Research Involving Community Participation[1]

Practical Guidelines & Definitions

How can researchers design and implement research projects that encourage community participation?

1. PURPOSE

The purpose of this document is to provide researchers with practical guidance on how to involve the community in orienting research ethics. The main purpose is to improve the research process and develop research that prioritizes the community's context and traditions. It focuses on the ethical considerations of the research process and the contributions that community members and representatives can offer to guarantee researchers' awareness to the local context. It aims at identifying key elements that can help to guarantee a design and implementation of projects that protect the rights and welfare of human research subjects, respect cultural traditions, and avoid power dynamics between researchers and the community. For this reason, this document:

1. Proposes strategies and mechanisms through which community organizations and members can participate in the design of research tools
2. Identifies required materials, documents and tools to be used in the different project stages, aiming at preserving the confidentiality and achieving the consent of the human subjects participating from the study
3. Proposes strategies to conduct research with communities, prioritizing their local traditions
4. Suggests approaches towards the design, the implementation, and the analysis of the project with the main objective of promoting community participation and generating useful data

2. COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

What is Community Participation and how community can orient research ethics?

Research projects can be approached through a variety of strategies. Projects that include community participation focus on groups of people from a same community that actively express

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[1] This document has been developed by Belen Fodde, as part of the fellowship program between the Zolberg Institute on Migration and Mobility (The New School) and the IRC.

their opinions and influence the processes of decision-making (18). In this approach, the key element is to listen to the community' voices and respond to as many needs and requests as possible. Engaging the community to the processes of research and decision-making can help achieve long-term and sustainable outcomes (4), as community participation can be seen as a tool for community development. Also, community participation benefits include innovation and low-cost solutions, improved government accountability, and sustainability of services (2).

Different strategies have been used to promote and organize community participation. Among them, Participatory Action Research (PAR) focuses on the study and the change of problematics in a given neighborhood, area, or community. Within PAR projects, researchers and human subjects are seen as "peers" that work together in the development of the research questions, methods, and analysis of findings. Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) understands the research process as a collaborative one between community participants and researchers. It focuses on listening to their voices and their knowledge as well.

While community participation takes different forms across projects, this guide focuses on community's input in the ethical aspects of the research process and the protection of the human subjects. In this sense, it prioritizes the consideration of non-traditional knowledge, the inclusion of different voices, and the representation of the different groups of the community to ensure their participation and the protection of their experiences shared.

Ethics is not a stage in the research process, but a continuum that supposes the consideration and protection of the community's input (20). For this reason, to have their input, research teams should focus on building trust with the community, recognizing the importance of local knowledge, relying on staff the belongs to the community, and partnering and collaborating with local community networks (2).

3. ETHICS GUIDELINES FOR EACH RESEARCH STAGE: STARTUP, IMPLEMENTATION, AND CLOSING

This section presents specific recommendations and guidelines for each project cycle stage (i.e., startup, implementation, and closing stages) when conducting research involving community participation.

STARTUP STAGE

Project design

Prior to start collecting and analyzing the data, and once research objectives and questions are clear, it is important to reserve some time for project planning. This implies strategizing about the logistics and financial aspects of the project, as well as the time feasibility and actors' support. These are a few elements to consider:

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DIAGNOSIS

Identify general characteristics of the area / community to be worked on and main governance structures and stakeholders: who lives in the area, what are the main conflicts or problems that affect the community, and what are the dynamics between the actors (16). This can be done through secondary sources or key informants.

TIMELINE

Establish a timeline for project design, data collection, analysis and dissemination that can help organize the work. This timeline should be flexible enough to enable changes and adjustments as the fieldwork process progresses. Times and activities might change as the researcher receives feedback from community organizations or liaisons, who could suggest changes to make the data collection process more efficient.

FIND LOCAL ALLIES

Doing fieldwork in a community will not be possible if the research team does not count with the support of representatives of the community or members of organizations working on the ground. It is crucial that researchers map the actors of the area and, once they identify key stakeholders , they work with them to obtain their acceptance and support for the development of the project (4)(12).

- Local allies are gatekeepers that can be community, neighborhood, or territorial leaders, district chiefs, or even workers of health establishments. In the case of health or nutrition studies, for example, district health workers are key actors to identify potential research participants. Try to be as inclusive as you can so you can get support from all different groups within a community, such as women, elderly, or IDPs.
- Having the local allies' approval and consent to develop the research in their communities is key as they are usually the ones in charge of facilitating access to research sites and human subjects to the researcher. If a study focuses on tracking the effects or dynamics of the community around one health condition, health workers can contribute to the identification and recruitment of the participants.
- Have a clear plan on which aspects of your research project will require the intervention of local actors. In this sense, **advisory committees or local advisory groups** are crucial to plan your research stages, get deep insights on the community that is being researched, and disseminate the findings.

Advisory committees or local advisory groups

Advisory committees are working groups that work hand-in-hand with researchers and community members to guarantee that research projects protect the interests of the community and contribute to its development and progress. They are conformed by members that represent the spirit of the community and can guide the researchers through the research process and provide feedback about main findings. Advisory committees support local researchers, ensure accurate representations of local communities, help to protect people from harm (20), and can

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help decolonize researchers, familiarizing them with the community's customs, traditions and values (11). Its members are knowledgeable about and invested into the inclusion and respect of their communities (11).

Partnership between researchers and the community (6):

- They can help in the dissemination and promotion of the research project and its findings amongst the community members.
- Together with the local allies, they can be the ones establishing the **first contact** with potential participants (9): they can help identify research participants, acknowledging the diversity of the participants.
- They can provide **advice on consent protocols**, research design, and implementation that adjusts to the reality of the community (23).

Members:

- Members vary depending on the project and the type of input needed in the process, but they can be territorial leaders, community health workers, research participants, government officials, or members of community organizations. In some cases, as for example research projects with elderly and disabled communities, it is more convenient to rely on members of organizations that work with these groups and can help design and implement the research process.
- Be mindful of who is invited to participate in these advisory groups. They should truly represent the main characteristics of the community that is being researched. For example, if the project aims at studying a community with low levels of education, then community representatives must reflect those characteristics (10).
- When planning on the local advisory group structure, try to replicate the governance structure of the community. This implies including representatives of the different groups, balancing power dynamics, and doing a trade-off between representativeness and politics.

Size:

- The size of the local advisory groups depends on the resources available in project, the size of the project, the topic of the study and the context. While it is important to guarantee representativeness of the community, the size must be manageable to guarantee discussion and exchange of ideas. It is important to consider where meetings will take place, and if there are restrictions to number of people attending meetings.

When to start working with the advisory group:

- Ideally, the advisory group will advise during the entire process. The research design can be done prior to start working with the group. However, there should be some flexibility from the research team to make any adaptations according to the advisory group' feedback.

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CASE STUDY: Setting up a Local Advisory Group

The IRC-UNITE project **"Cities at the forefront of conflict and climate migration: mitigating the risks of conflict over urban land and water in fragile contexts"** included the creation of local advisory groups in the two cities included in the study: Maiduguri, in Nigeria, and Bukavu, DRC. The Maiduguri group was the first one to be established and certain learning were later on applied in the Bukavu group.

1. **Members of the local advisory group** included: local community leaders, scholars, and government representatives. Interactions between the research team and the different members did not happen necessarily at the same time. That depended on the topics discussed, and the political sensibilities around them.
2. There was a limit to the **number of people** that could participate from the group. Even though the group tried to represent the governance structure of the community, only 6 people could participate from it due to financial restrictions as well as COVID-19 protocols that inhibit the attendance of more people to the IRC country office. Within these constraints, choices had to be made on who to include as members.
3. In **replicating the governance structure** of the community, there were representatives of the Bulama -community leaders- but none of the IDP group, as they work under the guidance of the Bulama. As the project evolved, it became clear that it was necessary to have specific representatives from the IDP community, as their demands and expectations were different from the rest of the leaders. This was noted and considered when setting up the group in Bukavu.

Cohesive and Flexible budget

Resource allocation planning is crucial to organize interventions and activities. The first step is to identify which parts of the research project will require to be funded (travel expenses, renting spaces to conduct the research, technologies used -phones, cameras, recorders, computers, staff, food, etc.).

- Think about possible services that can be contracted or hired from the community. If any of the spaces created for research include the distribution of refreshments, consider hiring local entrepreneurs.

Once the number of financial resources is estimated and contrasted to the available funding, it can be organized to give enough flexibility to the budget. A few elements are important to consider in this regard:

- Funding should be flexible enough so the community can influence the organization's decision-making. If during the research project the community suggests a way for resource allocation, the researching institution should try to fulfill those goals. This might require exploring interactions with donors and finding ways to guarantee enough flexible budget (17).
- Make sure to have flexible allocation of resources so funding can be easily redirected. There might be a need to contract other consultants or extra services not included in the original plan (1).

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- Consider staff or assistants that can be hired, such as gatekeepers. Be clear about their compensation according to their role and their expected tasks (12).
- Fair compensation for research participants: there would be no research project without the participants that agree to be a part of it. Make sure that compensation to them is fair to their time and knowledge. If there are not enough financial resources to give high compensations, try at least to cover for their refreshments and travel costs if appropriate.

Research tools and recruitment

As part of your planning, you need to think about feasible and efficient strategies to collect data on the ground, as well as to access human subjects:

RECRUITMENT
How to identify and recruit potential participants of a research project depends on the context and the purpose of the study. There are different options to do that:
- Rely on local allies: local organizations or community representatives working on the ground and partnering with the research team can help identify potential participants due to their knowledge of the community. They can also reach out to individuals and help to establish trust between the participants and the researchers.
- Rely on previous projects on the ground: if the research institution has already developed projects in the community, contacts and relationships established in those previous studies can be of help to identify and assembly research participants.

THINK ABOUT METHODOLOGY
Different contexts and actors may require and accept different ways of data collection.
- Be flexible and explore different types of participatory tools, such as: social and institutional mapping, well-being analysis, focus groups, semi-structured interviews, observations, interactive activities (i.e. use of flashcards) (17).
- Consider cultural aspects of the research community when designing the tools. Consider language, vocabulary used, socioeconomic and political context of the community, and any other elements that might hinder the smooth process of collecting data. Community's input can be of great help to do this.
- Maximize the opportunity of doing research but find a balance with participants' time. There might be many interesting questions and aspects to explore as part of the project. However, try to find a balance between questions that want to be answered and the availability of the research participants. Be mindful of participants' time and efforts to participate from the study and avoid doing research just for the sake of research.
- Consider adding specific questions or inquiries that can be useful for your community liaisons, as long as: 1) these questions are relevant to the overall study objectives; 2) these questions do not increase risks to the study participants, and 3) the questions do not make the questionnaire too long (no more than 1 hour to 90 minutes to administer). In certain contexts, is possible to use the opportunity of doing research to contribute to the

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local organizations by collecting data that can be useful for their operations. For example, if the community organization is interested in exploring the community's level of satisfaction with their operations, a few questions related to that can be included. Keep in mind that this will need to be approved by IRB reviewers.

IMPLEMENTATION STAGE

Preparing for fieldwork

IDENTIFICATION OF RESEARCHER
Keep in mind you might have to openly show who you are or try to not be easily identified depending on the context.

- In certain communities, it can be very helpful for the researcher to carry an identification that allows participants and community members to know who they are and what they are doing in their community (4). If this is the case, prepare an ID that can be easily seen by participants, detailing your name, institutional belonging, and any other information you would like them to know and consider appropriate sharing.
- However, in some contexts, the identification of the researcher can threaten the research process as well as the safety of the participants. In projects related to conflict or violence, or sensitive topics as some health research, it might be better if the researcher is not easily identified. This way, the community won't identify participants based on their interactions with the research team.

RESEARCH MATERIALS AND TRAINING
Materials used while doing fieldwork need to be easy to grasp and approachable by the community. This implies:

- Preparing necessary documents: recruitment forms, consent forms, and data collection tools be prepared before starting fieldwork so that they can be discussed or used in the appropriate moment.
- Translating materials: all forms, flyers, or informative documents to be shared with the community must be translated into the local languages. Materials cannot be only available in the researcher's language, and simultaneous translation of documents while on-site should be avoided. All information shared must be approachable and easy to understand by the community.
- Beyond words: think about alternative elements that can be included in the materials and that may facilitate the community's understanding on the project. Instead of only focusing on translating documents into the local language, pictures, diagrams or graphs can be included as well (9).
- Training the researchers: before starting the data collection process, the research team working on the ground should receive training on IRB standards and data collection

methods, as well as on local customs and the best practices to approach the community. This can be informed by country offices or community representatives providing feedback during the process.

- Consider piloting the ethics process: when working with vulnerable communities, one useful approach to ensure that the project is guaranteeing ethical principles is to pilot the recruitment and consent stages in a community of similar characteristics. This can help to test whether the information and the materials used are clear enough at the community level, both in terms of content and language (22). Tools and procedures can also be discussed and tested with the local advisory group. This feedback can boost changes in research materials to make it more approachable to the participants.
  - o While the benefits of piloting the tools and strategies are significant, the trade-off to consider is the need to have enough time and financial resources.

While on the ground

THE ROLE OF THE RESEARCHERS

Developing research projects on the ground requires considering the interaction between the human subjects and the researchers.

- Doing research in vulnerable contexts can affect researchers as it can face them with realities that are hard to grasp (24). Emotional detachment is non-existent, and it can be challenging at times to maintain a distance from what the participants share (21). A way to approach this is to establish regular moments of reflection and checking-in, to see if any arrangements need to be done to the way in which the research is being conducted. This will enable to create a reciprocal relationship between the researcher and the participants, where data can be gathered at the same time stories and feelings from the human subjects are heard and acknowledged (21).
- Dealing with being an "outsider": a big part of the interaction between researchers and participants depends on the way in which the researcher is perceived. The researcher may be perceived as an "outsider" to the community, which can pose challenges to the human subjects' openness in relation to sharing their opinions or life stories. It is important that the researcher decides which information to share with the participants (i.e., does the researcher work in the government?) (12), and to also acknowledge that they might be perceived as a figure of authority. Being aware of this will help the researcher to refine their approach to the community, being sensitive to power differentials and finding approaches that ensure a safe space (14).

COLLECTING THE DATA

The way in which data collection is approached determines its quality and the experience that researchers and participants have during the project. For this reason, it is important to be flexible with research sites and spaces, and mindful of the cultural context of the community.

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- Respect local cultural customs (4): the way researchers engage with human subjects and the language used should be consistent with the traditions and the culture of the communities that are part of projects. Respecting customs implies respecting concrete traditions, as well as finding sensitive ways of using language. This implies adjusting research materials and changing as many words and structures used as needed to make sure that communities understand and don't feel offended by questions or assumptions researchers share with them. Local advisory groups can make concrete and significant suggestions and contributions in this regard due to their local knowledge and familiarity with community's traditions and concerns.

There can be different strategies to collect data, depending on the projects, time and resources' availability. **Semi-structured interviews** can help to have more in-depth conversations and information about the experience of research participants. In this case, once potential participants have been identified, it is a matter of setting the space and time to do the interviews while ensuring consent and confidentiality. There are a few things to consider when doing interviews:

- Questions should be clear and appropriate to the context of the study. Using plain language, providing examples, and using appropriate cultural references is key to make participants feel comfortable and willing to share their experiences.
- Participants should always have the possibility to refuse to respond to any specific questions or demands from the researcher. This should be made clear to them before starting the interview and repeated as many times as needed.

Many research projects are planned to collect qualitative data through individual interviews. While this can be very enriching as it allows deepening the analysis, using alternative spaces or strategies to do research can be useful as well. **Focus groups** can work as useful spaces to listen to the community's opinions, while doing a more efficient use of time and promoting the interactions between participants. This way, all participants from a focus group can contribute to the creation of a narrative. For this purpose, it is important that the researcher enhances dialogue and cross-pollination between the participants (4).

How to set up a focus group?
- The first step is to identify the categories of people that should be represented (25). The organization of participants is done following a certain characteristic that allows to split them into groups, such as: gender, age, occupation, location, residency status, etc.
- Focus groups discussions must take place in spaces where the conversation and information shared remains private to the participants and the researchers. Beyond the space, it is important that the consent information specifies that participants are expected to not share the opinions of other members of the group with outsiders.
- A moderator should be assigned to each focus group, who will introduce a standardized set of questions that can organize the discussion (25).
- As with any other technique used to collect data, the way in which focus groups are set up can inhibit or limit participant's participation and, as a result, condition their contribution to the research. Reasons for this are varied: power dynamics between participants, the group not feeling as a safe space for the participant, presence of external individuals, etc. It is important to consider:
    o Criteria for groups' organization: the criteria selected might be contributing to the exclusion of inhibition of some members of the group. For example: if participants are only divided between IDPs and Host Communities, but not between gender, women might not feel safe to share their opinions, or their male peers may even silence them. Consider any power dynamics that could intervene in the research process. Power dynamics can be created by gender, age -having the elderly in the same space as younger participants-, race, tribal groups.
    o "External" participants: the presence of external individuals in the meetings can threaten the normal functioning of the discussions. External individuals can be community leaders or gatekeepers that conditioned the research space with their presence or by trying to redirect what participants express. They might try to discourage participants from sharing certain information about the community if they don't find it politically appropriate to share with the researchers (12). For this reason, try to maintain the focus group meeting as a space available only for researchers and participants, where the latter can feel safe and confident enough to express their thoughts and opinions without being conditioned.

Ensuring participant's protection and confidentiality

Research participants must be aware at all times of the implications of their participation in the project, as well as feel secure and protected from any potential risks the research could pose to them. This implies focusing on the consent of the human subject to participate in the study, the importance of preserving its privacy and confidentiality, and being aware of the cultural and social context where the research is being conducted.

INFORMED CONSENT PROCESS

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Before starting to do research, it is important to share with participants the main elements of the research project, its methods, benefits, and the potential risks of participating from the study. This should be done through a consent form that should also specify that participation of the individual in the study is voluntary, as well as explain how the data will be used and how it will be protected. Consent should always provide full information about the research, so participants are fully aware of it and the implications of participating in the study.

- Any type of activity or research method should include an informed consent (interviews, focus groups, surveys, media collection, etc).
- Information should be clear and accessible by all participants. Explanation should be concise, simple, and in a language that is understandable by the community.
- Information to be included: potential risks and benefits of the study, confidentiality of the data collected, duration of the study, who to contact with questions, who is the sponsor of the study, and what to expect by being part of the study (i.e. compensation) (19). For more information about the minimum requirements of a consent form, and also to access some examples, please refer to the Consent Form Guidance & Template.
- It can be verbal or written. Verbal consent can be read by the researcher to the participant, who will be asked to respond to the question on whether they are willing to participate on the study. Written consent supposes the research participant reading the form and signing in agreement to participate from the study. Whether consent is given orally or written can depend on the subjects of research (i.e. illiterate communities) and the context where the research is taking place (i.e. regions of conflict). In general, written consent is recommended.
- Consent can be given by the individual participants but in some cases by parents or other figures. For example, in studies that involve children, approval to participate from the study will be provided by the parents of the participant.
- Right of refusal: all potential research participants have the right to refuse to participate from the study. It is important that participants have the freedom to refuse to participate. To avoid pushing participants into a study they're not sure if they want to participate of, it would be good to give them the option of saying no (i.e. instead of asking "Do you consent to participate?", asking "Do you consent, or do you not consent to participate?")

Possible scenarios, ideas and considerations:
- To be time-efficient and at the same time ensure community participation, a possible approach is to create common spaces where the consent information can be shared and explained to community members. Researchers can organize community meetings where the main elements of the consent form are explained (purposes of the study, implications of the participation of community members, expectations, rights of human subjects, etc) and discussed by community members. Questions can be responded, and further clarifications can be done. For those community members interested in participating from the research project, individual meetings can be set up for them to review and sign their

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written consents (22). When conducting research on sensitive topics, this type of approach is not recommended because it can identify participants and make them more vulnerable to being stigmatized by their community.

- Parental consent: in projects where parental consent is needed, organizing a meeting with the parents of the participants explaining the implications of the project can also be helpful to expedite the process (15).
  - Some conditions (i.e. topic, context) might enable the waiver of parental consent. An example was an IRC project in Nigeria and South Sudan that focused on adolescents' sexual reproductive health. Consent was supposed to be provided by parents because participants were below 18 years old. However, in those cases where participants were already mothers, they could provide consent for themselves. It is important to consider these examples to find alternatives about how to proceed.
- Community organization's consent: in some communities, consent might be provided by the community leaders, especially when doing research on public or communal spaces (3). It is important to identify these situations to be able to plan ahead and ask those representatives for the appropriate approval. In some studies, it is recommended not only to get consent from the individuals, but from the community organizations as well, depending on their level of representation in the community (7). In general, this happens in projects where the entire population is involved (13).
- Consent becomes a sensitive topic particularly in vulnerable communities since being economically disadvantaged may make it difficult to deny participating in research (8).
- Although the general norm advises to use written consent, sometimes doing oral consent could be more feasible and secure. This is the case of research done in context of conflict, where encountering participants' forms could put them at risk within their community, or working with illiterate communities, considering that research participants should not sign a document they cannot read (13). In this case, reading the consent form and obtaining an oral consent can suffice.
- Working with children or youth can be challenging when doing fieldwork. Certain topics or aspects of the research can be challenging to be researched when involving young people, especially if there are cultural barriers or limitations to them such as LGTBQ+ or birth control related questions. Obtaining parental consent can be challenging as the participants might be afraid of sharing private information with their parents. A possibility to approach this is to establish consent age not based on chronological age but based on the youth's cognitive capacity to participate (5). This would imply that young participants would not be required to reach a certain age, but instead to be cognitively capable of understanding the purposes of the project and the benefits and risks that it entails.
- Flexible formats. Consent forms tend to use a formal and inflexible language that can hinder the complete understanding of what participants are consenting to.

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> o Giving examples of elements of the consent form can be useful to make sure that information is understood (i.e. "Your responses will remain anonymous, that means that we may use some of your quotes in our study but your name won't be specified").
> o The consent form could also be structured around specific questions, to make it easier to go through the different aspects of it (19), or in a format of conversation so that is easier for children to understand.
> o The use of images or diagrams can also help to make the information clearer (7).
> o In the case of consent for media components, such as pictures, an option can be to show the participant how their image would look like in a webpage.

- Use the local advisory groups to achieve true consent. Local groups can help disseminate information related to the informed consent process as well as help respond to general questions and requirements from potential participants (23).
- Have a 'support person' in the conversation. In projects where it can be harder to arrive at a level of trust or comfort between the researchers and the participants, the presence of a support person familiar with the participant can be of help. For example, if doing a study with people with disabilities, the support person can help explain or 'translate' questions to the individual to ease their comprehension. In IRC projects where this strategy was used, consent of the 'support person' was not required for IRB purposes.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Research projects must ensure that participants are safe during and after the data collection process. This implies thinking about the spaces in where research is conducted, as well as preserving outputs such as interviews, surveys, fieldnotes, and focus groups conclusions.

- Spaces to conduct research: participation in research projects should be done in safe and private spaces that enable community members to express their opinions and experiences openly and with no conditionings. Sometimes, homes are not the ideal place to conduct interviews as other members of the household may hear what is being shared by the participant, posing barriers to participation. Other times, participants may not feel comfortable doing interviews in the organization's offices, for example. Everything will depend on the context and the type of research being done. For this reason, it is important to be flexible and think about alternative spaces to conduct research where both researchers and participants feel comfortable.
- Preserving confidentiality: as specified by IRB regulations, researchers must make sure that no personal information is leaked. Protecting the data that has been collected is as important as ensuring confidentiality during the activities to collect it. It is important to make sure that audio files, transcripts, and documents where contact information is

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registered are protected. Rely on devices with passwords or Drive folders password-protected where the data can be saved, not lost, and untraceable.

- Confidentiality check: if the participant seems to feel uncomfortable at any point during the interviews or the activities, some questions or comments can be made such as "Would you prefer going somewhere else to have this conversation?" or "Remember that none of this conversation will be shared, and your identity will be protected".

Possible scenarios, ideas and considerations:
- Try asking participants, community liaisons, or local advisory groups where can research take place for more comfort of the participant. Be open to asking and listening to where participants prefer to do interviews or activities (i.e. saying "Let us know if you'd like to go to a more private space to talk" when seeing the participant is uncomfortable with the interview or activity)
- When doing health-related projects or questions, spaces like hospitals or community clinics might be a good option to consider.

SENSITIVITY TO THE LOCAL CONTEXT
Each community has its own characteristics and customs, which should be respected by the research team. A few considerations or ideas on this regard:
- Think about the questions being asked and who is asking them. Certain projects involve asking sensitive or personal questions to the research participants. When assembling the research team, think not only about the questions to ask, but also who will be asking them. For example, if researching on women's reproductive health, ideal interviewers or mediators will be women.
- Testing tools on the ground. Working with community organizations or country offices can be of help to test the tools to collect data. These representatives can provide feedback on the language used and the questions asked and help improve the tools before moving onto data collection.
- Consider different ethnicities and social identities. Questions and ways of approaching the community should be aligned or respectful of the community's traditions.

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Local Advisory Groups' role in the implementation stage

These groups are key actors in the development of the research project. In the implementation stage, their input becomes meaningful as they can:

- Test and provide feedback on materials prepared, and potentially participate on the training to researchers
- Make suggestions on the research team assembled
- Suggest appropriate language to use, and specify traditions and cultural references that should be considered by the researchers
- Make suggestions on which are the best data collection strategies (i.e. focus groups vs. interviews), as they are familiar with availability from the community
- Organize communal meetings to disseminate information or work on consent
- Contribute to the achievement of consent from community leaders
- Disseminate information about the project to guarantee true consent from the participants
- Help to think about space and time of research spaces and activities

4. THE CLOSING STAGE

- Validation: once research and analysis is done, it is important to validate the interpretation of the data collected with the community. Findings should be shared with the local advisory group (in the case the research has one) or other community representatives, who can provide feedback to the researchers, and collaborate with the researchers on the dissemination of final reports amongst the community. Ensure that workshops are large enough and that there is real discussion around the findings of the project between the researchers and the community representatives.
  - o It may happen that advisory groups have a different understanding of the phenomenon being analyzed. Try to be respectful of their feedback while showing the data or evidence collected and emphasizing how these findings can be of help for the community.
- Main findings and conclusions of the research project should be shared with the community (4). This enhances community's trust into research projects and shows the importance of their participation in them.
- Safe dissemination of findings: community representatives are more aware of the general context and can help deciding which information can be shared and with whom. Rely on the local advisory groups (in case the research has it), local allies, and/or community organizations to decide whether is safe or not to share certain information collected during the process.
- Assess the general process. Even if not required by the donor or sponsor of the project, it can be useful to take an overview of the general process and the final outcomes of the

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research to do a general evaluation of elements that worked and didn't work during the process. This implies reflecting on the quality of the data collection tools, the success of the interaction with local liaisons, the cultural appropriateness of the approach, etc. This way, future projects can benefit from the reflection and improve the process.

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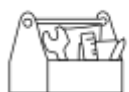
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