

Chapter Title: Action and community-based research: Improving local governance practices through the community scorecard

Chapter Author(s): Diana Sanchez-Betancourt and Elmé Vivier

Book Title: Transforming Research Methods in the Social Sciences

Book Subtitle: Case Studies from South Africa

Book Editor(s): Sumaya Laher, Angelo Fynn, Sherianne Kramer

Published by: Wits University Press. (2019)

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.18772/22019032750.28>
Text

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



This book is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0). To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>.



Wits University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Transforming Research Methods in the Social Sciences*

23 Action and community-based research: Improving local governance practices through the community scorecard

Diana Sanchez-Betancourt and Elmé Vivier

Introduction

The community scorecard method speaks to the emancipatory potential of doing research that falls within a broad typology of action and participatory research. It is driven by a concern with how the research process can contribute to the development of knowledge while at the same time be relevant for and potentially improve local realities and livelihoods. Action and participatory research practices emerged in the second half of the twentieth century. These often contributed to developmental and self-transformation interventions, especially in rural and community development in the global South. Tools and concepts for doing participatory action research (PAR) are now promoted and implemented by many international development agencies, researchers, consultants, civil society and local community organisations around the world (Access Alliance Multicultural Health and Community Services, 2011). There are important differences between 'action' research and 'participatory' research. Action research does not necessarily entail participatory methods, and participatory research does not necessarily result in 'action'. With the growing attention to and application of PAR has also come a proliferation of labels and acronyms (Dick, 2010), too many to list here. While there may be variations in emphasis and nuance, the terms 'community-based research' (CBR) and 'participatory action research' are often used interchangeably. We follow this approach in referring to the kinds of research methods oriented around participation and transformation.

The chapter begins with an examination of the elements of PAR/CBR. Thereafter we describe the implementation of the community scorecard in Cape Town, drawing on the steps and rationale we followed as the researchers who designed and facilitated the process. As will be discussed, the community scorecard is a method used to bring together government actors and communities (residents and local leaders) to evaluate the provision of services. In international practice, it is considered a valuable monitoring instrument to measure the quality of public services through a comparison of citizens' and government officials' experiences (CARE, 2013). It begins with participants developing the questions that will comprise the 'scorecard', then using the scorecard to evaluate a service, and finally comparing scores and experiences with one another. Given the limitations of participatory mechanisms currently applied in South

African cities, the community scorecard was employed within the local service delivery process in order to push for direct engagement between officials and citizens. The focus was particularly on informal settlement contexts where residents increasingly express frustration towards researchers parachuting into their communities and providing little if any immediate benefits.

While the community scorecard focuses on local service provision and community participation, it – and PAR/CBR methodologies in general – may be relevant to many other contexts and aims. This chapter will therefore be useful for anyone working on activism towards improving the quality of life in marginalised communities, or for anyone interested in exploring different ways in which research processes, products and participants could come together to inform existing knowledge, produce new insights and have an impact. Specifically, the reflections on the scorecard offer insights into a process where the design is open, flexible and adapted as it unfolds, the role of the researcher shifts to that of ‘intermediary’, and dialogue and participation bring new perspectives and understandings. We conclude the chapter with specific recommendations for undertaking scorecards and reflect on the benefits and limitations of this method for the South African context.

Participatory action and community-based research

Participatory action and community-based research propose a fundamental reconfiguration of research principles and practice, including how research is done, who conducts and controls research, the value and purpose of research, and what constitutes valuable research knowledge and evidence. According to Dick et al. (2015, p. 38), this provides not simply a research method but a meta-methodology or ‘orientation to inquiry’. As a collective and self-reflective process (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2003), these approaches depart from conventional research in their emphasis on collaboration, transformation and reflection. Both in principle and in practice, these methods entail collaboration between researchers and communities, therefore validating different sources of knowledge. They aim to be transformative by enabling action and welcoming experiential learning and problem solving (Baum, MacDougall & Smith, 2006). Finally, they rely on continuous reflection as an integral part both of the actions undertaken and the critical distance required for analysis and scientific contribution. While particular PAR/CBR methods may vary (e.g. in the selection and combination of methods or tools used,¹ the outcomes desired and even the theoretical links made), conscientisation, activism and the acknowledgement of power dynamics are at the heart of this approach.

Collaboration

While PAR/CBR often combines a range of traditional, qualitative and quantitative methods (Lederman & Lederman, 2015), a key element is participation and collaboration. Participant agency and autonomy is thus valued and

mobilised in ways far beyond the provision of consent and is essential to analysing and addressing problems and solutions (Brabeck, Brinton Lykes, Sibley & Kene, 2015; Greenwood, 2012). Drawing from critical theory and constructivism (Kennedy, 1995), PAR/CBR challenges the researcher/researched binary and takes the epistemological view that knowledge emerges out of social relationships (Hawkins, 2015). PAR/CBR therefore invites communities to share control over research agendas and processes (Greenwood, 2012; Smithies & Webster, 1998). Hawkins (2015, p. 469) describes the 'initiating or facilitating researcher' who orients participants into the method and thereafter facilitates collaborative decision-making. The 'community of interest' (the community which the research is about) takes a leadership role whilst academics support the process as collaborators and mediators (Israel, Schulz, Parker & Becker, 1998). At a project-planning level, collaboration means the researcher cannot exercise 'unilateral control over its timing and effectiveness' (Greenwood, 2012, p. 127).

The literature looking critically at the impact of participatory research approaches has, however, noted a dearth of assessments to demonstrate the contribution of participatory techniques in fields such as health and interventions. Here, the few systematic reviews (such as those conducted by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality) have provided no clear evidence of the benefits of community participation to enhance research and health outcomes (Jagosh et al., 2012). As an open-ended process, however, PAR/CBR must be managed on the principle of trust, and it therefore seems best suited to projects with an aim to deepen trust between different actors.

In order to build trust and generate constructive participation, researchers must recognise the inevitable power imbalances between themselves and other participants, as well as amongst participants (Brabeck et al., 2015). Research is not a neutral process but a complex and politically engaged one where large inequalities (e.g. power around knowledge and resources) affect both the process and outcomes. As Cornwall and Jewkes (1995) explain, who defines the research problems, who analyses them, participates or is represented, and who 'owns and acts' on the information generated needs to be critically assessed when embarking on participatory research. For them, the key element of participatory research lies not in the method but in the attitudes of researchers, which in turn determine how, by and for whom research is conceptualised and conducted.

Transformation

Action research is oriented towards change. The possibility of transformation gives purpose to the collaboration and underpins an understanding of knowledge as action or 'actionable' (Dick et al., 2015, p. 38). It is a problem-solving process using a mix of scientific methods alongside the knowledge of those the researcher is expected to engage with. This transformation may occur in individual or social views, attitudes, behaviours or relationships, or in institutional systems and processes. From the perspective of the researcher, PAR/CBR is grounded in an ethical concern and conviction that research must benefit society (or some part thereof) beyond the principle of 'do no harm' (Brabeck et al., 2015).

The research process may also improve the conditions of participants in unexpected ways, and not simply in terms of the identified project outputs and outcomes. This may come in the form of connecting participants to legal, social or health services (as in the case of Brabeck et al., 2015), or subcontracting participants to provide catering during the course of the project, as in our project (see later). The manner of transformation may thus be subtle or unplanned, but it is an important distinction from traditional research practice. While the contribution to knowledge for the benefit of society remains a core mandate of science, PAR/CBR views the research process itself, and not only research outcomes, as a source of possibilities for change.

Reflection

Reflection is an integral part of the action and problem-solving process, but it also entails stepping back from the action in order to rigorously scrutinise the process. Levin (2012) refers to this as the Janus face of action research. On the one hand, the goals of transformation require individuals and communities to embrace a conscious and reflective approach to social phenomena and local circumstances. For the researcher, it means becoming actively immersed in the field. On the other hand, the researcher must also subject understandings and experiences of that participation to 'critical inspection necessary for scientific reasoning' (Levin, 2012, p. 134). 'Deep empathic and political involvement must be confronted with critical and detached reasoning' (Levin, 2012, p. 136). PAR/CBR is therefore also about critiquing itself (Hawkins, 2015). Managing this duality of reflection is essential for researchers to make a scientific contribution and raises the matter of rigour and trustworthiness.

The strength of participatory research is its orientation towards partnerships, transparency and openness to alternative explanations, all of which can be achieved systematically in order to counter researcher bias and ensure trustworthiness (Levin, 2012). This approach therefore does not forego the use of standardised methods and relevant scientific knowledge. PAR/CBR initiatives are still concerned with making sense of a particular phenomenon through the application of a methodology to generate and analyse data (Levin, 2012). A participatory approach may in fact overcome some of the limitations of traditional research methods, such as convincing study participants to share accurate and reliable information; accurately interpreting, analysing and validating data/findings; or accounting for cultural, linguistic and semantic nuances (Access Alliance Multicultural Health and Community Services, 2011). Scientific rigour and trustworthiness are furthermore achieved through the exercise of critical skills and key activities, such as keeping an analytical journal and forming research partnerships (Levin, 2012). Together, these engender continual discussion and reflection in order to question individual assumptions as well as confront ethical and political challenges in the research process.

Conscientisation, activism and power

Conscientisation and activism are two closely linked concepts relevant to PAR/CBR. Critical consciousness or conscientisation is a popular concept

in educational and social development, articulated by Paulo Freire (1970). It describes the process of PAR as one where marginalised people become critically aware of their social and political reality, in particular the configuration of power relations, and are potentially inspired to radically change reality (Sinwell, 2009). Conscientisation is therefore closely linked to the notion of activism, which refers to multifarious efforts to change and improve societal conditions. These may include various forms and practices of 'local organising, agitating, educating, and leadership-building' (Shragge, 2013, p. x), from marches, strikes and boycotts to political campaigning, writing letters to the media or politicians, and working in or with social movements. Entering the realm of activism requires by definition engaging (in collaboration or confrontation) with power dynamics. When challenging urban governance towards social justice, activists in cities like Cape Town, for example, need to acknowledge and manage power struggles that entail aspects such as class, race, political affiliation and social recognition.

In our project, framed under an action research approach rather than activism, conscientisation became the process by which participants reflected on their experiences, and became aware of the nuances of specific situations, and of the decisions and actions that might affect their current reality and status quo. Power dynamics between citizens (community leaders) and public officials naturally played themselves out, often resulting in moments of confrontation. As discussed in the next section, the researchers and facilitator managed these tensions as 'neutral' mediators. However, the idea of neutrality, impartiality or objectivity must also be scrutinised since the research team retained great control over conversations, agendas and, ultimately, some of the decisions that shaped the process and outcomes. The transformative aspect of the project was therefore shaped not only by the conscientisation of participants, but to a large extent by the power that researchers exercise in mediating dialogues, defining agendas and processing and presenting data to participants.

Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that PAR/CBR processes happen not in a vacuum but rather in complex contexts where the theoretical and methodological pathways guiding the research may not be easy to follow (Van der Riet & Boettiger, 2009). They are often long and complicated and their implementation is far from perfect. Also of concern is that as the popularity of PAR/CBR increases, 'community-placed' projects may be sold to funders as 'community-based' approaches (Van der Riet & Boettiger, 2009). Furthermore, Cornwall and Jewkes (1995, p. 1673) highlight the problematic assumption that there is 'a community', understood as a more or less unified entity with representative structures. But communities are composed of diverse individuals, interests, capacities and tensions, where representation through local leadership may be challenged and blurry. Community cohesion is thus a mythical notion (Crawley [1998] and Guijt and Shah [1998], as cited in Van der Riet and Boettiger [2009]).

A common assumption in PAR/CBR approaches, as highlighted by Van der Riet and Boettiger (2009), is that engaging the most marginalised members of a community in a research intervention will further enable transformation.

Although prioritising the 'last' (Chambers, 1983) is an expression of this political and social dimension, it does not by itself ensure effective impact or fairness. Considerations of the local contexts and the roles and positionality of researchers and communities remain fundamental. In South Africa, for instance, power manifests through gender, age, level of education and the ability to speak in the same language (Van der Riet & Boettiger, 2009). This affects the capacity to collaborate, create spaces of trust, manage conflict or build consensus. Researchers in this context, such as Isobell, Lazarus, Suffla and Seedat (2016), suggest that research projects need to create spaces for sharing experiences of oppression and disadvantage in order to recognise these factors openly. Practical measures to nurture awareness of an appropriate response to the skewed nature of power include journaling processes through regular reflective writing; self-disclosure of the researcher's location in relation to power dynamics; and facilitating processes for the partnering community to also be reflexive in relation to their positionality (Isobell et al., 2016).

Overall, researchers need flexibility to respond to the messiness of local realities and to recognise their power and influence in the overall process. Implementing PAR/CBR involves personal, political and professional challenges that go beyond simply producing information (e.g. Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995). The impact of PAR/CBR will be determined more by the contexts, power dynamics and choices and actions of researchers than by the methods. Researchers, like us, carry a subjective experience and are influenced by aspects such as personal attitudes, background, training and the institutions we represent or to which we belong.

Ethics and ethical considerations

Although the above sections touch on various ethical elements of PAR/CBR, it is important to take into account how conventional ethical considerations such as informed consent, voluntary participation and ethical clearance impact the research process and outcomes. According to Reid and Brief (2009), requirements such as informed consent and the confidentiality requirements that go with it may sit at odds with the advocacy/activism that drives PAR/CBR. In their experience, expecting community participants to remain confidential, for instance, may exclude them by default from claiming their participatory role in the research, responding to research findings, or using the research for continued activism. This may defeat the purpose of PAR/CBR. They argue further that such traditional ethics requirements position research subjects as in need of 'protection', and thereby maintain 'the power difference between researcher and researched' (Reid & Brief, 2009, p. 83). However, involving subjects as equal participants means they become visible rather than remain invisible. Ethical considerations are also not finalised at the start of the process but are ongoing (Reid & Brief, 2009) and therefore require greater attention from researchers to 'monitor' the extent to which community participants remain involved, especially in the analysis and dissemination phases. It also means working closely with ethics

committees to ensure better understanding of these research methods (Wolf, 2010). In our experience, it was at the end of the project that we appreciated these considerations require more reflection and attention, since research ethics clearance does not necessarily ensure a holistic and relevant ethical approach. PAR/CBR entails complex processes, roles and outcomes that require researchers to constantly consider ethical implications and outcomes to strengthen the collaborative and transformative aspects of this method.

The community scorecard: Applying action and community-based research

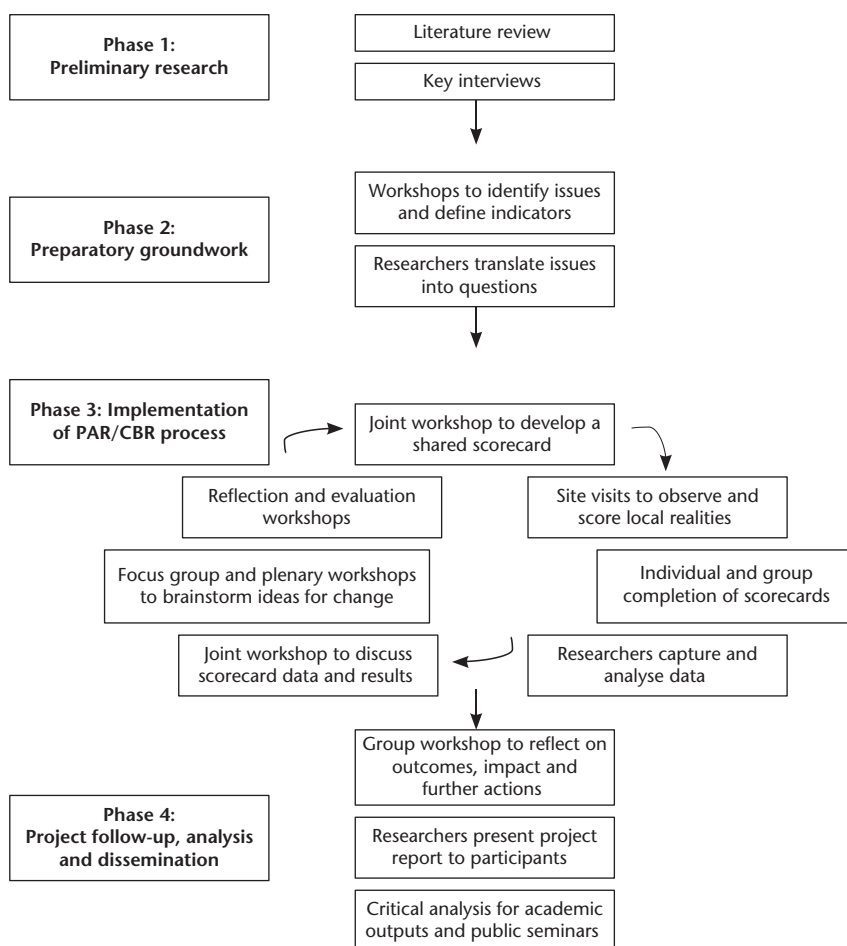
During March and April 2015, residents of five informal settlements known collectively as The Heights joined city officials in Cape Town to experiment with a method called the community scorecard. The aim was to create a space for experiential learning in order not only to address specific service and public participation issues, but to support the potential for lasting transformation in how the city understands and approaches participation and delivers core services to informal settlements (Vivier & Sanchez, 2014). While indicators, scores and ideas for change were important outputs (and there was evidence of actual improvements, such as fixed street lights), changed perceptions and improved relations also emerged as significant outcomes. Transformative aspects thus included better understandings of communication processes and challenges; better and easier access between officials and leaders (exchange of cellphone numbers); changed perceptions of the complexities of delivery and maintenance of services; strengthened relations and cooperation between city departments; and more cohesive and empowered community leadership across the five settlements.

The project benefited from generous financial support (under National Treasury's City Support Programme), which allowed a flexible and realistic timeframe. This was further reinforced through the generous assistance (time, administrative support and knowledge) of the Utilities Directorate in the city, as well as the experience, time and access to facilities provided by overworked community leaders.

The core of the scorecard method was implemented in six weeks. However, months of background research and preparatory work preceded and followed the actual implementation activities. Overall, the process was organised around four broad phases comprising seven key activities, as shown in Figure 23.1.

Phase 1: Preliminary research

The identification of the scorecard as a method, and the selection of the five informal settlement areas as the 'site', emerged out of discussions between city officials, local politicians (area councillors) and the research team (two Human Sciences Research Council [HSRC] researchers). This was also preceded by several

Figure 23.1 Overview of the community scorecard process

Source: Authors

qualitative interviews with civil society organisations and academics across South Africa who work on public participation. Insights and advice from some of these individuals were also sought throughout the course of the project.

Whilst the process began with support and interest from the city, city officials agreed that the services to be scored should be chosen by the community. This was crucial for the project to be participatory from the beginning and successful in terms of the buy-in from community participants. However, decisions around the method and services were also informed by our own capacities and constraints, on the one hand, and by which government departments were committed and involved, on the other. Thus, while the process was opened up to collaboration with the city and communities, allowing for adaptations as it proceeded, such flexibility was also limited and trade-offs had to be made. Within the city, the process was championed by one department (Office of the Executive Director of the Utilities Department), and a group of relevant officials from

different departments comprised the 'city implementation team'. An external facilitator familiar with informal settlements and the city's institutional structures also joined the team to assist with the formal workshops.

Phase 2: Preparatory groundwork

Between August 2014 and February 2015, the researchers met several times with the chairpersons of the five informal settlement committees at a venue in one of the settlements. In the first two meetings, community leaders expressed their resistance to engage in 'yet another study' and aired their resentment towards being the subjects of research without getting much (knowledge or resources) in return. The researchers therefore introduced the scorecard as an intervention that would bring city officials into their areas for specific activities, but only if it seemed relevant for the communities. Limits of what could be achieved were also made explicit from the start.

Several informal visits and dialogues followed where researchers deliberately tried to open a space for residents to share their ideas and frustrations, regardless of whether these were immediately relevant in the researchers' views of the project. Conversations around expectations established some initial trust, and the meetings became more focused as they progressed. Main issues discussed were 1) concerns with service delivery and communication with the city; 2) the dynamics between residents, leaders, councillors and the city; and 3) the scorecard concept and whether there was genuine interest to implement a pilot. After considering methodological and logistical constraints, community leaders and researchers agreed to experiment with the scorecard, looking at the provision and maintenance of two services: electricity and water taps, with communication as a cross-cutting issue.

During these early meetings, researchers also consulted community members about logistics and the availability of local resources. For example, we decided to source catering from local providers so that resources would go directly into the community, and this was discussed with participants in an effort to remain transparent. While there was institutional (HSRC) scepticism about finding 'capable' providers in this impoverished area and resistance to implementing deviations, we identified the importance of pursuing this route and fought our way within the bureaucracy to make it happen. Each of the community representatives received an equal share for catering for the various meetings, and they had to collaborate and coordinate to deliver. Despite logistical challenges and bureaucratic hurdles, we believe it resulted in a sense of ownership, pride and agency among participants, which benefited the process considerably.

Phase 3: Implementing the community scorecard method

Defining indicators: Two separate workshops

The scorecard comprises a set of questions used to evaluate a service, which may in some ways be comparable to standard research instruments (e.g. surveys or interview and focus group questionnaires). However, as a *community* scorecard it is distinct since community and city participants are involved in the process of developing the questions. Using data and perceptions gathered in previous meetings, the researchers facilitated discussions with participants on their individual

experiences with water taps, electricity and government–community engagements. This workshop (held separately with the leaders and officials) aimed to refine key issues based on individual and shared experiences. Issues raised were recorded on a flipchart and numbered according to their importance for the group. The data and indicators currently used by the city were also reviewed in this process. These issues were then collated by the research team into a single set of ‘indicators’ and translated into questions to be refined at the first joint workshop.

Developing a shared scorecard: First joint workshop




This first joint workshop (which, like all shared meetings, took place in community halls rather than city offices) was conceptualised by the researchers and facilitator as an interactive meeting to create personal empathy to start developing trust and building more personal relations between citizens and city officials. Since some conflict was expected, the decision was to manage rather than suppress it. Ice-breaking activities that highlighted the human aspects of diverse individuals (e.g. personal interests and activities), alongside a relaxed language and physical set-up, were used to create personal connections. However, these efforts did not prevent some community leaders from speaking out, tensely and at length, about the city’s problematic policies towards informal settlements. Some city officials were also quick to point fingers. While space was given for participants to voice their frustrations and ideas, these processes can never truly be equal and some personalities (on all sides) dominated, threatening at times to derail or co-opt the process. As researchers and facilitators, we had to be cognisant of this and try to ‘manage’ these conversations without suppressing discussion but also ensuring the discussion proceeded ‘forward’. Although this also constitutes an act of power, we used the exercise of refining the scorecard to enable such interaction whilst continually bringing the focus back to this activity.

By this point we had drafted two preliminary scorecards – one for water taps and one for electricity – which were discussed and refined as a group. Every question was read out loud and projected onto a screen, and anyone could challenge, support or suggest changes to the question. Every suggestion was considered, and all questions were accepted into the final scorecard. The end results were two scorecards with a list of 14 agreed questions (Figure 23.2).

Observing and scoring local realities: Second joint workshop and site visits

The crux of the scorecard method is the ‘scorecard day’. This was the space for participants to share their individual experiences while on site visits and to hear the perceptions of ‘the other’. Most of the finer logistical details were decided only a few days prior, on the basis of the dynamics that had been unfolding. We considered levels of engagement, quality of dialogue, group energy, power dynamics and resource availability. The day comprised site visits with city officials and community leaders to the informal settlements, as well as separate group discussions between residents. Both individual and group scorecards were completed.

Figure 23.2 Section of the electricity scorecard

The Heights scorecard: Electricity					
Area: _____			Name: _____		
Measure/Criteria	Bad 	Okay 	Good 	Reasons/ Comments	Ideas for solutions
1. How are new electricity connections in your area?					
2. How are the electricity restorations in your area?					
3. How is the street lighting in your area?					
4. How is the city's maintenance of electricity equipment?					

Source: Authors

City site visits and scoring: Officials split into two groups and were given a scorecard per service to fill out based on their observations of the physical infrastructure and their discussions with residents. They were accompanied by the leaders, who guided officials through their settlements and facilitated dialogues with other residents. The 'inspection' of services was not a clear-cut process. Officials were not counting taps or street lights but rather 'getting a sense' of the overall service provision to the areas, and had the chance to discuss with leaders and residents why certain things were working – and not – in particular ways. However, from a methodological point of view, this meant the analysis of scores had to be understood as a 'guide' rather than a definitive account (in the form of quantitative statistics, for example) of the state of services.

It may also be argued that the community leaders – whose position and representivity is also not necessarily unchallenged or free from local power struggles – were given control over where the group visited and with whom they spoke, and thus limited the exposure of and access to officials. However, any residents who saw the groups were able to approach officials during the walkabouts. This happened on a number of occasions, and officials had to respond to both queries and angry complaints on the spot. On their return to the community hall, officials discussed their individual scores and observations and agreed on a consolidated 'city scorecard' per service for each of the settlements.

Residents' scoring: Additional residents who had been identified and invited by the community leaders (using guidelines and an invitation provided by researchers) joined the discussions on the scorecard day. Researchers facilitated group discussions that were divided according to settlement, and each resident was invited to fill in his or her own scorecard per service, as well as to discuss and agree on a collective scorecard that also included open-ended comments and suggestions.

Data capturing and analysis

Researchers captured and tabulated the data and comments from the scorecards, producing tables and graphs for the two services. Results were assessed according to themes, and enabled comparison of city and community evaluations; the general quality of water services versus electricity services; and the perceptions of services across the five settlements. We also looked at agreements (in both positive and negative scores) and disagreements. It must be acknowledged that the analysis of data, identification of findings and framing of issues for the final workshop were not collaborative processes but rather predefined by the researchers. However, consideration had to be given to time constraints between workshops as well as time demands on the part of community leaders and officials. This was, however, balanced by again allowing discussions in the final workshop to flow organically.

Discussing results and ideas for action: Final joint workshop

In the final joint workshop, researchers presented the general findings from the collected scorecards, highlighting positive evaluations, challenges and key issues. This workshop allowed for further dialogue between community participants and city officials, and across city departments. It provided a crucial platform for everyone to better understand how and why things work in particular ways. Invitations to this workshop were limited to community leaders and the city team. This was decided by the research team following the disappointment on the scorecard day that only a few residents (42 instead of the 80 expected) participated and were genuinely engaged in the exercise. After a group discussion of the results, community leaders split into five groups according to settlement and brainstormed ideas for how to address specific issues that had emerged. City officials simultaneously discussed their own proposals and moved around the different group discussions. The meeting ended with a representative per settlement presenting their ideas in plenary.

Although the workshop ran for almost a full day, the discussions took considerable time. A specific aim of the project had been to develop an action plan around service delivery and communication, but there was insufficient time at the end of the day to fully establish commitment from participants to the action plan. We therefore compiled all the suggestions into a plan for later discussion in the evaluation workshops, albeit without a clear 'exit strategy' for the research team vis-à-vis the role of the city. Given these limitations, it would eventually prove difficult to maintain the overall momentum and accountability created through the project.

Evaluating the process: Final separate workshops

Two final, separate evaluation meetings were held with community leaders and city officials to reflect on the pilot, especially lessons learnt and possibilities for the future. For the community meeting, researchers opted for a fairly unstructured, reflective discussion in order to have a creative space for final reflection. A more rigorous process may have provided more systematic reflections (useful for analysis), but it was decided to rather hear how the community leaders had experienced and understood the process. Leaders and residents were also invited

to again identify possible next steps in each settlement based on the ideas that had been recorded.

The meeting with the city was held in two sessions to accommodate the schedules of officials, allowing also for more in-depth reflections. Feedback included proposing follow-up meetings with residents, sharing the scorecard process with other departments and cities, and exploring the potential for trying another pilot elsewhere.

Although specific outputs and impacts, as noted above, have been welcomed as evidence of success, longer-term impact remains to be seen. Such impact might emerge as the interpersonal relationships between leaders and city officials are solidified. While critics may argue this is not sufficiently transformative as it does not challenge existing power configurations and development trajectories within which service delivery is defined and provided, our aim was to achieve changes at the micro scale. However, questions do remain as to how these changes could be measured and maintained.

Recommendations for implementing a community scorecard or PAR/CBR process

Following on the above description and reflections on the scorecard, we make a number of recommendations for implementing a community scorecard or a similar PAR/CBR method. As a first step, the desirability and feasibility of such a method should be decided, giving consideration to the particularities of context and circumstance. In particular, committed champions from the participant communities are essential. Thereafter, attention should be given to necessary preparatory groundwork and identification of key issues, design of discussion spaces and research instruments, data collection and analysis processes, as well as final reflection and dissemination activities.

Preparatory groundwork: Desktop analysis, observations and informal conversations in this stage will serve to assess power dynamics and availability of resources. Researchers should ask: What is the current situation? Who are the key 'stakeholders' and to what extent should different stakeholders be involved? It is important to be inclusive and mindful when inviting stakeholders to participate: consider language barriers, cultural protocols or expected formalities, and take actions to build trust and transparency.

Identifying issue(s): Stakeholders should define collectively the issue(s) or challenges to address within a process where power dynamics and different priorities and perspectives between participants are acknowledged. It may be beneficial to hold separate preliminary meetings with different stakeholders until they seem genuinely interested in collaboration. It is also important to frame the issues within the local context and current events (e.g. elections). A key question to ask is: What is the main problem and what may be related factors?

Discussion spaces: The creation of discussion spaces needs to be guided by physical, logistical and emotional considerations. This requires deciding who

should be part of each discussion and to what extent. It also means ensuring objectives are clear, mutually defined and agreed upon, but also accommodating new issues that come up. Researchers need to use the space according to levels of engagement, energy and trust on the day. Furthermore, they need to assess accessibility (how safe or accessible is the meeting place), condition (good working space) and any extra opportunities to create 'soft' social spaces (e.g. coffee breaks/lunches) for interaction where participants may interact in a more relaxed way.

Research instruments: Participants developed indicators for the scorecards in a collaborative manner, with researchers guiding the process through methodological considerations. This may be applied to the development of any kind of research instrument. It also entails assessing what language to use and if translation is needed/important.

Scoring (collecting data): Researchers need to set the conditions for participants to capture relevant data and potentially engage one another as part of the process. It requires preparing but remaining flexible and adaptable. Preparations will entail defining when and how to hold the exercise, considering logistics (distance, time, weather conditions, safety), and preparing all the logistics (transport, food, working material, photographic assistance). Taking pictures/short films of this exercise and recording observations, side discussions and any other ethnographic accounts is recommended.

Capturing data: Information should be compiled in both academic and accessible formats, highlighting the human stories beyond the collected data (scores) by recording ethnographic observations. This should also involve identifying key emerging issues to prompt discussion (either with participants or for participants to comment on). Researchers must also acknowledge that the selection of data to emphasise and present for discussion is not necessarily a neutral one (it may be possible to draw different narratives from the results), and therefore additional review and input from the different participants can assist.

Discussing findings and defining an action plan: Researchers hold considerable power in defining what to present, and how to conduct the discussion. To manage power dynamics, they need to work with the facilitator to ensure all sides are heard and information is carefully captured. As an output from this exercise, researchers should help participants to produce an accessible document that identifies the following: issues that require urgent attention; actions to take and how to implement them; who takes responsibility; realistic timeframes; and how to monitor progress.

Evaluating and reflecting on the process: Researchers may decide to predefine some issues and questions to be discussed, while leaving ample space for organic reflections. Structured or open conversations could be used, as long as honest conversations are encouraged.

Disseminating knowledge: Ideally, researchers should have discussed with participants the best ways to disseminate knowledge. In our experience, it was useful to produce tailored reports/outputs for the different participants, which they could use with their own constituencies (e.g. community report for leaders and city report for officials). Visually accessible outputs (PowerPoint or, ideally, a video, infographics or photographic presentation) will be useful to disseminate

and reflect on with other stakeholders (e.g. non-governmental organisations, academics, activists, public servants).

Conclusion

Participatory action and CBR challenge researchers to move beyond traditional methods and expectations in the interest of social action and change. The experiences from the community scorecard in Cape Town reveal some of the complexities in doing so, and in particular the demands for flexibility and reflexivity on the part of the researchers. While this chapter reflects on the application of the scorecard in a specific context and with particular aims (i.e. to improve urban governance processes and the living conditions in informal settlements), lessons from the scorecard may offer insights for researchers interested in applying this method in similar contexts, or a similar method of PAR/CBR to other issues and environments. As a monitoring tool, the scorecard experience may be particularly useful for informing knowledge around the various citizen-monitoring efforts that have been gaining momentum across South Africa since 2012. In this concluding section, we reflect further on some of the general benefits and limitations of the scorecard method and make final recommendations.

Methods such as the community scorecard entail ongoing and interrelated processes undertaken in an organic, adaptable way, rather than a top-down approach where the process is pre-designed and implemented in a linear manner. It requires substantial resources (time, money, energy) and flexibility from all participants, including researchers and the organisations they represent. Given that most research is housed or funded by some institution, this poses various challenges that need to be addressed or at least acknowledged. Either institutions start accommodating new roles for researchers to be more flexible and reflective, or researchers implementing methods like the community scorecard find their own ways to open such spaces. In our experience, institutional ethos, structures and leadership were, at times, at odds with these participatory principles. Therefore, high levels of financial and logistical flexibility and moving away from linear project cycles are needed to tackle the challenges of implementing PAR/CBR. It is therefore recommended that the research team secure this space from the preparatory phase in order to enable more collaborative, reflective and transformative research.

Key to the transformative element of this approach is the opportunity to observe tangible issues on the ground while experiencing relationships and emotions (such as frustration and apathy) through the process. It demands awareness and mindfulness from researchers to act in conscious ways and invite others to do the same. In bringing together multiple actors, the role (and responsibility) of the researcher shifts to that of intermediary, with the potential to support the development of constructive conversations, relationships and, ideally, self-reflection. Indeed, the method gives an opportunity for very different participants to experience a different way to relate to 'the other'. In our experience, participants embraced the process because it promised to deliver something to

them: potential change or at the very least some new insights. The possibility for change and the opportunity to interact with 'the other' (city officials and community leaders) in a more systematic way thus propelled the process. Both community leaders and city officials were open to experiment and hopeful for change given existing frustrations with the way services are provided, used and maintained in informal contexts, as well as the often ineffective systems of communication in place. Trust was built over time with the researchers who could, on the basis of that trust, hope and frustration, bring everyone together.

When mindfully applied, the community scorecard offers an opportunity to unlock community-based knowledge and is conducive to new understandings around local challenges and possibilities. However, the ethos of participatory and collaborative research did not materialise fully in our project since, in practice, communities were more hosts than partners. Therefore, researchers need to make a significant effort so that participants are not subjects but agents, and so that both the collaboration and the combination of the different knowledge happens while keeping academic rigour. While 'equal' participation is a guiding principle, researchers have the primary responsibility to remain aware and negotiate between power dynamics and asymmetries. Keeping an analytical journal and forming research partnerships (e.g. with other researchers or civil society organisations) allows one to continually reflect on and question individual assumptions and understandings, as well as confront ethical and political challenges in the research process.

More broadly, the scorecard method, as implemented in Cape Town, was limited in its capacity to substantially transform the service delivery or community engagement conditions in the local communities, or to transfer skills and knowledge around doing scorecards. Given the amount of resources invested, any new intervention of this type may pursue more ambitious objectives collectively set from the beginning. Similarly, limitations of the project include the lack of a proper exit strategy for the research team, as well as limited collaboration with participants in the dissemination phase and in working closer with community leaders to strengthen the potential of future action. Therefore, we suggest identifying from the start a clear exit plan that looks at the type of information that is expected and sets guidelines on how this could be used by participants or other stakeholders. Ideally, any small changes achieved through the process should be supported over the long term, thus extending past a particular 'end' defined in the formal project plan. In other words, transformation is a long-term endeavour that cannot be owned by researchers, or at least researchers alone. Results from these types of methods should therefore be used for further transformational efforts either on their own or as a starting point for a new process.

As the scorecard experience shows, participatory and action-oriented methods offer a valuable approach for researchers, communities and other actors (such as local government officials) to come together to share knowledge and reflect on individual and shared experiences. Such a research orientation views the research process itself, and not only research outcomes, as a source of possibilities for change. It requires a research design that is open and adaptable, and which shifts the role of the researcher between 'researcher', 'activist' and

'intermediary'. At the same time, the impact of PAR/CBR will be determined more by the contexts, power dynamics and choices and actions of researchers than by the methods. In the spirit of collaboration and reflection, we call for further experiments with, and critiques and understandings of, methods such as the scorecard in order to deepen our understanding of the roles, responsibilities and impacts of research processes and outcomes.

Note

- 1 These may include, amongst others, semi-/open interviews, focus groups as workshops, surveys, drawing, storytelling, Photovoice, photographs and drama.

References

- Access Alliance Multicultural Health and Community Services. (2011). *Community-based research toolkit: Resource for doing research with community for social change*. Toronto: Access Alliance Multicultural Health and Community Services.
- Baum, F., MacDougall, C., & Smith, D. (2006). Participatory action research. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health, 60*(10), 854–857.
- Brabeck, K., Brinton Lykes, M., Sibley, E., & Kene, P. (2015). Ethical ambiguities in participatory action research with unauthorized migrants. *Ethics and Behavior, 25*(1), 21–36.
- CARE (Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere). (2013). *The Community Score Card (CSC): A generic guide for implementing CARE's CSC process to improve quality of services*. Malawi: Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere. Retrieved from https://www.care.org/sites/default/files/documents/FP-2013-CARE_CommunityScoreCardToolkit.pdf
- Chambers, R. (1983). *Rural development: Putting the last first*. Harlow: Prentice Hall.
- Cornwall, A., & Jewkes, R. (1995). What is participatory research? *Social Science and Medicine, 41*(12), 1667–1676.
- Dick, B. (2010). Action research literature 2008–2010: Themes and trends. *Action Research, 9*(2), 122–143.
- Dick, B., Sankaran, S., Shaw, K., Kelly, J., Soar, J., Davies, A., & Banbury, A. (2015). Value co-creation with stakeholders using action research as a meta-methodology in a funded research project. *Project Management Journal, 46*(2), 36–46.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York, NY: Continuum.
- Greenwood, D. J. (2012). Doing and learning action research in the neo-liberal world of contemporary higher education. *Action Research, 10*(2), 115–132.
- Hawkins, K. A. (2015). The complexities of participatory action research and the problems of power, identity and influence. *Educational Action Research, 23*(4), 464–478.
- Isobell, D., Lazarus, S., Suffla, S., & Seedat, M. (2016). Research translation through participatory research: The case of two community-based projects in low-income African settings. *Action Research, 14*(4), 393–411.
- Israel, B. A., Schulz, A. J., Parker, E. A., & Becker, A. B. (1998). Review of community-based research: Assessing partnership approaches to improve public health. *Annual Review of Public Health, 19*, 173–202.
- Jagosh, J., Macaulay, A., Pluye, P., Salsberg, J., Bush, P., Henderson, J., & Greenhalgh, T. (2012). Uncovering the benefits of participatory research: Implications of a realist review for health research and practice. *Milbank Quarterly, 90*(2), 311–346. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23266513>

- Kennedy, A. (1995). Measuring health for all: Feasibility study in a Glasgow community. In N. Bruce, J. Springett, J. Hotchkiss & A. Scott-Samuel (Eds.), *Research and change in urban community health* (pp. 199–218). Aldershot: Avebury.
- Lederman, J. S., & Lederman, N. G. (2015). Taking action as a researcher or acting as a researcher. *Journal of Science Teacher Education*, 26, 117–120.
- Levin, M. (2012). Academic integrity in action research. *Action Research*, 10(2), 133–149.
- Minkler, M., & Wallerstein, N. (Eds.). (2003). *Community-based participatory research for health*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Reid, C., & Brief, E. (2009). Confronting condescending ethics: How community-based research challenges traditional approaches to consent, confidentiality, and capacity. *Journal of Academic Ethics*, 7, 75–85.
- Shragge, E. (2013). *Activism and social change: Lessons for community organizing*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Sinwell, L. (2009). *Participation as popular agency: The limitations and possibilities for transforming development in the Alexandra Renewal Project* (PhD thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa). Retrieved from <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/39666392.pdf>
- Smithies, J., & Webster, G. (1998). *Community involvement in health: From passive recipients to active participants*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Van der Riet, M., & Boettiger, M. (2009). Shifting research dynamics: Addressing power and maximising participation through participatory research techniques in participatory research. *South African Journal of Psychology*, 39(1), 1–18.
- Vivier, E., & Sanchez, D. (2014). *Proposal to implement a community scorecard in Ward 67*. Concept Note prepared for National Treasury, Cities Support Programme, November.
- Wolf, L. (2010). The research ethics committee is not the enemy: Oversight of community-based participatory research. *Journal of Empirical Research on Human Research Ethics*, 5(4), 77–86.