Decolonising knowledge production to support equitable community research partnerships: Participatory approaches with the ARISE consortium

Wafa Alam[1]
Jane Wairutu[2]
Milka Kori[2]
Michelle Koyaro[2]
Hemanth Chandu[3]
Sia Tengbe[4]
Hayley Stewart[5]
Neele Wiltgen Georgi[6]
Rosie Steege[6]

1 - BRAC University, Bangladesh
2 - Slum Dwellers International - Kenya
3 - The George Institute, India
4 - Sierra Leone Urban Research Centre
5 - Pamoja Communications
6 - Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine

Introduction

Co-production requires dismantling existing power hierarchies. As such, it can support decolonising knowledge generation and fostering inclusive and equitable relationships with diverse (and at times) marginalised actors participating in health governance, research and decision-making. Decolonising knowledge production recognises that expertise lies with those communities directly affected by health inequities and challenges as well as other key actors.

The Accountability and Responsiveness in Informal Settlements for Equity (ARISE) consortium aims to enhance accountability and improve the health and wellbeing of marginalised populations living and/or working in informal urban settlements in Bangladesh, India, Kenya and Sierra Leone.

ARISE uses community based participatory research (CBPR) to build the capacities of urban marginalised people to generate contextually grounded evidence to incite action and strengthen relationships with governance actors. Here we demonstrate a range of participatory methods used.

Ripple Effect Mapping in Kenya

Ripple effect mapping (REM) is a participatory monitoring and evaluation method that visually maps the impacts of research activities on an individual, community and wider level. The tool has been used by co-researchers and researchers to monitor and shape ARISE activities.

"The ripple effect mapping has helped us Mathare residents in identifying our areas of strengths and weakness when it comes to developments in our settlements. Through REM, we were able to identify and appreciate our positive stories and gain skills such as data collection. Mapping also helped some of us secure employment as co-researchers."

Co-researcher and youth leader, Muungano wa Wanavijiji

Ripple Effect Mapping Discussion in Kiamutisyia.
Credit: Muungano Wa Wanavijiji

Participatory Surveys in Sierra Leone

Participatory health and wellbeing surveys in three informal settlements provided an overview of health and wellbeing challenges and opportunities for residents. Co-researchers were involved in the design, piloting and data collection of the survey. The analysis and validation is ongoing.

"Even as residents we don't know and go everywhere. The survey was a great learning platform for us to know our community better and try to understand some of the health and wellbeing challenges people are going through."
Male co-researcher from Dwarzark Community

Coresearcher sharing reflections about the data collection process in Dwarzark
Credit: Mohamed Bangura

Interviewing a resident of Moyiba community.
Credit: Mohamed Bangura

Photovoice in Bangladesh

Community researchers took photographs on issues related to housing or WASH in their communities. They recorded short voice notes to discuss challenges and community adaptation measures to cope with the situation.

Community researcher taking photos of garbage disposal system in their community in Rongpur. **Credit**: Asif Faisal

"It's great that our community situation is being represented on a global platform through photovoice. It also helped us to better understand and critically analyse our own problems and situations."
Co-researcher from Shatkhira, Bangladesh

Performing Arts in India

The community and artists collaborated to create twelve songs and a street play that aimed to emphasise health rights, education, the power of collective action, and strategies for holding individuals and institutions accountable.

Women waste pickers performing songs about community issues.
Credit: Dalit Bahujan Resource Centre

"These songs depict our realities to society. They also serve as reminders of our rights."
Female waste picker from Vijayawada.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In ARISE, we used a range of participatory qualitative, quantitative and arts based methods with urban marginalised people and researchers. CBPR can be an effective means to work towards decolonising knowledge production and promote accountability. Working in true partnership with community researchers also requires navigating tensions and challenges that arise. Fostering equitable research partnerships requires an openness to learn from communities, and a foundation of humility, trust and respect.

Find out more about ARISE:

UKRI Economic and Social Research Council

GCRF Global Challenges Research Fund