

# PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH



An ESRC Research Centre



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## BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATORY METHODOLOGIES

- 1 Acknowledges affected communities are often best placed to understand & manage their environment
- 2 Gives affected communities a voice in arenas in which they are sometimes not considered – for example project and policy design/development
- 3 Affected communities are more engaged and invested in project activities as they feel listened to and the project aligns with their aspirations
- 4 Helps to ensure the sustainability of projects as affected communities can continue to lead the process upon project completion

## WHAT IS PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH?

When important decisions are being made regarding social issues, it is important to consider who has power and whose voices are being heard.

Participatory research is a qualitative methodology that explores social issues through direct engagement with affected populations. It recognises that the local perspectives and priorities of these populations are important in the management of social issues.

Participatory research often uses methodologies and tools that can be conducted in a participatory and democratic manner – giving voice and choice to affected populations in how their lives and environment are managed. Such methods can be verbal, visual or creative. This can be particularly helpful in engaging marginalised groups within the research process.

### LEVELS OF PARTICIPATION

Participation can be thought of as a ladder – in terms of the level of participation achieved within the research and practice process.

Nonparticipation is the creation of advisory boards that in practice have little power and mislead citizens through manipulation. Merely informing or consulting affected populations of project and policy design without incorporating their views is considered tokenistic. In order to foster ownership and empowerment amongst affected populations, we must let them guide the process as much as possible through equitable partnerships. Participation as citizen control enables and empowers affected populations to be in charge of the issues that affect them.

It is important to ensure participation of affected communities within the design, implementation and evaluation of research and practice, as they have unique and important experiences of project activities.



Arnstein's Ladder (1969)  
Degrees of Citizen Participation

## PARTICIPATORY METHODOLOGIES: FOSTA-HEALTH & PHOTOVOICE

In Tanzania, FoSTA-Health is using participatory photovoice methodology to explore gender and agricultural livelihood dynamics in the East Usambara Mountains in Tanga Region.

Photovoice is a creative participatory action and visual storytelling method that puts cameras into the hands of 'participants' - enabling community members to photograph and discuss their life conditions as they see them.

A key aim in FoSTA-Health is to let the 'participants' guide the research process as much as possible. The group is in control of what to photograph and who to show their photographs to.



***“In the workshop I like the way I got confidence to speak in front of many people, I have never spoken before many people, but that day I went in front to describe the photos, so I got confidence of speaking with people...even if next time I am invited to other places like Muheza to another workshop, I have confidence to meet those people and I have an experience to tackle the questions” – PV Participant***

### CO-PRODUCING AGENDAS

In FoSTA-Health, we have aimed to embed participation throughout the photovoice process. An important part of this was co-producing a plan together between researcher and 'participants' within the first meetings. This involved asking the group for: a) their expectations of participation, b) their expected benefits in engaging, c) what photos they would like to take and d) who they would like to show them to, and e) exploring their concerns related to engagement and thinking through ways to work through these.

This process has helped to ensure that the participants feel like their perspectives are valued and important, which has improved the relationship building and trust between the group and the researchers.

Allowing them to share their stories and life experiences through the photos has enabled the group to find common challenges that exist within their communities in Amani Nature Reserve – located in Muheza District in the East Usambara Mountains of Tanzania. Sharing these challenges with policymakers and practitioners during photovoice exhibitions has given the group the confidence to articulate what change they would like to see.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Participatory methodologies can help to align the project theory of change with individual and community aspirations by bringing these people and their unique experiences, needs and desires into to policy and practice process.
- Aim to co-produce project aims and interventions with the affected communities so that they are engaged and invested in the project from the start.
- Consider different and creative methodologies in project design, implementation and monitoring as a way to empower and give voice to communities and move beyond tokenistic consultation and toward citizen control.
- Listening & incorporating community perspectives can promote the sustainability of activities beyond project lifecycle as they feel in control.



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To find out more about the project, please visit [fosta-health.eu](http://fosta-health.eu)

