

Research for change

Cases for discussion

Introduction

What is “research excellence” for civil society organizations and their academic partners?

All types of research require methodological rigour, and different research approaches have their own standards for guiding research design accordingly. However, when civil society organizations collaborate with academic partners to do research for social change, there are additional expectations. The engagement of communities affected by the research is expected, as well as their meaningful participation as partners in the research. Researchers and all other stakeholders are expected to learn from the research and the research process, building capacity to make informed decisions and take effective action. Evidence that the research process and its findings have influenced social change is also expected. With these considerations in mind, participants at the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and Coady Institute Learning Forum *Research for Change: What is ‘research excellence’ for civil society organizations and their academic partners?* proposed four “quality criteria” for this kind of research: **Design, Participation, Learning, and Influence**².

Sometimes there is tension between these criteria, competing demands on time and funding, and uneven capacity levels among partners. For this reason, institutions that support this kind of research are beginning to adjust the way they screen proposals and allo-

cate funding, and to consider how to ensure that research findings influence social change through multiple channels, not only through more conventional academic and policy circles. One way of encouraging this effort is to understand how researchers have attempted to do quality research, satisfying academic requirements as well as insisting that civil society and community stakeholders are fully engaged in the process.

With funding support from IDRC, the following teaching cases have been designed to illustrate how consideration of quality in **Design, Participation, Learning** and **Influence** play out in very different research projects and highlight the practical decisions research collaborators must make when undertaking this type of research. They are summaries of longer case studies prepared for the Learning Forum mentioned above. As teaching cases, they offer scope for delving into the challenges associated with achieving “research excellence,” and add to a body of work on how to build capacity in community engaged research that is still quite sparse.

We recommend these cases for use with undergraduates and graduates learning about community-based research, or with civil society organizations partnering with academic institutions. For further reading, each case refers to the longer versions of these cases and related published material.

² See Hodgson, D. (2014). A Report on the 2013 IDRC/ Coady Learning Forum. November 12-13, 2013. (<http://coady.stfx.ca/tinroom/assets/file/ResearchForChange-HodgsonEN.pdf>)

List of cases

1. "Taking culture seriously in community mental health": A participatory action research project in Ontario, Canada
2. Asset-based, community-driven development: Involving multiple stakeholders in 10 years of action research in Ethiopia
3. Salt is Life: Social Movement Learning in defence of communal access to the Songor salt lagoon, Ghana
4. Academic-civil society research collaboration on indigenous self-governance in Bolivia