

# Preface

Participatory research methodologies have, since the 1970s, been used as a tool to garner accurate information about communities in which development practitioners operate. In particular the key tenets of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), those of participation, teamwork, flexibility and triangulation, make it a valuable set of approaches through which we can better understand communities and therefore design and implement programmes that not only have a more significant impact on those intended, but that also are locally owned thereby enjoying stronger commitment from these communities.

Whilst participatory research techniques have, in the past, been predominately utilized by development practitioners their usefulness as a collection of research techniques has been evident in academic disciplines such as politics, sociology, anthropology and economics, among others. Over recent years participatory methods have proven to be advantageous to the researcher and their use for this purpose has increased. However, with its wide range of challenges from accessing populations to the low levels of security and ethical concerns, conducting research in development, post-disaster and post-conflict contexts present a set of challenges to the beneficial use of participatory research methodologies. More importantly, there lacks any comprehensive study comparing its application in such environments.

This gap in the literature represents a particular problem as the lessons to be learnt for the various applications of participatory research methodologies may be lost. With the increasing use of participatory methodologies as a research toolset it is evident that a publication addressing the lessons learned and the experiences of researchers using participatory research techniques in different contexts would be highly valuable to methodological literature.

The key objective of this proposed text is, therefore, to assess the use of participatory methods as a research tool in the contexts of development and reconstruction after conflict and disasters through identifying the cross-cutting themes and establishing a comparative lessons learned framework that can help inform future uses of them, both for practitioners and researchers. More importantly, rather than adopting a prescriptive perspective, the volume aims to provide a critical analysis of such methodologies. Specifically, this text brings together a wide range of experiences on the utilization of participatory research methods from both academic and practitioner perspectives in different operational contexts and countries.

The book is structured around two main sections in order to explore the participatory research method experiences of development and post-disaster in

the first part and those in the context of post-conflict reconstruction in the second one. In addition to overall introduction and conclusion chapters, each section has its own separate introduction and conclusion chapters, which helps establish a coherent argument from chapter to chapter and section to section, and allows the book to focus on a comparative analysis in the final chapter. In Chapter 1, 'A Theoretical and Practical Exposition of "Participatory" Research Methods', Richard Bowd, Alpaslan Özerdem and Derese Getachew Kassa introduce theoretical understandings of participatory methodologies before progressing to examine the evolution of their use. The primary purpose of this chapter is to provide a theoretical exposition of participatory research methodologies that underpin the practical focus of the remainder of this publication, and also avoid the repetition of a generic literature review on research methods in each case study chapter. The only literature review in each case study chapter will be specifically related to those particular research methods used or conceptual issues in focus.

In Chapter 3, 'Who Speaks for the Community? Negotiating Agency and Voice in Community-based Research in Tanzania', Anna Mdee from the University of Bradford explores an attempt to work in partnership with active local community researchers in Uchira, Tanzania. The basis for doing this was to go beyond the application of PRA tools to have community involvement in the research from inception to final analysis. The project set out to analyse collective village life and in particular the operation and impacts of a community-managed water project and investigates those tensions relating to power, resources and capacity in the interaction and the evolving relationship of the research team. In Chapter 4, 'Poverty Assessment in Rwanda through Participatory Rural Appraisal', Richard Jones from the Department for International Development demonstrates the use of PRA techniques in an economic assessment context in Rwanda as part of the methodology used to research poverty baselines in preparation for the Rwandan Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP). Chapter 5, 'Participatory Approaches to Impact Assessment: Experiences from Humanitarian Interventions in Zimbabwe', by John Burns and Andrew Catley from the Feinstein International Center at Tufts University, reviews the use of participatory methods in measuring the impact of a drought response livelihoods project implemented by Africare. Describing the systematic use of participatory tools to generate a set of representative qualitative and quantitative data demonstrating project impact, based on the perceptions of project participants, the chapter investigates the strengths and weaknesses of the methodology, as well as some of the methodological and organizational challenges involved in measuring impact within the humanitarian sector.

In Chapter 6, 'Applications of Participatory Research Methods in a Post-disaster Environment: The case of Cyclone Sidr, Bangladesh', Bimal Kanti Paul and Sohini Dutt from Kansas State University examine the prevalent conditions under which participatory methods have been used in natural disasters, as well as the suitability of these techniques. Based on existing literature and personal field research experience, PRA methods along with their scope in future disaster research in Bangladesh, are evaluated. In Chapter 7, entitled 'Rediscovering

Traditional Knowledge for Post-disaster Reconstruction through “Participatory” Research Methods in India and Nepal’, Rohit Jigyasu from Ritsumeikan University in Kyoto, Japan explores the participatory research challenges and opportunities in the context of the research aimed at rediscovering traditional knowledge systems for post-earthquake reconstruction in Marathwada and Gujarat in India and Kathmandu valley in Nepal.

The first case study chapter on post-conflict reconstruction, Chapter 10, ‘Understanding Social Capital and Reconciliation in Rwanda through Participatory Methods’, by Richard Bowd from CARE International, draws on PRA research conducted in Rwanda to provide an appreciation as to how participatory research methods contribute to our understanding of social capital and reconciliation in war-torn communities. Based on an empirical appraisal of the author’s field work in Sierra Leone on the study of how community-based disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) can facilitate a more sustainable peace-building, in Chapter 11, ‘Door Knocking in Sierra Leone: A Necessity in Post-conflict Research’, Victor Asiedu from the University of York argues that door knocking facilitates the building of trust and addresses some methodological and ethical challenges in post-conflict environment. Given that the dynamics of child soldiers’ reintegration continues to be understudied, together with evidence that young child soldiers might not respond best to survey questionnaire and semi-structured interview techniques, Chapter 12, ‘Mapping Child Soldiers’ Reintegration Outcomes in Liberia: A Participatory Approach’ by Sukanya Podder from the University of York, explores the role of PRA techniques in mapping child soldier reintegration outcomes in the context of Liberia.

In Chapter 13, ‘A Participatory Approach to Ethnographic Research with Victims of Gross Human Rights Violations: Studying Families of the Disappeared in Post-conflict Nepal’, Simon Robins from the University of York describes research into the needs of families of persons disappeared during the decade long Maoist People’s War in Nepal. The chapter shows that through the use of a participatory approach to ethnographic methods an understanding can be developed that allows efforts to address violent pasts to be made that go beyond the currently favoured prescriptive approaches. This methodology also represents an effort to go beyond the purely consultative to a research concept in which conflict victims participate in research planning and implementation in a way that both uses and strengthens their own organizations, providing a platform for the mobilization of victims to advance their own agendas.

In Chapter 14, ‘Unexamined Lives: a Methodology of Women, Violence and War in Lebanon’, Maria Holt from the University of Westminster develops an appropriate participatory methodology for carrying out research into the experiences of Arab–Muslim women who find themselves caught up in violent conflict. By adopting feminist research methods and placing the voices of women at the centre of the research, the chapter explores the possibility of a more egalitarian relationship between the researcher and the researched. In Chapter 15 entitled ‘Participatory Research in Programme Evaluation: The Mid-term

Evaluation of the National Solidarity Programme in Afghanistan', David Connolly from the University of York examines the use of participatory research methods in the mid-term evaluation of post-war recovery programmes. The analysis concentrates on the effectiveness of such methods in terms of three overlapping domains: gathering valid evidence; meeting the aims and objectives of a mid-term evaluation; and managing the expectations of both research participants and programme stakeholders. The chapter argues that participatory research methods are effective with particular focus on their ability to manage the inevitable tensions between the three mid-term evaluation domains. Nevertheless, it identifies reasons why such methods can fail to develop the capacities of research participants and programme stakeholders and explore ways to overcome specific challenges in the post-war context.

Differently from the preceding case studies, in Chapter 17, 'Participatory Research Methods in Post-conflict Reconstruction Study Visits', Alpaslan Özerdem from the University of York explores the ways of teaching participatory research techniques as part of conventional postgraduate research method courses and the way such techniques can be used in study visits individually or as a group by MA and PhD students. Starting its investigation from a set of ethical concerns in using such techniques by students under or without supervision in disaster and conflict-affected areas, the chapter questions how such methodologies can be taught, tested and practised in an ethical, effective and efficient way in the preparation of future researchers.

The final chapter of this book presents the overall conclusions by undertaking a comparative analysis of the use of participatory research methods in the three contexts of development, post-disaster and post-conflict, and, in order to achieve this, the chapter uses the taxonomy of participation, power and empowerment to analyse the similarities and contrasts between them. Having focused on the benefits of participatory research methods for triangulation, the chapter presents a set of recommendations for an improved practice in the use of such methods by focusing on the issues of flexibility and multi-disciplinarity, diversity and interpretation, trust and confidence building, and finally the ethics of participatory research methods, which all can serve as the main principles for an improved practice.