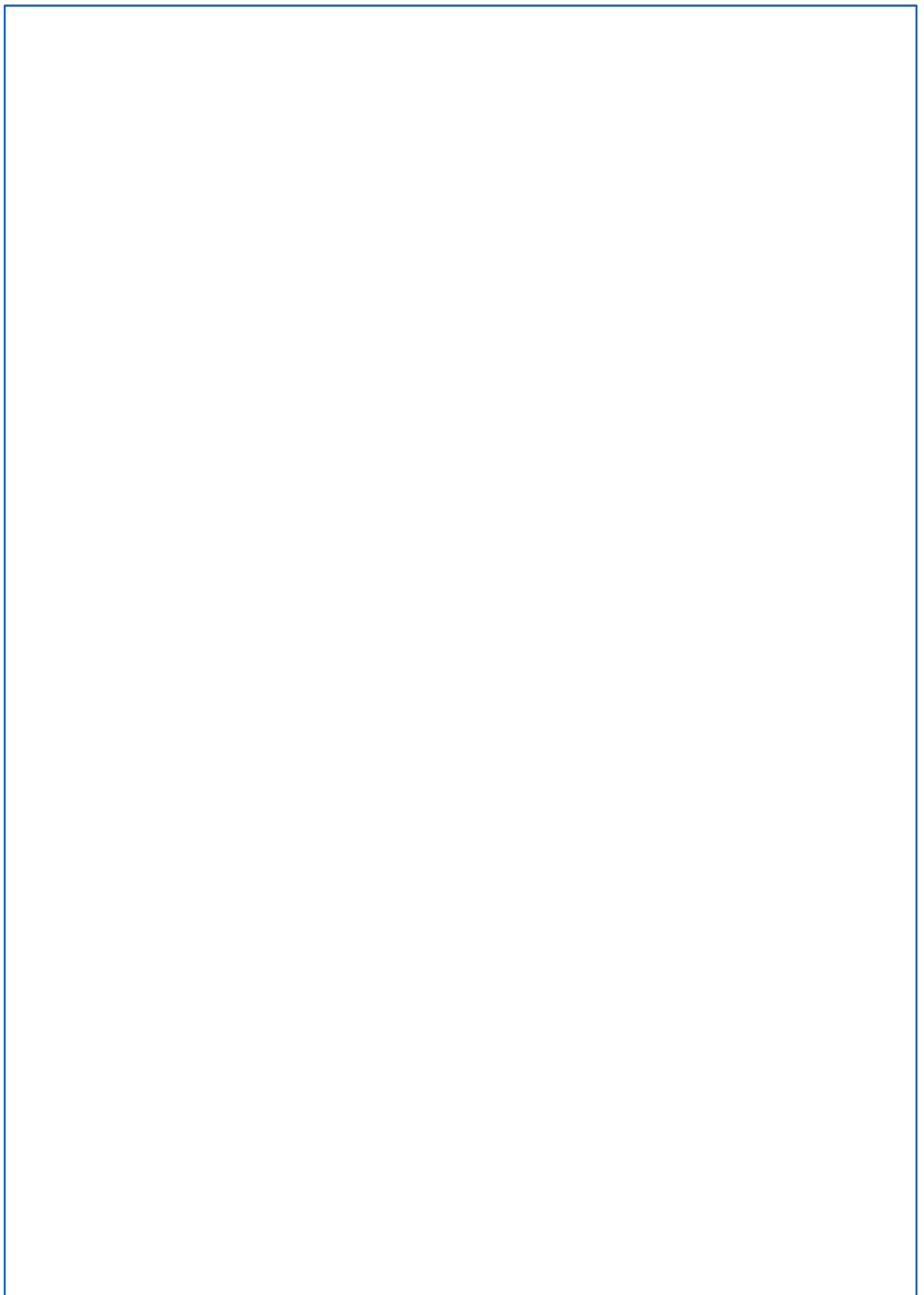


TRAINING MODULE: COMMUNITY BASED APPROACH TO EVIDENCE COLLECTION



IN COLLABORATION WITH





ABOUT THE MODULE

The module presents research concepts, methods, and tools based on best practices from our work with Community-Driven Data and a unique approach to the Community Based Participatory Action Research (CBPAR) framework, which promotes research that:

- i. Starts with issues and strategies then produces analysis that informs action
- ii. Uses technology to engage remote and distant organizations in the research process
- iii. Focuses both on a community as well the location

This process extensively hinges on the involvement of community-based organizations who can bring together members of the community to conceptualize and actualize the research. These organizations could be non-profits operating in specific local communities where they work with, represent or assist on finding actionable strategies to tackle the issues affecting the community. The organizations who have ideally worked in these communities for a significant time and whose work has resulted in gaining community's trust are the ones who can be most useful in creating change through this process.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This module has been prepared based on the learnings from all the community-based organizations we have collaborated with for research. Without their dedicated support and determination to create good quality citizen-generated data, this work would not have been possible.

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National Open SDG Club; Human Rights Research and Advocacy Foundation

CONTENTS

Community-Driven Data	1
Community Based Participatory Action Research.....	2
Geography-focused Research	3
Community Participation and Engagement	4
Benefits of Community Based Approach.....	4
Research Ethics	6
Planning Community Based Research	7
Challenges	13

COMMUNITY-DRIVEN DATA

Governments periodically collect and report data sets that track the development of their population on various indicators to map the progress on health, education and other aspects of development and rights access. In the case of India, we have available central and state-level data from individual ministries, departments, and government think tanks along with national data sets such as the Census, National Family Health Survey, etc. International agencies such as the United Nations, World Bank, International Labour Organization etc. also track development in different regions and aspects across the country. With all this data available – why is there an emerging need of community-driven data?

If we look at the population of India, it can be divided into people following different religions, belonging to different caste groups or tribal groups but there are further stratifications present within these broad groups. Within the recognized 3000 castes, there are 25000 sub-castes. Within the 705 recognized tribes, there are 75 who have been recognized as particularly vulnerable. Within the 9 recognized religions, there are several sects and castes and cultural hierarchies.

Further people may be segregated on the basis of their economic status, occupation, physical abilities or geographical residential location which may be putting them at an unequal risk. Within all of these different categories there are then identities of gender, age and dis-abilities that add on to creating a complex, intersectional web of population groups all of whose vulnerabilities can be mapped at a differential level.

When government data or any other datasets analyze development in a region as big as the country or a state, they do so on the basis of a large sample size that is representative of this intersectionality, but not adequately enough to depict each of their specific challenges. Given the nature and magnitude of analysis undertaken, it is also not feasible for these datasets to be able to adequately represent each population group for a stand-alone analysis.

As a result, though, the data pushing for any change in government policy or programs is considering a deeply diverse population in starkly different contexts as homogenous. This further results in implementation strategies that do not work for everyone and leave a lot to be desired from existing interventions. The solution to counter this is to present data on how a certain policy or program is not working with the same efficacy for all population groups – but collecting this level of disaggregated data for each and every intervention is not a feasible exercise for the governments to practice.

‘Community-driven Data’ or data collected by the community to map their own developmental needs – thus emerges as a feasible solution to understanding ground-level implementation to make government interventions sustainably functional for everyone. It allows the community to define the narrative and focus on what’s most important to them in their own context.

COMMUNITY BASED PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

Community Based Participatory Action Research (CBPAR) brings together all stakeholders for a collaborative research process throughout. The research design, data collection, analysis and actionable strategies based on the findings are all developed with a dedicated focus on tackling practical concerns of people of the community. The roles of a researcher and those being researched are thus fundamentally different from the traditional methods of research. This approach to research begins with the community, with their issues and creates evidence to support or enhance strategies towards possible solutions. It frames research to be:

COMMUNITY BASED— grounded in the needs, issues, concerns, and strategies of communities and the community-based organizations that serve them

PARTICIPATORY—directly engaging communities and community knowledge in the research process and its outcomes

ACTION BASED AND ORIENTED—supporting and/or enhancing the strategic action that leads to community transformation and social change

CBPAR seeks to address issues critical to communities and focuses on engaging with community members in research directed at dealing with their concerns. As a framework for research conducted in, for, and by communities, CBPAR recognizes that:

- There is no substitute for community knowledge and the key insights it can provide
- Expert traditional research can often not understand or adequately address complex social issues
- Interventions entirely external to the community's context often have disappointing results
- Inclusive collaboration with communities to identify, research and resolve their issues is key
- The knowledge of individuals, families and others in a community is valid and legitimate

GEOGRAPHY-FOCUSED RESEARCH

The work of community-based organizations is often centered on not just a community, but also a geographical location. Recognizing that, the CBPAR framework discussed in this module encourages research based within not just a community, but also a geography which may be defined to include streets, neighborhood, cities, villages or any other physical boundaries which are the organizations' focus of study. The fact that community-based organizations may refer to the people residing in a physical, geographic space or location as a community that needs common concentrated interventions is given due recognition within this framework.

The localized focus of work of these organizations provides for a unique opportunity to have a holistic model of change using comprehensive methods that bring together different sectors and resources to develop long-term innovative collaboration for research and action at the local level. It "aims to apply methods of data collection and analysis to generate findings that have highly practical results. The audience for such findings is typically made up of community members, practitioners, and local policymakers who wish to design an intervention that benefits a geography-...based community" [1].

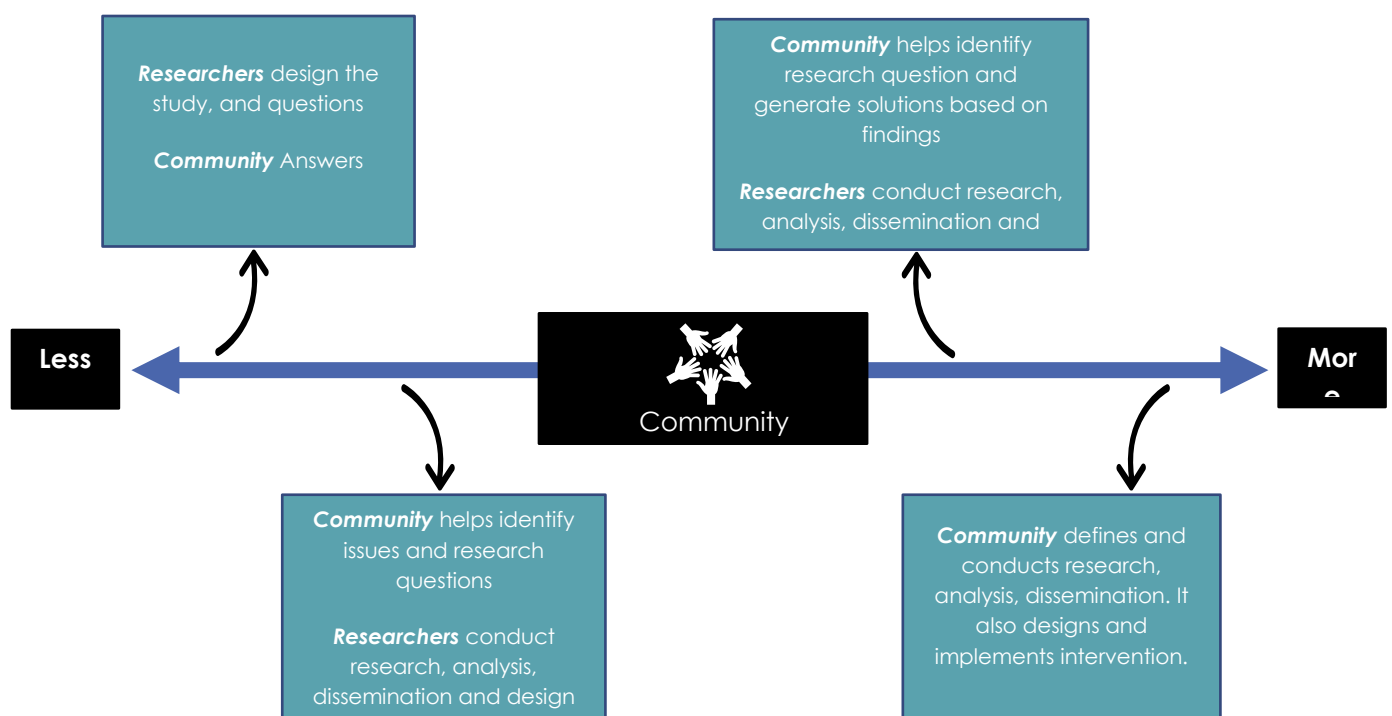
Research based on geography also takes into account the recognitions of CBPAR, as mentioned above, that the ultimate knowledge of issues, strengths and workable solutions comes from the residents. Community engagement in research processes, especially in primary data collection, ensures that the research is grounded in perspectives and experiences unique to the population in focus.

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND ENGAGEMENT

The CBPAR framework keeps community members' participation at the core of its research and develops outcomes that they can use in their own communities. Therefore, a significant level of contact and interaction is maintained between the researchers and the communities. Through their involvement, community members help keep checks and balances in the research process, which in turn helps strengthen the accuracy and validity of the outcomes.

Community participation can range from having minimal input where the community is primarily involved as respondents, to community members helping define the research question and process with their inputs, to community members engaging in all aspects of research including design, data collection, analysis, dissemination and action.

Depending on the nature of community involvement, the role of a 'researcher' also evolves. A traditional researcher is thought of as a trained scholar who wants to collect information from the community, but doesn't necessarily want to personally get to know the community or acknowledge their knowledge and experiences as information. As the research becomes more participatory in nature, the line between community and researcher blurs to the point where community members develop research, collect data, analyze it and interpret the findings to form implementable solutions.



BENEFITS OF COMMUNITY BASED APPROACH

There are critical benefits of CBPAR compared to traditional research. With community participation being such a critical component of the CBPAR framework, it carries its own list of benefits during the research process and in its outcomes.

- Community participation in identifying issues helps increase alignment with issues critical for the community and motivates them to take part in the process
- Community participation in developing the study design increases acceptability of the study approach, processes and outcomes among stakeholders
- Community participation in developing data collection tools increase reliability of results and helps identify and better tackle issues sensitive for the community
- Community participation in analysis and interpretation results in increasing validation for results and the possibility of them translating into action

Communities and community-based organizations who use this framework for research are able to [2]:

- Develop collaborative and equitable partnerships in the whole research process
- Balance research and the subsequent evidence-based action for the benefit of all
- Recognize and get recognition for community as a unit of analysis
- Build on community strengths and resources for solutions
- Promote and generate opportunities of joint learning, skill-sharing and capacity-building among partners
- Commit to long-term processes for developing cyclical and iterative processes with local systems
- Engage in emphasizing and addressing complex causes of community challenges
- Use research to bring together partners and collaborators for action

RESEARCH ETHICS

Research Ethics provide the principles and rules guiding how participants should be treated in a research process. When engaging with communities, especially those whose context is unfamiliar to the researcher, it might be difficult to anticipate or predict the ethical dilemmas that may arise during the process – but it is important to become cognizant of the sensitivities of people involved in your research. Some possible ethical questions to consider during a community-based research are:

- Can community members and their representatives access, understand and find meaning in the findings and outcomes of the research?
- How to gain as much information as possible without putting the participants or the community at added risk or vulnerability and not unfairly impacting all or a section of them?
- How to define a community's voice? Are all social identities within a community duly recognized within your process and do they address the existing hierarchies of differential privilege among these identities?
- Whose voice is amplified when the results are presented – the researcher's, the community's or a privileged section of the community?
- Are the results amplifying or reinforcing any bias or negative social stereotypes about the focus community?
- How can you safely and responsibly define and ensure data ownership?
- Will your research, its process or its outcomes put the community or a sub-group or individuals in a position to be harmed in any way?
- How do you respectfully engage, encourage and motivate those involved in conducting the research?
- Are your data collectors safe in gathering sensitive information from their own community?

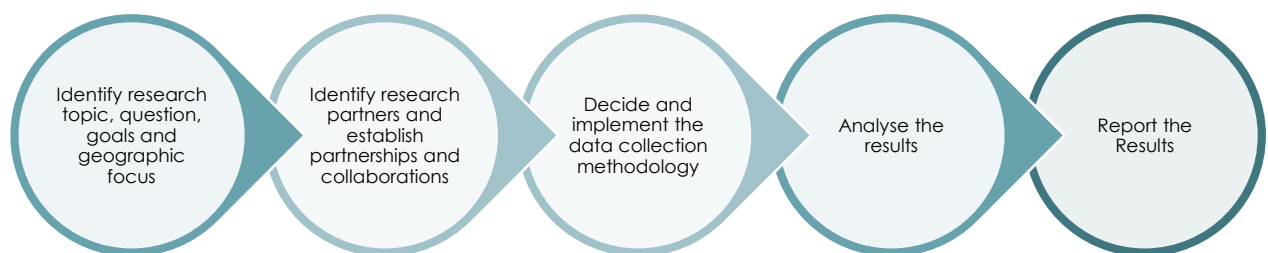
There is no one solution to turn to if faced with these challenges because the context of community-based research is unique to its own community, but preparing and strategizing to deal with them in advance allows the team to prioritize and reach resolutions quickly during the process.

PLANNING COMMUNITY BASED RESEARCH

Planning every community-based research project is a unique and time-intensive process. Depending on the stakeholders involved at different stages, each step of the project needs to take into account different considerations. The stakeholders could involve community members, community-based organizations, professional researchers and any other individuals who may be impacted by the process.

INITIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- **Economic Resource** – Have a thorough understanding of all kind of resources available at your disposal to see if you have funds to cover the research costs or do you want to apply for funding or work creatively to share costs with partner and associate organizations.
- **Human Resource** – How many people are available and willing to commit to the research project? What is their combined skill set? Depending on their level of engagement, would they be able to participate in capacity building as required?
- **Data Tools and Equipment** – Do you need and have any specific tools or equipment such as a software or phone to collect and analyze data?



- **Experienced Support** – Does the group organizing have access to the above resources and required research expertise? If not, do they have contact and associations with organizations who can help bridge the gap to partner and collaborate with?

With these considerations taken care of, the steps outlined in the following pages can be used to implement the research project. The figure below gives an overview of the steps detailed further:

Step 1: Project Design and Implementation (in some cases, may occur after Engagement)

OBJECTIVE: Identifying your research question and geographic focus

- Based of community needs and interests and your strengths and capacity, decide a general issue to address
- Identify the specific problems within the issue and based on that formulate the research questions you aim to seek answers to
- Thoroughly reason and understand the cause behind the decided research questions – do you want to draw attention to something that is now already known; is known but not understood sufficiently; is known but not known sufficiently?
- Asses the feasibility of carrying out research within geographic and social limitations
- Keep time for any dialogues and negotiations that may be needed to adjust these limitations

Step 2: Partner Engagement (in some cases, may occur before Project Design)

OBJECTIVE: Identifying partners for research and action and inviting them to collaborate

- Recognize key stakeholders based on the decided feasible geography and the identified general issue
- Identify those who you can collaborate with
- Conduct a stakeholder analysis to see who might still be missing and to also understand each participant’s expectations of and from the process
- Understand what resources are they willing to contribute
- Define the level of involvement each of them will have in different elements of the process

Step 3: Data Collection

OBJECTIVE: Refining research questions, finalizing and implementing data collection methods, and identifying key participants for further engagement

- Review research questions and their relevance based on the finalized issues and stakeholders
- Decide on who will be the respondents based on the required knowledge for answering the research questions
- Figure out the adequate sample size – one which is feasible to cover within your resources, but also large enough to be considered representative of the community in the location
- Decide upon the appropriate sampling strategy from one or combination of the methods mentioned in the table below:

Sampling Type	Is achieved by	Pros	Cons
Simple Random Sampling	Selecting the required sample size by entirely random selection from the population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simple • Convenient • Random 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk of researcher’s bias • Risk of choosing a homogenous sample • Findings may not be considered holistically representative of the entire community
Systematic Sampling	Deciding a number N and selecting every N th person from the population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simple • Convenient • Unbiased in selection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fixed intervals, high potential for manipulation • Respondents with key insights may get left out, especially in small populations

Stratified Random Sampling	Dividing the required sample size into relevant social categories based on actual population and selecting within each of them randomly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Random • Rigorous • Representative of different categories within the population 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be a tedious process in a large population • Requires advanced skill and training for calculation and selection • Risk of choosing a homogenous sample within categories
Stratified Systematic Sampling	Dividing the required sample size into relevant social categories based on actual population and selecting every N th person with them	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rigorous • Removes bias • Representative of different categories within the population 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be a tedious process in a large population • Requires advanced skill and training for calculation and selection
Convenience Sampling	Selecting the respondents most convenient for the researcher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simple • Convenient 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk of researcher's bias • Findings may not be considered holistically representative of the entire community
Purposive Sampling	Seeking out the respondents with a <i>purpose</i> to find those who have the knowledge and experience to answer the research question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Useful when researching an issue relevant to a specific category within a community • Can help quickly reach results • Results in pointed findings on the research subject 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be a tedious process in a large population • Is not representative of proportions within the community • Requires advanced skill and training for identification and selection
Snowball Sampling	Seeking out one respondent that meets the criteria and then finding the next one based on their reference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Useful to study hidden or sparsely populated groups • Results in pointed findings on the research subject 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be a tedious process in a large population • Is not representative of proportions within the community • Requires advanced skill and training for identification and selection

- Figure out your target audience for the research outcomes and your possible strategies of evidence-based action
- Based on the available resources, skills and anticipated use of results, decide on the nature of data you will collect
 - **Secondary Data:** Government data, UN data, research papers and literature available
 - **Primary Quantitative Data:** Physical Survey, Online Survey, Telephonic Survey, Information from RTIs, etc.
 - **Primary Qualitative Data:** In-person Interviews, Telephonic Interview, Focus Group Discussions, Photovoice, Case Studies, etc.
- The data collection tools should take into account the format in which you want to answer each research question
- When gathering data through a community-driven approach, keep extra focus on aspects mentioned in the following table:

Survey Design

- The survey should have a clear objective and framework to build upon.

Example: If we want to understand the impact of MGNREGA in a region, our objective is to 'under the impact' and our framework is MGNREGA. So, all further process will be defined after a thorough study of MGNREGA, the rules of its implementation and any secondary research available

- Based on the objective, and the available capacities, the decision to collect quantitative or qualitative data should be taken.
- All questions for quantitative and qualitative process should have a logical chronology moving from one topic to the other. Sequencing all questions from the same topic together helps avoiding the feeling of being asked about the same thing repeatedly among the respondents which keeps their interest in the process maintained.
- Questions for quantitative surveys should be direct and to-the-point. Long or complex sentence structures and difficult or technical words should be replaced with phrases that are easy to understand for data collectors and respondents. Also, if not asked directly, there will remain room for interpretation which would lead to errors.

Example: 'Would you consider yourself a literate?' can result in error responses where the audience not familiar with the exact definition of 'literate' may choose wrong. Alternatively, 'Can you read or write in any language?' leaves much less room for interpretation or error and is easy to understand and respond correctly.

- If not using a professional for analysis of the quantitative data collected, it is strongly advisable to stick to questions that can be answered with a single choice from a list of options or with a number. This would help making the analysis process simple and convenient, while also capturing the maximum knowledge possible.
- The total number of questions should be kept to the minimum possible. Once the questions are finalized, they should be revisited to make rules for follow-up questions within each topic to define flow and minimize the number of questions that need to be asked to a respondent.

Example: Suppose there are five questions on employment in the survey, but the respondent is unemployed. Considering that the first question is 'Are you currently employed?', the remaining four questions won't be applicable to the respondent and thus, a rule can be made to not ask the respondent these questions.

- Questions for qualitative surveys should be as open-ended as needed, but should avoid complex sentence structure or technical language that would be hard for the field workers or respondents to understand.

Utilize Technology

- Physical surveys can produce just as good quality work without technology, but by using an app or an online form for survey the process can be very streamlined quickly.
- An app or an online form also allows for real-time monitoring which helps tackle errors promptly. These apps also allow to define the flow for each respondent based on rules set within the questionnaire to minimize any error entries.
- Having all data automatically available in a downloadable file to analyze is also helpful in minimizing errors and saving input time in the overall process

Communicate Effectively

- All preparations and corrections in survey design and documents should be done before engaging with the data collectors to minimize back and forth as much as possible.
- The process of data collection should be initiated with an orientation and training session for the data collectors where they can be briefed about the objective, the process and their exact role in it. This training should be followed by a period where they are allowed to familiarize themselves with the details shared and practice as needed.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There should be constant periodic follow-up with the data collectors, especially in the initial stages, to resolve any queries or questions and keep the process going smooth. Constant follow-up with data collectors also helps gain insights into the field especially when the team is monitoring remotely and is not closely acquainted with the context.
<p>Inculcate Ownership</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Including the narratives of the community, albeit through representatives, in the process of survey design and data collection helps the data collectors from the community believe the process to be their own leading to their own development • Ownership of the data and the overall process helps keep the data collectors motivated to collect good quality data and go an extra mile for it if needed.

Step 4: Data Analysis

OBJECTIVE: Creating and implementing a plan for analysis

- If collecting community-driven data through community members, hold a debriefing session before you begin analysis to help you better understand the collected data from the community's perspective
- Analyze the data within the context of local geographies and the demographics existing in the community
- Based on the format in which data is collected, develop a plan for analysis to gather basic information and learnings about the general issue from the data
- Identify clear patterns in the data that would answer the research questions
- Reach back out to the data collectors to clarify and bridge any confusions or gaps found in analysis that you need to investigate further

Step 5: Reporting

OBJECTIVE: Presenting and disseminating findings

- Develop an outline with a thought-out perspective of the story you want your data to tell, your audience, and the format through which the findings will have the most impact – a printed report, an online report, a public hearing, a community hearing, etc.
- In written reports, keep text to the minimum while adding maximum available information through graphs, photos, graphics, etc.
- Based on the action you want to support with this evidence, determine different engagement strategies to involve community members, CBOs, elected officials, etc.

These steps and the descriptions within them make it clear that, as a whole, this approach is time-intensive and requires a comprehensive skill set to achieve quality results at each stage. With that insight, it is highly advisable to implement this approach in association with partners who can bring expertise of different fronts and collaborate to deliver results efficiently.

CHALLENGES

There is the challenge of creating a need for the data and action that your research is working towards. If the data is not felt needed or there is no attention on the issue that the community is facing, you need to initiate discussions and create a dialogue before aiming for evidence-based action.

There is also the fact that while the need for community-driven data and community-based research is increasing, recognition from the government continues to be a key challenge. The government discredits all data generated and documented through communities on the basis of lacking rigorous research process. The only way to get recognition though, is to keep doing authentic and verifiable research that creates knowledge that eventually the government can also use to supplement and support their data and policies.

RESOURCES

1. **Community Tool Box. Developed by Center for Community Health and Development, University of Kansas.** Practical Step-by-step guidance for improving communities for the better with toolkits of acquiring skills for competent community work - including how to conduct a community assessment, develop a strategic plan, write a grant, or evaluate your efforts, and more. <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/toolkits>
2. **A Community Research Lap Toolkit. 2011, HealthCity, Advancement Project California.** A non-profit approach to community-based research with comprehensive discussion on basics of research, data collection, analysis and presentation. https://hc-v6-static.s3.amazonaws.com/media/resources/tmp/Community_Research.pdf
3. **Community-Based Participatory Research: A Strategy for Building Healthy Communities and Promoting Health through Policy Change. 2012, Policy Link.** Strategies and examples to effectively collect community-level data and use it to push for interventions. <https://www.policylink.org/sites/default/files/CBPR.pdf>
4. **A Manual for Community Based Participatory Research. 2013, Center for Excellence in Assisted Living, University of North Carolina.** A comprehensive resource for all stakeholders to understand and implement community-based research. <https://www.shepscenter.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/CEAL-UNC-Manual-for-Community-Based-Participatory-Research-1.pdf>

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