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Methodology Paper on Collaborative Research
**Learning from
the ECAP-MWCC-RCT network**

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Methodology Paper on Collaborative Research

Executive summary

This working paper details the experiences of a collaborative research program involving researchers from RCT and practitioners from ECAP (Equipo de Estudios Comunitarios y Acción Psicosocial) in Guatemala and MWCC (Masisukumeni Women's Crisis Centre) in South Africa. From its inception, the research program has aimed at both producing high quality research and working through a model of collaboration between researchers and practitioners. The working paper is primarily concerned with the collaborative aspects of the program. It details the anxieties, challenges and benefits of doing collaborative research. In order for the collaboration to be constructive, researchers need to consider the effects of their research and practitioners must confront some of the often implicit assumptions on which they base their work.

A first conclusion of the working paper is the need to disaggregate different forms of collaboration between researchers and practitioners. The working paper outlines six different modes of collaboration. These are: Research projects where local NGOs are used to gain access; outsourced research; outsourced data collection; collaborative research by invitation; co-designed collaborative research projects and action research. The working paper stresses that no single modality is superior to other forms. This depends solely on the purpose of the collaboration. The particular experience of collaboration referred to throughout the paper was research by invitation. It was initiated by RCT researchers and built up through active collaboration in workshops and fieldwork. As such, it came to include elements of action research.

The working paper continues exploring the complex relationships between researchers and practitioners. To a large extent, the complexities emanate from the presence of other actors involved indirectly in the collaboration: Donors, beneficiaries and the host organisations (ECAP, MWCC and RCT). The working paper outlines the tensions in the collaboration, resulting from a cross-cultural encounter where researchers and practitioners do not share foundational assumptions about the relationship to beneficiaries or informants and have different notions of time, incentives, language, resource allocation and authority. For example, researchers focus on methodologies and data collection, whereas practitioners are preoccupied with the need for social change. The conclusion from the collaborative experience is that these anxieties are systemic rather than personal. The working paper also concludes that there are potential substantial benefits to be derived from such collaboration in terms of better data quality, better research ethics, more reflection on intervention and even new forms of intervention co-designed between researchers and practitioners.

As the challenges are systemic, so should the recommendations be. The working paper concludes that this form of collaboration takes time and resources (intervention as well as research) and that hitherto donors have been reluctant to fund such expenses that are not considered an integral part of the project or program activities. Hence:

- Collaboration should be considered in all research activities that include local NGO presence.
- Collaboration must be integrated into the project cycle from its inception.
- Processes of reflection must be integrated into the project design. This could take the form of workshops but must include open and frank dialogue on how to confront systemic dilemmas and anxieties.
- New funding lines must be accepted by donors to enable dialogue and reflection through collaboration.
- Research and collaborative innovation and learning must be institutionalised in all participating institutions.

Chapter 1: Introduction

In the development sector, there has been a growing interest in integrating research and intervention. This interest has been influenced by donor demands for evidence-based interventions by the implementing organisations' need to systematise and document their work, and by the need for researchers to ground their questions in actual social problems and thereby produce research evidence that adds new insights and informs interventions. Despite the interest, and even demand, to connect research and intervention, existing forms of partnership between donors, research institutes and NGO practitioners do not always provide for a systematic process of identifying problems and research questions, nor for sustained collaboration in fieldwork, data analysis and the implementation of research insights and results. This position paper explores an alternative form of collaboration and its potential to develop in-depth interchange between partners on all of the above areas.

Drawing on a case study of a specific research program, "Histories of victimhood", the paper details the benefits and successes as well as the complex dilemmas that were encountered in the process of collaboration. The research program included from its inception a component of thinking through collaboration between researchers and practitioners. The aim of the program was double: It aimed at understanding victimisation academically¹, and it wanted to carry this analytical work out in ways that included the active participation of those working with victim empowerment and victim rehabilitation programs. The aim of the collaborative research was therefore to identify research methods which would explicate the shared experience of suffering and simultaneously inform interventions that were contextually relevant. Importantly, this focus held potential for identifying critical areas of policy development for those working in the development sector, both because of its analytical substance, and because of the collaborative effort which is the issue at stake in this position paper.

The program was initiated by researchers from the Rehabilitation and Research Centre for Torture Victims (Henrik Rønsbo and Steffen Jensen) and involved two NGOs from the South, Masisukumeni Women's Crisis Centre (MWCC) from South Africa and Equipo Comunitario de Acción Psicosocial (ECAP) from Guatemala. A more detailed description of the organisations follows below.

The working paper emanates out of the experiences from the research program as well as three workshops, of which two were held in Malelane in South Africa and one was held in Antigua, Guatemala, where the research process and the collaboration were discussed in details. Apart from the authors, fieldworkers, leaders of the two NGOs and post-graduate students made inputs to the formulations in the position paper.

¹ See for example Ronsbo, Henrik (2006) 'Displacing Enigma and Shaping Communal Hegemony: Towards the Analysis of Violent Experience as Social Process', *Dialectical Anthropology*, vol. 30, No. 1-2, pp. 147-167; Jensen, Steffen and Sikhauli, Enos (2006) 'Sundhedspraksisser og Sundhedssystemer i Nkomazi', *Den Ny Verden*, vol. 39, 3, pp. 69-78.

Chapter 2: Typologies of Research Collaboration

Before examining in detail the particular form of collaboration illustrated by this case study, a simple typology of research collaboration is presented below.ⁱⁱ This typology does not only outline the different types of research collaboration that exist, but also suggests that the demands and needs for research and intervention require a range of forms of collaboration. In this way, none of the different forms of research collaboration is superior to other forms of collaboration. Rather, when making a choice between different formats it is crucial to clearly reflect on the purpose of the research and to tailor-make possible areas of collaboration between practitioners and researchers. By “tailor-make” we understand detailed design processes that take into consideration the needs of all partners.

1) Individuals or teams of researchers (Northern or Southernⁱⁱⁱ) execute research projects without any counterpart except for the researched population

In this form of research, the researcher or research team may establish a loose contact with an organisation working in the area where the researched population is located. The organisation assists the researcher in accessing the area and introduces her to the research population. Much ethnographic research entails this kind of loose collaboration with an organisation.

2) Outsourced Research. Research outsourced on contractual basis to organisations or individual consultants or researchers

In outsourced research, organisations or individual consultants, which may be based in the North or the South, undertake data collection following a specified protocol which in part is jointly elaborated. The key aspect here is the outsourcing of data collection and also data processing and analysis. The actual research topic and questions are decided by the project's commissioner. Larger national and international donors often commission this kind of research via more or less stable networks of research oriented organisations.

3) Outsourced Data Collection. NGOs in the South undertake data collection as part of the intervention. Research is generated on the basis of this data

Outsourced data collection is a restricted version of the above outlined mode of research. It is distinguished by the researcher taking an active role in overseeing data collection and securing the quality of data. The NGO/data collecting organisation provides human and material resources. The form of research is used in relation to larger monitoring programs which also generate knowledge and data of interest to researchers. It is often used in relation to larger agricultural, environmental and health oriented interventions in which standard protocols of data collection can be implemented as part of a working routine.

4) Collaborative Research Projects by Invitation

The researchers or the NGOs propose and, in some cases, raise funds for a particular research project. Subsequently, they invite other partners (researchers or NGOs) to collaborate in the implementation of the project. The research project is co-implemented with extensive collaboration and negotiation between the partners. In this type of collaboration, careful attention must be paid to the potential effect research findings may

ⁱⁱ Partly based on “Memo on Principles for Research Cooperation” by Steffen Jensen and Henrik Ronsbo, Mpumalanga, South Africa, May 21, 2006

ⁱⁱⁱ We use this distinction because it gestures towards very real differences in relation to different organisations' proximity to international donors on one hand and the target populations (TOV and AIDS victims) relevant for our discussions.

have on the work of practitioners participating in the network. Even if there is a common research interest and collaborative formulation of the project at the outset, it is important to be aware that the research outcomes and results may have implications for practice. Thus, questions arise very clearly as to what actions may have to be implemented on the basis of research findings.

The case study that this paper examines is an example of collaborative research project by invitation. Through extensive negotiation and ongoing collaboration it was co-implemented by the three organisations RCT, ECAP and MWCC.

5) Co-designed Collaborative Research Projects

In contrast to the above form of research collaboration, co-designed forms of research collaboration are characterised by the fact that the research questions emerge out of a joint process of reflection on interventions and implementation practices. The ownership of the research process is shared, and the implementation of the research project is a joint venture. This matches, for instance, a variety of smaller research projects, implemented by the RCT, in which researchers and practitioners jointly develop an intervention model, document its effects and subsequently suggest improvements. In this type of research attention must be paid to the potential effect of the research findings on the work of the practitioners. In other words, the partners have to address the question of actions which must be taken on the basis of the research findings.

6) The Action Research model

In its most radical version, the action research model assumes the researcher as an activist, i.e. the aim of the research and the role of the researcher are to change social conditions.^{iv} In this researcher-practitioner relationship, a transformative or action-based objective is included and made explicit in the research design. The research targets an identified social problem, and on the basis of the findings, new forms of action are formulated. The action is then implemented and researched, and in an ongoing process of reflection, impact is assessed and actions are re-formulated. The researcher does not necessarily have an implementing partner in this process but works herself as a practitioner-researcher directly with a subject population.

In less radical versions of the action research model, the researcher maintains a certain distance to the subjects of study, and the direct actions are implemented by a partner. In this form of action research, the role of the researcher is to capacitate practitioners and to create space in the implementing NGO for reflection/ reflexivity on the interventions and practices. The long-term aim is to incorporate the principles of action research or action learning into the NGO and thus make reflection and action research sustainable through a continuous process of posing questions to the practice, and developing practices which are based on research, reflexive wisdom and users' opinions.

In sum, the typologies described above reveal a continuum of collaboration; from one in which academics organise networks and research programmes, via those in which there is increased involvement of non-academics or practitioners in research design and execution, to the more radical types of action-research.

^{iv} Freire P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum.

These types of research collaborations are not equally applicable to all social contexts, and the choice of forms of collaboration will be influenced also by the overall purpose of the research. For example, issues such as insecurity, violence and widespread traumatisation may require more complex models of collaboration to meet the potential needs and challenges that arise from data collection and analysis. Likewise, those models of research which involve intermediate forms of collaboration may serve the purpose of preparing for closer forms of interchange between researchers and practitioners as well as developing longer term sustained collaboration. It is important to stress that it is the purpose of the collaboration that determines the modality of collaboration, and that one form is not superior to another.

In what follows, a case study of the 'collaborative research by invitation' is described and examined. For the research questions posed – i.e. explicating shared experiences of suffering while simultaneously pointing to contextually relevant implications for practice and intervention – this model has proved valuable. Practitioner partners were invited to implement the same research instruments, the results of which highlight the shared experiences of suffering across social contexts. At the same time, the research instruments identified unique and specific needs of organisations to systematise and document their practices, and through a process of joint reflection on the research instruments and fieldwork experiences, each partner has identified both interventions and potential ways of institutionalizing the research as a way of improving their interventions. What makes an examination of this case study particularly interesting is that it will be seen that the model has been re-shaped and refined in the process of collaboration. Although collaboration was always the intention of the researchers, the ways in which this took form and developed were critically dependent on the inputs, protestations and experiences from the NGO-based participants. In this way, the case study represents a collaboration that began as collaboration by invitation and later moved towards something resembling action research, not least because part of the research was concerned with the dilemmas faced by NGO's working in volatile and violent conditions. As such, the case study reminds us of the dynamic nature that collaborative efforts have.

Chapter 3: Actors in collaborative research: The MWCC, ECAP, RCT multilateral program process

The program upon which the present reflections are based is a specific program of collaboration undertaken between the three organisations Masisukumeni Women's Crisis Centre (MWCC), Equipo Comunitario de Acción Psicosocial (ECAP) and the Research Department of the Rehabilitation and Research Centre for Torture Victims (RCT), starting in late 2005 and still in progress. The name of the program is *'Histories of Victimhood'*. Each of the organisations has very different characteristics. MWCC is a small local activist-driven organisation working with women's rights in rural South Africa. Staff and target population share fundamental socio-economic and cultural characteristics and in many cases also residence. It was set up as the outcome of a research project, implemented by Dr. Tina Sideris, and is thus a result of action research. ECAP is a large and influential NGO working with psycho-social support to exhumations in Guatemala, and it has a diversified portfolio of activities in training, project implementation and a substantial back catalogue of publications. RCT is a large quasi-governmental organisation based on clinical rehabilitation of torture survivors in Denmark, a global network of national NGOs working with rehabilitation and prevention of torture, and a research department with medical, psychological and social research on issues linked to torture, violence and trauma.

The program was initiated by RCT's research department through contacts to MWCC in late 2004 and early 2005. RCT researchers outlined a vision for a collaborative research process carried out jointly by an alliance of NGOs in different countries in the South and the RCT-based researchers. Elements of this larger program obtained funding from the Danish Research Council for Society and Business Research in 2005. What animated the three partners involved in the case study was a common understanding of violence, trauma and suffering. Suffering is a shared and universal condition but specified by social context, thereby enabling comparison – indeed rendering it critical. As Kleinman and Kleinman eloquently argue:

“For there is, we hold, something panhuman in the experience of distress of the person, in the bearing of wounds, in the constraints to the human spirit, in the choke and sting of deep loss, in the embodied endurance of great burdens” . Yet as they point out the immediate, lived experience is “elaborated in greatly different ways in different cultural settings”.^v

The research program takes as the point of departure that conflict and post-conflict become increasingly important in humanitarian and development interventions. In this process, categories of victimhood have come to complement traditional indicators of social development and crisis. However, recognised categories of victimhood cannot contain the multiple ways in which people in developing countries live with suffering and death. This is partly because categories of victimhood are negotiated and appropriated by health and development organisations – including all participating organisations in this research program – seeking to position themselves in the donor market. In this way, the categories are part of a political economy of victimhood. The program suggests that the political

^vKleinman A. & J. Kleinman (1991). Suffering and Its Professional Transformation: Toward an Ethnography of Interpersonal Experience. *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry*, 15, 275-300

economy is an important element, causing many of the failures which haunt health and development interventions in post-conflict societies. Understanding the political economy is therefore of critical importance. It was the idea of the initial research that this political economy is best understood by involving those who are participants in it, i.e. RCT, MWCC and ECAP.

Since the inception, the overall program has continued to grow. Additional components in the form of four PhD studies have been added: One is currently being implemented in Colombia and one was started in Gaza in 2007. The third study has grown out of the deepening of the research collaboration between RCT and ECAP and thus entails a continuation of the initial field work component. Finally, a South African-based PhD-candidate has been hired to conduct research on Zimbabwean refugees or migrants in South Africa. Each of these components has gained funding independently of the program although associated to it. It is the intention that the Colombia and Gaza projects will bring additional NGO members to the partnership in the form of intervention-oriented organisations that work with issues of torture, organised violence, mental health and human rights.

During 2006, research was conducted in South Africa and Guatemala. As a result of two data collection and methodology workshops, partners in both countries applied similar research methods which can be likened to comparative ethnography. In other words, the two projects applied the same or similar instruments in the same sequence for the same purposes; a procedure which will also be applied in the PhD projects that have grown out of the program.

As stated above, this makes the program one of collaboration through invitation. In essence, the program aimed to set up a 'learning network' which would:

- Build on a set of collaborative relationships between researchers and practitioners.
- Expand and deepen the interchange as the process moved on.
- Establish a space of reflection between institutions on their practices, that is, research and intervention.
- Develop a set of principles through which to institutionalise interventions that are informed by research.

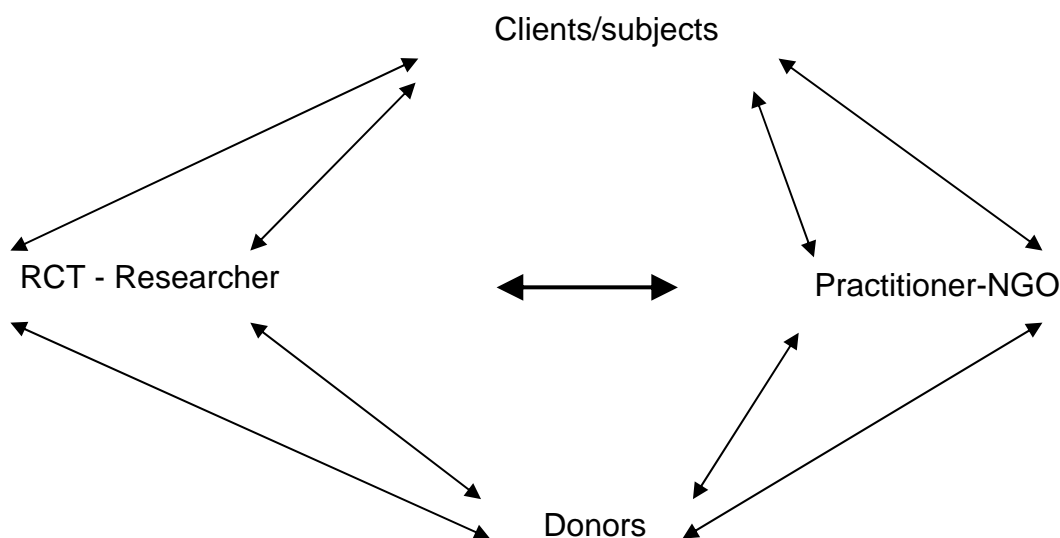
The process of establishing the learning network required long and careful negotiations and evoked significant anxieties in all the actors involved. Confronting these anxieties in many discussions and encounters has resulted in a cohesive group with a clearer sense of both the demands and dilemmas and the benefits of working as part of a network for research as well as for intervention.

Actors in research

In order to understand the dynamics, the tensions and the anxieties that are produced in the relationships formed by programs such as this, it is important to examine the actors participating in the program. The most obvious actors are the researchers and practitioners. However, to reduce the complexities like this would be to miss the point. While neither donors nor project beneficiaries are physically present in the learning network, they frame it in fundamental ways by setting the terms for the interaction. Both researchers and practitioners depend on donor money for the implementation of activities (intervention or research). Hence, donors exert influence on choices regarding research

themes, beneficiary populations, and the duration of interventions and research. Perhaps the beneficiaries exert, or should exert, even more influence, as their needs constitute the ultimate *raison d'être* for this kind of work. Furthermore, both the researchers and the practitioners are positioned within institutions, which, in many ways, inform the possibilities of collaboration.

In this way, while we may imagine two sets of actors in the learning network set up by the collaborative research, it should be emphasised that this is not simply a dyadic relationship but should rather be understood within a larger field that includes donors, beneficiaries and the respective 'home' organisations. The diagram below represents those involved in this collaborative research program.



The two groups directly involved in the learning network, researchers and the practitioners, each enters into collaboration with their own agendas, assumptions about the other and needs or requirements determined by their professional positions. One cannot assume that all participants enter into the relationship in similar ways or for the same reasons. An example from the collaboration illustrates the point.

MWCC has had a long relationship with Steffen Jensen, one of the two Danish senior researchers initiating the program. He had established links with the centre when he was doing research more independently. Over a number of years of regular contact, trust was established between Steffen and particular individuals at MWCC who had knowledge of and understood his needs as a researcher. But by and large, his research and its results remained outside the domain of MWCC's daily work. For most of the employees at MWCC, Steffen remained a stranger bearing the label, "an overseas visitor", and his work held little meaning for their everyday practice. After negotiation to commence the collaboration, Steffen introduced new elements into his relationship with MWCC. Firstly, he returned wearing an RCT-hat, thus introducing a third party into the relationship. Secondly,

this time his research was to be integrated into the organisational culture of MWCC, and more members of the organisation were pulled into the loop of the research.

A range of questions emerged that needed to be explored: To what extent did the people involved at MWCC have a grasp of RCT, of what this organisation does and of its motives for research? Could it be that Steffen continued to wear the label “an overseas visitor” who brought a research topic and agenda with little integration into the culture of the organisation?

Dilemmas also arise because participants understand the research agendas differently. Initially, concepts were very difficult to translate from English to Spanish, and even though time was spent on this, misunderstandings arose due to different readings of concepts once translated.

One critical conclusion from this collaboration is that such dilemmas are systemic rather than results of misunderstandings. Practitioners and researchers tend to ascribe such dilemmas to lack of communication or lack of partnership. However, one must accept that there are significant differences between the demands and requirements of the research enterprise and those of the intervention projects. The dilemmas created by the differences in demands and requirements result in a fundamental tension inherent to the process with which all actors must contend. In part, this tension is informed by the actors who are not physically present in the collaboration: Donors and beneficiaries, e.g. beneficiaries constitute a key point of reference for researchers and practitioners alike. The relationships to these populations are shaped, however, by different needs and requirements, thus raising questions such as: Whose needs should define the subject population? Who can claim most time with it? And whose output, from an ethical and practical point of view, is more relevant? In essence, the question relates to the status of beneficiaries: Are they informants or are they clients? Another example illustrates this point.

In the South African case study, the fieldwork team consisted of an academic and a practitioner. The academic claimed precedent in most cases when it came to academic or methodological issues, while the practitioner took over whenever informants talked of highly emotive issues. In that sense, both parties slipped into the ascribed roles and professional identities. There is nothing wrong with this in the sense that expertise should be the basis of decisions. However, is it possible that the practitioner and academic alike unconsciously employed a logic of “the researcher knows it all”? Did the practitioner fall back into a professional role without letting the collaboration – and hence the possibility of another response – animate the intervention? If this is the case, the collaboration informed only marginally the responses and entrenched roles of researchers and practitioners. This is part of the dilemma which does not disappear just because we are aware of it. It has to be worked on at all times.

How are we to understand this relationship between researchers and practitioners? Analyses of collaboration between research institutes and NGO's suggest the metaphor of a 'cross cultural' encounter to understand some of the dilemmas and difficulties that arise. We may not agree with the term 'cross cultural' if we think it to imply closed systems. If we consider, however, that it can refer to differences in assumptions and beliefs that have to be unpacked in the crossing of experiences, then it may be a useful expression. The Centre for AIDS Prevention Studies at the University of California, San Francisco, argues that the worlds of the research and NGO program delivery are often separate, each having its own sense of time, incentives, language, resources and authorities. For example,

researchers speak the language of methodologies, while NGOs speak about social action for change. Another example: Researchers measure success in terms of validity and reliability of data, while practitioners' measures relate to healing, transformation and impact.

Therefore, much of what applies to the cross-cultural encounter also applies to the encounter between researchers and practitioners, i.e. it is a relationship that is characterised by anxiety, emotionality and insecurity about the motives and acts of the other. Nevertheless, it is also a relationship potentially characterised by reciprocity, where the parties make inputs that through reflection may be digested and lead to transformation in the thinking of both. We argue that in this process, a 'third space' might emerge in which creative dialogue and learning can take place.

The form of collaboration suggested in this paper creates a space to address such dilemmas through careful discussion and identification of principles and guidelines which always keep the interests of beneficiaries in mind. Inevitably, anxieties arise in the processes of exploring, articulating and negotiating their respective needs, assumptions and requirements. Therefore, the process needs to be shaped in such a way as to gradually establish a space to communicate openly and nurture a capacity for dialogue about research and interventions which confronts the assumptions that researchers and practitioners have about each other. In the present program, this took place through not only collaborating on producing good research results, but also through constant reflections in workshops where the ultimate purpose was to debate and reflect on the respective roles and assumptions of the partners in the collaboration. The creation of this 'third space' only takes place if resources, both money and time, are dedicated to the purpose of reflection.

This part of the program was realised in the three workshops. One of the main challenges here – apart from the fact that reflection on mutual roles and assumptions is often not an integral part of the overall design of research collaboration – is that donors are quite unwilling to fund such activities. Illustrative for this dilemma is that these program activities were funded in an *ad hoc* manner. Hence, to make such reflection possible, it is imperative that programs begin to integrate the reflection in the overall design, and that donors are made aware of the centrality of such activities for the success of researcher-practitioner collaboration.

Chapter 4: Collaborative Research and Learning: Challenges and benefits

If a process is generative of new insights and reflections, then it is a learning process. In this chapter, we will continue with a discussion of collaborative research as a learning process. It is our understanding that learning occurs in the space that lies between what is known and what is unknown. If confronting the unknown provokes anxiety for individuals, then, we would argue, such anxieties are even greater when two different professional cultures – practitioners who seek transformation and researchers for whom knowledge production is the aim – must confront the uncertainty of the unknown in the field and in their encounter with each other.

The encounter between a practitioner who seeks stable and applicable knowledge for the effective and successful transformation of humans and their environments, and the researcher who explores the ambiguities of knowing and not knowing is fraught with tension.

In the collaborative research process we saw this very clearly in the contradictory messages sent by both the researchers and the practitioners. The researcher, claiming that she knows where the process is heading and that she should therefore be trusted, while she also applies the standard scientific explanation that ‘we do not know what it is we are looking for and this is why we do research’. This is in fact a highly anxiety producing statement, “trust me, because I don’t know where we are heading”! Likewise, the NGO practitioners demanded clear terms of reference while they, at the same time, demanded full participation and the possibility to negotiate all aspects of the research.

The expression of such completely opposite desires, positions or signals by both parties can jeopardise the process of collaborative research. These contradictory signals lead to anxiety, frustration and anger, potentially blocking the deepening of the collaborative research and potential learning processes.

Yet, the tensions are foundational in that they define all collaborative research processes – or any research process for that matter – which can be managed through reflection and unpacked and exposed by joint discussion and reflexivity on the part of the participants. In other words, one of the objectives of collaborative research is to transcend these tensions and the anxiety producing effects they have on the participants.

So, while collaborative research for the practitioner often requires that she learns to learn, i.e. learns to work through the process of not-knowing, for the researcher it requires learning to listen to other kinds of data. The time consuming process of working through these contradictory relations and resulting anxieties is merited especially in research on social interventions. The complexity of the learning groups that emerge from these processes is such that they potentially generate better quality of data and thereby a firmer basis for examining and developing interventions.

The advantages of openly talking about and reflecting on the anxieties generated by collaboration between different professional groups with their unique interests, needs, and demands are highlighted in the more detailed examination of the themes of data collection

and the ethics of research and intervention.

Data Quality

The inclusion in the research group of members with different backgrounds in terms of ethnicity/race, religion, gender and language creates a group that is able to capture not only dominant texts but also a variety of submerged experiences and narratives. In some cases non-national others have easier access to communities than national others (in the case of Guatemala it was easier for the white European than the Ladino national to create an initial dialogue with community authorities), while at a later stage in the process the linguistic and social skills of the male and female group members enabled that subtleties were captured, and a variety of different voices were included in the data material.

This observation has also been made in the anthropological literature during the 1980s and 90s under the heading of 'reflexive anthropology', and requires the deliberate deployment of different subjectivities within a social field. Multi-ethnic and pluri-gendered research groups which are committed to one another in structural ways thus produce better data.

Apart from the better data, they also produce a better space for reflection regarding the impact of the individuals' own subjectivity during data collection, typically in the form of interviews. Attitudes, biases and black spots held by one member are often identifiable by other members. Although issues such as seniority or professional identities may inflict on the ability of junior members to approach seniors regarding this issue, occupying different structural roles (research vs. practice) help the generation of data. Also insider-outsider dichotomies are important to take into consideration. Both projects used a complex mixture of insiders and outsiders in different hues; what is considered a national insider may in many situations be a local outsider, i.e. the white South African or the Guatemalan Ladino.

Thus, issues within the data material regarding race, gender and generation are much better approached by a complex research group than a non-complex one.

Ethics of Research and Intervention

Complexity is an important corrective in the work with interventions. The diverse and complex nature of the research group will in many ways generate debates and entertain reflection regarding the unstated assumptions on which specific interventions may rest. Complexity of the research/learning group thus leads to the opening of reflections on the ethics and politics of interventions seeking transformation, in ways in which mono-professional and mono-ethnic groups of practitioners do not. Over time, homogenous groups tend to reaffirm professional models and explanations. This often leads to a loss of data which can only be acquired or made apparent as outsiders enter the group and try to establish a common ground in terms of knowledge.

This was the case on several occasions where researchers and the systematic data collection unconsciously or unwittingly forced practitioners to reflect on changes in their fields of intervention which had altered parameters that had shaped the original design of interventions, i.e. changes in settlement patterns, livelihood strategies, etc.

In both the above mentioned dimensions (data quality and intervention), the complexity of the group changes the nature of its external relations. It is, however, required of them not to generate conflicts that are detrimental to the work of the group, and it requires an

ongoing process of reflection and reworking on part of the participants.

When seen from the ethical perspective, complexity also appears to be an important value added in the research process – in particular when target populations are victims of stigmatisation, poverty, violence and exclusion.

The ethical imperative requires that researchers not only undertake research, but also take some kind of stand about the conditions in which research subjects live. Whether this takes the form of supporting political processes or intervening more directly in households and families depends on the specific circumstances. However, the resources and options available for such ethically bound interventions are, to a large extent, increased if researchers work in teams with practitioners. Interviews may provoke anxiety on part of the researcher. For example, some researchers may not know what to do when informants become emotional during interviews, or they may feel uncomfortable because they lack knowledge of local idioms of suffering. In such cases, a close partnership with practitioners not only eases the anxiety of the researcher; more importantly, it also provides the researchers with the tools necessary for applying the 'do no harm'-principle. Although there is a danger that these kinds of problems reproduce the notions "researchers know about research and practitioners know about intervention", it enables reflection on the roles if both parties are open to reflecting on the respective practices.

On the other hand, due to their lack of exposure to hegemonic interpretations among particular groups of practitioners, researchers may in fact be able to change therapeutic discourse and intervention by calling attention to unheard voices, particularly in situations of dialogical data collection (open or semi-open questioning). By doing research, in this way practitioners may become aware of problems that their previous models of intervention made it difficult to see. This can take a quite simple form, as in South Africa where the head of the NGO suddenly realised that the area the organisation worked in looked much different from what the organisation knew.

So, from both sides of the relationship, the complexity of the practitioner-researcher group potentially adds to the depth and quality of work and can ensure that important ethical requirements of doing research with victims and survivors of violence and calamity are well catered for. In the last section, we will explore some of the initiatives that the present program engaged in as a result of the reflections between researchers and practitioners.

Chapter 5: Applications: Collaborative Model

In this section, we explore possible applications of this collaborative research model in relation to the actors outside the immediate practitioner-researcher relationship: Beneficiaries, donors and institutions in which practitioners and researchers are located. The implementation of these activities is still in progress, and we can only outline some of the possible areas of activities and relate some examples of how we went about institutionalising the research-practitioner collaboration.

Beneficiaries

Beneficiary populations remain crucial for the collaborative model. We must distinguish between two levels of the beneficiary populations: The wider community in which the collaborative work was conducted and the participants in the research project.

During the collaborative research project, researchers were often questioned as to how the participants in the research were chosen. In communities where resources are limited, the perception that underlies this question is that participation in projects, including research, generates resources. According to the agreements made, researchers referred to the random criteria for the inclusion, an explanation which most participants accepted. However, larger questions about the ways in which the research benefits the community need to be addressed. On a general level, the benefit for the larger community lies in the potential of enabling the organisations to reflect in fresh ways on their interventions and to acquire tools that are helpful in the everyday work. We consider this in some detail below.

One of the complex discussions that took place as part of collaborative research process concerned how to engage with the beneficiaries that participated in the research project and, more specifically, how to exit the field site. Although this is always a concern in ethnographic research, in this case the concern was more pronounced as the research was carried out through institutions which would remain in the area. It was agreed that at the very least, participants should receive some kind of feedback on the process. In other words, there should be some kind of dissemination. Social context and institutional aims and objectives determined the choices made as to how the process would be disseminated. The following concrete suggestions were made:

- Intellectual feedback: This idea was based on the principle that 'ordinary people' are interested in and benefit from an analysis of the information they have given, and from seeing themselves as part of the global context of marginalisation. In other words, there is the benefit of conscientisation. The inter-regional nature of the collaboration gives the added dimension of comparing themselves to others and to making political sense of their suffering.
- Documentary return of testimony in the form of written texts, videos, photos, CDs.
- Feedback to formal health and service providers, political organisations and local government, as a way of giving them insight into the social conditions in which people are living and the needs and priorities of those they should be servicing.

- Recognition of participation, such as thank you letter, social function, as a way of acknowledging their contribution to knowledge generation and to giving organisations new insights.

Most of these suggestions have subsequently been carried out in the different sites. Discussions during the process of collaboration on obligations to beneficiaries, identified as a principle that specific and actual strategies must always emerge in negotiation between members of the research group/learning network and the local practitioner organisation.

Institutions

The question of the specific values for intervention of this particular collaborative research model can only be answered tentatively as the process is on-going. However, some preliminary points emerged out of the process. Firstly, network members identified a distinction between research results and the actual research process in relation to interventions. In most research-intervention partnerships, the focus is on the ways in which research results inform intervention. In this collaboration, a strong argument was made that, in addition to research findings, the research process itself can and should be considered when thinking of interventions and practice.

To date, the data gathered in the research has not been analysed in great detail. Hence, it is not possible to make recommendations for interventions on the basis of findings. As part of the ongoing research, collaboration plans have been set in place to develop a method of phased and joint researcher-practitioner data analysis. A model of data analysis, in which researchers and practitioners participate, will of necessity accept a division of labour based on skill and competence. Thus, only on completion of this process, it will be possible to draw conclusions on the value of the research results in intervention.

However, in the South African case, some preliminary findings can be detailed. One of the aims of the research program was to understand which pressures and dilemmas confront NGO intervention. As NGOs were part of the research program, an insider view was possible. During a data analysis workshop in September 2007, the NGO's relationships with donors, state agencies and beneficiaries were discussed, and dilemmas and pressures identified. Potentially, this sort of reflections will enable the NGO to handle the pressures better to the benefit of the interventions.

Given that the fieldwork has been done and, as mentioned above, involved application of similar research methods and the same research instruments, some conclusions have been made about the benefits of the research process itself for practice and intervention. A joint process of reflection and discussion has generated important insights for practitioners and researchers on how research instruments, the discipline of research and the documentation it involves benefit practitioner organisations.

As noted above, in practice the researcher-practitioner collaboration is individualised, i.e. both the researcher's and the practitioner's organisation are potentially marginalised. Hence, a constant concern during the discussions related to the ways in which the collaborative research model, and more particularly its practices and instruments, could be institutionalised or domesticated within participating institutions. In order to expand the learning network from the individualised relationship between researcher and practitioner into the rest of the organisation, discussions noted that strategies of institutionalisation

need to be carefully designed.

This was attempted during an in-house seminar at MWCC in September 2007. Members of the team from MWCC felt very strongly that some of the research instruments could strengthen their organisation and deepen their intervention. The MWCC members identified the following strategy in collaboration with the researcher:

- *Expand* some of the research instruments which had been adapted to the purpose of intervention rather than research as part of counselling to a select group of counsellors on a pilot basis. The methods included home visits, simple socio-economic surveys and brief life histories. The pilot project was targeted at the group of clients who received Anti-Retroviral (ARV) medication after rape.
- *Organise* a workshop for selected staff members who are lay counsellors which would be facilitated by the research team with the aim of explaining the research process, methods and instruments and exploring the usefulness of the research method and instruments to the daily work of counselling and assisting survivors of gender based violence.
- *Establish* a learning group/network of individuals within the organisation who would volunteer to incorporate and apply the methods and instruments in their work and meet to reflect on and analyse their experiences and findings.
- *Incorporate* the discipline of documentation and some of the research methods as part of existing management supervision and monitoring practices, such as in case supervision.
- *Organise* bi-annual forum of staff dedicated to reflection on practices.

Discussion in relation to RCT and the potential institutional value of the research process identified particular complexities. Currently, RCT policies and practices do not allow for research based partnerships with organisations that are not formal RCT partners. Hence, it was suggested that one strategy would be to open discussion within RCT and with its partners with the aim of:

- Informing official partners of the particular collaborative model outlined in this paper.
- Communicating to RCT as an organisation and to its partners the successes and benefits of this form of collaboration, and exploring with them whether they might find some benefit in extending it to their work.

In the period following the meeting between the participating organisations, some of these issues have been discussed with some RCT partners and within the RCT.

Donors

At one point during the collaboration (Seminar on Lessons Learned), a donor perspective on collaborative research partnerships was presented. The donor perspective confirmed that donors have an interest in, and see the value of, research-practitioner partnerships and in particular are keen to see interventions that are supported by research. The point was that donors preferred already established partnerships or learning networks. As a caution, the donor representative noted the importance of clearly outlining the benefits of collaborative research which include strengthened interventions, capacity building, monitoring and evaluation. Importantly, the donor also noted that such research collaborations hold the potential to identify areas for policy development and that this is a

key interest for the donor community. As far as the current case study goes, more discussions and work would need to be done to consider donor interests.

Inter-regional collaboration

The discussion of this case study of research collaboration by invitation has focused largely on the process of collaboration and the development of the model during this process. However, as mentioned above, the aims of the research had, as a key component, a comparative, cross-regional element of victimhood and suffering. Questions of the value of the comparative approach are evident in terms of the research question itself. However, its value for members of the learning network, in terms of the process of collaboration, has not been fully explored. Preliminary discussions pointed to one important benefit. In the same way that experiences of suffering are shared across contexts, it emerged that practitioner organisations in different social contexts share similar problems related to unsettling assumptions about practices, and they certainly have similar difficulties in working out how to incorporate new research findings into already established interventions. To this extent, the inter-regional collaboration identifies common problems of practice and as a research collaboration could come up with useful strategies for dealing with such difficulties. Nevertheless, further reflections on what inter-regionality brings to the learning network are important.