Our Trip to Molalatau

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Friday was spent driving to the village of Molalatau, a small village near the borders of Zimbabwe and South Africa. This village is home to a library built by the Rothschild Family Foundation, operated by a very determined librarian Mma Habutusi who has been doggedly pursuing further partnership with the Rothschild Family Foundation and OSU's College of Health BGHI to expand the library space for community engagement programs, similar to that of Maunatlala's Community Engagement Center (CEC). The Foundation, College of Health, BGHI, and the community will work together to try to counter some of the challenges faced in Maunatlala.

The 20 libraries built by the Rothschild Family Foundation are operated by the Botswana National Library Service, which comes with some challenges. The Maunatlala CEC has several commercial sewing machines donated to the National Library Service by the Rothschild Foundation, but managed by the government of Botswana, which stipulates that only government-licensed instructors can provide lessons on those machines – none of whom are available in Maunatlala. There are a few women in the village who can use the machines, and are willing to train the local sewing group, but have only been recently allowed to do so. Nineteen women have been trained to use the sewing machines, with another 25 students on the program waiting list!

Continued support is critical for the success of all of the CEC's programs (purchasing of textiles for sewing projects, instructors for community courses in computer literacy, early childhood education programs, etc.), but sustainability is paramount. Maunatlala has struggled with a lack of government support, and as Botswana as a country faces a worsening economy, the community must collectively engage to work towards self-sustainability rather than relying on government grants, the Rothschild Family Foundation, or COH's BGHI program. Many formal conversations (cont.)

Beautiful singing and music welcomed us in Molalatau



have underscored this point, and the community seems receptive.

All of the libraries are operated by government-appointed staff, and our experience in Molalatau underscores the critical importance of community engagement. We were greeted on arrival to the library by a structured community meeting – members of the library, the Reading Club, the *kgosi*, the Village Development Committee, and local artists and businesswomen shared the successes of the library and outlined detailed resources needed to improve and expand their existing programs (computers, sewing machines, art supplies, textiles, detergent-making supplies, etc.). We were served a traditional lunch of *samp* (dried corn) and beans, Ma Matiba performed on the *segaba*. The eagerness and engagement of the community was palpable – we all left with a lingering feeling of excitement and potential.

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# Moremi Gorge

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We spent our Saturday with a trip to Goo-Moremi Gorge. A short hike led us to a series of flowing waterfalls in the middle of an otherwise arid landscape, with dozens of endangered Cape vultures circling overhead. The gorge is of great cultural importance in this region, considered the resting place of ancestral spirits, or *badimo*. A few of our colleagues collected the clear water for bathing or drinking, as it is supposed to contain special properties or give you good luck! Hopefully the luck will pass on to the team as we continue finalizing our data collection this week and move into coding and data analysis (yay)! Anyways, we made our way back down in high spirits and finished our journey at the Gorge.



Purva, Kylie, Sunil, Ben, Emma, Mokopo, Bonshetse, and OT at Moremi Gorge

We were all smiles on this trip



Sunil, OT and Bonshetse laughing more than they're hiking, a happy research team, and a kudu

