

KNOWLEDGE IN TIMES OF CRISIS: TRANSFORMING RESEARCH-TO-POLICY APPROACHES



IDS Bulletin

Transforming Development Knowledge

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Transforming Development Knowledge

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Knowledge in Times of Crisis: Transforming Research-to-Policy Approaches

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James Georgalakis

Notes on Contributors	iii
Notas sobre los colaboradores de los artículos en español	viii
Notes sur les contributeurs à l'article en français	x
ملاحظات على المساهمين في المقال العربي	xi
Introduction: Lessons for Locally Driven Research Responses to Emergencies Andrea Ordóñez Llanos and James Georgalakis	1
Introducción: Lecciones para la investigación sobre respuestas a emergencias impulsada a nivel local Andrea Ordóñez Llanos y James Georgalakis	13
Introduction : Leçons issues des recherches menées localement en réponse aux situations d'urgence Andrea Ordóñez Llanos et James Georgalakis	27
Co-Modelling for Relief and Recovery from the Covid-19 Crisis in Zimbabwe Ramos E. Mabugu, Hélène Maisonnave, Martin Henseler, Margaret Chitiga-Mabugu and Albert Makochekeanwa	41
Research During the Covid-19 Pandemic: Crucial Arms for Struggle Ana Carolina Ogando	59
Policy Influence in Crisis: Reflections from a Southern Thinktank Helani Galpaya, Gayani Hurulle and David Gunawardana	75

Lessons Learned from Mobilising Research for Impact During the Covid-19 Pandemic	
Benghong Siela Bossba	93
Arab Region Social Protection Systems: Research and Policy Design Challenges	
Farah Al Shami	109
	نظم الحماية الاجتماعية في المنطقة العربية: التحديات أمام إجراء البحوث وسن السياسات
Farah Al Shami	131
Humanitarian vs Pandemic Responses: Vulnerable Groups among Rohingyas in Bangladesh	
Sameen Nasar, Bachera Aktar, Muhammad Riaz Hossain and Sabina Faiz Rashid	149
Resilience in the Time of a Pandemic: Developing Public Policies for Ollas Comunes in Peru	
Ricardo Fort and Lorena Alcázar	165
Resiliencia en tiempos de pandemia: generando políticas públicas para las ollas comunes en Perú	
Ricardo Fort y Lorena Alcázar	181
(Re-)Thinking a Collaborative Research Model After Covid-19: Introducing Colabora.Lat	
Jennifer Cyr, Matías Bianchi, Ignacio F. Lara and Florencia Coda	197
(Re)pensar un modelo de investigación colaborativa después del Covid-19: presentación de Colabora.Lat	
Jennifer Cyr, Matías Bianchi, Ignacio F. Lara y Florencia Coda	209
Glossary	223

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ملاحظات على المساهمين في المقال العربي

فرح الشامي خبيرة اقتصادية في مجال السياسات والتنمية. هي حالياً زميلة رئيسية في مبادرة الإصلاح العربي وتدير برنامج الحماية الاجتماعية الخاص بالمبادرة. لديها أكثر من ثماني سنوات من الخبرة، حيث عملت مع منظمات المجتمع المدني والمعاهد الأكاديمية وكيانات تابعة للأمم المتحدة على النهوض بإصلاحات السياسات العامة في المنطقة العربية. تشمل مجالات خبرتها إجراء البحوث وإدارتها وتحريرها، وتنسيق جهود الدعوة والمناصرة على منصات وطنية وإقليمية ودولية، وتيسير الائتلافات/الجماعات المهنية، وقيادة برامج تمكينية. هي حاصلة على درجة الماجستير في اقتصاد السياسات والتنمية الاقتصادية من جامعة ويليامز كولج (MA-USA)، كما على درجة الماجستير في الاقتصاد من الجامعة الأميركية في بيروت ودرجة البكالوريوس في الاقتصاد من الجامعة اللبنانية الأميركية (LAU).

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Introduction: Lessons for Locally Driven Research Responses to Emergencies*

Andrea Ordóñez Llanos¹ and James Georgalakis²

Abstract This article summarises learning from Southern-led research designed to influence the response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The case studies are drawn primarily from the Covid-19 Responses for Equity (CORE) programme, funded by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC). The article examines: (1) the characteristics of local research institutions' organisational readiness in times of crisis; (2) the form and function of knowledge that is fit for purpose in emergencies; and (3) knowledge processes and engagement strategies for rapid mobilisation. Organisational readiness hinged on the strength of research institutions' networks, access to key decision makers or affected communities, and resources and capabilities that allowed them to mobilise quickly. Hyper-local knowledge, combined with inclusive research methodologies, facilitates the positioning of research for use in emergencies. The pandemic has demonstrated that local and national research organisations are well placed to deliver impactful research, as both critical friends of government or outsiders advocating for change.

Keywords knowledge translation, knowledge mobilisation, research uptake, Covid-19, global South, development studies, thinktanks, emergencies, public health, socioeconomics, impact.

1 Introduction

This issue of the *IDS Bulletin* sets out learning from rapidly mobilised Southern-led research designed to influence the response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The eight case study articles are drawn primarily from the Covid-19 Responses for Equity (CORE) programme, which is a three-year rapid research initiative funded by the Canadian International Development Research Centre (IDRC). The programme brought together 20 research projects across 42 countries to understand the socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic and to generate better policy options



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for recovery. The case study authors and their institutions are from the global South and provide unique insights into the research response.

Ramos E. Mabugu *et al.* (this *IDS Bulletin*) explore their experience of working in close partnership with the Government of Zimbabwe during the early stages of the pandemic to model economic and fiscal measures for relieving the impact of Covid-19 and promoting recovery. Ana Carolina Ogando (this *IDS Bulletin*) reflects on the rapid design and delivery of a mixed methods longitudinal study with nearly 2,000 informal workers across 11 cities in the global South and North. Helani Galpaya *et al.* (this *IDS Bulletin*) share their reflections on seeking to influence Sri Lanka's digital and infrastructure responses to the pandemic amid the country's ongoing economic crisis. Benghong Siela Bossba (this *IDS Bulletin*) sets out the work of the Cambodia Development Resource Institute (CDRI) to implement large-sample research in the formal and informal sectors in Cambodia. In Farah Al Shami's article (this *IDS Bulletin*), the author takes a deep dive into the challenges of promoting social protection reform in the context of the politics of coloniality in Arab countries.

Sameen Nasar *et al.* (this *IDS Bulletin*) reflect on the strategies applied by Bangladeshi researchers to create a knowledge network between researchers and implementers responding to the impact of the pandemic on Rohingya refugees. Ricardo Fort and Lorena Alcázar's account (this *IDS Bulletin*) of the work of the Group for the Analysis of Development (Grupo de Análisis para el Desarrollo, GRADE) in Peru tells the story of how community-based initiatives such as soup kitchens worked in parallel to the state's response to the food insecurity experienced during the pandemic. Finally, Jennifer Cyr *et al.*'s case study (this *IDS Bulletin*) provides an assessment of the potential and limitations of collaborative governance in Latin America as a means to alleviate the impact of the pandemic on the most vulnerable citizens.

An Institute of Development Studies (IDS)-led knowledge translation support function accompanied this research cohort and provided space for learning and reflection.³ This *IDS Bulletin* is intended to capture some of that learning and make it available to those seeking to promote a locally driven, evidence-informed, and equitable approach to managing multiple global crises.

There have been numerous studies and reviews unpacking the lessons of the pandemic on research. These, however, tend to focus primarily on the methodological and implementation aspects of research, particularly in the global North (Guleid *et al.* 2021; Nind, Coverdale and Meckin 2021; Richardson, Godfrey and Walklate 2021; Tremblay *et al.* 2021; Vindrola-Padros *et al.* 2020). Although there is an emerging literature that seeks to identify

the key qualities of knowledge translation in low- and middle-income countries (Combaz, Connor and Georgalakis 2023), it is not framed specifically around rapid response research. Work has been undertaken to identify some of the special features of Covid-19 response research in the global South and the concerns of Southern researchers around the need for more equitable evidence-informed interventions (Taylor and Knipe 2022; Grant *et al.* 2023). This *IDS Bulletin* seeks to contribute to this literature by exploring a series of case studies from Southern research institutions who designed and delivered research during the pandemic to help shape policy and practice responses and longer-term recovery. This demands a focus on the characteristics of Southern research organisations that were able to mobilise quickly, the types of knowledge that were needed in these unique circumstances, and the processes that facilitated engagement and influence.

CORE provided an ideal sample of Southern-led rapid response research to explore these inquiry areas. The projects in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East successfully mobilised less-heard voices and engaged nationally, regionally, and internationally with policy actors and practitioners.⁴ Their research has addressed the ways in which the pandemic has deepened existing vulnerabilities while seeking to advance gender equality. The emerging body of knowledge has important implications for all those concerned by an increasingly uncertain world characterised by the poly-crisis (Price 2023; Rohwerder 2023; Saha 2023).

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. We provide a brief overview of CORE programme rapid research responses in areas such as the use of digital technologies by research teams. We then address three areas of learning: (1) the institutional factors that enabled research organisations in low- and middle-income countries to respond swiftly to the pandemic; (2) the characteristics of knowledge that can be best positioned to respond to a global challenge with local implications such as the pandemic; and (3) how organisations mobilised knowledge in an emergency with care and intent.

2 Overview of the CORE programme rapid research response

The Covid-19 pandemic presented unprecedented challenges to researchers and policy analysts who responded to IDRC's call for rapid research on the socioeconomic impact of the crisis in low- and middle-income countries. However, amid the crisis, various innovative and adaptive responses have emerged. This *IDS Bulletin* highlights several of these and showcases notable examples.

One of the significant features of the rapid research response to the pandemic, which is common among all case studies from CORE, has been the explicit use of digital technologies

in research projects. By leveraging online platforms and tools, researchers have been able to facilitate collaboration across geographic boundaries and engage diverse stakeholders. These digital approaches have opened new avenues for research, particularly in contexts where mobility restrictions limit in-person interactions.

Research institutions have embraced collaborations and partnerships. Despite the challenges of lockdowns, research teams have found innovative ways to work with various actors to achieve their goals. Collaborative approaches have led to transformative outcomes that have benefited all parties. Researchers have also demonstrated the adaptability of these research methodologies. These include using existing data and information in new ways, collecting new data to respond to pressing challenges, and developing innovative models and approaches. Examples of this approach can be seen in projects such as the South Asia thinktank LIRNEasia (Galpaya *et al.*, this *IDS Bulletin*), which repurposed data from past surveys to study the impact of lockdowns on children's education, and later adapted their data collection to identify issues with cash transfers during an economic crisis.

Overall, the rapid research response to the pandemic has revealed a range of innovative and adaptive research approaches. By adopting digital technologies, collaborations, and diverse methodologies, local researchers can respond to unprecedented situations and make valuable contributions to policy and practice.

3 Institutional readiness in times of crisis

No research organisation or government seemed ready for the pandemic despite the warning signs.⁵ During this high-stakes period, certain institutional characteristics proved important for the engagement of evidence with emergencies. Organisations have a relevant history to draw upon in such moments, and it is essential that they can turn institutional credentials into credibility and readiness. All case studies highlight the importance of a range of pre-existing intangible assets acquired through the years. These include credibility and legitimacy, the capacity to mobilise and capitalise on existing relationships, and the talent to deploy them creatively.

At the onset of the pandemic, researchers began framing policy problems and positioning them on the public agenda. They relied heavily on their perceived credibility to get a foot in the door, whether with policymakers, the media, or affected communities. Public health crises demand fast responses, and political and civil society actors seek known partners for assistance. Research institutions' credibility therefore rested on their responsiveness, expertise and, most crucially, their knowledge of the context.

Existing networks both prepared researchers to respond rapidly to the demands for evidence and shaped their responses. Across the case studies, we see a spectrum of evidence and policy interactions, from the deeply government-embedded model to the more peripheral or outsider approach. Some organisations were well positioned to pursue multi-level strategies of leveraging awareness of evidence and promoting its use. Hence, these pre-existing networks and relationships serve diverse purposes and occur in various contexts. They can relate to working with communities, government officials, or international organisations. Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO), for example, highlights the importance of having solid, pre-existing relationships; in its case, with worker organisations in different cities in the global South. The WIEGO case highlights that institutional readiness cannot be disassociated from long-standing, interpersonal relationships that ultimately served as both a medium for rapport and bonding and an anchoring to grass-roots realities even without face-to-face interactions (Ogando, this *IDS Bulletin*).

In contrast, it was the Partnership for Economic Policy (PEP) researchers' long-standing investment in partnerships and close personal relations with government officials in Zimbabwe that gave them a niche insider status. This facilitated the co-production of economic modelling in a political environment that favours centralised decision-making and homegrown research (Mabugu *et al.*, this *IDS Bulletin*). The authors state: 'In our view, it was not just that the findings were timely and could be translated into policy user formats... at the root of it were partnerships' (*ibid.*: 46). Likewise, the CDRI (Benghong Siela, this *IDS Bulletin*) was building on 30 years of experience in policy research in close formal and informal partnerships with governmental actors: '[R]egardless of the shock of the pandemic, CDRI already has an advantage in terms of linkage to the policy formulation sphere' (*ibid.*: 100).

While institutional readiness may be linked closely to long-standing, interpersonal, and networked relationships, both CDRI and PEP acknowledge that there are political and structural dimensions to this in which both visible and hidden power shapes whose knowledge counts (Gaventa 2006). Benghong Siela (this *IDS Bulletin*), in relation to the CDRI in Cambodia, reflects that scholars are sometimes undermined, and the political system is driven by patronage networks, with limited space for research to influence policies. In Zimbabwe, some of the officials who helped open doors into government were former university students of members of the PEP research team (Mabugu *et al.*, this *IDS Bulletin*). These types of deep personal relationships in a highly centralised government decision-making structure, that was open to evidence-informed policymaking, may have facilitated PEP's engagement but presumably closed doors to other potential sources of evidence.

Most cases reveal the importance of trust; however, it is not necessarily easy to build it in times of crisis. As the Asuntos del Sur case study reveals (Cyr *et al.*, this *IDS Bulletin*), building trust with new partners during the pandemic was difficult, and this may not only affect the project's response but may shape the organisation's future partnerships. As the authors highlight:

The restricted opportunities for trust-building during a pandemic may, over time, impede the creation of new and potentially fruitful partnerships. On the other hand, the pandemic may help to consolidate existing relationships, enabling partners to more easily activate and collaborate on problems in the future.
(*ibid.*: 204)

Trust is not only related to existing relationships, and the ability of institutions to quickly build new ones, but also to the wider political context. For Farah Al Shami (this *IDS Bulletin*), the ability of the Arab Reform Initiative to influence thinking and policy around the inadequacies of MENA's⁶ social protection systems to support the most vulnerable during the pandemic was a 'daunting task' (*ibid.*: 111). The Arab Reform Initiative's mode of engagement was largely outsider lobbying and partnerships with academia and activists in an environment in which broader politico-economic and governance factors are driving Arab states away from assuming responsibility for nationwide social assistance (*ibid.*). Under such circumstances, neither PEP's highly embedded model or CDRI's semi-insider strategy were applicable or even desirable. The Arab Reform Initiative's institutional readiness was therefore derived from an understanding of the political context and its ability to engage across multiple levels and across diverse stakeholder groups, including the raising of wider public awareness.

Finally, institutional readiness translates into the ability to deploy resources and begin to work fast. To do so, institutions require a deep knowledge of their context and suitable funding relationships. For example, the WIEGO team (Ogando, this *IDS Bulletin*) used its knowledge of different occupational sectors of informal workers to anticipate the challenges respondents would have in taking part in research that covers sensitive and difficult topics related to the impacts of the pandemic. Crucially, the case studies featured here all benefited from the rapid release of funds by a Northern donor through a semi-closed call. This funding mechanism built on a set of pre-existing, and in some cases very long-standing, relationships and provided the grantees with the flexibility to re-focus or adapt existing projects. Thus, institutional readiness entails a constant interplay between personal and institutional capacities and relationships. The combination of a strong research team backed by a sustainable organisation is required for credibility, trust, and capacity to deliver rapid response research in crisis conditions.

4 Knowledge fit for purpose

The experiences shared in this *IDS Bulletin* employ a wide range of research methods as well as approaches to promote the use of knowledge by key stakeholders. In general, the examples highlight the key characteristic of knowledge that is fit for purpose as being a combination of how well it is positioned for use, and inclusivity. Positioned for use or relevance entails that it is directly applicable to a practical problem or question. Research sometimes also plays a critical role in framing the problem, not just its solutions. Furthermore, knowledge needs to be accessible. It should be available in a format that matches the needs of diverse stakeholders so that individuals who need the knowledge can find it and use it effectively. Knowledge that is positioned for use must be actionable and should be flexible and adaptable to different circumstances, providing insights or solutions that can be implemented in real-world situations to solve problems or make decisions.

However, this is about more than just research relevance, which largely exists in the eyes of the beholders, who may include powerful actors. It is also about an inclusive research process that is built on highly contextualised knowledge. There is a common thread among the case studies that highlights the value of what could be described as hyper-local knowledge, and its use to inform policy and practices. This is knowledge that focuses on an in-depth understanding of ground-level issues instead of more universally applicable findings. For example, for the BRAC James P Grant School of Public Health, Bangladesh, it was essential to understand the service delivery at refugee camps from the recipient's point of view and to integrate community perspectives (Nasar *et al.*, this *IDS Bulletin*). Such methods can be adapted and sensitised to local contexts, where, for example, the BRAC team faced unique challenges such as Covid-19 misinformation, food insecurity, lack of economic opportunities, and inadequacies with food rations during and before the lockdown (*ibid.*).

In some contexts, evidence gaps and the imposition of low-quality international data threatened to undermine the Covid-19 response. Al Shami (this *IDS Bulletin*) reflects on 'data poverty' in countries such as Iraq and Lebanon whose census data are more than 25 years old. National unified social registries are rare, and quantitative or qualitative social care data is incomplete. Under these circumstances, pseudo-sampling by foreign organisations and policy analysis that is subject to bias and a poor understanding of local context create deep knowledge inequities. Therefore, the role for local and national research organisations to shape their own inquiries is an essential characteristic of knowledge fit for purpose.

Ogando (this *IDS Bulletin*) argues that traditional research methods often prioritise academic rigour over practical relevance, which can result in research findings that are disconnected from

the realities of people's lives. In contrast, the co-production of knowledge, which involves engaging with diverse stakeholders throughout the research process, can help ensure that research is grounded in local contexts and responsive to community needs. The case study also highlights the importance of using multiple forms of knowledge, including academic and non-academic sources, to develop a more comprehensive understanding of complex social issues.

For CDRI (Benghong Siela, this *IDS Bulletin*), its local expertise was supplemented by additional capacities that helped it meet some of the challenges of conducting research in less structured areas such as the informal sector. It established a technical advisory team as a part of its research consortium. The advisory team consisted of a gender expert, an economic expert, and a gender and macroeconomic expert.

Hence, we can see how positioning evidence for use, inclusivity, and locally engaged research are inseparable. The rigour or quality of Covid-19 response research rested on both the ability of research teams to frame their projects for local and national actors and deliver highly contextualised and locally driven evidence. International research organisations and agencies may appear to be poorly positioned to deliver this hyper-local and responsive research that combines sociocultural and political understanding with direct access to communities.

5 Mobilising knowledge in an emergency with care and intent

Building on these dimensions of organisational readiness and the key elements of knowledge that is fit for purpose in a pandemic, we can identify some recurrent themes that challenge traditional notions of linear processes by which research project outputs are produced, and then used by different stakeholders. While these simplistic concepts of research uptake may have their limitations during periods of stability, they are rendered entirely obsolete during a crisis. What the case studies showcase is that: (1) mobilising knowledge is underpinned by the entire engagement processes and cannot be related to specific outputs; (2) these processes need to be purposeful and responsible; and, finally, (3) that researchers need to remain flexible about how to deploy their analytical skills to support stakeholders in resolving the problems.

While knowledge mobilisation, planning, and monitoring tends to focus on outputs and specific activities that target particular stakeholders, the case studies focus on the entire knowledge process: the research methodologies, the networking, the relationship building, and approaches to engagement. A whole range of knowledge translation or uptake tools are available, and researchers deploy them throughout the life of a project. The flexibility required includes the ability to navigate complex political realities. In some cases, impact is possible when a

balance can be struck between responding to demand for evidence and influencing that demand. For example, PEP in Zimbabwe experienced a 'coincidence of wants' and successfully negotiated a form of collaborative economic modelling in which the research team were able to influence what was being modelled (Mabugu *et al.*, this *IDS Bulletin*).

A key component seems to be not only engaging others but doing so with intent and care. Ogando (this *IDS Bulletin*) highlights that WIEGO's case study stresses the importance of an approach that is non-extractive with participants of research and which is sensitive to the difficult experiences of individuals during the pandemic. The author summarises: 'By engaging with care, researchers were able to transmit the notion that the research was not only **on** workers, but **with** and **for** them' (*ibid.*: 65). In practice, this also entails concrete choices that value participant engagement such as covering the costs of participation or giving sufficient flexibility to accommodate interviewees' needs and schedules. This research engagement is then followed up by careful consideration of how to present the data and stories collected, to respect the research participants and enhance their voices in the process.

Flexibility in terms of the activities covered by a project is essential. The case of GRADE highlights the additional knowledge work required to translate research into policy and practices and how research institutions have capacities to support decision makers and implementing partners in the process (Fort and Alcázar, this *IDS Bulletin*). The example of its work with public institutions showcases an array of strategies that may seem beyond the scope of a research project, but which are essential for success. While working with *ollas comunes*,⁷ the team was asked by the relevant ministry to survey these spaces to improve the support they could provide them. However, the research team had some hypotheses from their experience working in the field, that the initial database that the ministry was working with was dated and did not include the most marginalised neighbourhoods, and that the newer marginal settlements were responding to the crises through different alternatives. Although the team prepared the survey to support the ministry, the most important part of their work was to demonstrate, through very explicit data, how the ministry needed an overhaul of their approach.

Finally, there are indications from the case studies that how organisations responded to the pandemic may have a longer-term impact on the future of these organisations. Researchers have developed new skills and capacities, including the ability to use digital tools for data collection and analysis, as well as the ability to present research findings in a clear and accessible way for different audiences. These new capacities and strengthened networks and relationships will continue to be important for ensuring that

research is accessible and relevant to various stakeholders, including policymakers, practitioners, and community members.

6 Conclusions

The paradox of research during the pandemic is that Covid-19 both vastly increased operational challenges and empowered local and national research organisations. As researchers and institutions based in the global North found themselves grounded, and the urgent need for local knowledge and highly contextualised learning grew rapidly, many Southern research organisations found themselves in a prime position to respond. However, organisational readiness to do so was dependent on the strength of their networks, access to key decision makers or affected communities, and their ability to mobilise quickly. In the case studies reviewed here, this last attribute was largely dependent on funder flexibility and responsiveness.

It was both researchers' embeddedness in local and regional contexts and their ability to frame evidence for specific audiences that determined their success. The pandemic exposed governments' reliance on outdated data. It has challenged academic rigour in the absence of local knowledge. It has accentuated the necessity of access to civil society and advocacy movements in politically closed spaces. Finally, it has emphasised the central importance of knowledge mobilisation as part of the whole research process, delivered with intent and care. This all highlights just how essential locally led research is for pandemic response and for development more broadly.

It is unlikely that anyone can put this genie back in the bottle, even if they wanted to. The Covid-19 pandemic has shown us that local and national research organisations, with the right international flow of resources and support, are eminently well placed to deliver impactful research. Their hyper-local knowledge, flexibility, and unswerving focus on the real-world influence and wellbeing of affected communities has not just demonstrated their utility in times of crisis but suggests their superiority over international responses. We must harness this energy and expertise as we face multiple global crises that will require unique blends of local and global research collaboration and innovation.

Notes

- * This *IDS Bulletin* was produced as part of the Covid-19 Responses for Equity (CORE) Knowledge Translation Programme, led by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), which supports the translation of knowledge emerging from the CORE initiative. Supported by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), CORE brings together 20 projects to understand the socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic, improve existing responses, and generate better policy options for recovery. The research is being led by local researchers, universities, thinktanks, and civil society organisations across

42 countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East. The views expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of IDRC or its Board of Governors, or IDS. For further information, please contact: c19re.org.

- 1 Andrea Ordóñez Llanos, Executive Director, Southern Voice, Ecuador.
- 2 James Georgalakis, Director of Evidence and Impact, Institute of Development Studies, UK.
- 3 **Covid-19 Responses for Equity (CORE) website.**
- 4 See the **CORE documented stories of change.**
- 5 The world was warned by the World Health Organization (WHO) that 'highly pathogenic coronaviral diseases' (other than Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) or Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS)) could be the next great international health crisis (WHO 2018).
- 6 Middle East and North Africa.
- 7 'Communal pots', similar to soup kitchens, whereby local communities pool their resources to supply food for everyone in the neighbourhood (Fort and Alcázar, this *IDS Bulletin*).

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Introducción: Lecciones para la investigación sobre respuestas a emergencias impulsada a nivel local*

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Traducido del inglés por Atlas Translations

Resumen Este artículo resume lo aprendido a partir de una investigación dirigida por el Sur Global y diseñada para influir en la respuesta a la pandemia de Covid-19. Los estudios de casos proceden principalmente del programa Covid-19 Responses for Equity (CORE), financiado por el Centro Internacional de Investigaciones para el Desarrollo (IDRC). El artículo examina lo siguiente: (1) las características de la disposición de las organizaciones de investigación locales en tiempos de crisis; (2) la forma y la función del conocimiento apto para su aplicación en situaciones de emergencia; y (3) los procesos de conocimiento y las estrategias de participación para una movilización rápida. La disposición de las organizaciones dependía de la fuerza de las redes de las instituciones de investigación, del acceso a los principales responsables de la toma de decisiones o a las comunidades afectadas y de los recursos y capacidades que les permitieran movilizarse rápidamente. El conocimiento hiperlocal, combinado con metodologías de investigación inclusivas, facilita el posicionamiento de la investigación para su uso en emergencias. La pandemia ha demostrado que las organizaciones de investigación locales y nacionales están bien situadas para llevar a cabo investigaciones de gran impacto, ya sea como colaboradores críticos del gobierno o como agentes externos que abogan por el cambio.



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Palabras clave traducción de conocimiento, movilización del conocimiento, uso de evidencia científica para el desarrollo de políticas, Covid-19, el Sur Global, estudios sobre el desarrollo, laboratorios de ideas, emergencias, salud pública, socioeconomía, impacto.

1 Introducción

Este número del *IDS Bulletin* busca aprender de la investigación dirigida por el Sur Global rápidamente movilizada y diseñada para influir en la respuesta a la pandemia de Covid-19. Los ocho artículos de estudios de casos proceden principalmente del programa Covid-19 Responses for Equity (CORE), que es una iniciativa de tres años de investigación rápida, financiada por el Centro Internacional de Investigaciones para el Desarrollo (IDRC) de Canadá. El programa reúne 20 proyectos de investigación de 42 países para comprender los impactos socioeconómicos de la pandemia y generar mejores opciones de políticas para la recuperación. Los autores de los estudios de casos y sus instituciones proceden del Sur Global y aportan una visión única a la respuesta de investigación.

Ramos E. Mabugu *et al.* (este *IDS Bulletin*) explora su experiencia de trabajar en estrecha colaboración con el Gobierno de Zimbabue durante las primeras etapas de la pandemia para modelar medidas económicas y fiscales destinadas a aliviar el impacto del Covid-19 y promover la recuperación. Ana Carolina Ogando (este *IDS Bulletin*) reflexiona sobre el rápido diseño y realización de un estudio longitudinal de métodos mixtos con casi 2000 trabajadores del sector informal en 11 ciudades del Sur y Norte Global. Helani Galpaya *et al.* (este *IDS Bulletin*) comparte sus reflexiones sobre el intento de influir en las respuestas digitales y de infraestructura a la pandemia de Sri Lanka en medio de la actual crisis económica del país. Benghong Siela Bossba (este *IDS Bulletin*) expone la labor del Cambodia Development Resource Institute (CDRI) para llevar a cabo investigaciones de muestreo amplio en los sectores formal e informal en Camboya. En el artículo de Farah Al Shami (este *IDS Bulletin*), la autora se adentra en los desafíos de promover una reforma de la protección social en el contexto de la política de colonialidad en los países árabes.

Sameen Nasar *et al.* (este *IDS Bulletin*) reflexiona sobre las estrategias implementadas por los investigadores de Bangladesh para crear una red de conocimiento entre investigadores y ejecutores que responda al impacto de la pandemia para las personas refugiadas rohingya. El relato de Ricardo Fort y Lorena Alcázar (este *IDS Bulletin*) sobre el trabajo del Grupo de Análisis para el Desarrollo (GRADE) en Perú cuenta la historia de cómo las iniciativas de base comunitaria, como los comedores sociales, funcionaron en paralelo a la respuesta del Estado a la inseguridad alimentaria experimentada durante la pandemia. Por último, el estudio de casos de Jennifer Cyr *et al.* (este *IDS Bulletin*) ofrece

una evaluación del potencial y las limitaciones de la gobernanza colaborativa en América Latina como medio para aliviar el impacto de la pandemia en los ciudadanos más vulnerables.

Una función de apoyo para la traducción de conocimiento dirigida por el Institute of Development Studies (IDS) acompañó a esta cohorte de investigación y proporcionó un espacio para el aprendizaje y la reflexión.³ Este *IDS Bulletin* pretende recoger parte de ese aprendizaje y ponerlo a disposición de quienes buscan promover un enfoque equitativo, basado en evidencia e impulsado a nivel local para gestionar las múltiples crisis mundiales.

Se han realizado numerosos estudios y revisiones para desentrañar las lecciones de la pandemia en la investigación. Sin embargo, estas tienden a centrarse principalmente en los aspectos metodológicos y de implementación de la investigación, sobre todo en el Norte Global (Guleid *et al.* 2021; Nind, Coverdale y Meckin 2021; Richardson, Godfrey y Walklate 2021; Tremblay *et al.* 2021; Vindrola-Padros *et al.* 2020). Si bien existe una bibliografía emergente que intenta identificar las cualidades clave de la traducción de conocimiento en países de renta baja y media (Combaz, Connor y Georgalakis 2023), esta no se enmarca específicamente en torno a la investigación de respuesta rápida. Se ha trabajado para identificar algunas de las características especiales de la investigación sobre la respuesta al Covid-19 en el Sur Global y las inquietudes de los investigadores del sur en torno a la necesidad de intervenciones más equitativas basadas en evidencia (Taylor y Knipe 2022; Grant *et al.* 2023). Este *IDS Bulletin* busca contribuir a esta bibliografía explorando una serie de estudios de casos de instituciones de investigación del sur que diseñaron y llevaron a cabo investigaciones durante la pandemia para ayudar a dar forma a las respuestas de desarrollo e implementación de políticas y prácticas y a la recuperación a largo plazo. Esto exige centrarse en las características de las organizaciones de investigación del sur que pudieron movilizarse rápidamente, los tipos de conocimientos que se necesitaron en estas circunstancias únicas y los procesos que facilitaron la participación y la influencia.

El CORE proporcionó una muestra ideal de investigación de la respuesta rápida dirigida por el Sur Global para explorar estas áreas de indagación. Los proyectos de África, Asia, América Latina y Oriente Medio movilizaron con éxito a las voces menos escuchadas y lograron una participación de responsables del desarrollo e implementación de políticas y profesionales a nivel regional, nacional e internacional.⁴ La investigación ha abordado las formas en que la pandemia ha agravado las vulnerabilidades existentes, al tiempo que ha tratado de promover la igualdad de género. El corpus de conocimiento emergente tiene importantes implicaciones para todos los afectados por un mundo cada vez más incierto caracterizado por la multiplicidad de crisis (Price 2023; Rohwerder 2023; Saha 2023).

El resto del artículo se estructura de la siguiente manera: ofrecemos una breve descripción general de la respuesta de investigación rápida del programa CORE en ámbitos como el uso de tecnologías digitales por parte de los equipos de investigación. Luego, abordamos tres áreas de aprendizaje: (1) los factores institucionales que permitieron a las organizaciones de investigación de países de renta baja y media responder rápidamente a la pandemia; (2) las características del conocimiento que puede estar mejor posicionado para responder a un desafío global con implicaciones locales como la pandemia; y (3) cómo las organizaciones movilizaron el conocimiento durante una emergencia con cuidado y de forma intencionada.

2 Descripción general de la respuesta de investigación rápida del programa CORE

La pandemia de Covid-19 planteó desafíos sin precedentes para los investigadores y analistas de políticas que respondieron al llamamiento del IDRC para investigar rápidamente el impacto socioeconómico de la crisis en los países de renta baja y media. Sin embargo, en medio de la crisis, surgieron diversas respuestas innovadoras y adaptativas. Este *IDS Bulletin* destaca varias de ellas y muestra ejemplos notables.

Una de las características significativas de la respuesta de investigación rápida de la pandemia, común a todos los estudios de casos del CORE, ha sido el uso explícito de las tecnologías digitales en los proyectos de investigación. Al aprovechar las plataformas y herramientas en línea, los investigadores han podido facilitar la colaboración más allá de las fronteras geográficas y lograr la participación de diversas partes interesadas. Estos enfoques digitales han abierto nuevas vías de investigación, sobre todo en contextos en los que las restricciones de la movilidad limitan las interacciones en persona.

Las instituciones de investigación han acogido las colaboraciones y asociaciones de forma plena. A pesar de los desafíos impuestos por los cierres de emergencia, los equipos de investigación encontraron formas innovadoras de colaborar con diversos agentes para alcanzar sus objetivos. Los enfoques de colaboración han dado lugar a resultados transformadores que han beneficiado a todas las partes. Los investigadores también han demostrado la adaptabilidad de estas metodologías de investigación. Entre ellas figuran la utilización de datos e información existentes de formas innovadoras, la recopilación de nuevos datos para responder a desafíos acuciantes y el desarrollo de modelos y abordajes innovadores. Algunos ejemplos de este tipo de abordaje pueden verse en proyectos como el laboratorio de ideas LIRNEasia del sur de Asia (Galpaya *et al.*, este *IDS Bulletin*), que reutilizó datos de encuestas anteriores para estudiar el impacto de los cierres de emergencia en la educación de los niños, y más tarde adaptó su recogida

de datos para identificar problemas con las transferencias de efectivo durante una crisis económica.

En general, la respuesta de investigación rápida a la pandemia ha puesto de manifiesto una serie de enfoques de investigación innovadores y adaptativos. Mediante la adopción de tecnologías digitales, colaboraciones y metodologías diversas, los investigadores locales pueden responder a situaciones sin precedentes y hacer valiosos aportes a las políticas y la práctica.

3 Disposición de las organizaciones en tiempos de crisis

A pesar de las señales de advertencia, ninguna organización de investigación ni ningún gobierno parecían estar preparados para la pandemia.⁵ Durante este período de gran tensión, ciertas características institucionales demostraron ser importantes para lograr una aplicación práctica de la evidencia en situaciones de emergencia. Las organizaciones tienen una historia relevante a la que recurrir en momentos tales, y es esencial que puedan convertir sus credenciales institucionales en credibilidad y disposición. Todos los estudios de casos ponen de relieve la importancia de una serie de activos intangibles preexistentes adquiridos a lo largo de los años. Entre ellos figuran la credibilidad y la legitimidad, la capacidad de movilizar y capitalizar las relaciones existentes y el talento para implementar todo esto de forma creativa.

Al inicio de la pandemia, los investigadores empezaron a enmarcar los problemas de políticas y a darles un lugar en la agenda pública. Se basaron en gran medida en su percepción de credibilidad para abrirse camino con los responsables del desarrollo de políticas, los medios de comunicación o las comunidades afectadas. Las crisis de salud pública exigen respuestas rápidas, y los actores políticos y de la sociedad civil buscan la ayuda de socios conocidos. Por lo tanto, la credibilidad de las instituciones de investigación se basaba en su capacidad de respuesta, su experiencia y, sobre todo, su conocimiento del contexto.

Las redes existentes prepararon a los investigadores para responder con rapidez a la demanda de evidencia y moldearon sus respuestas. En todos los estudios de casos, observamos un espectro de interacciones entre la evidencia y las políticas, desde el modelo profundamente arraigado en el gobierno hasta el enfoque más periférico o externo. Algunas organizaciones se encontraban bien posicionadas para perseguir estrategias de varios niveles de aprovechamiento de la concientización de la evidencia y promoción de su uso. Por lo tanto, estas redes y relaciones preexistentes sirven diversos propósitos y se dan en varios contextos. Pueden referirse al trabajo con comunidades, funcionarios públicos u organizaciones internacionales. Mujeres en Empleo Informal: Globalizando y Organizando (WIEGO), por ejemplo, destaca la importancia de contar con relaciones

estables y preexistentes; en su caso, con organizaciones de trabajadores de distintas ciudades del Sur Global. El caso de WIEGO pone de relieve que la preparación institucional no puede dissociarse de las históricas relaciones interpersonales que, en última instancia, sirvieron tanto de medio para la compenetración y la creación de vínculos como de anclaje a las realidades de base, incluso sin interacciones cara a cara (Ogando, este *IDS Bulletin*).

Por el contrario, gracias a la larga inversión en asociaciones de los investigadores de la Partnership for Economic Policy (PEP) y a sus estrechas relaciones personales con funcionarios del Gobierno de Zimbabue, estos gozaban de una posición privilegiada. Esto facilitó la coproducción de modelos económicos en un entorno político que favorece la toma de decisiones centralizada y la investigación propia (Mabugu *et al.*, este *IDS Bulletin*). Declaran los autores: "En nuestra opinión, no se trataba solo de que las conclusiones fueran oportunas y pudieran traducirse en formatos aptos para los usuarios de las políticas... en la base estaban las asociaciones" (*ibid.*: 46). Asimismo, el CDRI (Benghong Siela, este *IDS Bulletin*) se basaba en 30 años de experiencia en la investigación de políticas en estrecha colaboración, tanto formal como informal, con actores gubernamentales: "Independientemente del impacto de la pandemia, el CDRI ya cuenta con una ventaja en términos de vinculación con el ámbito de la formulación de políticas" (traducción libre) (*ibid.*: 100).

Si bien la disposición de las instituciones puede estar estrechamente vinculada a las relaciones interpersonales y de redes ya establecidas, tanto el CDRI como la PEP reconocen que existen dimensiones políticas y estructurales en las que los poderes visibles y no visibles determinan qué conocimientos cuentan y cuáles no (Gaventa 2006). Benghong Siela (este *IDS Bulletin*), en relación con el CDRI en Camboya, indica que a veces se socava a los académicos y el sistema político se rige por redes clientelares, lo que deja un espacio limitado para que la investigación influya realmente sobre las políticas. En Zimbabue, algunos de los funcionarios que ayudaron a abrir puertas en el gobierno eran antiguos alumnos universitarios de miembros del equipo de investigación de la PEP (Mabugu *et al.*, este *IDS Bulletin*). Este tipo de relaciones personales profundas en una estructura gubernamental de toma de decisiones altamente centralizada y abierta a la elaboración de políticas basadas en evidencia puede haber facilitado el compromiso de la PEP, pero podría haber cerrado las puertas a otras posibles fuentes de evidencia.

La mayoría de los casos revelan la importancia de la confianza; sin embargo, su construcción en tiempos de crisis no es necesariamente fácil. Como revela el estudio de casos de Asuntos del Sur (Cyr *et al.*, este *IDS Bulletin*), establecer la confianza con nuevos socios durante la pandemia fue difícil, y

esto no solo puede afectar a la respuesta del proyecto, sino que determinar las asociaciones futuras de la organización. Destacan los autores:

Las escasas oportunidades para establecer confianza durante una pandemia pueden, con el tiempo, impedir la creación de asociaciones nuevas y potencialmente fructíferas. Por otro lado, la pandemia puede ayudar a consolidar las relaciones existentes, ya que permite a los socios comprometerse y colaborar más fácilmente en problemas futuros.
(*Ibid.*: 217)

La confianza no solo se relaciona con las relaciones existentes y la capacidad de las instituciones para establecer otras relaciones nuevas rápidamente, sino también con el contexto político más amplio. Para Farah Al Shami (este *IDS Bulletin*), la capacidad de la Arab Reform Initiative para influir en el pensamiento y el desarrollo de políticas en torno a las insuficiencias de los sistemas de protección social en la región de Oriente Medio y el norte de África (MENA)⁶ para apoyar a los más vulnerables durante la pandemia fue una "tarea de enormes proporciones" (*ibid.*: 111). La participación de la Arab Reform Initiative consistió en gran medida en ejercer presión desde el exterior y asociarse con el mundo académico y los activistas en un entorno en el que los factores político-económicos y de gobernanza más amplios están alejando a los estados árabes de asumir la responsabilidad de la asistencia social a escala nacional (*ibid.*). En tales circunstancias, ni el modelo altamente integrado de la PEP ni la estrategia parcialmente interna del CDRI eran aplicables o siquiera deseables. La disposición institucional de la Arab Reform Initiative se derivaba, por lo tanto, de la comprensión del contexto político y de su capacidad para implicar a múltiples niveles y a diversos grupos de partes interesadas, incluida una sensibilización más amplia de la opinión pública.

Por último, la disposición de las instituciones se traduce en la capacidad de desplegar recursos y empezar a trabajar rápidamente. Para ello, las instituciones necesitan un profundo conocimiento de su contexto y unas relaciones de financiación adecuadas. Por ejemplo, el equipo de WIEGO (Ogando, este *IDS Bulletin*) utilizó su conocimiento de los diferentes sectores ocupacionales de los trabajadores informales para anticipar los desafíos que tendrían los encuestados a la hora de participar en una investigación que abarca temas delicados y difíciles relacionados con los impactos de la pandemia. Lo más importante es que todos los estudios de casos aquí presentados se beneficiaron de la rápida liberación de fondos por parte de un donante del Norte Global a través de una convocatoria semicerrada. Este mecanismo de financiación se basó en un conjunto de relaciones preexistentes, y en algunos casos muy antiguas, y proporcionó a los beneficiarios la flexibilidad

necesaria para reorientar o adaptar los proyectos existentes. Así, la disposición de las instituciones implica una interacción constante entre las capacidades y las relaciones personales e institucionales. Para lograr la credibilidad, la confianza y la capacidad de ofrecer una investigación de respuesta rápida en condiciones de crisis, se necesita la combinación de un equipo de investigación sólido respaldado por una organización sostenible.

4 Conocimiento apto para su aplicación

Las experiencias compartidas en este *IDS Bulletin* emplean una amplia gama de métodos de investigación y enfoques para promover el uso del conocimiento por parte de las principales partes interesadas. En general, los ejemplos ponen de relieve que la característica clave de un conocimiento apto para su aplicación es una combinación de un buen posicionamiento para el uso y su carácter integrador. Estar bien posicionado para su uso o relevancia implica que es directamente aplicable a un problema o cuestión práctica. A veces, la investigación también desempeña un papel fundamental a la hora de enmarcar el problema, no solo sus soluciones. Además, el conocimiento debe ser accesible. Debe estar disponible en un formato que se ajuste a las necesidades de las diversas partes interesadas, de modo que las personas que lo necesiten puedan encontrarlo y utilizarlo eficazmente. El conocimiento posicionado para su uso debe poder utilizarse en la práctica y ser flexible, adaptarse a diferentes circunstancias y proporcionar puntos de vista o soluciones que puedan implementarse en situaciones del mundo real para resolver problemas o tomar decisiones.

Sin embargo, se trata de algo más que la relevancia de la investigación, que en gran medida existe a los ojos de quienes la contemplan, entre los que puede haber actores poderosos. También se trata de un proceso de investigación integrador que se basa en conocimientos altamente contextualizados. Existe un hilo conductor entre los estudios de casos que pone de relieve el valor de lo que podría describirse como conocimiento hiperlocal, y su uso para informar el desarrollo de políticas y las prácticas. Se trata de conocimiento que se centra en una comprensión profunda de los problemas de base, en lugar de conclusiones de aplicación más universal. Por ejemplo, para la BRAC James P Grant School of Public Health, de Bangladesh, era esencial comprender la entrega de servicios en los campos de refugiados desde el punto de vista del receptor e integrar las perspectivas de la comunidad (Nasar *et al.*, este *IDS Bulletin*). Dichos métodos pueden adaptarse para atender los contextos locales. Por ejemplo, el equipo de la BRAC enfrentó desafíos únicos como la desinformación sobre el Covid-19, la inseguridad alimentaria, la falta de oportunidades económicas y la insuficiencia de las raciones alimentarias antes de y durante los cierres de emergencia (*ibid.*).

En algunos contextos, la falta de evidencia y la imposición de datos internacionales de baja calidad amenazaron con socavar la respuesta al Covid-19. Al Shami (este *IDS Bulletin*) reflexiona sobre la "pobreza de datos" en países como Irak y El Líbano, cuyos datos censales tienen más de 25 años. Los registros sociales nacionales unificados son escasos, y los datos cuantitativos o cualitativos sobre atención social, incompletos. En estas circunstancias, el seudomuestreo realizado por organizaciones extranjeras y el análisis de las políticas sujeto a sesgos y a una escasa comprensión del contexto local crean profundas desigualdades de conocimiento. Por lo tanto, el papel de las organizaciones de investigación locales y nacionales a la hora de dar forma a sus propias investigaciones es una característica esencial de un conocimiento apto para su aplicación.

Ogando (este *IDS Bulletin*) sostiene que los métodos tradicionales de investigación suelen dar prioridad al rigor académico sobre la relevancia práctica, lo que puede dar lugar a resultados de investigación desconectados de la realidad de la vida de las personas. En cambio, la coproducción de conocimientos, que implica la participación de diversas partes interesadas a lo largo de todo el proceso de investigación, puede ayudar a garantizar que la investigación se base en los contextos locales y responda a las necesidades de la comunidad. El estudio de casos también pone de relieve la importancia de utilizar múltiples formas de conocimiento, incluidas fuentes académicas y no académicas, para desarrollar una comprensión más completa de cuestiones sociales complejas.

En el caso del CDRI (Benghong Siela, este *IDS Bulletin*), su experiencia local se complementó con capacidades adicionales que le ayudaron a afrontar algunos de los desafíos de llevar a cabo investigaciones en ámbitos menos estructurados, como el sector informal. Para esto, estableció un equipo de asesoramiento técnico como parte de su consorcio de investigación. El equipo de asesoramiento estaba formado por un experto en género, un experto en economía y un experto en género y macroeconomía.

Por lo tanto, podemos ver cómo el posicionamiento de la evidencia para su uso, la inclusión y la investigación participativa a nivel local son inseparables. El rigor o la calidad de la investigación sobre la respuesta al Covid-19 se basaron tanto en la capacidad de los equipos de investigación para enmarcar sus proyectos para los actores locales y nacionales como en el aporte de evidencia altamente contextualizada e impulsada a nivel local. Las organizaciones y agencias internacionales de investigación pueden parecer mal posicionadas para llevar a cabo esta investigación hiperlocal y de respuesta que combina la comprensión sociocultural y política con el acceso directo a las comunidades.

5 Movilización del conocimiento durante una emergencia con cuidado y de forma intencionada

Partiendo de estas dimensiones de disposición de las organizaciones y de los elementos clave del conocimiento apto para su aplicación durante una pandemia, podemos identificar algunos temas recurrentes que cuestionan las nociones tradicionales de los procesos lineales por los que las distintas partes interesadas producen y utilizan los resultados de los proyectos de investigación. Si bien estos conceptos simplistas de uso de evidencia científica para el desarrollo de políticas pueden tener sus limitaciones durante los períodos de estabilidad, quedan totalmente obsoletos durante una crisis. Lo que muestran los estudios de casos es que: (1) la movilización de conocimiento se sustenta en la totalidad de los procesos de participación y no puede relacionarse con resultados específicos; (2) estos procesos deben tener un propósito y desarrollarse con responsabilidad; y, por último, (3) los investigadores deben ser flexibles en cuanto a la forma de desplegar sus capacidades analíticas para ayudar a las partes interesadas a resolver los problemas.

Mientras que la movilización del conocimiento, la planificación y el seguimiento tienden a centrarse en los resultados y las actividades específicas dirigidas a determinadas partes interesadas, los estudios de casos se centran en todo el proceso de conocimiento: las metodologías de investigación, la creación de redes, el establecimiento de relaciones y los enfoques de participación. Existe toda una serie de herramientas de traducción de conocimiento o uso de evidencia científica para el desarrollo de políticas que los investigadores utilizan a lo largo de la vida de un proyecto. La flexibilidad requerida incluye la capacidad de navegar por realidades políticas complejas. En algunos casos, el impacto es posible cuando puede alcanzarse un equilibrio entre la respuesta a la demanda de evidencia y la influencia sobre dicha demanda. Por ejemplo, en Zimbabue, la PEP experimentó una "coincidencia de deseos" y negoció con éxito un modelo económico colaborativo con la influencia del equipo de investigación (Mabugu *et al.*, este *IDS Bulletin*).

Un componente clave parece ser no solo implicar a otras partes interesadas, sino hacerlo con intención y cuidado. Ogando (este *IDS Bulletin*) destaca que el estudio de casos de WIEGO subraya la importancia de un enfoque que no sea extractivo con los participantes de la investigación y que sea sensible a las difíciles experiencias de los individuos durante la pandemia. La autora resume: "al participar con atención, los investigadores pudieron transmitir la noción de que la investigación no se hacía solo **sobre** los trabajadores, sino **con y para** ellos" (*ibid.*: 65). En la práctica, esto también implica opciones concretas que valoren el compromiso de los participantes como, por ejemplo, cubrir los costos de participación o dar suficiente flexibilidad para adaptarse a las necesidades y horarios de los entrevistados. A este compromiso con la investigación le sigue una cuidadosa

reflexión sobre cómo presentar los datos y las historias recopiladas, para ser respetuoso con los participantes de la investigación y potenciar su voz en el proceso.

La flexibilidad en cuanto a las actividades alcanzadas por un proyecto es esencial. El caso del GRADE pone de relieve el trabajo adicional de conocimiento necesario para traducir la investigación en políticas y prácticas, y cómo las instituciones de investigación tienen la capacidad para apoyar a los responsables de la toma de decisiones y a los socios ejecutores en el proceso (Fort y Alcázar, este *IDS Bulletin*). El ejemplo de su trabajo con instituciones públicas muestra una serie de estrategias que pueden parecer fuera del alcance de un proyecto de investigación, pero que son esenciales para el éxito. Durante su trabajo en las ollas comunes,⁷ el ministerio competente pidió al equipo que estudiara estos espacios para mejorar el apoyo que podían prestarles. Sin embargo, el equipo de investigación tenía algunas hipótesis derivadas de su experiencia de trabajo sobre el terreno: que la base de datos inicial con la que trabajaba el ministerio había quedado anticuada y no incluía a los barrios más marginados, y que los asentamientos marginales más recientes estaban respondiendo a las crisis de diferentes maneras. Si bien el equipo preparó la encuesta para apoyar al ministerio, lo más importante de su trabajo fue demostrar, con datos muy explícitos, que el ministerio necesitaba una revisión de su enfoque.

Por último, los estudios de casos indican que la forma en que las organizaciones respondieron a la pandemia puede tener repercusiones a largo plazo en el futuro de estas. Los investigadores han desarrollado nuevas habilidades y capacidades, entre ellas la capacidad de utilizar herramientas digitales para la recopilación y el análisis de datos, así como la capacidad de presentar los resultados de investigación de forma clara y accesible para diferentes públicos. Estas nuevas capacidades y redes y relaciones reforzadas seguirán siendo importantes para garantizar que la investigación sea accesible y pertinente para las diferentes partes interesadas, incluidos los responsables del desarrollo de políticas, los profesionales y los miembros de la comunidad.

6 Conclusiones

La paradoja de la investigación durante la pandemia es que el Covid-19 aumentó enormemente los desafíos operativos y empoderó a las organizaciones de investigación locales y nacionales. Cuando los investigadores y las instituciones del Norte Global vieron limitadas sus posibilidades de acción y la necesidad urgente de conocimientos locales y aprendizajes altamente contextualizados crecía rápidamente, muchas organizaciones de investigación del sur se encontraron en una posición privilegiada para responder. Sin embargo, la disposición de las organizaciones para hacerlo dependía de la solidez de sus

redes, del acceso a los principales responsables de la toma de decisiones o a las comunidades afectadas y de su capacidad para movilizarse rápidamente. En los estudios de casos aquí analizados, este último atributo dependía en gran medida de la flexibilidad y capacidad de respuesta de los patrocinadores.

Lo que determinó su éxito fue tanto la inmersión de los investigadores en los contextos locales y regionales como su capacidad para dirigir la evidencia hacia públicos específicos. La pandemia puso de manifiesto la dependencia de los gobiernos en datos obsoletos. Esto ha puesto en tela de juicio el rigor académico en ausencia de conocimientos locales. Además, ha acentuado la necesidad de acceder a la sociedad civil y a los movimientos de defensa en espacios políticamente cerrados. Por último, ha subrayado la importancia central de una movilización del conocimiento realizada con cuidado y de forma intencionada y llevada a cabo durante todo el proceso de investigación. Todo esto pone de relieve lo esencial que es la investigación dirigida a nivel local para la respuesta a la pandemia y para el desarrollo en general.

Es poco probable que las cosas vuelvan a ser como antes. La pandemia de Covid-19 nos ha demostrado que las organizaciones de investigación locales y nacionales, si cuentan con un flujo internacional de recursos y apoyo adecuados, están eminentemente bien situadas para llevar a cabo una investigación de gran repercusión. Su conocimiento hiperlocal, su flexibilidad y su inquebrantable atención a la influencia en el mundo real y al bienestar de las comunidades afectadas no solo han demostrado su utilidad en tiempos de crisis, sino que sugieren su superioridad por sobre las respuestas internacionales. Debemos aprovechar esta energía y experiencia para hacer frente a las múltiples crisis mundiales que requerirán combinaciones únicas de colaboración e innovación local y mundial para la investigación.

Notas

- * Este *IDS Bulletin* se creó como parte del programa de traducción de conocimiento Covid-19 Responses for Equity (CORE), dirigido por el Institute of Development Studies (IDS), que apoya la traducción de conocimiento que surge de la iniciativa CORE. Con el apoyo del Centro Internacional de Investigaciones para el Desarrollo (IDRC), el programa CORE integra 20 proyectos para comprender los impactos socioeconómicos de la pandemia, perfeccionar las respuestas actuales y generar mejores opciones de políticas para la recuperación. La investigación está a cargo de investigadores, universidades, laboratorios de ideas y organizaciones civiles locales en 42 países de África, Asia, América Latina y Oriente Medio. Las opiniones aquí expresadas son las de los autores y no reflejan necesariamente las opiniones del IDRC,

su Junta Directiva ni del IDS. Para obtener más información, póngase en contacto con: c19re.org.

- 1 Andrea Ordóñez Llanos, Directora Ejecutiva, Southern Voice, Ecuador.
- 2 James Georgalakis, Director de Evidencia e Impacto, Institute of Development Studies, Reino Unido.
- 3 **Sitio web del Covid-19 Responses for Equity (CORE).**
- 4 Consulte las **historias de cambio documentado del CORE.**
- 5 La Organización Mundial de la Salud (OMS) advirtió al mundo de que las "enfermedades coronavirales altamente patógenas" (distintas del Síndrome Respiratorio de Oriente Medio [Middle East Respiratory Syndrome, MERS] o el Síndrome Respiratorio Agudo Grave [Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome, SARS]) podrían ser la próxima gran crisis sanitaria internacional (OMS 2018).
- 6 Oriente Medio y el norte de África.
- 7 Las ollas comunes, similares a los comedores sociales, permiten a las comunidades locales aunar recursos para proporcionar alimentos a todos los vecinos (Fort y Alcázar, este *IDS Bulletin*).

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Introduction : Leçons issues des recherches menées localement en réponse aux situations d'urgence*

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Traduit de l'anglais par Cyrielle Havard-Bourdais

Résumé Cet article résume les enseignements tirés d'une recherche menée dans les pays du Sud et destinée à influencer la réponse à la pandémie de Covid-19. Les études de cas proviennent principalement du programme Covid-19 Responses for Equity (CORE), financé par le Centre de recherches pour le développement international (CRDI). L'article examine : (1) les caractéristiques de la préparation organisationnelle des institutions de recherche locales en temps de crise ; (2) la forme et la fonction des connaissances adaptées aux situations d'urgence ; et (3) les processus de connaissance et les stratégies d'engagement pour une mobilisation rapide. L'état de préparation organisationnelle dépend de la solidité des réseaux des instituts de recherche, de leur accès aux décideurs clés ou aux communautés touchées, ainsi que des ressources et des capacités qui leur permettent de se mobiliser rapidement. Les connaissances hyperlocales, associées à des méthodologies de recherche inclusives, facilitent le positionnement de la recherche en vue de son utilisation dans les situations d'urgence. La pandémie a démontré que les organismes de recherche locaux et nationaux sont bien placés pour mener des recherches ayant un impact, à la fois en tant qu'alliés cruciaux des gouvernements et en tant qu'acteurs extérieurs plaidant pour le changement.

Mots clés application des connaissances, mobilisation des connaissances, utilisation des résultats de la recherche, Covid-19, pays du Sud, études sur le développement, groupes de réflexion, urgences, santé publique, socio-économie, impact.



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1 Introduction

Ce numéro de l'*IDS Bulletin* présente les enseignements tirés d'une recherche rapidement mobilisée par les pays du Sud et conçue pour influencer la réponse à la pandémie de Covid-19. Les huit articles portant sur des études de cas proviennent principalement du programme Covid-19 Responses for Equity (CORE), une initiative de recherche rapide, sur trois ans, financée par le Centre canadien de recherches pour le développement international (CRDI). Ce programme a rassemblé 20 projets de recherche dans 42 pays afin de comprendre les impacts socio-économiques de la pandémie et d'élaborer de meilleures options politiques pour la reprise. Les auteurs des études de cas et leurs institutions sont originaires des pays du Sud et apportent un éclairage unique sur la réponse apportée par la recherche.

Ramos E. Mabugu *et al.* (présent numéro de l'*IDS Bulletin*) explorent leur expérience de travail en partenariat étroit avec le gouvernement du Zimbabwe au cours des premières phases de la pandémie afin de modéliser des mesures économiques et fiscales pour atténuer l'impact de la Covid-19 et de promouvoir la reprise. Ana Carolina Ogando (présent numéro de l'*IDS Bulletin*) réfléchit à la conception et à la réalisation rapides d'une étude longitudinale à méthodes mixtes avec près de 2 000 travailleurs informels dans 11 villes des pays du Sud et du Nord. Helani Galpaya *et al.* (présent numéro de l'*IDS Bulletin*) partagent leurs réflexions sur la tentative d'influencer les réponses numériques et infrastructurelles du Sri Lanka à la pandémie dans le contexte de la crise économique actuelle du pays. Benghong Siela Bossba (présent numéro de l'*IDS Bulletin*) présente le travail du Cambodia Development Resource Institute (CDRI) pour la mise en œuvre d'une recherche sur un grand échantillon dans les secteurs formel et informel au Cambodge. Dans l'article de Farah Al Shami (présent numéro de l'*IDS Bulletin*), l'autrice examine en profondeur les problématiques rencontrées dans la promotion d'une réforme de la protection sociale dans le contexte de la politique de la colonialité dans les pays arabes.

Sameen Nasar *et al.* (présent numéro de l'*IDS Bulletin*) réfléchissent aux stratégies appliquées par les chercheurs bangladais pour créer un réseau de connaissances entre les chercheurs et les responsables de la mise en œuvre répondant à l'impact de la pandémie sur les réfugiés rohingyas. Le compte rendu de Ricardo Fort et Lorena Alcázar (présent numéro de l'*IDS Bulletin*) sur le travail du Groupe d'analyse du développement (Grupo de Análisis para el Desarrollo, GRADE) au Pérou raconte comment les initiatives communautaires telles que les soupes populaires ont fonctionné parallèlement à la réponse de l'État à l'insécurité alimentaire rencontrée lors de la pandémie. Enfin, l'étude de cas de Jennifer Cyr *et al.* (présent numéro de l'*IDS Bulletin*) fournit une évaluation du potentiel et des limites de la gouvernance collaborative en Amérique latine comme moyen d'atténuer l'impact de la pandémie sur les citoyens les plus vulnérables.

Une fonction de soutien à l'application des connaissances menée par l'Institute of Development Studies (IDS) a accompagné cette cohorte de recherches et a fourni un espace d'apprentissage et de réflexion.³ Ce numéro de l'*IDS Bulletin* a pour but de recueillir une partie de ces connaissances et de les mettre à la disposition de ceux qui cherchent à promouvoir une approche équitable, fondée sur des données probantes et menée au niveau local pour gérer les multiples crises mondiales.

Il existe de nombreuses études et analyses détaillant les leçons de la pandémie sur la recherche. Toutefois, elles tendent à se concentrer principalement sur les aspects méthodologiques et de mise en œuvre de la recherche, en particulier dans les pays du Nord (Guleid *et al.* 2021 ; Nind, Coverdale and Meckin 2021 ; Richardson, Godfrey and Walklate 2021 ; Tremblay *et al.* 2021 ; Vindrola-Padros *et al.* 2020). Bien qu'il existe une littérature émergente qui cherche à identifier les qualités clés de l'application des connaissances dans les pays à revenu faible et intermédiaire (Combaz, Connor and Georgalakis 2023), elle n'est pas axée spécifiquement sur la recherche à réponses rapides. Des travaux ont été entrepris pour identifier certaines des caractéristiques particulières de la recherche sur la réponse à la Covid-19 dans les pays du Sud et les préoccupations des chercheurs des pays du Sud concernant la nécessité d'interventions plus équitables fondées sur des données probantes (Taylor and Knipe 2022 ; Grant *et al.* 2023). Ce numéro de l'*IDS Bulletin* cherche à contribuer à cette littérature en explorant une série d'études de cas d'institutions de recherche des pays du Sud qui ont conçu et réalisé des recherches pendant la pandémie pour aider à façonner les réponses politiques et pratiques, et le rétablissement à plus long terme. Il faut pour cela se concentrer sur les caractéristiques des organismes de recherche des pays du Sud qui ont pu se mobiliser rapidement, sur les types de connaissances nécessaires dans ces circonstances particulières et sur les processus qui ont facilité l'engagement et l'influence.

CORE a fourni un échantillon idéal de recherches à réponse rapide menée par les pays du Sud pour explorer ces domaines d'enquête. Les projets menés en Afrique, en Asie, en Amérique latine et au Moyen-Orient ont réussi à mobiliser des voix moins entendues et à s'engager aux niveaux national, régional et international avec des acteurs politiques et des professionnels.⁴ Leurs recherches ont porté sur la manière dont la pandémie a aggravé les vulnérabilités existantes tout en cherchant à faire progresser l'égalité entre les hommes et les femmes. Le corpus de connaissances qui est en cours de constitution a des implications importantes pour tous ceux qui sont concernés par l'instabilité grandissante d'un monde caractérisé par la polycrise (Price 2023 ; Rohwerder 2023 ; Saha 2023).

Le reste de cet article est structuré comme suit. Nous donnons un bref aperçu des réponses rapides du programme CORE en matière de recherche dans des domaines tels que l'utilisation des technologies numériques par les équipes de recherche. Nous abordons ensuite trois domaines d'apprentissage : (1) les facteurs institutionnels qui ont permis aux organismes de recherche des pays à revenu faible et intermédiaire de réagir promptement à la pandémie ; (2) les caractéristiques des connaissances qui peuvent être les mieux positionnées pour répondre à un défi mondial ayant des implications locales comme la pandémie ; et (3) la manière dont les organismes ont mobilisé avec soin les connaissances dans une situation d'urgence.

2 Aperçu de la réponse rapide du programme CORE en matière de recherche

Lors de la pandémie de Covid-19, les chercheurs et analystes politiques ayant répondu à l'appel du CRDI pour une recherche rapide sur l'impact socio-économique de la crise dans les pays à revenu faible et intermédiaire se sont retrouvés face à des défis sans précédent. Cependant, au milieu de la crise, diverses réponses innovantes et adaptatives ont vu le jour. Ce numéro de l'*IDS Bulletin* met en lumière plusieurs d'entre elles et présente des exemples notables.

L'une des caractéristiques significatives de la réponse rapide de la recherche à la pandémie, commune à toutes les études de cas du CORE, a été l'utilisation explicite des technologies numériques dans les projets de recherche. En exploitant les plateformes et les outils en ligne, les chercheurs ont pu faciliter les collaborations au-delà des frontières géographiques et impliquer diverses parties prenantes. Ces approches numériques ont ouvert de nouvelles voies de recherche, en particulier dans les contextes où les restrictions de mobilité limitent les interactions en personne.

Les institutions de recherche se sont investies dans des collaborations et des partenariats. Malgré les défis posés par les confinements, les équipes de recherche ont trouvé des moyens innovants de travailler avec différents acteurs pour atteindre leurs objectifs. Les approches collaboratives ont abouti à des résultats transformateurs dont toutes les parties ont pu bénéficier. Les chercheurs ont également démontré l'adaptabilité de ces méthodologies de recherche. Il s'agit notamment d'utiliser les données et informations existantes d'une nouvelle manière, de collecter de nouvelles données pour répondre à des problématiques urgentes et de développer des approches et des modèles novateurs. Des exemples de cette approche peuvent être observés dans des projets tels que celui du groupe de réflexion LIRNEasia en Asie du Sud (Galpaya *et al.*, présent numéro de l'*IDS Bulletin*), qui a réutilisé les données d'enquêtes antérieures pour étudier l'impact des confinements sur l'éducation des enfants, et qui a ensuite adapté les données collectées pour

identifier les problèmes liés aux transferts d'argent liquide en période de crise économique.

Dans l'ensemble, la réponse rapide de la recherche à la pandémie a révélé une série d'approches de recherche innovantes et adaptatives. En adoptant les technologies numériques, les collaborations et diverses méthodologies, les chercheurs locaux peuvent répondre à des situations sans précédent et contribuer grandement aux politiques et à leurs applications.

3 Réactivité institutionnelle en temps de crise

Aucun organisme de recherche ni aucun gouvernement ne semblait prêt à faire face à la pandémie et ce, malgré les signes avant-coureurs.⁵ Au cours de cette période critique, certaines caractéristiques institutionnelles se sont révélées importantes pour l'utilisation des données probantes dans les situations d'urgence. Les organisations disposent d'un passif pertinent à faire valoir dans de tels moments, et il est essentiel qu'elles puissent transformer leurs compétences institutionnelles en crédibilité et en réactivité. Toutes les études de cas soulignent l'importance d'une série d'actifs immatériels préexistants, acquis au fil des ans. Il s'agit notamment de la crédibilité et de la légitimité, de la capacité à mobiliser et à capitaliser sur les relations existantes, et du talent pour déployer ces actifs de manière créative.

Dès le début de la pandémie, les chercheurs ont commencé à formuler des problèmes politiques et à les inscrire à l'ordre du jour des autorités publiques. Ils se sont fortement appuyés sur leur crédibilité pour s'immiscer dans les débats, que ce soit auprès des décideurs politiques, des médias ou des communautés touchées. Les crises de santé publique exigent des réponses rapides, et les acteurs du milieu politique et de la société civile recherchent des partenaires connus pour les aider. La crédibilité des instituts de recherche reposait donc sur leur réactivité, leur expertise et, surtout, leur connaissance du contexte.

Les réseaux existants ont à la fois préparé les chercheurs à répondre rapidement aux demandes d'éléments probants et façonné leurs réponses. Les études de cas révèlent un large éventail d'interactions entre les données probantes et les politiques, allant d'un modèle profondément ancré dans le gouvernement à une approche plus périphérique ou extérieure. Certaines organisations étaient bien placées pour mettre en œuvre des stratégies à plusieurs niveaux visant à faire connaître les données probantes et à promouvoir leur utilisation. Par conséquent, ces relations et réseaux préexistants servent des objectifs divers et prennent forme dans des contextes variés. Ils peuvent concerner le travail avec les communautés, les fonctionnaires ou les organisations internationales. Femmes dans l'Emploi Informel : Globalisation et Organisation (Women in Informal Employment : Globalizing and Organizing, WIEGO),

par exemple, souligne l'importance d'avoir des relations solides et préexistantes ; dans son cas, avec des organisations de travailleurs dans différentes villes des pays du Sud. Le cas de WIEGO montre que la préparation institutionnelle ne peut être dissociée des relations interpersonnelles de longue date qui, en fin de compte, ont servi à la fois de support pour les liens humains et de connexion avec les réalités locales, même sans interactions face à face (Ogando, présent numéro de l'*IDS Bulletin*).

Par contre, c'est l'investissement de longue date des chercheurs du Partenariat pour la politique économique (PEP) dans des partenariats et leurs relations personnelles étroites avec les représentants du gouvernement zimbabwéen qui leur ont conféré un statut d'initiés. Cela a facilité la coproduction de modèles économiques dans un environnement politique qui favorise la prise de décision centralisée et la recherche locale (Mabugu *et al.*, présent numéro de l'*IDS Bulletin*). Les auteurs déclarent : « Selon nous, ce n'est pas seulement le fait que les résultats étaient opportuns et qu'ils pouvaient être traduits dans des formats destinés aux politiques... à la base de tout cela, il y avait des partenariats » (*ibid.* : 46). De même, le CDRI au Cambodge (Benghong Siela, présent numéro de l'*IDS Bulletin*) s'appuyait sur 30 ans d'expérience en matière de recherche sur les politiques dans le cadre de partenariats étroits, formels et informels, avec des acteurs gouvernementaux : « Indépendamment du choc de la pandémie, le CDRI a déjà un avantage en termes de liens avec la sphère politique » (*ibid.* : 100).

Même si la réactivité institutionnelle peut être étroitement liée à des relations de longue date, interpersonnelles et en réseau, le CDRI et le PEP reconnaissent tous deux qu'il existe des dimensions politiques et structurelles dans lesquelles les pouvoirs visibles et cachés déterminent quelles connaissances comptent (Gaventa 2006). Benghong Siela (présent numéro de l'*IDS Bulletin*), en lien avec le CDRI au Cambodge, indique que les chercheurs sont parfois négligés et que le système politique est dirigé par des réseaux de patronage, laissant un espace limité pour l'influence de la recherche sur les politiques. Au Zimbabwe, certains des fonctionnaires qui ont contribué à ouvrir les portes du gouvernement étaient d'anciens étudiants de l'équipe de recherche PEP (Mabugu *et al.*, présent numéro de l'*IDS Bulletin*). Ces relations personnelles profondes dans une structure décisionnelle gouvernementale très centralisée, ouverte à l'élaboration de politiques fondées sur des données probantes, ont pu faciliter l'engagement du PEP, mais ont probablement fermé les portes à d'autres sources potentielles de données probantes.

La plupart des cas révèlent l'importance de la confiance ; cependant, il n'est pas nécessairement facile de l'instaurer en temps de crise. Comme le révèle l'étude de cas d'Asuntos del Sur (Cyr *et al.*, présent numéro de l'*IDS Bulletin*), il a été

difficile d'instaurer une relation de confiance avec de nouveaux partenaires pendant la pandémie, ce qui peut non seulement affecter la réponse du projet, mais aussi façonner les futurs partenariats de l'organisation. Comme le soulignent les auteurs :

Les possibilités limitées d'instaurer une relation de confiance pendant une pandémie peuvent, avec le temps, entraver la création de nouveaux partenariats potentiellement fructueux. D'un autre côté, la pandémie peut contribuer à consolider les relations existantes, permettant ainsi aux partenaires de se contacter et de collaborer plus facilement lors de problèmes à l'avenir.

(*Ibid.* : 204)

Les relations de confiance ne sont pas seulement liées aux relations existantes et à la capacité des institutions à en établir rapidement de nouvelles, mais aussi au contexte politique général. Pour Farah Al Shami (présent numéro de l'*IDS Bulletin*), la capacité de l'Initiative de réforme arabe à influencer la réflexion et la politique sur les insuffisances des systèmes de protection sociale de la région MENA⁶ pour soutenir les plus vulnérables pendant la pandémie représentait une « tâche redoutable » (*ibid.* : 111). Le mode d'engagement de l'Initiative de réforme arabe consistait essentiellement en un lobbying extérieur et en des partenariats avec des universitaires et des militants dans un environnement où des facteurs politico-économiques et de gouvernance plus larges poussent les États arabes à ne pas assumer la responsabilité de l'assistance sociale à l'échelle nationale (*ibid.*). Dans de telles circonstances, ni le modèle très intégré de PEP ni la stratégie semi-intérieure de CDRI n'étaient applicables ou même souhaitables. La réactivité institutionnelle de l'Initiative de réforme arabe découlait donc d'une compréhension du contexte politique et de sa capacité à s'engager à plusieurs niveaux et auprès de divers groupes de parties prenantes, y compris en sensibilisant davantage le public.

Enfin, la réactivité des institutions se traduit par la capacité à déployer des ressources et à commencer à travailler rapidement. Pour ce faire, les institutions ont besoin d'une connaissance approfondie de leur contexte et de relations de financement appropriées. Par exemple, l'équipe de WIEGO (Ogando, présent numéro de l'*IDS Bulletin*) a utilisé sa connaissance des différents secteurs professionnels des travailleurs informels pour anticiper les difficultés que rencontreraient les personnes interrogées pour participer à une recherche portant sur des sujets sensibles et difficiles liés aux impacts de la pandémie. Il est important de noter que les études de cas présentées ici ont bénéficié du déblocage rapide de fonds par un donateur des pays du Nord dans le cadre d'un appel semi-fermé. Ce mécanisme de financement s'est appuyé sur un ensemble de relations préexistantes et, dans certains cas, de très longue date, et a donné aux bénéficiaires la possibilité de réorienter ou d'adapter les projets existants.

Ainsi, la réactivité institutionnelle implique une interaction constante entre les capacités et les relations personnelles et institutionnelles. La combinaison d'une équipe de recherche solide et d'une organisation durable est nécessaire pour assurer la crédibilité, la confiance et la capacité à fournir une réponse rapide de la recherche dans des conditions de crise.

4 Des connaissances adaptées aux besoins

Les cas présentés dans Ce numéro de l'*IDS Bulletin* font appel à un large éventail de méthodes de recherche ainsi qu'à des approches visant à promouvoir l'utilisation des connaissances par les principales parties prenantes. D'une manière générale, les exemples mettent en évidence la caractéristique clé des connaissances adaptées à l'objectif visé, à savoir la combinaison de leur positionnement en vue d'une utilisation et de leur caractère inclusif. La position d'utilisation ou pertinence signifie que les connaissances sont directement applicables à un problème ou à une question pratique. La recherche joue parfois un rôle essentiel dans la formulation du problème, et pas seulement de ses solutions. En outre, les connaissances doivent être accessibles. Elles doivent être disponibles dans un format adapté aux besoins des différentes parties prenantes, de sorte que les personnes qui en ont besoin puissent les trouver et les utiliser efficacement. Les connaissances qui sont positionnées pour être utilisées doivent être exploitables et doivent être flexibles et adaptables à différentes circonstances, en fournissant des idées ou des solutions qui peuvent être mises en œuvre dans des situations du monde réel pour résoudre des problèmes ou prendre des décisions.

Cependant, cela va plus loin que la seule pertinence de la recherche, qui existe en grande partie dans les yeux de ceux qui la regardent, qui sont parfois des acteurs puissants. Il s'agit également d'un processus de recherche inclusif qui s'appuie sur des connaissances fortement contextualisées. Les études de cas ont en commun de souligner la valeur de ce que l'on pourrait appeler les connaissances hyperlocales et de leur utilisation pour orienter les politiques et les pratiques. Il s'agit de connaissances qui se concentrent sur une compréhension approfondie des questions de terrain plutôt que sur des conclusions plus universellement applicables. Par exemple, pour la BRAC James P Grant School of Public Health, au Bangladesh, il était essentiel de comprendre la prestation de services dans les camps de réfugiés du point de vue du bénéficiaire et d'intégrer les perspectives de la communauté (Nasar *et al.*, présent numéro de l'*IDS Bulletin*). Ces méthodes peuvent être adaptées et sensibilisées aux contextes locaux, où, par exemple, l'équipe du BRAC a été confrontée à des défis uniques tels que la désinformation au sujet de la Covid-19, l'insécurité alimentaire, le manque d'opportunités économiques et l'inadéquation des rations alimentaires pendant et avant le confinement (*ibid.*).

Dans certains contextes, les lacunes en matière de données probantes et l'imposition de données internationales de faible qualité ont menacé de saper la réponse à la Covid-19. Al Shami (présent numéro de l'*IDS Bulletin*) s'interroge sur la « pauvreté des données » dans des pays tels que l'Irak et le Liban dont les données de recensement datent de plus de 25 ans. Les registres sociaux nationaux unifiés sont rares et les données quantitatives ou qualitatives sur les soins sociaux sont incomplètes. Dans ces conditions, le pseudo-échantillonnage par des organisations étrangères et l'analyse politique sujette à des préjugés et à une mauvaise compréhension du contexte local créent de profondes inégalités en matière de connaissances. Par conséquent, l'élaboration de leurs propres enquêtes par des organismes de recherche locaux et nationaux est une caractéristique essentielle d'une connaissance adaptée à l'objectif visé.

Ogando (présent numéro de l'*IDS Bulletin*) affirme que les méthodes de recherche traditionnelles privilégient souvent la rigueur académique à la pertinence pratique, ce qui peut aboutir à des résultats de recherche déconnectés des réalités de la vie des gens. En revanche, la coproduction de connaissances, qui implique l'engagement de diverses parties prenantes tout au long du processus de recherche, peut contribuer à garantir que la recherche soit ancrée dans les contextes locaux et réponde aux besoins de la communauté. L'étude de cas souligne également l'importance d'utiliser de multiples formes de connaissances, comprenant des sources académiques et d'autres non académiques, pour développer une compréhension plus complète des questions sociales complexes.

Pour le CDRI au Cambodge (Benghong Siela, présent numéro de l'*IDS Bulletin*), son expertise locale a été complétée par des capacités supplémentaires qui l'ont aidé à relever certains des défis liés à la conduite de recherches dans des domaines moins structurés tels que le secteur informel. Une équipe de conseillers techniques a été mise en place dans le cadre de son consortium de recherche. L'équipe consultative était composée d'un expert en genre, d'un expert en économie et d'un expert en genre et en macroéconomie.

Nous voyons donc que le positionnement des données probantes en vue de leur utilisation, l'inclusivité et l'engagement local de la recherche sont indissociables. La rigueur ou la qualité de la recherche sur la réponse à la Covid-19 a reposé à la fois sur la capacité des équipes de recherche à encadrer leurs projets pour les acteurs locaux et nationaux, et à fournir des données hautement contextualisées et pilotées au niveau local. Les organisations et agences de recherche internationales peuvent sembler mal placées pour mener à bien cette recherche hyperlocale et réactive, qui allie compréhension socioculturelle et politique, et accès direct aux communautés.

5 Mobiliser les connaissances en cas d'urgence avec intention et attention

À partir de ces réflexions sur la réactivité organisationnelle et sur les éléments clés des connaissances adaptées à une pandémie, nous pouvons identifier certains thèmes récurrents qui remettent en question les notions traditionnelles de processus linéaires par lesquels les résultats d'un projet de recherche sont produits, puis utilisés par différentes parties prenantes. Si ces concepts simplistes d'utilisation des résultats de la recherche peuvent avoir leurs limites en période de stabilité, ils deviennent totalement obsolètes en période de crise. Les études de cas montrent que (1) la mobilisation des connaissances est sous-tendue par l'ensemble des processus d'engagement et ne peut être liée à des résultats spécifiques ; (2) ces processus doivent être ciblés et responsables ; et, enfin, (3) les chercheurs doivent rester flexibles quant à la manière de déployer leurs compétences analytiques pour aider les parties prenantes à résoudre les problèmes.

Alors que la mobilisation, la planification et le suivi des connaissances tendent à se concentrer sur les résultats et les activités spécifiques qui ciblent des parties prenantes particulières, les études de cas se concentrent sur l'ensemble du processus de connaissance : les méthodologies de recherche, la mise en réseau, l'établissement de liens et les approches en matière d'engagement. Il existe toute une série d'outils d'application ou d'assimilation des connaissances, que les chercheurs déploient tout au long de la vie d'un projet. La flexibilité requise inclut la capacité à naviguer dans des réalités politiques complexes. Dans certains cas, il est possible d'avoir un impact si un équilibre peut être trouvé entre le fait de répondre à la demande de preuves et celui d'influencer cette demande. Par exemple, le PEP au Zimbabwe a connu une « coïncidence des volontés » et a réussi à négocier une forme de modélisation économique collaborative dans laquelle l'équipe de recherche était en mesure d'influencer ce qui était modélisé (Mabugu *et al.*, présent numéro de l'*IDS Bulletin*).

Un élément clé semble être non seulement de faire participer les autres, mais aussi de le faire avec intention et attention. Ogando (présent numéro de l'*IDS Bulletin*) souligne que l'étude de cas de WIEGO met en évidence l'importance d'une approche non extractive des participants à la recherche et sensible aux expériences difficiles vécues par les individus pendant la pandémie. L'auteur résume : « En faisant preuve d'attention, les chercheurs ont pu transmettre l'idée que la recherche n'était pas seulement **sur** les travailleurs, mais **avec** et **pour** eux » (*ibid.* : 65). Dans la pratique, cela implique également des choix concrets qui valorisent l'engagement des participants, tels que la prise en charge des coûts de participation ou l'octroi d'une flexibilité suffisante pour répondre aux besoins et aux horaires des personnes interrogées. Cet engagement dans la recherche est suivi d'une réflexion approfondie sur la manière de présenter les

données et les récits recueillis, afin de respecter les participants à la recherche et de leur permettre de mieux s'exprimer dans ce processus.

La flexibilité en termes d'activités couvertes par un projet est essentielle. Le cas de GRADE souligne le travail de connaissance supplémentaire nécessaire pour traduire la recherche en politiques et en pratiques, et la manière dont les institutions de recherche ont les capacités de soutenir les décideurs et les partenaires de mise en œuvre dans le processus (Fort and Alcázar, présent numéro de l'*IDS Bulletin*). L'exemple de son travail avec les institutions publiques illustre une série de stratégies qui peuvent sembler dépasser le cadre d'un projet de recherche, mais qui sont essentielles à sa réussite. Lors du travail avec les *ollas comunes*,⁷ l'équipe a été chargée par le ministère compétent d'enquêter sur ces espaces afin d'améliorer le soutien qu'elle pouvait leur apporter. Cependant, l'équipe de recherche avait émis quelques hypothèses issues de son expérience sur le terrain, à savoir que la base de données initiale avec laquelle le ministère travaillait était obsolète et n'incluait pas les quartiers les plus marginalisés, et que les établissements marginaux plus récents répondaient aux crises par d'autres moyens. Bien que l'équipe ait préparé l'enquête pour soutenir le ministère, la partie la plus importante de son travail a consisté à démontrer, à l'aide de données très explicites, que le ministère avait besoin de revoir son approche.

Enfin, les études de cas indiquent que la manière dont les organisations ont réagi à la pandémie peut avoir un impact à plus long terme sur leur avenir. Les chercheurs ont acquis de nouvelles compétences et capacités, notamment la capacité d'utiliser des outils numériques pour la collecte et l'analyse de données, ainsi que la capacité de présenter les résultats de la recherche de manière claire et accessible à différents publics. Ces nouvelles capacités et le renforcement des réseaux et des liens continueront d'être importants pour garantir une recherche accessible et pertinente pour les différentes parties prenantes, y compris les décideurs politiques, les professionnels et les membres de la communauté.

6 Conclusions

Le paradoxe de la recherche pendant la pandémie est que la Covid-19 a certes considérablement accru les défis opérationnels mais a aussi renforcé les capacités des organismes de recherche locaux et nationaux. Alors que les chercheurs et les institutions basés dans les pays du Nord se retrouvaient cloués au sol et que le besoin urgent de connaissances locales et d'un apprentissage hautement contextualisé augmentait rapidement, de nombreux organismes de recherche des pays du Sud se sont retrouvés dans une position privilégiée pour répondre à la situation. Toutefois, leur capacité à le faire dépendait de la solidité de leurs réseaux, de leur accès aux décideurs clés ou aux communautés

concernées, et de leur capacité à se mobiliser rapidement. Dans les études de cas examinées ici, cette dernière caractéristique dépendait largement de la flexibilité et de la réactivité des bailleurs de fonds.

C'est à la fois l'ancrage des chercheurs dans les contextes locaux et régionaux, et leur capacité à formuler des données pour des publics spécifiques qui ont déterminé leur succès. La pandémie a mis en évidence la dépendance des gouvernements à l'égard de données obsolètes. Elle a remis en question la rigueur universitaire en l'absence de connaissances locales. Elle a accentué la nécessité d'accéder à la société civile et aux mouvements de défense civique dans des espaces politiquement fermés. Enfin, elle a souligné l'importance capitale de la mobilisation des connaissances dans le processus global de recherche, avec intention et attention. Tout cela montre à quel point la recherche menée au niveau local est essentielle pour la réponse à une pandémie et, plus généralement, pour le développement.

Il est peu probable que quiconque puisse faire marche arrière, même s'il le voulait. La pandémie de Covid-19 nous a montré que les organismes de recherche locaux et nationaux, avec le flux international approprié de ressources et de soutien, sont éminemment bien placés pour mener des recherches ayant un impact. Leurs connaissances hyperlocales, leur flexibilité et leur attention constante à l'influence du monde réel et au bien-être des communautés touchées n'ont pas seulement démontré leur utilité en temps de crise, mais suggèrent leur supériorité par rapport aux réponses internationales. Nous devons impérativement exploiter cette énergie et cette expertise pour faire face aux multiples crises mondiales qui nécessiteront des combinaisons uniques de collaboration et d'innovation en matière de recherche aux niveaux local et mondial.

Notes

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- 1 Andrea Ordóñez Llanos, Directrice exécutive, Southern Voice, Equateur.
- 2 James Georgalakis, Directeur de *Evidence and Impact*, Institute of Development Studies, Royaume-Uni.
- 3 **Site internet du programme Covid-19 Responses for Equity (CORE).**
- 4 Voir **CORE documented stories of change.**
- 5 L'Organisation mondiale de la Santé (OMS) a averti le monde que les « maladies coronavirales hautement pathogènes » (autres que le syndrome respiratoire du Moyen-Orient (MERS) ou le syndrome respiratoire aigu sévère (SRAS)) pourraient constituer la prochaine grande crise sanitaire internationale (OMS 2018).
- 6 Moyen-Orient et Afrique du Nord.
- 7 Les *ollas communes* ou « marmites communautaires » sont semblables à des soupes populaires, où les communautés locales mettent en commun leurs ressources pour fournir de la nourriture à tous les habitants du quartier (Fort and Alcázar, présent numéro de l'*IDS Bulletin*).

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Co-Modelling for Relief and Recovery from the Covid-19 Crisis in Zimbabwe*†

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Abstract This article presents lessons on transcendence, from research on the socioeconomic impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic to policy, using experiences from Zimbabwe. The case study parallels literature on knowledge translation that suggests that the challenge of evidence-informed policy is more a problem of evidence production than evidence translation. The positioning, influence, and leverage of the research team was predominantly built on a platform of personal relationship legacies, academic legitimacy, and networks. The data and model co-produced with state actors could influence policy decisions and behaviours because they were designed with and for policymakers to assist with policy decisions. The results had direct implications for Covid-19 response measures, informing policymakers on what the impact on different groups is likely to be and indicating what policy measures could do to address impacts. Knowledge co-production also proved pivotal in reducing some of the concerns around the limitations of risk-based modelling in a crisis.

Keywords collaborative modelling, bilateral learning, risk-based modelling concerns, knowledge translation, evidence-informed policy, Covid-19, Zimbabwe.

1 Introduction

This article highlights the importance of the evidence production process for evidence-informed policy. In particular, it shows how co-production between economic modellers and state actors of the research product may reduce some of the concerns around the limitations of risk-based modelling in evidence-informed policymaking. The article examines a project organised by a global thinktank, the Partnership for Economic Policy (PEP), in which the collaboration between local/international researchers and local policymakers creates new research and knowledge



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of global interest to address a timely policy challenge that is implemented locally.

While the promotion of evidence-based development policymaking, invariably through some form of collaboration and partnership with practitioners, has been gaining momentum (Georgalakis *et al.* 2017; Nelson 2017), in line with, among others, Mulugeta *et al.* (2019) and Oliver *et al.* (2021), this article adds to the literature by demonstrating the importance of the process of generating evidence to be itself as significant as the evidence in evidence-informed policy. We illustrate explicitly the working phases and information flow by presenting an internally consistent approach whereby we combine a quantitative economic research tool (economic modelling) with expert knowledge and policymakers' interest to create a bilateral learning nexus from modellers to policymakers and vice versa. Even where evidence appeared very well received, throughout the article, we present critical self-reflections and highlight instances where issues such as power dynamics and political expediency could have come into play, for example in influencing the composition of research teams and the nature of evidence that policymakers generally showed a higher preference for.

The case study we present is based on experiences from a PEP project on Zimbabwe that helped policymakers design and implement policies to address the immediate and medium-term socioeconomic effects of the Covid-19 pandemic as it unfolded (Mabugu *et al.* 2021). The Covid-19 crisis challenged researchers and government policymakers at the time of onset because of the widespread nature of its impacts and the uncertainty concerning their magnitude and duration. The uncertainty and knowledge gap inadvertently created a shared need to understand better the Covid-19 impacts as the health crisis evolved and interrogate how to start building back better after the pandemic.

The model we developed provided quantitative data on the potential impact of the pandemic and the associated socioeconomic shocks on different groups. The reason the data and model could influence policy decisions and behaviours was that it had direct implications for Covid-19 response measures. For example, the disaggregated model could be used to assess various scenarios of possible pandemic severity, mild and severe, with and without mitigation policies under each scenario, a feature policymakers found insightful and useful for their day-to-day work. This approach informed policymakers not only on what the impact on different groups is likely to be, but also indicated what policy measures could do to address the impacts. The model is thus explicitly designed to assist with policy decisions.

The rest of the article is organised into five sections. Section 2 sets out the political economy of evidence production use in

Zimbabwe in the context of the Covid-19 crisis. Section 3 looks at some of the critical issues that were central in ensuring that research-generated policy perspectives found an audience in relevant policymaking arenas and society at large; namely, how we set up the arrangements (entry point, securing a trusted adviser, engagement with policymakers) and then how low (donor and civic society community) and high (the Cabinet) the information generated reached. Section 4 presents in a structured way the working phases and information flow we used to create a bilateral learning nexus from modellers to policymakers and vice versa and, in the process, diminishing general concerns around risk-based modelling for policymaking. Section 5 concludes, drawing lessons for the broader audience.

2 The political economy of evidence production and use in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe is a small, impoverished, and highly centralised country where national government enjoys a great deal of leeway in the budget. Thus, policy decisions are mostly discretionary choices made by national decision makers and parliament. In line with Nord (2018), country context, particularly in this case the power of centralised organs such as the Cabinet, played a key role. The Cabinet during the pandemic was making inter- and intra-governmental decisions that would direct most crisis mitigation expenditures, a feature which played a key role in shaping government responses to Covid-19 research and translating that into policy. Our study hugely benefited from this feature of the centralised decision-making process as it made it relatively straightforward for our research findings to reach the government.

In the case of our study, the findings are mostly used by the Cabinet to make decisions on Covid-19-related issues, and once the decision is made, its implementation will affect all citizens throughout the country. The government, through the National Covid-19 Task Force representative, took on board some of the preliminary recommendations from our research directly following engagement with us and shared these at ensuing Cabinet meetings (see process outlined and elaborated in sections 3 and 4). The research findings were significant to policymakers in that they expanded their knowledge base of Covid-19 impact and responses in a timely and coherent macro-micro framework. What was novel regarding the early part of the pandemic outbreak and subsequent panic was that the co-produced modelling work was the first such exercise of its kind in the country. Importantly, what the policymakers, empowered by this evidence, seemed to get right was the ability to have meaningful influence over government ministers and non-governmental bodies, especially as non-governmental organs were playing evermore active roles in the delivery of services in mitigation of Covid-19 impacts.

But this successful experience begs the bigger question of what it is that facilitated the research team's access to higher-level policymakers, as well as the translation of the research into actual policy. While many other factors may have been at play, including the overriding necessity of migrating rapidly to online electronic communication platforms, our interpretation is that the deep-rooted and collegial economic modelling team relationships with state actors and a culture of evidence use within the Zimbabwean government played a key role in opening doors for the research team to policymakers. The research team's own positionality played a decisive role in this regard. The nationals in the research team derived legitimacy as respected academics amongst the Zimbabwean politicians and policymakers. They have previously conducted policy-relevant research over the years and been interacting with the Office of the Presidency and Cabinet (OPC) as part of stakeholder engagements, and the research has proved to be both objectively relevant and having practical application in relation to the issues of the day.

Furthermore, some of the OPC top officials who helped with access to government were former university students of PEP research team members. Such ties are very important, albeit often not amplified enough as useful entry points for knowledge co-production in such settings. As such, there have been long-standing professional relationships that have been maintained over many decades that we used effectively as an entry point. While this experience may not necessarily be widely applicable to many other countries or even other policy settings within Zimbabwe, the salient point for the practitioner community is that of knowing and defining clearly upfront one's unique leverage points prior to embarking on the knowledge co-production process. This worked well in the Zimbabwean case.

While our case study experiences as outlined thus far may inadvertently signify that the Zimbabwean government favoured modelling as a key type of research to inform Covid-19 government responses, in reality, this perceived preference was just by coincidence and was a culmination of many other factors at play. Our case is perhaps unique in that it reflects a particular aspect of knowledge co-production, requiring a particular framing of the policy design to make it suitable for modelling analysis, at a very specific moment brought about by the pandemic. Indeed, as we elaborate in later sections, our co-producers in the research exercise – i.e. the policymakers – made many other suggestions that were important for policy but were not followed through because economic modelling was not the best approach to address those questions, important as they were. As the pandemic was unravelling, data on its evolution and economic consequences was scarce, and this drastically narrowed the choice of available methods. So naturally, simulation methodologies such as the ones we used in the economic modelling provided a logical route to follow.

Indeed, the Zimbabwean government does not appear to be inclined to any particular or unique approach to evidence and has embraced a variety of approaches in other policy settings from both local and foreign sources. The government, though, generally prefers any credible research evidence with the proviso that it speaks to issues in Zimbabwe and is conducted with the involvement of Zimbabwean stakeholders and researchers. The government, in the new dispensation following departure from office of the then President Robert Mugabe, has increasingly warmed to evidence-based research, and over the years, the government has been taking on board research findings and global evidence from institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the African Development Bank (AfDB), among other institutions that provide global evidence. National thinktanks such as the autonomous thinktank Zimbabwe Economic Policy Analysis and Research Unit (ZEPARU) have been in some instances commissioned by the government to conduct studies in a variety of areas.

For any such commissioned studies, sometimes even research design and analysis leading to study recommendations are presented to the Cabinet and the president of the country. This shows political will and at least some form of respect for the importance of research in generating evidence for policymaking at the highest level and generally permeates to other spheres of decision-making. Furthermore, some national thinktanks receive budget allocation annually from the country's national budget, a rough indication of the importance attached to their contributions to policymaking architecture. The fact that the government has tacit influence over who does research and the nature of that research to find its way into policy could be construed as a form of subtle political expediency or more cynically as tokenism. However, this situation is perhaps better than the alternative. There is evidence to suggest (Zinyama 2021) that researchers are sometimes humiliated, bullied, and generally insulted in public when they venture into contested policy terrain with, at times, contrary views, sadly a feature that was not uncommon in the recent history of the country prior to the new dispensation.

The elements of power dynamics and political expediency also play out in the insistence on the involvement of local researchers and on Zimbabwean issues, even if these conditions are neither unique to Zimbabwe nor did they constitute an impediment to our work. The preference for local researchers and research questions generated by and with locals resonated well with the PEP objective of involving Southern researchers and voices in Southern research issues. Thus, by default, the research team already satisfied government conditions of a research team led by Zimbabwean researchers and consisting of both national and international researchers. This PEP team worked closely and collaboratively with policymakers in coming up with the inclusive

intervention proposals to subject to quantitative analysis before translating these proposals into policy actions (Mabugu *et al.* 2021).

Finally, we think Zimbabwe provides an interesting approach for a much more resource-constrained African country when dealing with the impacts of the pandemic. How does such a country undertake mitigation and recovery from a position where finances were always tightly squeezed as a result of both severe international economic sanctions and economic decline? Here, we argue that even when foreign aid dwindles and the country is subjected to such a severe negative shock as the pandemic, having state actors with sound research literacy at various government levels significantly ameliorates the negative consequences of shocks. There is capacity in various Government of Zimbabwe ministries and state-owned enterprises. On economic issues, these government institutions are staffed with technical people with academic qualifications being mostly at master's and doctoral levels. Furthermore, there are other government officials who have even worked outside the country in other jurisdictions, hence they have international experience.

With regard to structured support connecting evidence with policy, the fact that the Cabinet sometimes makes decisions using evidence from research on any particular issue is one connection that exists between evidence and policy. That said, despite Zimbabwe's turbulent past and difficult economic situation, this nascent culture of evidence use in government has facilitated the acceptance and use of the evidence generated in this project for policymaking. Other than the evidence itself, admittedly, many other factors influenced decision-making, including political expediency, ideology, and short-term priorities. As an example of the latter, although it might not have been explicitly stated, Zimbabwean policymakers would probably have perceived this project as one way of re-engaging with external donors to fund even larger interventions aimed at groups left behind by the devastating effects of the pandemic. It is quite conceivable this may in part explain why policymakers played a large role in facilitating the modelling team's access beyond the Cabinet to civic society and the donor community to share the results of the work (see section 3 for further elaboration).

3 Partnership arrangements and process

As discussed in section 2, building enduring relationships with policymakers proved important in opening doors to them and subsequently for the government to use evidence generated in policy. In our view, it was not just that the findings were timely and could be translated into policy user formats, though this was important, but that at the root of it were partnerships. We document and discuss three other main elements regarding partnership arrangements that were pivotal for the successful execution of the process.

The first is that the entry point matters for researchers regarding partnership formation for collaborative modelling; in particular, how one goes about setting up the arrangements. Our experience constitutes what can be characterised as PEP's niche insider status with policymakers during the Zimbabwe project. From the very outset, we as the PEP team were very clear in our strategy that developing a strong PEP team with the ability to not only forge but also sustain enduring relationships with the OPC in Zimbabwe was going to be a critical condition for project success. As described previously and reiterated here, the positioning, influence, and leverage PEP and the local team enjoys is built on a combination of the legacy of PEP researchers being respected academics, their personal relationships, and their networks. The personal relationships local researchers had with state actors is what is often referred to in the policy literature as niche insider status, wherein access to OPC in this case is facilitated by these relationships (Maloney, Jordan and McLaughlin 1994).

For our study, just before we commenced our research, we sought approval from the Chief Secretary to the president and the Cabinet to conduct the study. The request was not only granted but also other relevant government arms were directed to cooperate with us on the study. The same request was also a way of informing the Government of Zimbabwe about the study and this created a sense of eager anticipation of the research evidence as it unfolded. What cemented the relationship over and above the niche insider status enjoyed by the researchers in our assessment was also: (1) a shared sense of urgency and desire to seize the opportunity to understand on both sides the impacts and rethink gender-focused development during a crisis, and (2) the centralised decision-making system in Zimbabwe alluded to earlier in section 2 through the Cabinet.

Thus, while there was no binding agreement developed or signed between us and the Cabinet, what was important in this process at the time was our niche status, a 'coincidence of wants' at that opportune moment, prior 'institutionalised' knowledge on both sides of the policy and research divide and what would be brought to the table, and that the Chief Secretary to the president and the Cabinet took it upon himself to send formal letters to all relevant ministries and policy organs at very high local level, introducing and endorsing the project. Maloney *et al.* (1994) refer to this as the rules of the game already factored in between the two sides, given the long association described earlier in this section and section 2. The information sharing at high policy level with other organs of state by the Chief Secretary further created the opportunity for developing a mutual agenda between the policy experts, policy contacts, and the research team.

Since different priorities often limit the establishment of mutual agendas in research-policy partnerships, such an invitation to collaborate within the process was essential for building

mutual agendas as much as possible (Georgalakis and Rose 2019; Newman, Bharadwaj and Fransman 2019) in the context of collaborative economic modelling. Admittedly, it is unlikely that all groups that produce knowledge relevant to the response to the pandemic can enjoy such niche access as we did, nor should it be a general expectation, but a general lesson here would appear to be that these relationships can be built through long-term investment. This is especially relevant for stakeholder engagements including deliberate actions by researchers to involve policymakers in knowledge co-production and always safeguarding researcher independence and objectivity. It does appear from the Zimbabwean case that safeguarding objectivity and yet being deliberate about knowledge co-production also enhances researcher credibility in the eyes of policymakers. This no doubt has wider or growing relevance for other country contexts.

The second feature of the work was that in order to corroborate results from the quantitative analysis, get buy-in from other key stakeholders (not necessarily those with previous relations or connections with researchers, i.e. policy experts and policymakers), and ensure recommendations are used, strong relationships had to be forged with the implementing ministries and agencies in government. Notwithstanding the well-documented risks involved in using modelling analysis for policy, generally addressed in section 4, and how these risks were minimised during the modelling approach, the following institutions in the process at the coalface of the Covid-19 policy response particularly stand out and were enduring: the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, Ministry of Health and Child Care, Ministry of Industry and Commerce, Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Small to Medium Enterprises, the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA), Zimbabwe National Chamber of Commerce (ZNCC), Confederation of Zimbabwe Industries (CZI), and the Chamber of Mines.

As will be discussed further on in this section and in section 4, the approach taken with these central agencies followed the introductory letter sent from OPC and consisted of interactive workshops and one-on-one engagements facilitated via online platforms. It also comprised in-person follow-up by locally based researchers, where necessary, with the respective experts and policymakers. This ensured that these experts were informed and also able to influence the design of policies to respond to the Covid-19 crisis as it unfolded. The specific modelling innovations for the project included modelling more scenarios as they were motivated and requested by government itself (see elaboration in section 4).

The third and final feature was the interaction with civil society and the donor community. What is unique about this aspect for Zimbabwe is perhaps that the policy partners facilitated our

research team engagement with civil society and donors. This is interesting because often we see development researchers engaging with civil society and not government or using donors as leverage to engage their findings with policy. In our case, the government brokered our own engagement with civil society as we were located closer to the government and further away from civil society than the government was when it came to the specific issue of policy response to the ongoing pandemic.

The Coordinator of the National Covid-19 Technical Task Force made it her role to facilitate our engagement and presentation of study findings in these other fora, such as groupings of development partners and civil society where Covid-19 issues and policy programming were discussed. She was in any case the main coordinator of these stakeholder engagements with the government. Given the panic and vacuum of credible information surrounding the onset of the Covid-19 crisis, the government was well positioned to champion this role as this was a completely new issue, in that none of our researchers had dealt with civil society and donors before.

As already alluded to, Zimbabwean policymakers would probably have perceived and realised that the reputation of PEP itself and links to funding from the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) on this project offered an opportunity for them to re-engage with donors to fund larger-scale interventions for groups left behind by the devastating effects of the pandemic. This in part may explain why policymakers played a significant role in facilitating the modelling team's access to civil society and the donor community to share the results of the work.

4 Economic modelling collaboration between researchers and state actors

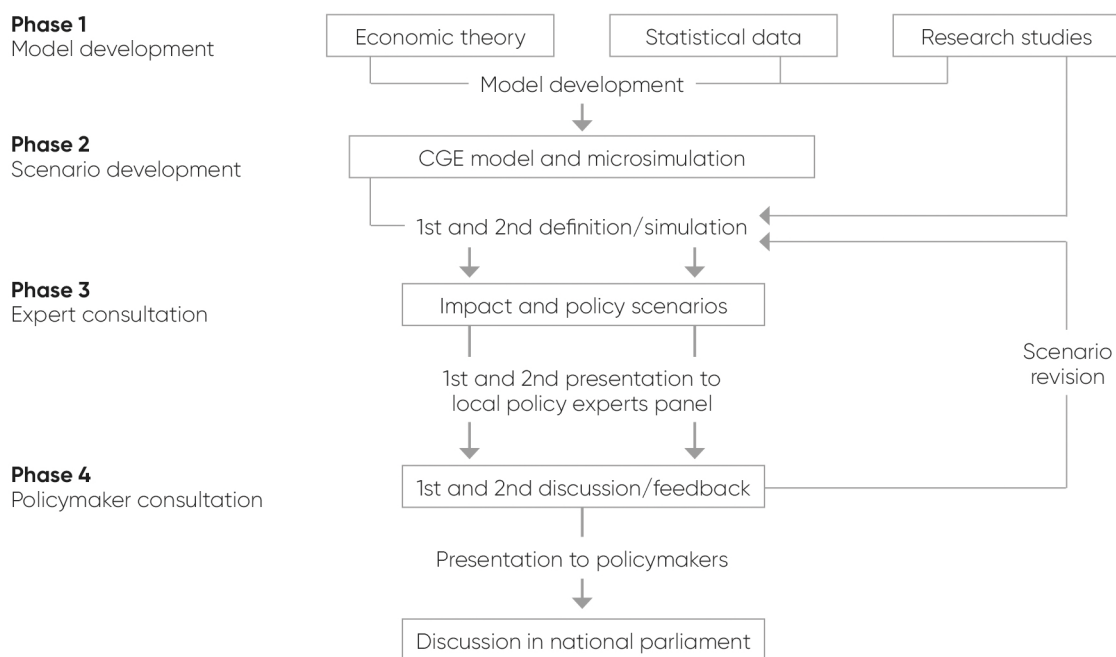
The Covid-19 crisis has challenged policy analysis with its multidimensional impacts on productivity and trade (Kim *et al.* 2022; McKibbin and Fernando 2020a, 2020b; van Heerden and Roos 2021). We start this section by explaining why computable general equilibrium (CGE) with microsimulation were chosen as the main tools for the analysis. At the time of the study, surveyed data as empirical data were not yet available as a base for impact analysis. As the Covid-19 crisis impacted multiple channels in the economy, an economic policy simulation model was the appropriate tool to simulate and analyse impacts and policies.

The experimental framework of an economic policy simulation model requires model development based on statistical data. Since the pandemic created economy-wide impacts, we chose a CGE model as a suitable simulation tool to analyse economic shocks on economic growth, economic sectors, and different agents. The main advantages of CGE models are the relatively small data requirements, the scientifically rigorous methodological framework based on microeconomic and

macroeconomic theory, and the high flexibility in application. These advantages make CGE models a flexible quantitative analysis tool applicable for relatively low development cost in countries with small data availability (Devarajan and Robinson 2013; Lemelin and Savard 2022).

However, using CGE models (or economic models in general) as a policy decision support tool has its limits and risks for the policy decision process (Devarajan and Robinson 2013; Lemelin and Savard 2022). These include:

- 1 Representing the economy with different markets, sectors, and agents. CGE models are complex algebraic model systems. Policymakers perceive them as 'black box' models, with mechanisms and results that are challenging to be understood.
- 2 Although highly complex, CGE models can only be considered as a simplified representation of reality, subject to the underlying assumptions, data, and model algorithm. Normally, CGE models represent sufficiently well the most important aspects to address the research question. However, no CGE model can capture all phenomena and characteristics of the complex and dynamic economic reality and policy decisions.
- 3 CGE models provide quantitative results on simulated economic impacts. These results inform on the trend and the magnitude of economic changes, which can be used to support policy decisions. However, CGE model results require careful interpretation subject to the limitation. If policy decision makers interpret results selectively without sufficiently considering their limits, this can misinform the support to policy decisions.
- 4 The results of CGE model simulations represent only a selected set of potential impacts or policy options and need to be treated like this. In reality, the economic impacts and space for policy options are much bigger than a CGE assessment can cover. If policymakers focus exclusively on the assessed impacts and options, other relevant potential impacts and options could be missed. In this regard, CGE models and their results cannot guide policy decisions. They feed into the policy debate. The policy debate will assess impacts and policy options under consideration of non-modelled aspects and influenced by the dynamics and objectives of policymaking. Policy decisions might not be driven by numbers or trends indicated by CGE model simulation results. The policy decisions are normally taken based on domestic political consensus (Devarajan and Robinson 2013). Last but not least, CGE models used for policy decision-making should be considered, as stated by Lemelin and Savard (2022):

Figure 1 Process of stakeholder-oriented economic policy modelling

Source Authors' own.

CGE (and other) models are useful to contribute insights to the policy debate[s]... while leaving some room for improvement – no model is perfect, no model is complete. It would be fair to say that every model should be considered as a work in progress.
(Lemelin and Savard 2022: 771)

To overcome limits and reduce the risks for policy decision-making, and to provide the most representative analysis as possible we (PEP researchers) followed a stakeholder-oriented economic modelling approach. A stakeholder-oriented application of the model required participatory development and validation by policy experts and makers (hereinafter referred to together as policymakers or state actors). The participation of policymakers in the development process can lower the burden to understand the model and the simulation results (Benfica 2021; van Bruggen, Nikolic and Kwakkel 2019). By involving the policy experts directly and interactively in the modelling process, a second aspect to learning on the part of the modellers can be achieved; i.e. the model can be designed according to stakeholders' perceptions and their subsequent further input (Süsser *et al.* 2021). As a participatory approach, we followed PEP's approach,

which is premised on the belief that evidence produced from an in-country perspective, by empowered and engaged local researchers, results in better policy choices, more sustainable development outcomes, and more inclusive policy debates. As a network, PEP facilitates collaboration between local researchers and stakeholders to produce contextualised, policy-relevant evidence. (de Haan and Sanchez-Swaren 2022: 48)

In this stakeholder-oriented approach to economic modelling, we designed impact and recovery scenarios of interest and allowed for revisions of the analysis after the discussion of results. Figure 1 presents schematically the approach and processes that this project followed in that regard. In phases 1 and 2, we developed the economic policy simulation model as a CGE model linked to a microsimulation model (Decaluwé *et al.* 2013). We combine the CGE model with a distributional analysis (microsimulation) to analyse the impact on poverty at household level (data obtained from Davies, Kwaramba and van Seventer 2018; ZIMSTAT 2018, 2019; ZIMSTAT and World Bank 2020). We then developed the model for Zimbabwe by consulting academic studies and reports (ZIMSTAT 2018, 2019; ZIMSTAT and World Bank 2020), as well as including home-based researchers from the local university in the modelling team.

Next, we designed first impact scenarios based on research studies on other African countries which provide estimates on the expected economic impacts (e.g. Fofana and Sall 2020; Djiofack, Dudu and Zeufack 2020; Escalante and Maisonnave 2022; Maisonnave and Cabral 2021). Based on the official reports of the Government of Zimbabwe (2020a, 2020b) we defined first mitigation scenarios, which we presented in Phase 3 to the Zimbabwean policy experts. After revisions (see Mabugu *et al.* 2023 for how such revisions played out in practice) in which we redefined the impact and policy scenarios according to the experts' knowledge, we presented in Phase 4 the 'new' results to the policymakers. This interactive two-way learning process built not just co-production and co-learning and much-needed transparency around what economic models could or could not do, but importantly cemented the much-needed trust between researchers, local policy experts, and policymakers which was pivotal in ensuring the analysis linked to the specific policy needs of users.

With the closely oriented collaboration and inclusion of experts' knowledge, we addressed concurrently several limitations and risks as outlined in section 4. Through extensive explanation and presentation, we reduced the burden for policymakers, helping them to understand and trust the 'black box model'. With the model validated by experts and the corresponding revision, we progressively nudged the model closer to reality at the same time, taking into account the more relevant aspects.

Through presenting and explaining the results, we bring them into the policy debate and reduce the risk of selective bias or misinterpretation. By offering several different scenarios, we can outline a larger set of possible impacts and policy options than focusing on only a small set of scenarios.

By means of further explanation, from an initial two policy simulations, we ended up with 11 policy simulations run through the modelling tool. Most of the new policy suggestions from policymakers were also motivated by the fact that during the life of the project, different Covid-19 variants began to emerge, resulting in more serious illness and a greater number of deaths. These variants were envisioned neither during the planning period of the project nor at the inception and carrying out of the research study. Also, from their side, participants from the government had to be agile and responsive to new priorities and pressures from their political managers. This had a bearing on what they would prioritise or hope to get from the participation, even if at times it would prove unfeasible to accommodate some of the 'demands', given the nature of the research design.

The approach to gender modelling greatly improved as a result of the interaction with policymakers and representatives from the gender, labour, and agriculture ministries. Particular attention and emphasis were subsequently placed on the labour market as well as the agricultural sector in order to capture the realities of the Zimbabwean labour market and therefore, gender inequities. For instance, in large-scale farming, two thirds of the wage bill is allocated to permanent male workers, while this type of labour is absent from small-scale farming where female workers are more prevalent. Zimbabwe women are particularly prevalent in the agricultural sectors, especially in the smallholder farming sector and have less access to capital than men. We modelled this at the behest of the policy partners and went on to include a capital subsidy policy simulation for the agricultural sectors with a subsectoral emphasis on the smallholder farming sector as a simulation (Mabugu *et al.* 2023).

With hindsight, having different voices in the teams raising concerns and participating in the modelling was critical, not only to arrive at solutions that could be implemented but also as a mechanism that reduced some of the concerns around the limitations of risk-based modelling in a crisis. The strategy facilitated knowledge co-production, and better assimilation and use for both researchers and state actors, and ultimately at Cabinet level. However, the process was not always smooth and at times even became chaotic as would be expected when a team of policymakers, academia, and civil society organisations collaborate.

Quite often, we would receive many good suggestions on interventions, but these were usually made based on the area

of expertise, patronage, or what could be described as the topicality or 'flavour of the moment'. These suggestions did not always prove to be feasible with regard to the pandemic and recovery, or lend themselves to the economic modelling tool. Some of the suggestions were also at times generic in nature – a classic example being 'we need more funding' or requests for better implementation from each of the state actor participant's specific constituencies.

While important, many of these issues could not be addressed using the tool developed for the specific exercise, and it was important to be frank and honest about this without undervaluing the issue or giving the impression of being dismissive. On self-reflection, our view as lead researchers on the project is that the combination of such a study driven by modelling with in-depth interviews with selected relevant actors may have been helpful in advancing the design of these policies and accommodating some of the issues stakeholders raised that were not compatible with our type of modelling approach. Filling these gaps is important going forward. It may also be useful to select some specific policies and attempt to design and implement a more rigorous economy-wide modelling evaluation study complemented with the aforementioned in-depth interviews.

Finally, at times, it was clear to us that the modelling design and results from such modelling is too complex for the policymakers, even having taken into consideration the online and face-to-face follow-ups that took place as previously outlined. It may have been useful to design some more innovative ways of informing the main aspects of the research, including results interpretation (such as short interactive video). Thus, our own learning as economic modellers from this experience would be that an innovative communication, advocacy, and dissemination strategy should accompany the modelling from the outset.

5 Concluding remarks

This article makes the point that the process of generating evidence-based recommendations for policy should be as important as their content. An important dimension of the article is the learning about how collaborative economic modelling as a form of co-production of evidence may reduce some of the concerns around the limitations of risk-based modelling in a crisis. Partnerships in this respect were pivotal and, it goes without saying, there is a need for researchers to be deliberate in investing in activities that forge enduring partnerships with state actors. The article highlights several messages.

First, country context, particularly the underlying socio-political conditions and culture of using research, plays a key role in shaping government responses to Covid-19 research and translating that into policy. Together with state actors, we exploited the paucity of evidence on the unanticipated

shock of the pandemic and the centralised nature of policy decision-making. This then allowed us to rapidly formulate a number of mitigation and recovery policy measures and to find an audience at the highest level of policy decision-making.

Second, the importance of designing an interactive yet structured framework with internal consistency to enhance co-production, co-learning, and transparency, and to build the much-needed trust of policymakers in the results arising from technical economic modelling. The approach chosen needs to be flexible and adaptable enough to provide evidence-based input with very short turnaround times.

Third, while, as elsewhere, public institutions in Zimbabwe need official channels to gain meaningful cooperation, the process of building mutual respect involves enduring relationships that may be forged through long-term investments in knowledge co-production. In addition, understanding how key decision makers and relevant stakeholders react to evidence-based policy responses during feedback sessions and then meaningfully implement those responses is key to having policies established.

Fourth, involving policymakers, particularly in simulation design and interpretation of the model results, is pivotal to minimising risks around engaging modelling with policy. Complementing this is a need for economic modellers to invest in developing innovative communication and dissemination strategies that reinforce learning amongst state actors in the intricacies of economic modelling.

Notes

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Research During the Covid-19 Pandemic: Crucial Arms for Struggle*†

Ana Carolina Ogando^{1,2}

Abstract At the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO), a global research–action–policy network, collaborated with membership-based workers’ organisations and non-governmental organisations to conduct a mixed methods, longitudinal study with nearly 2,000 informal workers across 11 cities in the global South and North. The research process underpins three of WIEGO’s core research principles, which include centring informal workers’ lived experience and knowledge, fostering collective ownership over the research process, and producing actionable evidence for advocacy. Drawing from the insights of researcher-activists, this article considers how WIEGO’s institutional readiness, highly nuanced and contextualised analyses, and attention to trust and care enabled a co-productive research process. Moreover, the article seeks to understand how these factors can potentially shape the broader objectives of research as both a capacity-building and mobilising tool and as a medium for translating knowledge for advocacy locally, nationally, and internationally.

Keywords knowledge co-production, Covid-19, research, informal workers.

1 Introduction

Statistics in the hands of workers is power.

(Ela Bhatt, founder of the Self Employed Women’s Association, SEWA)

During a crisis, research is crucial arms for struggle. It was good to have this kind of research, validating what workers were going through and then trying to make it visible.

(WIEGO team member, New Delhi)

Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO), a global research–action–policy network, is committed



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to supporting informal workers' livelihoods through direct engagement and alliances between three of its constituencies: worker organisations, researchers and statisticians, and development practitioners. These relationships seek to strengthen and connect organisations as a means of amplifying their collective voice in key policymaking settings. By working closely with these constituencies over the past 25 years, one of WIEGO's fundamental objectives has been to challenge myths around the informal economy in academic and policy discourse. At the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic and amidst a context of fear regarding the public health crisis, increasing stigma against informal workers and a drastic loss of livelihoods and earnings, WIEGO collaborated with local membership-based workers' organisations (MBOs), non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and research-activist teams to conduct a mixed methods, longitudinal study.³ The study examines the degree and pathways of impact on almost 2,000 informal workers working as home-based workers, domestic workers, street vendors, and waste pickers across 11 cities⁴ in five regions of the world (Asia, Africa, Latin America, North America, and Eastern Europe).

The Covid-19 Crisis and the Informal Economy Study mapped the multidimensional impacts of the crisis on workers' livelihoods, including impacts on workers' earnings and ability to work; impacts of unpaid care work on paid work; differentiated government responses to the pandemic, including city-level restrictions and relief measures; workers' health concerns; workers' coping and adaptation strategies; MBO support and advocacy strategies; and workers' demands for inclusive economic recovery. Round 1 fieldwork was conducted during June and July 2020 and round 2 fieldwork was conducted during June to early August 2021 in nine of the 11 cities. Due to the severity of the Delta variant outbreak, fieldwork in two Indian cities could only be conducted during September and October 2021 (Alfers *et al.* 2022; Chen *et al.* 2021).

The pandemic has catalysed discussions around conducting research at a time of global health and economic crisis (Taylor and Knipe 2022). This article considers key factors that enabled a co-productive research process with distinct yet interconnected local and global dynamics oriented towards advocacy objectives and cross-country learning. More specifically, the article unpacks how a knowledge co-production approach, which brings together researchers, activists, and informal workers' organisations, can produce robust and rigorous data. By opening up the research process to input from multiple perspectives and, equally importantly, from informal workers' organisations, knowledge co-production helps challenge the notion of which and whose knowledge is valid. Moreover, the rejection of an extractive approach reflects a commitment to the notion that the generation of data is never an end in and of itself. Rather, research can be an important means to strengthen the capacity of informal workers' organisations to leverage claims-making

opportunities and to engage with the state. In other words, 'the co-production of knowledge challenges the idea of research on disadvantaged and marginalized groups, demanding the recognition of research processes with organized citizens' (Mitlin and Bartlett 2018: 364).

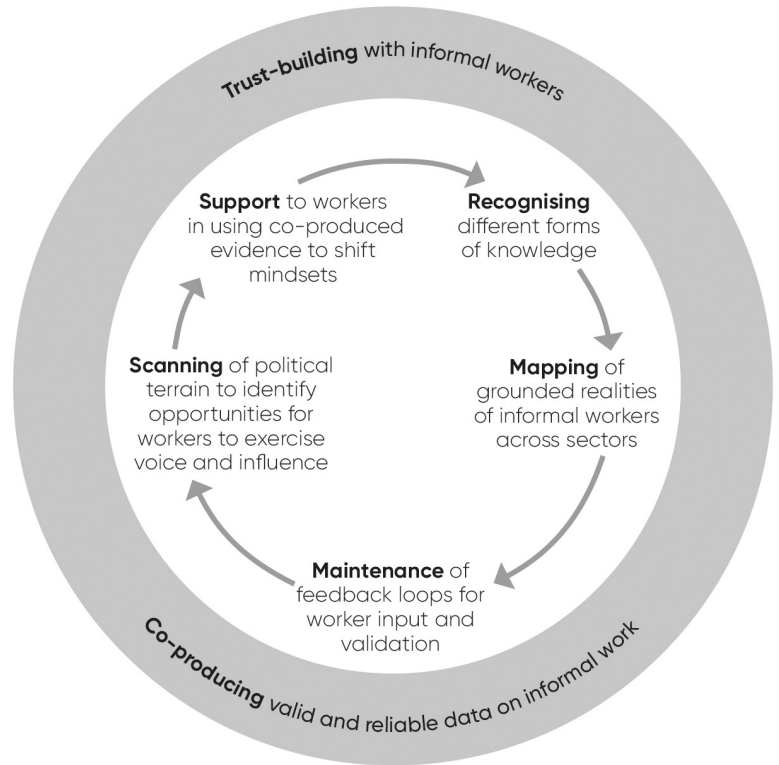
Several questions guide the reflections in this article. How do long-standing relationships of trust strengthen an organisation's readiness to design and implement research with vulnerable groups during crises? How does a research process committed to deep listening and care, as well as to valuing localised knowledge and diverse skillsets help navigate the ethical conundrums and increased complexities of doing research during crises? Engagement with the needs, demands, and voices of the global South points in the direction of understanding how research can be a pathway for making visible contextualised and bottom-up solutions to structural inequalities.

2 WIEGO's approach to knowledge co-production: a political strategy for action

WIEGO draws on interdisciplinary perspectives in its policy work, development of statistics, research, worker education and capacity building, and direct support to informal workers' organisations (Ogando and Harvey 2020). In particular, the development of statistics and research, ranging from Action Research to research using more traditional methods, serves WIEGO's key function of increasing the visibility of informal workers in policy discourse and decision-making fora, at both local and global scales. These engagements rely on the generation of actionable evidence, which entails producing knowledge that can help address concrete problems as well as present contextualised solutions. Ultimately, action-oriented queries serve to systematise data that can be mobilised for political action.

In addition, WIEGO sees research as a strategy to strengthen MBOs' capacities and to amplify workers' voices and demands through fostering their ownership of data. WIEGO upholds a set of guiding principles in research with and for MBOs, including recognition of workers' situated experience and knowledge, provision of continuous feedback loops, and commitment to strengthening long-standing relationships with informal workers' organisations, their NGO allies, and global networks of informal workers. This approach underscores a commitment to more horizontal, democratic, and collaborative relationships throughout research and advocacy processes (see Figure 1). Moreover, this approach reflects the belief that research is never an end in itself but rather, and more importantly, a process and political strategy (Mitlin and Bartlett 2018; Alfes, Xulu and Dobson 2016a, Alfes *et al.* 2016b; Ogando and Harvey 2020). In this regard, WIEGO and informal workers' organisations work to identify and leverage policy opportunity windows that can result in more enabling policy environments for informal workers.

Figure 1 WIEGO's approach to knowledge co-production



Source Ogando and Harvey (2020). © Edward Elgar, reproduced with permission.

3 Conducting research during crises: why institutional readiness matters

At the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, several scholars reinforced how it served to further lay bare existing structural inequalities and erode assets and collective arrangements for survival amongst the working poor in urban cities across the global South and North (Bahn *et al.* 2020; Gupte and Mitlin 2021). Being strongly connected to and engaged with the grounded realities of informal workers enabled WIEGO to conduct research at a time of greater complexity around data collection processes, increased vulnerability and isolation, and loss of livelihoods for the urban working poor. WIEGO's prior experience with knowledge co-production in multi-city, multi-sector, and mixed methods research initiatives in the past, including a study on the 2007–09 global economic crisis (see Horn 2009) and the Informal Economy Monitoring Study (2012–14),⁵ laid the groundwork for its institutional readiness to undertake research. In this regard, institutional readiness⁶ relates broadly to WIEGO's organisational history and anchoring to grass-roots dynamics and intelligence, respect for bottom-up driven demands, and experience in relying

on local–global relationships. It is this history that positioned WIEGO to conduct research which could then feed directly into context-based advocacy needs at a time of crisis and urgency.

In addition, a fundamental enabler for conducting research during the pandemic was the presence of WIEGO team members in many of the study cities, and their long-standing relationships and partnerships with informal workers' organisations. Because of these relationships, WIEGO was informed, from the start of the crisis, of informal workers' organisations' assessment of the gravity of the initial impacts of the pandemic on workers' livelihoods in several cities. Amidst increasing attention on the informal economy by governments and media at the start of the crisis, and in the absence of research or reporting centring informal workers themselves, WIEGO and its partners understood the importance of collecting data that would capture the lived experiences of workers during the crisis to better inform advocacy processes.

In response to this bottom-up driven demand for research, WIEGO quickly formed a Covid-19 Crisis Study Advisory Team and started to gather direct inputs from informal workers' organisations on the design of the study, the essential themes to cover through the survey tool and interview guides, and processes for identifying and mobilising study respondents. The Study Advisory Team was composed of 12 WIEGO team members, 11 of whom were women and half of whom represented the global South.⁷

WIEGO focal city teams⁸ have long worked with MBOs in five of the study cities (Accra, Dakar, Lima, Mexico City, and New Delhi), supporting their organisational development and advocacy objectives. Once abruptly confined to their homes at the start of the crisis, these teams pivoted to become action researchers – working with MBO leaders to connect with members for phone surveys and interviews. In the remaining six of the study cities, the research was carried out by MBO partners and NGO allies, with support from WIEGO's Study Advisory Team.

Despite the practical and ethical challenges (Taylor and Knipe 2022) related to conducting phone surveys and interviews in a context where the physical proximity so critical for building rapport is lost (Hall, Gaved and Sargent 2021; Townsend *et al.* 2020), existing relationships of trust with workers facilitated the research process, and in some cases, workers reported that phone surveys served as a welcome source of connection during a time of isolation.

From a research implementation perspective, several challenges emerged relating to conducting surveys and semi-structured interviews over the phone – namely the lack of visual cues and limited interpersonal connection. Nevertheless, research teams worked to establish a sense of empathy and flexibility in carrying out interviews that met workers' availability. Conscious that

conducting research during a pandemic requires adaptation and concerned with burdening workers at a time of livelihood losses and fear, on-ground assessments were made to establish reasonable timelines, which resulted in delays in data collection in some cities.

Institutional readiness was also reflected in our MBO partners' and local research-activist teams' deep knowledge of different occupational sectors of informal workers, allowing them to both anticipate and respect the challenges respondents would have in taking part in research that covers sensitive and difficult topics related to impacts of the pandemic. In this sense, institutional readiness cannot be disassociated from long-standing, interpersonal relationships that ultimately served as both a medium for rapport and bonding and an anchoring to grass-roots realities even in the absence of face-to-face interactions. As a researcher from Accra, Ghana noted: 'On the issue of relationships, assuming WIEGO had no established relationship with MBOs, would this study have been possible? My answer would be no. Because WIEGO has [these] relationships, it builds trust and [this] is very key.'

4 Embedding trust and care in research

If existing trust enabled the research process, in some cases, the research process served to strengthen it further – local research-activist teams from New Delhi, India and Lima, Peru equally noted how being part of the study strengthened trust between WIEGO and informal workers' organisations. For a researcher-activist in New Delhi, India the global study provided a means to stay connected to workers and centre their voices in subsequent advocacy with the data: 'This iterative process strengthened our bonding with the partners, but also our credibility in the sense that we were part of a global study and we wanted to listen to workers.' A research-activist from Accra, Ghana reflected on empathy and deep listening as fundamental elements contributing to the process of reinforcing trust and care that the global study took shape within:

And there was this issue of empathy. Most of them [workers] felt they had no one to talk to. The fact we were there to speak to them made them feel WIEGO was present when everyone had turned their back against workers. Talking was a path for [workers] to vent because there was so much fear. For me, that is something that helped build trust.?

Listening with care and attention were conscious actions taken by researchers who understood the need for changing the ways one relates to others while conducting research at a time of grave crisis.

Similarly, local partners in Ahmedabad, India highlighted the isolation workers were facing and the importance of bearing

witness to their stories: 'It was very emotional to the members, no one was talking to them during the lockdown.'

By round 2 of the study, workers were expressing that they felt supported as a result of partners maintaining contact with them. As the executive director of local partner Asiye eTafuleni (AeT) in Durban, South Africa reported: 'The members felt supported because we went back to them during round 2. Many of the informal workers were reported saying, "You have not forgotten us."' By engaging with care, researchers were able to transmit the notion that the research was not only **on** workers, but **with** and **for** them.

Trust was also reinforced by WIEGO's commitment to collaborating with worker leaders in the analysis and use of the data. While the fast-paced evolution of the pandemic eliminated the possibility of in-person training and feedback in the design phase, and complicated WIEGO's ability to conduct continuous in-person data validation with worker leaders as a result of new waves of the Covid-19 virus, strategies for constant communication around the research process, analysis of findings, and advocacy possibilities helped establish greater buy-in and ownership with MBO partners. With regard to the latter, it is important to note that the ability to capture contextual and sector nuance in accessible formats, such as city-level fact sheets, helped workers see their stories and lived experience reflected back in the data, encouraging the use of results. Bearing witness to workers' lived experience encompassed the various dimensions of a deeply engaged research process (Pacheco-Vega and Parizeau 2018), which sought to connect the care expressed in the research process with critical attention to the ways in which data is presented and who it represents.¹⁰

Commitment to a non-extractive approach was also embedded in the way that fieldwork was carried out. For WIEGO, conducting fieldwork through online platforms included covering the costs of data usage for workers; stipends for research participation; flexibility to carry out interviews based on workers' availability; sensitivity to privacy issues, particularly for women in isolation in households; and greater empathy through non-visual cues. In addition, the ability to connect workers to relief, and the fast turnaround in sharing findings with workers and worker leaders, strengthened the perception of WIEGO as a credible source and ally.

The multiple configurations of trust and care, expressed distinctly across the 11 cities, reflected an ethical and epistemological orientation towards the depth of vulnerability and inequalities that the pandemic served to exacerbate. In addition, centring trust and care in the research process builds on an understanding that 'relational, other-centered ways of knowing the world' (Lynch, Kalaitzake and Crean 2021: 54) can extend beyond intimate,

private settings and into community contexts and political settings to address inequalities and exclusionary discourse, practice, and policy (*ibid.*).

In several ways, the careful and respectful engagement with workers during the Covid-19 Crisis and the Informal Economy Study helped frame injustices in an 'understandable, knowable and actionable' manner (Tironi and Rodríguez Giralt 2017: 89) and without erasing the very struggles that configure the day-to-day life and resistance of informal workers' organisations beyond the pandemic (Bahn *et al.* 2020; Gupte and Zahan 2021). Embedding forms of care in our research practice allows for subjective dignity and connects care with the political (Tironi and Rodríguez Giralt 2017). Hence, placing value on care was a deliberate choice grounded in ethical considerations related to the gravity of the pandemic. The Study Advisory Team and researchers discussed what was at stake for workers to engage in research and how to minimise the consequent negative impacts on their livelihoods and wellbeing. These efforts were a means for articulating and making visible the extent of differentiated impacts on and the agency of informal workers.

5 Leveraging diverse skills and forms of knowledge towards local and global action

The Covid-19 Crisis and the Informal Economy Study was designed to build from the strengths of WIEGO's global network structure and to maximise impact in both local and global advocacy processes in support of MBOs.

Throughout all stages of the research process, spaces for participation of different actors were created to bridge and value diverse forms of knowledge, build research confidence and skills with mixed methods, and enable an inclusive exchange and collective sense-making across members of the Study Advisory Team and local research teams.

As previously mentioned, inputs from informal workers' organisations and local research-activist teams in the design phase were essential for designing tools in a way that would respond to both local and global advocacy needs. In addition, online training workshops around the quantitative and qualitative tools in both rounds of the study served the purpose of valuing and translating local contextual and sector knowledge into the actual tool design.

During the data analysis phase, participation was embedded through deep sense-making whereby local research teams provided key contextual information to substantiate findings, while WIEGO's Study Advisory Team sought to map broader global trends by themes and sectors.

The confluence of distinct knowledge and skill sets helped hone WIEGO's approach to mixed methods.

For a local team member from Mexico City, Mexico, the distinct phases of research proved to be a positive learning process: 'Analysis was difficult in the beginning but after all, I think it was a good exercise to clarify and to order my thoughts.' For a local team member in New Delhi, India, the process of analysing the data first hand was both empowering and a validation of how their insights of grass-roots dynamics were reflected back in hard data.

We looked at the data ourselves and [looked at where] the research and ground realities came together. It's this confidence of your own ability to deal with research. This process is very enriching and empowering for the team because it anchors you to the ground work. When what you are seeing on the ground [is also in] statistics, it gives you the confidence of knowing you have your feet on the ground.

From the Study Advisory Team's perspective, there was the opportunity to get further training for online survey platforms (Survey CTO) and qualitative data software (NVivo). Lastly and equally important was the fact that some MBOs reported improving their own research and digital skills through participation in the study. SEWA in Ahmedabad, India started using Zoom meetings and other online platforms such as Google Forms in their current work after participating in the study.

Relatedly, local research teams highlighted the importance of the study in providing common spaces for North–South and South–South exchanges around findings and advocacy strategies, which for many seemed to underscore the value of Southern voices and knowledge. In addition, these learning exchanges helped both local research teams and the Study Advisory Team sharpen their understanding of power dynamics and strategies for targeting influential stakeholders and allies at multiple levels.

The study was also an opportunity to build confidence around key messaging and new formats for disseminating research findings. From academic papers to accessible worker materials, WIEGO's Study Advisory Team reported new capacities around testing new formats and styles to translate study findings for different audiences, which is reflected in media uptake of the study findings in over 44 countries.

Nevertheless, the study also faced its own set of trade-offs and challenges. From a participatory research perspective, possibilities for extensive deliberation during key decision-making moments were more limited throughout the study. For example, timing constraints to release findings, advocacy pressures, technological barriers, strains on workers, and complexity of findings created difficult trade-offs around how much and how to engage MBO partners in the analysis of results.

While standardisation and rigour created a strong base for global advocacy, it reduced the flexibility for local customisation that would incorporate themes relevant for local advocacy. At the same time, this trade-off still presented a gain, as there was value in situating local findings in a global context. Another noted challenge was the ability to fully engage workers within and across sectors in multi-day, in-person validation workshops that are common practices of WIEGO's local teams and partners. Given that the pandemic imposed restrictions, teams had to re-strategise on how to engage with worker leaders through a more consultative approach, which involved sharing findings, opening space for questions, and contextualisation from leaders. This lighter touch approach to engaging with MBO leaders in the analysis phase was nonetheless pivotal for strategising on advocacy plans. In addition, it has led some local teams to think of next steps for engaging with worker leaders to strengthen feedback on the findings for future learning and advocacy with organisations.

The knowledge synthesis that occurs at the local and global levels is mutually reinforcing and serves a twofold purpose: to value diverse knowledge and to secure gains in policy terrains at both levels. The actual work involved in connecting and translating diverse knowledge resembles what some authors understand as 'emancipatory circuits of knowledge'¹¹ (Butcher *et al.* 2022: 206). This synergy reinforces the push for shifting and influencing policy discourse and practice in ways in which key stakeholders not only engage with the realities of the urban poor and the multiple arrangements of urban collective life (Bahn *et al.* 2020) but also learn from bottom-up solutions (Gupte and Mitlin 2021). It is ultimately about recognising and valuing how localised knowledge holds solutions that can enable more effective and sustainable pathways for recovery, as well as mitigate against future shocks and crises.

6 Actionable data as a compass for framing policy demands

The global study led to mobilisation around the collective analysis of problems and the proposal of solutions with and for MBOs. On one level, the research process itself helped WIEGO to mobilise as a network whereby local teams and MBOs responded to the crisis in a timely manner, even before the publication of all findings became an authoritative source on the sector-based demands of informal workers. As the director from AeT affirmed: 'Our organisation has become authoritative on the Covid-19 pandemic. We can give you a list of presentations we have done during the Covid-19 crisis, including to urban professionals [and] academics, among others.' On another level, it provided space for the elaboration of proposals and agendas with worker leaders based on the contextualisation of findings. While there is still much to unravel and monitor in terms of policy wins and shifts in punitive discourse and practice, Table 1 presents some key highlights of how MBOs in several cities engaged with the data in

Table 1 Workers' use of data for advocacy

City/country	Use of data	Advocacy objective
Accra, Ghana	Street vendor leaders from Informal Hawkers and Vendors of Ghana (IHVAG) used city-level reports in preparation for media interviews.	Highlighted the challenges and demands of the sector, particularly relating to punitive and exclusionary measures taken against informal workers in public spaces.
Bangkok, Thailand	HomeNet International and the Federation of Informal Workers of Thailand (FIT) present findings to the Minister of Labour in Thailand.	Drew on findings to address informal workers' demands, leading to the establishment of multisectoral committees that brought together the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Industry, the Bangkok Metropolitan Authority, and Bank of Thailand. These meetings focused on addressing relief measures for informal workers and long-standing demands for social protection.
Dakar, Senegal	Waste pickers' leaders from Bokk Diom cooperative presented key findings from the study to local authorities.	Drew on findings to shape advocacy messages for inclusive solid waste management policies.
Lima, Peru	A domestic workers' organisation used findings in discussions with policymakers and to complement findings from other studies on domestic workers.	Drew on findings to shape advocacy messages and call attention to long-standing demands for social protection.
Mexico City, Mexico	The National Union of Domestic Workers – Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores y Trabajadoras del Hogar, SINACTRAHO – presented findings from the study to Congress.	Drew on findings on food security and loss of earnings to present demands of domestic workers.

Source Author's own analysis of study impacts.

their advocacy work. These initial gains reveal the importance of closely aligning the research design and stages with the concrete needs of informal workers' organisations.

7 Concluding thoughts

The Covid-19 pandemic has presented a myriad of challenges and ethical considerations for the ways we conduct research. It has caused a recalibration of the modes for generating knowledge even in a co-productive approach. While thinking and knowing through trust and care (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017; Tironi and Rodríguez Giralte 2017) present a call for greater attention to power dynamics and forms of involved¹² engagement, it just as equally reveals the extent of our interconnections and interdependency. What it reveals is that co-productive knowledge generation holds transformative potential to build community and capacities when multiple perspectives can influence the design, implementation, analysis, and dissemination of research.

WIEGO's Covid-19 Crisis and the Informal Economy Study provides some key lessons related to conducting research in times of crisis and exacerbated vulnerabilities. First, the study reinforced the importance of having solid, pre-existing relationships with workers' organisations in order to ethically conduct research of this nature. Second, participating in the research process helped support worker leaders to extend their outreach to members and translate documented needs into claims-making strategies. Third, by relying on local-global expertise in the sense-making process, findings revealed highly contextualised and differentiated policy needs in cities. Such rich and nuanced findings could then be aggregated for cross-city worker solidarity, strategy formulation, and global advocacy.

The balance of institutional readiness, embedding trust and care, and generating actionable data for local-global advocacy highlights how fundamental it is to value knowledge and expertise from the bottom up. WIEGO's Covid-19 Crisis and the Informal Economy Study served to maximise the visibility of the long-standing demands of the urban working poor. Along with workers' organisations, the end goal is to effectively translate these demands in ways in which key stakeholders take stock of grass-roots' solutions to equitable urban development. Furthermore, by broadening the ways in which we co-produce and are involved with knowledge, we can support the creation of new configurations of solidarity (Spade 2020) in a context of growing inequalities, political tensions, and compounding crises.

Notes

- * This *IDS Bulletin* was produced as part of the Covid-19 Responses for Equity (CORE) Knowledge Translation Programme, led by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), which supports the translation of knowledge emerging from the CORE initiative. Supported by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), CORE brings together 20 projects to understand the socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic, improve existing responses, and generate better policy options for recovery. The research is being led by local researchers, universities, thinktanks, and civil society organisations across 42 countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East. The views expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of IDRC or its Board of Governors, or IDS. For further information, please contact: c19re.org.
- † The Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) Covid-19 Crisis and the Informal Economy Study team would like to acknowledge their local partners in each study city, as well as the informal workers who participated in the study. Despite the significant health concerns and economic hardships, local informal workers' organisations and the local research teams willingly participated in the study. This research was made possible thanks to generous support from Canada's IDRC. The author

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- 1 Ana Carolina Ogando, Research Coordinator, WIEGO, Brazil.
- 2 It is important to note the author's positionality as a member of the WIEGO Covid-19 Crisis Study Advisory Team. She has conducted several interviews with local city teams and partners regarding the global crisis study research process.
- 3 The sample from each city was based on a purposive quota approach designed to reflect the composition of the membership of the informal workers' organisations participating in the study.
- 4 The cities included in the five regions are (1) in Asia: Bangkok (Thailand), and Ahmedabad, New Delhi, and Tirupur (India); (2) in Africa: Accra (Ghana), Dakar (Senegal), and Durban (South Africa); (3) in Latin America: Lima (Peru) and Mexico City (Mexico); (4) in North America: New York City (USA); and (5) in Eastern Europe: Pleven (Bulgaria).
- 5 For more information and reports, see the **Informal Economy Monitoring Study webpage**.
- 6 See de Haan and Sanchez-Swaren (2022) for considerations on WIEGO's Covid-19 Crisis and the Informal Economy Study during the pandemic.
- 7 The Study Advisory Team drew on senior team members who had led previous WIEGO global studies, junior researchers, specialists in quantitative and qualitative methodologies, experts in the field of social protection, research-activist team members directly involved in city-level advocacy work, and WIEGO Communication Team members. Authorship of global findings and academic articles has been shared among senior and junior researchers on the Study Advisory Team, as well as members of city-level research teams.
- 8 For more information, see **WIEGO's focal cities webpage**.
- 9 Interviews with local research teams and partners were conducted in March–June 2022 as part of an extensive monitoring and evaluation process that follows an outcome harvesting approach. The author conducted and/or participated in several of the interviews. Outcome harvesting is a method that seeks to identify, describe, verify, and analyse change in the behaviour, relationships, actions, activities, policies, or practices of an individual, group, community, organisation, or institution influenced by a project (Wilson-Grau 2018).
- 10 Action Research, Participatory Action Research, and feminist methodologies, as complementary research traditions, highlight the ways in which a more liberating and transformative research process includes different ways of relating and constructing knowledge (Reid and Frisby 2008). Other researchers have noted the potential of care, trust, and reflexivity as central tenets of 'deeply engaged scholarship' that is relevant for both fieldwork and data analysis (Pacheco-Vega and Parizeau 2018).

- 11 These circuits reflect processes of co-producing and mobilising knowledge across research and practice, actors, and scales with the intention of challenging structural urban inequalities (Butcher *et al.* 2022).
- 12 For Puig de la Bellacasa (2017), involved knowledge signals a dimension of affective connection rather than distant observation.

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Policy Influence in Crisis: Reflections from a Southern Thinktank*

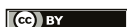
Helani Galpaya,¹ Gayani Hurulle² and David Gunawardana³

Abstract This article is a reflection by LIRNEasia, a thinktank working in the developing Asia Pacific, on factors enabling and hindering its ability to influence policy during two separate but related crises in Sri Lanka: the Covid-19 pandemic and the fully fledged economic collapse that the country underwent in 2022. The article discusses LIRNEasia's readiness and ability to respond to the unprecedented situation of crisis in the country it is headquartered in and where most of its staff are located. We detail the specific actions LIRNEasia took during each crisis in terms of research (both new and repurposed) and dissemination of research in order to frame debates and influence policy.

Keywords policy windows, research to policy, policy influence, policy impact, crisis response, Covid-19, global South.

1 Introduction

This article is a reflection by a South Asian thinktank on factors enabling and hindering its ability to influence policy during two separate but related crises in Sri Lanka. The organisation is LIRNEasia, a pro-poor, pro-market thinktank working in South and Southeast Asia on infrastructure policy and regulatory issues. The two crises are the Covid-19 pandemic and the fully fledged economic collapse that Sri Lanka is undergoing at the time of writing (2022). We explain the context of these two interconnected crises in the country and focus on the related government policies. We then discuss the way in which LIRNEasia has been operating since its inception in order to explain its readiness to engage with these unprecedented crises in the country that it is headquartered in and where a majority of its staff are located. We detail the specific actions LIRNEasia took during each crisis in terms of research (both new and repurposed) and dissemination of research in order to frame debates and influence policy.



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2 Context of the Covid-19 pandemic and economic crisis in Sri Lanka

The Covid-19 pandemic required unprecedented policy interventions, both of type and magnitude, around the world. Sri Lanka was no exception. Stringent restrictions on movement helped curtail the spread of the virus but had multiple knock-on effects on economic activity, highlighted by the economy contracting by 3.6 per cent in 2020. This curtailed income streams for those who were unable to work from home, with daily wage earners being particularly impacted (UNICEF 2020). Hence, food was unaffordable to many, given the income losses. Additionally, schools closed their (physical) doors nationwide in March 2020 and attempted to deliver education remotely.

Vaccination began in early 2021. By the end of March 2022, 82 per cent of the population aged 12 and above had received two doses of the vaccine (Ministry of Health Epidemiology Unit 2022).

Then in 2022, as many other countries were entering into their 'post-Covid-19' recovery phase, Sri Lanka transitioned seamlessly into a major economic crisis. The country experienced twin deficits, given shortages in foreign exchange reserves and government revenue. These deficits led to shortages in multiple essential items including food, medicine, fuel, and cooking gas. Fuel shortages had a domino effect on people's ability to go to work and school. Hence, the school closures continued into 2022, just as people in other countries were returning to schools and workplaces.

Unsustainable inflation rose to 66.7 per cent year-on-year in July 2022. Food inflation, which soared further to 82.5 per cent (Central Bank of Sri Lanka 2022), had a disproportionate impact on the poor, as they spend a larger than average share of income on food. In June 2022, the United Nations (UN) estimated that nearly 6 million people – over one quarter of the country's population – needed humanitarian aid (UN News 2022). At the time of writing (November 2022), schools have reopened after one of the longest periods of school closure in the world (UNICEF 2022). However, the cost of living remains high and mass brain drain is occurring, while negotiations with the countries' creditors and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) are ongoing.

The pandemic certainly contributed towards this economic crisis; for example, travel restrictions reduced tourist arrivals, impacting foreign exchange earnings. However, the government's misinformed, miscalculated policies over decades was the key driver of the economic crisis. A populist tax cut in 2019 reduced local income in a country with an already-small tax base (Verité Research 2022). A high debt burden undertaken to support vanity infrastructure projects, unaffordable but politically motivated subsidies, and high government expenditure on unproductive labour and state-owned enterprises were also root causes (Rafi 2022; Fernando 2022).

3 LIRNEasia's response

3.1 About LIRNEasia

LIRNEasia is an independent thinktank working on digital policy issues across South and Southeast Asia. Founded in 2004, its mission is 'catalyzing policy change through research to improve people's lives in the emerging Asia Pacific by facilitating their use of hard and soft infrastructures through the use of knowledge, information and technology'.⁴ To achieve this, LIRNEasia has undertaken a three-pronged approach: (1) conducting policy-relevant research, (2) communicating that research to relevant policymakers, and (3) improving the capacity of policymakers and stakeholders in the region. It has a small core staff of researchers and administrators (primarily based in Colombo, Sri Lanka, but with some staff working permanently from outside the country) and a larger group of Research Fellows and Policy Fellows dispersed throughout and working in the Asian region.

3.1.1 Model of policy influence

Over the years, LIRNEasia's model of policy influence broadly aligns with that of Lindquist (2001) and therefore its activities fit into the framework as follows:

- **Affecting policy regimes:** includes the modification of existing policies and re-design of new ones. Examples include facilitating changes in Sri Lanka's data protection law (Samaratunga and Tissera 2022) and Myanmar's Universal Service Policy (LIRNEasia 2018). In each instance, the organisation identified emerging policy windows, or at times created them, ensuring policy-relevant knowledge was available to policy actors and policy influencers. Thanks to the foresight and flexibility of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC, one of LIRNEasia's long-standing funders), many past research grants from the IDRC allowed a budget line item titled 'rapid response', intended to mobilise experts and communication resources if and when a new policy window opened, even when the policy window was not directly related to the project that was being funded.
- **Broadening policy horizons:** includes providing policymakers with opportunities for networking and learning with colleagues elsewhere, introducing new concepts to frame debates, putting ideas onto the agenda or stimulating public debate; educating researchers and others to take up new positions with a broader understanding of issues and stimulating quiet dialogue among decision makers. Examples include LIRNEasia's 'Expert Fora', invitation-only events that are attended by senior policy actors, aimed at discussing policy challenges and solutions, where the discussion is seeded by LIRNEasia's own research. The Expert Forum on Broadband Policy and the series of Virtual Dialogues on Digital Trade and Content Regulation are examples of slightly different formats, where the events were conducted under modified Chatham House rule⁵ in order to facilitate open discussion, without the presence of the media.

- **Expanding policy capacity:** improving the knowledge/data of certain actors; supporting recipients to develop innovative ideas; improving capacities to communicate ideas; developing new talent for research and analysis. A long-standing example of this is the 12 years of Communication Policy Research South (CPRsouth) conferences that brought together young scholars and mid-career policy researchers and developed their capacities in communicating research to policy (Samarajiva 2019; Samarajiva and Gamage 2022). Another example is the 13 consecutive series of the Executive Course on Telecom Reform that targeted policymakers and private sector actors in Africa and Asia.⁶ Multiple rounds of training for parliamentarians (e.g. in the Upper and Lower House of Myanmar's Parliament, as well as the Yangon regional parliament) also illustrate LIRNEasia's approach (LIRNEasia 2016).

The latter two actions are also discussed by Weiss (1977), who points out that even if not implemented by policymakers, organisations such as LIRNEasia can still provide value to the policy arena. The enlightenment model of research highlights how research that challenges the status quo offers innovative ways of thinking about issues and identifying problems and possible responses (*ibid.*). The same research may lead to different questions being asked. This leads to the reframing of questions and debates, which could allow for the resolution of problems more efficiently by approaching the policy issue in a different way.

3.1.2 Values and ways of working

LIRNEasia's philosophy towards its work can be understood through the following principles.

Policies that work in context

LIRNEasia was founded at a time when global North models and priorities of digital infrastructure governance were imposed on emerging economies. The organisation has often pointed out how such models from developed, well-governed, highly resourced countries do not work in poorly governed, less resourced, low-capacity institutions in emerging Asia. An example would be promoting light-touch regulation of retail prices in mobile telecom markets where high levels of competition exist, instead of significant market power (SMP)-based price regulation that is employed in many global North markets (Samarajiva and Iqbal 2009). Focus on the Asian context also lends itself to regional benchmarking and identification of best-fit practices from comparable countries instead of ideal ones. Comparative studies across Asia are enabled by LIRNEasia's network of Research and Policy Fellows. Over 15 years of partnerships with African and Latin American organisations (Research ICT Africa and Centro Latam Digital) enables global South comparisons and learning.

User-centric research, supported by policy and legal analysis

Connecting ground truths of how a technology is used is central to our research. While LIRNEAsia employs traditional tools (such as policy and legal analysis), the recommendations are nearly always informed by the impact that the proposed (or ongoing) policies or technology has on users. For example, at a time when mobile number portability was pushed for in many markets, our research showed that the poorest were keener on lower prices, and that they had already solved the off-net pricing challenges by having multiple SIM cards and missed calls (LIRNEAsia 2008). As such, LIRNEAsia argued for licensing (i.e. increased competition in the market) as a regulatory priority over implementation of number portability.

User-centricity is supported by a multidisciplinary approach to research. LIRNEAsia's data scientists analyse very large data sets using algorithms; social scientists study how marginalised groups are impacted by algorithm-controlled digital work platforms; quantitative researchers conduct nationally representative surveys to quantify the level of digital platform use; an ethicist will develop guidelines on how ethical principles should be incorporated into platform regulation; and a lawyer will make recommendations on platform-related laws.

Emphasis on dissemination of results

From its inception, LIRNEAsia has placed high emphasis on dissemination. It uses multiple modes of dissemination to reach target audiences. Where possible, direct presentations to policymakers are made or policy briefs are sent directly. The evidence is presented (sometimes repeatedly) at national, regional, and international policy events. LIRNEAsia also organises its own events and invites key stakeholders to attend and discuss the results and their impact on policy. Traditional media (newspapers, television) and new digital and social media are used to influence the symbolic environment in which policymakers exist. LIRNEAsia often employs established public relations firms in the countries it works in to convene relevant journalists and hold press conferences. Given the heavy private provision of digital services, Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) of private sector service providers have been one of the first audiences that LIRNEAsia disseminated to. Even as far back as the 2006 and 2008 household survey results, these were first disseminated to e-telecom operators, enabling them to make better pro-poor product offerings. LIRNEAsia uploads to its website nearly all its intermediary and final outputs including data sets (with personally identifiable data stripped).

3.2 LIRNEAsia's response to the Covid-19 crisis

Covid-19 restrictions impacted many facets of people's lives. The education sector was one that saw significant impact. In Sri Lanka, once schools (physically) closed in mid-March 2020, the government made several attempts to facilitate remote

education for students. It zero-rated the *e-thaksalawa* learning platform by the end of March, allowing users to access the platform free of charge, and launched a dedicated distance-learning helpline by mid-April. These were steps in the right direction. The assumption was that these actions would enable students to keep learning.

However, our nationally representative survey of information and communications technology (ICT) use conducted two years prior in 2018 showed that only 48 per cent of households with children had a smartphone or computer; only 34 per cent had an internet connection (Zainudeen and Amarasinghe 2020). The survey finding allowed us to compare such access against households with other forms of communication such as television and radio. Despite our data being a few years old, we knew this was the only relevant data available for Sri Lanka.

We knew also that the numbers from 2018 would not have grown significantly enough to invalidate the key takeaway in this context – that relying solely on digitally enabled remote education would exclude many, further widening disparities in education, and possibly even leading to children dropping out of school. Therefore, we mobilised resources from a newly funded research grant to analyse the data further and pushed out the message through multiple channels (traditional and social media) with some urgency. These findings were also shared at international events of strategic importance, such as when the LIRNEasia CEO participated in the opening panel of the Stockholm Internet Forum (Sverige 2021) and the South Asia Digital Opportunity (online) panel discussion organised by the World Bank.⁷

In keeping with LIRNEasia's model of policy influence, the aim was to expand the capacities of policymakers. In this case, the desired change was advocating for education delivery through multiple modes (instead of relying on purely internet-based channels) and creating remedial programmes for those who may have been left behind. This was achieved in part with the Sri Lankan opposition leader using our research to highlight how more accessible channels such as television, radio, and the postal service should be used to augment digitally enabled education (*Economynext* 2020; *ColomboPage* 2021).

True success in taking research to policy lies with seeing the desired policy changes and outcomes. As part of our Covid-19 response, under the same research grant, a new nationally representative survey was commissioned in 2021 to understand the impacts of the pandemic on accessing education, health care, food, and work (LIRNEasia 2021). A particular focus of the survey was understanding what impact being digitally connected (or unconnected) had on accessing these services. The survey results showed that while only 63 per cent of children accessed education through online channels during school closures,

a further 22 per cent had used offline channels (television, radio, and picking up physical notes and workbooks from schools) to access education at that time (2021). We cannot draw causal links between our research and advocacy efforts, programmes implemented by government and schools, and access to education (nor comment on the efficacy of these programmes for educational attainment/learning outcomes *vis-à-vis* online education). However, we can see that the concurrent delivery of education through non-digital channels gave many children who would otherwise not have been able to access education some access at this time.

Education was not the only sector that we studied. We explored mobile payments, the access to and use of credit cards, and the use of digital commerce for purchasing and selling goods, all relevant factors when contactless payments and remote ordering of food became a habit in some households when movement was restricted. The data showed very poor use of these services by a majority outside the higher economic strata and outside the urban centres. But finding out how those without constant digital access or credit cards were accessing food and other services was key.

It was not possible to travel to conduct field research. Therefore, LIRNEasia used an innovative 'e-diary' method to remotely study 20 families during a stage when lockdown was severest. The insights were illuminating, both about survival techniques and the importance of local grocery shop infrastructure and supply chains. The organisation once again went public with these findings regarding access to food (Samaratunga 2020). The confusing messaging to people during lockdowns and the need for better lockdown/movement restriction strategies was pointed out in the media by LIRNEasia researchers (Hurulle 2021). Others, including the team's ethicist, had output related to incorporating ethical principles in pandemic-related policymaking (Bandaranayake and Chandana 2020a) and were invited to write a blog on the topic by the London School of Economics (Bandaranayake and Chandana 2020b). The data scientists engaged in new research examining the possibilities and issues around using wearable technology and mobile phone-based Covid-19 tracking systems and expressed the findings in articles well-circulated over social media (Chandana 2020). The issues around the collection of personally identifiable data during the control of the pandemic were explored through new research in Sri Lanka and Thailand (Bandaranayake *et al.* 2021) and led to media dissemination in both countries. In Sri Lanka, we received feedback that the findings were very relevant to how government handled quarantine measures and related data (Bandaranayake and Natesan 2021; Suriyawongkul 2021).

3.3 Response to the economic crisis

While many countries faced the economic impact of the Covid-19 health crisis, Sri Lanka's economy was impacted more than average. For the LIRNEasia team, this meant our Covid-19 response had to take into account the economic crisis, instead of a more straightforward post-pandemic recovery. As Sri Lanka was attempting to re-negotiate with its creditors and reach a debt-support agreement with the IMF, many political parties, trade unions, and chambers of commerce were proposing policy solutions that the country should adopt.

An analysis showed that support for poor people in the form of cash transfers was one of the few areas that parties and organisations across the political spectrum could agree on as part of a Common Minimum Programme (CMP) that the government could adopt to bring the country out of the debt crisis. We realised that one of the ways we could contribute to making the economic recovery equitable and pro-poor was to rapidly gather and present knowledge related to cash transfers and social welfare. As such, the research broadened to situate cash payments in the context of the new austerity measures and the inflation seen in the country.

When responding to the economic crisis too, expanding on and pushing out existing knowledge while identifying new questions and deploying new research became our strategy. Luckily (and as mentioned in section 3.2), our response to the pandemic included a new nationally representative survey of individuals and households to understand the impacts of the pandemic along various dimensions – livelihood, access to food, education, and digital platform use. These 2021 survey results enabled LIRNEasia to understand several key trends around various types of welfare benefits offered to poor people.

The starkest finding was that there were issues in targeting those that were most in need of the assistance, with both inclusion and exclusion errors. For example, 55 per cent of households most in need (those in socioeconomic category E, which refers to the poorest segment of society) did not receive any assistance; meanwhile, 7 per cent of those least in need (those in socioeconomic category A, the richest) did receive assistance. The reasons for this are multifold, ranging from the lack of objective and easy-to-assess entry and exit criteria to politicisation.

Most, if not all, these faulty structural underpinnings predated the current crisis. Given that it would have a significant impact on how any relief relevant to the crisis was distributed, there was broad interest to reform the social protection system from both government and the Bretton Woods institutions.⁸ Also relevant is that by the second quarter of 2022, LIRNEasia's 2021 data was once again the only new/latest data set that could shed light on

this topic, despite the original survey not being focused on social safety nets *per se* (just a handful of questions were directly about routine and Covid-19-related government payments). As defined by Kingdon (1984: 165), a policy window opened.

Noteworthy is that social protection was not an area LIRNEasia had studied in detail prior to this. We had, however, studied many other areas that were a natural complement, such as service delivery to the poor and digital access and use. Therefore, we identified several ways in which we could capitalise on our core expertise to contribute to the discourse on policy reform related to social welfare. One was to explore better ways of identifying those in need of benefits, to reduce the notable inclusion and exclusion errors in targeting mentioned earlier. Here we are paying particular attention to the role digital data traces can play in identifying household-level poverty.

Another approach was to explore the role bank accounts and mobile phones could play in streamlining the welfare payment system, which is currently very fragmented and prone to leakages. LIRNEasia's previous research in the area of 'big data analytics' had examined how near-real-time data streams from mobile network operators could be combined with other large data sets to map socioeconomic levels in a city, to predict population movements, thereby avoiding the problems of out-dated or slow data from traditional tools such as census surveys. Therefore, the research team knew we were not wasting time exploring the possibilities of extending such thinking to social welfare payments.

Within a few weeks of actively researching and engaging in this topic, LIRNEasia began sharing its work publicly. The LIRNEasia CEO participated in a local-language online webinar conducted weekly called Kathikawa (Sadharana Samajayak 2022), where the problems with traditional targeting mechanisms were discussed and the potential improvements achievable through the use of data streams from mobile networks and electricity consumption were presented. The CEO then wrote an opinion editorial in the *DailyFT*, a reputed national newspaper (Galpaya 2022). Thereafter, the Senior Research Manager participated in and conducted the opening presentation for a panel on social safety nets (Hurulle 2022b) attended by several Members of Parliament and thought leaders at the Advocata Institute's two-day conference on economic reform.⁹ The Senior Research Manager also used this work as a basis for conversation on a local-language 45-minute primetime television interview (*Newsfirst Sri Lanka* 2022). LIRNEasia's Chair, who is widely regarded as a policy intellectual and was previously a policymaker and regulator himself, was a key connector in driving conversations.

These efforts helped LIRNEasia build traction and credibility in this space, allowing it to engage with key policymakers such as government officials (who were engaged in unifying and

automating some of the welfare beneficiary databases), the World Bank (which had diverted funds from other projects to pay cash transfers to the poor), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (which was interested in identifying the newly poor and rolling out efficient systems of cash transfer), and other academics and policy practitioners. The CEO also presented the data to the visiting IMF delegation that was negotiating the bailout agreement with the Government of Sri Lanka.

While disseminating data and calling for new ways of designing cash welfare payments, LIRNEasia also began work on several new studies that would enable policymakers and implementers to better target and implement the new welfare payment mechanisms. The first was a 10,000-sample nationally representative survey to answer our questions on targeting, delivery, and graduation from welfare schemes, and the second was a qualitative study across 12 districts to understand administrative processes and user perceptions on the same. We have continued to engage the key entities mentioned above when designing our studies, both to capitalise on their expertise and to build awareness of our work from an early stage, which we hope will allow us to contribute towards policy change once these studies are completed. The design of the survey was greatly aided by technical input from the World Food Programme, which helped us identify questions that would enable the measurement of food poverty in the country. At the time of writing, both research projects are underway, with multiple organisations, including multilateral and government entities involved in social welfare, indicating they are awaiting the findings.

In the meantime, LIRNEasia continues to engage with the topic as key reforms take place. A Senior Research Manager wrote an opinion piece in a newspaper with national reach, arguing that the new proposed delivery of four welfare benefits through Samurdhi banks was not citizen-centric (Hurulle 2022c), and this article was shared with the newly appointed Welfare Benefits Board. LIRNEasia used its pre-existing work (LIRNEasia 2022) and ongoing qualitative fieldwork to understand the on-ground impact of the new welfare reforms. These qualitative findings were almost in real time, with stakeholders including heads of key government institutions, Members of Parliament, and partners.

4 Synthesis and conclusions

The sections above describe how LIRNEasia, a thinktank located in Sri Lanka and working across emerging Asia, responded to the Covid-19 pandemic and the economic crisis that followed in Sri Lanka. Most of the research mentioned above (excluding the 2018 national surveys) and all the dissemination was funded by the competitively awarded Covid-19 Responses for Equity (CORE) grant from the IDRC, Canada as part of the rapid response to the pandemic and related recovery. Work under the grant is still ongoing, with perhaps the most impactful research (on improving

social safety nets in Sri Lanka) still being at the fieldwork stage. Nevertheless, the authors reflect here upon factors we think contributed to LIRNEasia's ability to deploy knowledge to achieve change under two sub-themes: institutional readiness and knowledge fit for purpose.

4.1 Institutional readiness

Several factors point to LIRNEasia's readiness to influence policy during the pandemic and related economic crisis period(s).

A history of credible research

LIRNEasia has been engaged in bringing credible research-to-policy processes in Sri Lanka and the region. Thus, when it re-used existing research to shed new light on Covid-19-related issues, the data was seen as rigorous and taken seriously. The data used in our initial interventions was the fifth in a series of nationally representative surveys of household and individual digital access and use in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. This data, supplemented by qualitative research, enabled us to paint a clear picture of digital access and barriers in the country. This credibility carried through when we entered new research areas such as social welfare payments.

Further to this, the credibility of the individual researchers, their profiles, and networks of influence also helped. Several of LIRNEasia's senior staff have worked in government in the past, which helped build credibility in relation to current work. LIRNEasia's Chair and Senior Research Manager conducted the analysis (in a voluntary capacity) on the CMP for the National Movement for Social Justice (NMSJ), which serendipitously was instrumental in linking our research on social safety nets to the CMP. The CEO's opinion piece on cash transfers in the *DailyFT* newspaper (Galpaya 2022) was instrumental in potential partners such as UNDP reaching out to LIRNEasia to work strategically on cash transfers.

Multidisciplinary skills and approach

LIRNEasia had just a few data points on the poor distribution of cash-based welfare payments. But within a few weeks of seeing the policy window, the research team was able to utilise their training in economics, social science, big data analytics, and legal and policy analysis to not only get up to speed on all the different ways of thinking about Covid-19 lockdowns and welfare payments but also to design new research that could contribute to ongoing improvements to the system. The mix of subject-matter specialists and generalists in the team helped.

Visibility in the media and to policymakers

When it has research relevant to an ongoing policy issue, or even in between such policy windows, LIRNEasia's staff keep engaging with policy issues in public fora. The Chair is a regular face on national television. The CEO participates in international public

fora regularly, as do some of the senior staff, who also wrote multiple opinion pieces in major newspapers on the issues around Covid-19-related economic development and welfare payments. Building a personal 'brand' is encouraged as much as building LIRNEasia's organisational brand, with annual staff reviews rewarding the use of research to build brand and influence policy.

When issues relevant to (digital) infrastructure access and use come into play, senior staff were and are often a first point of call in the region, and certainly in the country. This was the case when it came to access to education using digital technology during the pandemic. The literature also highlights the need for the constant communication of ideas between knowledge brokers and policymakers, with actionable policy choices being explained to policymakers. LIRNEasia is not just a knowledge broker (in that it produces its own original research). A study conducted during the pandemic in Iran showed that having better communication links between policymakers and knowledge brokers led to more evidence-based policies being adopted (Bastani *et al.* 2022).

Partnerships

Given that LIRNEasia had never worked in social protection before, it worked with Advocata, a thinktank that has significant public presence in topics related to public finance and public enterprise reform. Advocata invited LIRNEasia to make the opening presentation on social welfare payments at its high-profile economic policy summit. This led to high levels of publicity for LIRNEasia research, amplifying our message and that of other groups.

LIRNEasia's close, ongoing partnership with Sri Lanka Education Forum was key to increasing the reach of our research on remote education. The Education Forum, co-founded by a former Secretary to the Ministry of Education and a long-time education policy practitioner (also a Senior Policy Fellow at LIRNEasia), convenes regular meetings with ministry officials and educators (Sri Lanka Education Forum 2022; Hurulle 2022a). These convenings and their regular interactions with the media using LIRNEasia's findings further amplified the message and broadened the policy horizons of other practitioners at large.

We argue that these partnerships were essential. LIRNEasia is a digital policy thinktank, but both instances of policy engagement required situating digital technology within a broader economic context and reaching a set of policymakers from across government, not just those related to digital technology.

Managing risk and being flexible under difficult conditions

Over the years, LIRNEasia's operational practices have been fine-tuned to provide a balance between procedure-driven repeatability (i.e. templated approaches that can be deployed quickly) and flexibility to allow innovation (i.e. ability to change based on circumstances). This has enabled the

organisation to use innovative research methods (e.g. remote e-diary observations of households during a deep lockdown) (Samaratunga, Hurulle and Galpaya 2021), while also updating vendor contracts (e.g. for household surveys) to manage new types of risks during the pandemic while maintaining data quality. LIRNEasia even presented its thoughts on conducting research under pandemic conditions to other research organisations in the global South as part of the CORE research consortium (Samaratunga and Amarasinghe 2020). As such, completing the research was possible even with exchange rate controls, extremely high inflation, and severely restricted movements.

Digital 'outsiders' coming into 'non-digital' policy spaces

While above are some of the factors that enable us to achieve impact, the two crises we describe and how we work also highlighted the challenges of LIRNEasia's institutional framing. In the eyes of stakeholders and policymakers, the pandemic was a health crisis on a global scale. As such, the natural allies in civil society or among knowledge producers/brokers were those working in the health space. LIRNEasia is seen as an expert on digital policy. Despite digital technology being a crucial and cross-cutting infrastructure which impacts every sector of the economy, when it comes to health, we need to not only produce new knowledge but make sure we frame it within the larger health challenge and communicate in ways that make it obvious why digital technology is important.

Similarly, in social welfare reform, many others have focused on traditional ways of data collection and beneficiary targeting. Most policies tend to be incremental improvements on these methods. Using the digital data trace and algorithms is a radical change and one that has to be experimented with and fine-tuned before being implemented. Policymaking in Sri Lanka does not reward experimentation. As such, we are once again in the situation of having to first convince the policy actors about our way of thinking, deliver a proof of concept, and then work towards scale-up/adoption. It can be a longer impact pathway than for organisations that use traditional approaches and which work on economic reforms or livelihood development.

4.2 Knowledge fit for purpose

The nature of knowledge that was produced by LIRNEasia and used during the pandemic and economic crisis had the following characteristics.

Taking into account the local context

The pandemic was a time when education was severely disrupted, and models of online teaching and learning became extremely popular. LIRNEasia's mantra has always been about solutions that work in context. The context in Sri Lanka during the pandemic was one of low internet penetration, poor broadband quality, high access to television, low access to radio, and low preparedness

among schools to deliver online content. In this situation, using multiple modes to reach households with children of school age is more important to ensure that everyone gets some contact with educators and some form of learning. It is also important to ensure that the most marginalised are not left behind. This was more crucial than getting the perfect educational content delivered digitally to a smaller percentage of households.

Similarly, in the case of the payment of cash welfare benefits, the government-implemented surveys to gather data to identify beneficiary households are out of date, and as such, not fit for identifying newly poor households. The sign-up process is one that is politicised and the payment channels are inefficient and not designed for citizen convenience. As such, using frequent digital transaction data is a way to eliminate delays in surveys, fill the data vacuum in a country with a low tax base, and reduce opportunities for 'playing the system' that physical asset verification by government officials enables.

Good enough, if not perfect

During this time, the data LIRNEasia had was methodologically rigorous and relevant. During Covid-19 lockdowns, LIRNEasia's was the only recent data on digital access relevant to remote learning. But in a fast-moving sector such as digital connectivity, the data was ultimately not up to date because digital adoption changes fast. Yet given the absence of anything else more recent, the organisation used the data to make policy interventions. Past knowledge was used to contribute to reasonable assumptions and predict current trends.

Similarly, in the case of cash-based welfare payments, the latest national survey commissioned by government to identify beneficiaries was completed, but the data was still being cleaned, analysed, and made public. At the onset of the economic crisis, LIRNEasia's 2021 survey data was the only source for understanding inequities in emergency cash transfers and social safety nets. The 2021 LIRNEasia data was intended for other purposes (to understand how digital access impacted access to education, food, and work during the pandemic), but sufficient insights were gained on the matter of welfare payments such that we could engage with policymakers.

'Fast to market'

In the unprecedented situation of the Covid-19 lockdowns, a quick input of relevant information was important to shape policy. The ability to re-analyse existing household digital access data fast and get it to policymakers was key.

In the case of the economic crisis, the synthesis of knowledge from across the world within a matter of weeks, examining existing survey data, and making recommendations rapidly was also key to getting into the right fora – such as being able to make

presentations at the CMP press conference and to the visiting IMF delegation.

Similarly, LIRNEasia's rapid response on welfare delivery utilised ongoing interviews and focus group discussions to obtain insights on the change in collection points (adding to the existing research questions). LIRNEasia then utilised the findings without waiting for research completion to meet the policy window.

Many of these factors align with the systematic review of Oliver *et al.* (2014) which found that a lack of access to evidence, non-clarity, trustworthiness of findings, timeliness, and high costs were the main barriers to policymakers applying evidence.

4.3 Concluding thoughts

This article presents specific ways in which LIRNEasia, a thinktank working in digital and infrastructure policy in the emerging Asia Pacific, engaged with policymakers using new and existing data during the Covid-19 crisis and the ongoing economic crisis in Sri Lanka. It identifies how the organisation's structure, ways of working, and values have ensured that it is recognised as a trusted provider of knowledge to policy actors and able to mobilise resources and create new policy-relevant knowledge. This also explains why LIRNEasia's research may have reached and been taken up by policy actors.

The impacts of the organisation's work are still emerging but indications are that it has contributed to change in multiple ways.

Notes

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- 4 [LIRNEasia What We Do webpage](http://LIRNEasia.org).

- 5 Chatham House rule: in which the identity or affiliation of the speakers is not identified in reporting.
- 6 For example, the 2009 **Executive Course on Telecom Reform** in Cape Town, South Africa.
- 7 See the **South Asia's Digital Opportunity** panel video recording.
- 8 Bretton Woods institutions refers to the World Bank and the IMF.
- 9 Advocata is a leading thinktank with a special focus on fiscal and monetary policy issues.

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Lessons Learned from Mobilising Research for Impact During the Covid-19 Pandemic*

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Abstract During the Covid-19 pandemic, research organisations have strived to be resilient. This means navigating through the technical, operational, and political challenges to achieving successful research implementation. Particularly for local policy research thinktanks, the pandemic has made these challenges even more difficult to address. From the experience of the Cambodia Development Resource Institute (CDRI) in implementing large-sample research in the formal and informal sectors during the pandemic, these challenges are countered through: (1) the incorporation of a technical advisory team; (2) the adoption of a flexible resource allocation strategy; and (3) the implementation of a quality assurance system. Policy research is only impactful when the knowledge produced serves its purpose as evidence to inform policymaking and guide programme intervention. To realise this objective, CDRI implements three types of engagement activities (consultation, coordination, and validation) that provide opportunities for interaction between researchers and relevant stakeholders.

Keywords Covid-19 pandemic, policy research, local organisation, institutional readiness, policy impact, Cambodia.

1 Introduction

Over several decades, there has been growing recognition of the importance of research for informing policy and practice. Whilst this global movement had its roots in health, this phenomenon now exists in every aspect of public policy. The Covid-19 pandemic has further increased the need for evidence-based responses that value different forms of knowledge (UN 2020). Policy research institutions in developing countries have a central role in contributing to this need. Local research organisations have experienced a sudden demand for their expertise, putting their limited resilience to the test. Nevertheless, they remained the



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most suitable actors for local policy research. They are far more familiar with sociocultural and political contexts and the realities of conducting research in particular environments than most foreign organisations.

A body of evidence is now emerging that describes the impact of Southern-led research during the earlier phases of the pandemic (Taylor *et al.* 2022). However, researchers and their institutions in developing countries have faced significant challenges and many lessons have been reflected from addressing such challenges. Contributing to this non-exhaustive area of knowledge, this article explores: (1) the practices that strengthen the institutional readiness of research institutions, (2) policy uptake strategy in the context of the pandemic, and (3) lessons learned for mobilising research for impact during the pandemic.

2 Background

The Covid-19 pandemic has been an integral global change-maker since the outbreak in late 2019. This unprecedented global shock has caused 137,426 infection cases in Cambodia with an approximately total confirmed deaths of 3,056 by 21 August 2022 (Our World in Data 2022). With the public health impacts, there are 2,200 policy responses from the government dating from January 2020 to December 2021, which are clustered into four main categories: (1) the suspension of domestic and international flights, (2) curfews and restrictions on business operating hours, (3) restrictions on individuals gathering, and (4) closures of schools and universities (Bunthea *et al.* 2022).

From the first until the third quarter of 2021, with the rising cases due to the community outbreak and the increasing spread of the Delta variant, different negative impacts on the economy have been captured in different sectors, which resulted in a 6.5 per cent decrease in the export of garments products, a plunging 91.5 per cent reduction in international arrivals, and 45,000 and 6 million job losses for tourism and the informal sectors respectively (Dahles 2022). Cambodia has been assessed as being successful in mitigating the socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic. Thanks to high and effective vaccination rollout campaigns, death and hospitalisation rates have been lowered which has enabled the lifting of non-pharmaceutical restrictions and the reopening of the country, the path towards post-pandemic recovery (ADB 2022).

In Cambodia and the wider region, thinktanks are perceived as being crucial to helping map national strategies for resilience in the post-Covid-19 era (Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program 2021). As the pandemic caused significant socioeconomic impacts, the phenomenon has also shaped the direction of research agendas. On the beneficiaries' side, specific groups, including the underprivileged, workers in health care, women, and the elderly, were considered more in the research lens (Venkatesh 2020).

On cross-cutting issues, special consideration in understanding the roles of technology and evolution of the pandemic impacts by specific timeframes and types of impacts became the focused agenda during the pandemic (*ibid.*). Gender-based challenges such as inequality were prevalent at different times, and the pandemic provided a spotlight on the existing concern of the unpaid care burden and unequal pay for different genders.

During the pandemic, the urge from researchers and policymakers to understand inequalities was echoed louder than ever to ensure that any response measures would not be gender-blinded to mitigate the impacts on different genders (Vijayasingham *et al.* 2022). In the Asia-Pacific, significant financial resources were dedicated to stimulus packages for immediate intervention to mitigate the impact on the vulnerable population including women and informal groups (Elbehri *et al.* 2022). Thinktanks are expected to respond to this switch and contribute to Covid-19 response efforts. However, local expertise and technical capacity was not sufficient in terms of preparation to study the multidimensional impacts of a health crisis of this magnitude.

Another common challenge faced by development institutions was having to navigate through technical and operational uncertainties, considering the financial and operational limitations resulting from the implementation of Covid-19-related policy (Ramalingham and Prabhu 2020). The pandemic, and in particular lockdowns, created serious constraints on local thinktanks' institutional operation. For the Cambodia Development Resource Institute (CDRI), as a policy research institution, producing quality knowledge for policy impact is our main mission. For developing countries, this can be challenging due to four main reasons: troubled political contexts, problems with research supply, external interference, and the emergence of civil society as a key player (Young 2005). In addition to these challenges, the research institution had to overcome the hurdles posed by the pandemic. Therefore, timely measures and responses are necessary to strengthen the institutional capacity to respond to these challenges and continue to operate through a transformed process.

Reflecting critically on CDRI's experience of delivering the project 'The Impact of Covid-19 on Inclusive Development and Governance: Rapid and Post-Pandemic Assessment in the CLMV',² this article explains how CDRI addressed the above-mentioned challenges by benefiting from the support provided by the technical advisory team, the adoption of a flexible resource allocation strategy, and the implementation of a quality assurance system. These factors fundamentally enhanced CDRI's capacity during the pandemic to carry out its mission of producing relevant knowledge for policymaking. Lastly, this article explains policy uptake strategies implemented to achieve policy impact and reflects on the lessons learned from mobilising research for impact.

3 Research institutional readiness to maintain research operation

To effectively respond to the pandemic, resilience has been the key strategy contributing to institutional readiness. Resilience is diversely defined and rooted in various fields of disciplines. Awareness and adaptive capacity are the two dimensions of resilience (Rahi 2019). Awareness is the ability to comprehend the changes by reflecting on its capacity and surrounding environment; for instance, having an awareness of the internal structure, resources, and network that would affect an institution's response to the crisis (*ibid.*; McManus 2008; Chen, Xie and Liu 2021). Adaptive capacity, on the other hand, establishes a strong ground for institutional readiness by allowing the mobilisation of prompt and responsive measures to adapt to the changes in the external environment (*ibid.*).

In this manner, resilience derived from awareness and adaptive capacity can enable a research institution to sustain the operation even with the existence of a global shock such as the pandemic. Reflecting on the modern history of the country whereby scholars are undermined and the political system is driven by patronage networks, the lack of financial support and research infrastructures, the unfamiliarity of research culture, and limited space for research to influence policies have long been considered as structural constraints for Cambodian researchers (Eng 2014). Thus, building such resilience has always been a work in progress for Cambodian researchers to respond to these long-standing barriers, and the pandemic is an additional powerful reminder for local research institutions to keep working on their institutional resilience in the face of uncertain global challenges. The rest of this section elaborates on how the three main practices adopted by our research institution have contributed to strengthened readiness in responding to the pandemic.

3.1 Incorporate a technical advisory team into the research team

The sudden emergence of the pandemic created fundamental constraints on the ability to conduct research, especially on less structured areas such as the informal sector. Thus, by establishing a technical advisory team, it helps the institution to prepare better and seek effective organisational measures that would enable us to operate, given the compromised ability. By recognising this challenge early on, a technical advisory team was incorporated as a part of the research consortium. The advisory team consists of a gender expert, an economic expert, and a gender and macroeconomic expert.

The contribution of the technical advisory team was evident in the research conceptualisation stage, where the research team received substantial technical advice on ways to incorporate gender-sensitive analysis into the research design and how to develop a suitable research methodology to study the impact of the crisis. They guided the team on the crucial technical details, such as the incorporation of indicators that allow for the

understanding of gendered impacts such as unpaid care work, mental wellbeing, and access to social supports.

For the study on the formal sector, the team benefited from well-rounded information about how the sector has been holding up and the significant attention it has received based on the policy responses and intervention programmes. Under the supervision of the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training, the employment status of garment workers is updated regularly as a part of the mechanism for organising cash assistance to the affected workers.

Meanwhile, for the research in the informal sector, very little information is known, making it difficult to understand how the pandemic has been affecting the actors in the cassava value chain. When working with the informal sector, encountering this challenge is not new due to the nature of this sector, but the issue is compounded by insufficient statistical capabilities during the pandemic (OECD 2021). Thus, a short training on qualitative research was organised to inform researchers about the consortium of case study research methodology. This short capacity-building training advised our researchers on a way to better understand the social issues through an in-depth analysis using qualitative methods. The technical training was helpful for the researcher to conduct qualitative interviews and focus group discussions with relevant stakeholders before the data collection. These sessions allowed the researchers to dwell deeper on the important areas for research and the contextual knowledge required for survey operation.

3.2 Adopting a flexible resource allocation strategy

Funding is another concern experienced by civil society organisations (CSOs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) around the region. Eighty-four per cent of surveyed organisations in Eastern Europe and Central Asia voiced loss of funding as the main threat to their future operation (AFEW International 2020). Thus, a flexible resource allocation strategy is necessary to increase institutional readiness in response to the pandemic. In India, the main focus of capacity programmes provided to NGOs and CSOs to support their operation during the crisis are those related to monitoring and evaluation, and financial sustainability (Bandyopadhyay and Aravind 2021). Adopting a flexible resource allocation strategy in terms of communication methods and survey operation helps the institution to become more adaptive to the changes in the external environment.

Digital communication methods were a switch that played a big role in this strategy. Working collaboratively on cloud files, online meetings through Zoom, and doing interviews through phone calls were the transformation that proved effective to sustain the research operation. These practices were institutionalised

into a standard operating procedure during the pandemic. For these transformations to happen, budget reallocation witnessed a significant change. For instance, resources allocated for transportation were used for telephone bills and subscriptions for virtual meeting platforms, which are more cost-efficient. This change provided an opportunity to allocate more budget for realising a more ideal sampling methodology; for example, a larger sample size. This is particularly important for policy researchers, as it increases the credibility of the research finding as inputs for policymaking.

For the survey with garment workers, the implementation of a new resource allocation strategy was not as challenging as in the informal sector. Sufficient available information has made the budget and workplan estimation more accurate and easier to adapt, whereas research with farmers is more demanding in terms of time and resources. Switching to phone surveys has meant constructing our own sampling frame of cassava farmers from the targeted geographical location. Three months alone were spent on communication to obtain household contact information from five targeted provinces and phone survey data collection.

Despite the differences and the existence of the pandemic, fieldwork supervision was particularly challenging due to the fact that both surveys involved large-sample research. However, movement restrictions and difficulty in reaching out to survey respondents through their phone numbers also made it worse. One example is when enumerators face technical problems with their data collection tool and physical assistance to help them cannot be provided, thus causing disruption and delay in the data collection process. Since respondents in both the formal and informal sectors usually work during weekdays, it is difficult to reach out to them for an interview during working hours. The interview schedule has to be flexible based on the availability and convenience of the respondent. Hence, a phone survey protocol has been developed to assist the fieldwork supervision. The protocol covers a step-by-step interview process and a technical and administrative manual on operating the survey tool. In addition, more enumerators need to be employed to complete the survey on time. This also means more financial resources and time to spend on questionnaire training.

3.3 Implementing a quality assurance system in the research process

As a local-born policy research institution, CDRI's mission is to produce high-quality, influential, and impactful development knowledge. By upholding this organisational vision, it contributes to strengthening adaptive capacity for institutional resilience (McManus 2008). In that vein, the last measure taken is quality assurance, which is a crucial factor that helps CDRI to be ready in fulfilling its mission. Such practice is already embedded in our

system. But for this project, the technical advisory team plays a part in this process. At the research conceptualisation stage, a part of the quality assurance was done by the technical advisory team, through a back-and-forth process of review and revision, to ensure that the research design is relevant to the current demand for knowledge. During the stage of research implementation, fieldwork supervision is the main quality assurance mechanism. Finally, at the stage of output production, the quality assurance mainly lies within researchers' expertise to provide empirical inference from the data collected to benefit policymaking and intervention and programme design.

However, it should be noted that quality assurance from one step to another is interconnected and has an equivalent effect on each other if not implemented correctly. The knowledge that is appealing to policymakers for policymaking should be relevant, credible, and solutions-oriented (Court and Young 2003). Hence, the methodology used for analysis is crucial to achieving this. Policymaking demands rigorous evidence produced through rigorous evaluations using experimental methods such as randomised controlled trials and well-designed quasi-experimental studies (Evidence-Based Policymaking Collaborative 2016). Knowledge of this kind would provide a more credible overview of the estimated outcome of the subject of the study and is suitable to support a notion in policymaking or implementation.

Yet it should be noted that producing this kind of knowledge requires strong technical capacity, which is still a struggle in many developing countries. Generally, adopting an experimental research method is challenging as it is, considering the resources and technical knowledge that it requires. In the formal sector, the experimental research method is more feasible; as mentioned, this is due to sufficient and available information on this sector. Meanwhile, for the informal sector, this is more difficult.

4 Policy uptake strategies

Each country has its own policy formulation process. Nonetheless, four interrelated factors can be identified to determine whether the evidence from research is likely to be used in the policymaking process: (1) the political context, (2) the evidence, (3) the links between policy and research communities, and (4) external influences (Court and Young 2006). Hence, benefiting from the contextual knowledge and its well-established network with both governmental and non-governmental actors, CDRI has been able to work through these conditions more comfortably, compared to external organisations, in its effort for policy uptake. The contextual knowledge has been accumulated from policy research conducted over 30 years covering five main research themes: economics, agriculture, governance, education, and environment. During this time, CDRI has also engaged closely with governmental actors in both formal and informal ways.

These engagements have enabled CDRI to gain the trust and interest of policymakers in our research.

Thus, regardless of the shock of the pandemic, CDRI already has an advantage in terms of linkage to the policy formulation sphere. Consultation, coordination, and validation are the three main consistent mechanisms that CDRI has adopted to maintain this momentum. However, these mechanisms were not as easy to implement during the pandemic, when policymakers' minds were overwhelmed with its multifaceted impacts and the restricted environment for holding physical events and gatherings. The rest of this section details experiences of how CDRI dealt with these challenges and maintained its consistent practice of policy uptake mechanisms.

4.1 Consultation

In the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, partnerships, engagement, and contextualisation are recognised as the key characteristics that make policy research uptake efficient (Dumitriu 2018). Through consultation, a direct engagement between the relevant stakeholders and researchers is achieved. Such an engagement creates mutual gain for the relevant stakeholders and researchers. Consultation is normally organised before research implementation to seek input and feedback on the research initiative. Through consulting with the relevant stakeholders, researchers get the opportunity to improve the quality of the research design and to ensure that the research implemented will be a relevant input for the audience of concern. This also alleviates the difficulty in obtaining the diverse contextual knowledge possessed by the actors working on the same issue from different perspectives.

Vice versa, through this opportunity, the relevant stakeholder can develop expectations regarding the research project, as they are well-informed about it, and their input is reciprocated in the research study. For this particular research project, CDRI conducted a public online webinar joined by both governmental and non-governmental actors. From this webinar, CDRI was able to learn more deeply about the thematic area of the proposed research and its priority and relevance for the respective stakeholders. Following this were separate, informal closed-door one-on-one sessions with technical personnel and practitioners from relevant ministries and CSOs. The separate session allowed for a more comfortable environment to discuss the topic of concern and interests.

CDRI has existing Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with various ministries. These MoUs create a concrete basis for cooperation and collaboration for CDRI's research projects when necessary. In this case, CDRI consulted with officials from the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training. Indeed, it was an opportunity for researchers to obtain information that was

not obtainable elsewhere. CDRI received insight into how the pandemic was affecting workers in the garment industry and government intervention to address those issues. The input was also provided for constructing a representative sampling method. The consultation session with CSOs was conducted with senior practitioners who work directly in the garment sector. An additional conference call focus group discussion with garment workers was also facilitated with assistance from these CSOs.

These engagements enabled researchers to gain deeper insight into sensitive aspects of the discussed topic; for instance, gender-based violence. Our questionnaire design benefited greatly from their detailed micro-inputs on these aspects, whereas, for the informal sector, identifying relevant stakeholders was very challenging. We only talked with a few commune councils to receive their input in finding the best possible way to construct the sampling frame and the sampling methodology. Their input was sufficient to provide a contextual background on the status of cassava farming after the pandemic hit and their guidance on how we could compile the list of cassava farmers using the distance communication method was also useful.

From these experiences, it is clear that consultation is a good interactive approach to realising policy influence at the early stage of the research process, in times of crisis or without. This approach would definitely not be effective without the foundational relationship and the years of experience that CDRI has in working with local authorities. Sharing the same language and customs as these local actors is a critical factor for trust building, in which only a local research institution such as CDRI has a comparative advantage relative to foreign researchers (Eng 2014). Thus, this crucial element of a sustained local network with key governmental and non-governmental actors has placed local thinktanks in an effective position for rapid mobilisation and engagement of research in times of crisis.

4.2 Coordination

Engaging relevant stakeholders in our research implementation remains an approach that we take throughout the data collection process. This engagement happens through coordination. Before conducting primary data collection for every project, CDRI makes a formal request for permission from the relevant ministries or local authorities. Only when the formal request is accepted is the operation started. This is one way to gain trust and legitimacy among the concerned stakeholders. In doing research in the formal sector, not much coordination work is needed, as most of the support is only necessary before the research implementation. For instance, in our project, we received tremendous support from the Ministry in the provision of data for constructing the sampling frame. Such support was more than sufficient for us to successfully conclude the data collection process.

For the informal sector, coordination from the relevant authorities is the most crucial factor determining the success of data collection. The engagement of relevant authorities creates legitimacy for the research project and acts as a main contributing factor in establishing trust between researchers and research participants. In developing countries, troubled political contexts, diminishing democracy, and a volatile political environment have created an unfavourable environment for bridging the gap between research and policy (Sutcliffe and Court 2005). This is also applicable in the case of Cambodia, where reluctance to participate in research activities, particularly those containing political sensitivity, is evident (Pou *et al.* 2016). By involving local authorities in this process, it legitimises the research project and creates a sense of familiarity and community among the research participants.

On the other hand, it may be argued that by doing so, it also affects the credibility of the data collected, due to any unwarranted pressure respondents may feel with the presence of local authorities. To minimise this concern, CDRI adheres strictly to the confidentiality and consent principle. Third parties including the local authority are not allowed to be present with the interviewee unless requested or under exceptional circumstances.

Our research with cassava farmers benefited significantly from the engagement of the commune and village chief in the process of the sample listing and phone survey. We approached around 100 local authorities across the five provinces that have the largest land size for cassava farming. Certainly, this was not without its challenges. Most of the commune and village chiefs we contacted had difficulty understanding the objective and purpose of our research as well as the extent of their involvement in the research process. Their limited awareness of digital communication made it even more difficult for us to communicate. Notwithstanding these constraints, we were still able to communicate effectively with them on the research project before they became involved in research coordination. Their support has made a sampling strategy for empirical analysis feasible. Throughout their coordination, the stakeholders stayed engaged in the research implementation process and have simultaneously been informed about the research findings.

4.3 Validation

When the research findings are translated into research outputs, then comes the most crucial stage in policy influence. As part of the effort to engage stakeholders in the output production process, a validation workshop is organised to seek input and feedback on the research findings. The relevant stakeholders participate in the event, including those who were not involved in the research process. Policymakers and implementers are the prioritised audiences in such events. They might be representatives from ministries, technical committees, or the

officials engaged in specific programme implementation. The invitation is not only extended to high-level officials, who directly participate in the policy formulation process and implementation guideline, but also to mid-level bureaucrats who are responsible for specific technical matters. Most often, the latter groups are involved more intensively in policy implementation and engage closely with development partners during this process. They also tend to be a group of people who we seek consultation from.

Prioritisation is then extended to development partners such as international organisations, NGOs, civil society, and the private sector. Although targeted audiences may vary depending on the topic of the research, governmental actors stay on the list of our priorities. This is part of CDRI's effort to maintain its established relationship with the government. The structure of the validation workshop is normally done in a formal manner. However, if an interactive engagement is expected, the format of the workshop can be altered to achieve that purpose.

During the pandemic, event organisation was not an option. Instead, we opted for an online workshop on an invite-only basis. In addition to self-organised platforms, participation in externally organised events is also pursued. Preferable platforms may include policy dialogue, academic conferences, and technical panel discussions. Such interactive platforms allow for more favourable opportunities for researchers to present their work and appeal to a targeted audience using the research outputs.

Instead of a validation workshop, a dissemination workshop may be organised. This is usually done to publicise the final product of the research outputs, which could be policy briefs, reports, or any other analytical paper of a similar nature. Under the circumstance of tight time constraints, preliminary findings are the subject of focus. Researchers prepare a presentation to the audience highlighting the significant and relevant findings. This is followed by a question and answer session to clarify the questions that relevant stakeholders may have and their input on how the research output could be improved to meet their expectations or demand.

5 Lessons learned from mobilising research for impact during the pandemic

The contribution of strengthened research capacity to the increased ability in producing demanded knowledge

The pandemic has unveiled new and increasing priority for research. The emerging themes within the sphere of the social sciences are dominated by topics such as psychological issues, economics, and quality of life (Roychowdhury, Bhanja and Biswas 2022). The United Nations (UN) also identified social protection and economic response and recovery programmes among the top three pillars underpinning the research roadmap for Covid-19 recovery (UN 2020). Thus, strengthening the research capacity,

for instance through the incorporation of the technical advisory team, contributes to enhancing researchers' ability in producing relevant and timely knowledge for policy demand.

The importance of contextual knowledge on policy demand and ways to obtain such knowledge effectively

In times of crisis, policymakers tend to value the salient logic of knowledge – the provision of timely and relevant scientific information. This was evidenced in the context of Germany, Switzerland, and Italy, where the salience of knowledge for policy formulation is medium to high (Hadorn *et al.* 2022). The pandemic has created a dynamic environment for policy priorities. Thus, by adopting the consultative approach in the early stage of the research process, researchers are informed in a timely manner of the research priorities for real policy needs.

Moreover, CSOs are also important actors in the provision of contextual knowledge. Their contribution to responses aimed at mitigating the impact of the pandemic at the community level has proven more crucial than ever. Hence, they are well-informed of the reality. Their input is an asset in shaping research design for knowledge production which can create a real impact. It is further observed that a closed-door setting is a better approach to extracting relevant information about such contextual knowledge.

The utilisation of digital technology for institutional readiness and effective engagement with relevant stakeholders during a crisis

The pandemic can be considered an accelerator for the adoption of digital communication. However, as the pandemic has forced adaptation to it, the digital divide is glaringly observed to be a fundamental barrier, not only for institutional readiness but also regarding its impact on the institution's ability to engage effectively with the external world. This was evident in our operation, particularly in the data collection process and in our engagement with local authorities in the provinces. The research institution needs to be anticipative of such challenges and take them into consideration when constructing the research design as well as its policy uptake strategy.

Institutional readiness would benefit from an efficient policy uptake strategy and vice versa

Engagements in the form of consultation, coordination, and validation may be implemented to bridge the gap between research and policymaking, but they also contribute substantively to the resilience of the policy research institution. They enable researchers to effectively perform their role in using professional knowledge to translate the produced scientific knowledge to inform policymakers and the relevant stakeholders in policymaking and programme intervention (Nugroho, Carden and Antlov 2018). In turn, the enhanced capacity of research institutions during times of crisis, driven by their readiness, would

also allow researchers to achieve an efficient policy uptake strategy for impact.

Local context matters and therefore the organisation that is well-positioned in that context

Especially in times of crisis, local organisations should be empowered and entrusted to mobilise rapid research and policy engagement. This is not to disregard the engagement of external or foreign actors, but rather is an acknowledgement of the ongoing effort of local organisations dedicated to establishing trust and networks to create a favourable environment for a participatory approach. Local organisations can identify better with local actors, making them an efficient means for reaching the grass roots and a strong bridge to connect with the top whose work serves development at the foundation.

6 Conclusion

The lessons learned from implementing the large-sample research projects in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic have contributed greatly to the institutional readiness of our research institutions. Despite all efforts implemented to achieve this readiness, there are times when different actors could contribute to making it more reachable. Local thinktanks, especially those in developing countries, should institutionalise regular capacity development mechanisms to expand researchers' skills and expertise. There should also be a standard operating procedure for times of crisis to increase preparedness and minimise operational constraints.

Maintaining relationships with stakeholders should remain a priority to ensure connectivity and continuous effort in increasing the impact of research. For national and international donors, providing capacity development for researchers should be on the agenda of every financial proposal. In addition, the ability to demonstrate impact in policymaking should be one of the main criteria in grant provision. Likewise, donors should also assist and empower local institutions on building such ability where demanded. This would not only foster the culture of evidence-based policymaking but also contribute to resilience against future health and economic crises. Finally, those concerned stakeholders who will benefit from knowledge production need to remain open to cooperation to allow opportunities for the exchange and utilisation of information.

Notes

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- 2 This article mainly uses experience learned from implementing a research project that is a part of the regional project examining the impact of Covid-19 on inclusive development and governance in the CLMV countries (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam). From this project, CDRI is conducting research on the garment sector (formal) and cassava agriculture production (informal). The project is funded by IDRC, Canada. Views expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of either CDRI or the funder. The authors take full responsibility for unintentional errors.

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Arab Region Social Protection Systems: Research and Policy Design Challenges*

Farah Al Shami¹

Abstract This article examines the challenges and opportunities that exist for the production of knowledge and the design of evidence-based policies which aim at achieving more equitable and inclusive social protection systems in the Arab region. The article builds on the experiences of researchers and activists following the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic and considers the challenges they faced. It examines the root causes of those challenges as related to data collection, analysis, and interpretation; the adopted research methods and approaches; the typology of researchers, research subjects, practitioners, and activists; the research outputs and the policy recommendations ensuing from them; and the policy spaces encountered when lobbying for the necessary reforms. The article proposes solutions to extend the struggle against the 'violence of modernity' when trying to influence policymaking, suggesting a departure from normative forms of knowledge production and advocacy on socioeconomic rights in the Arab region to more homegrown, engaged forms.

Keywords social protection, Arab region, research, policy, challenges, decolonising knowledge, Covid-19.

1 Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has uncovered major flaws and deficiencies in Arab social protection systems. This has put the discussion about ways to expand social protection coverage to the most vulnerable social groups centre stage in research and advocacy efforts for post-pandemic recovery strategies and reforms in the region. Researchers, practitioners, and activists have come to realise that building universal, effective, and sustainable social protection systems is key to enabling Arab populations to overcome the social repercussions of any political or economic shock. This includes the loss of livelihoods



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and livelihood opportunities and the inability to access essential goods and services.

The successive and overlapping crises accompanying the pandemic have reasserted the need for solid social security infrastructures to strengthen people's resilience to the various threats to decent life standards. These crises range from the impact of the Russia–Ukraine war on food and energy security to the global river crisis,² amid other consequences of climate change, and passing through political along with financial/economic crises hitting countries such as Iraq, Tunisia, Lebanon, and Egypt. Such infrastructures are not only necessary for crises' preparedness but also to ensure that the poor, marginalised, and vulnerable are less susceptible to uncertainties and shaky socioeconomic circumstances affecting their day-to-day life and regular pathways, in general.

In 2020, right before the outbreak of Covid-19, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for West Asia (UNESCWA) *Arab Sustainable Development Report* revealed that, in Arab non-Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, the proportion of the population below the international poverty line of US\$1.90 per day was nearly 16 per cent. 'Extreme poverty was also higher than the world average and all other developing regions except for sub-Saharan Africa', according to this report (UNESCWA 2020a: 14). The multidimensional poverty rate reached 41 per cent for ten Arab countries, making up around 75 per cent of the region's population (*ibid.*). Four months into the pandemic, the UN regional commission announced that an additional 8.3 million people will fall into poverty in the Arab region, which 'could raise the number of undernourished people by some 2 million' (UNESCWA 2020b).

In addition, when the average unemployment rate of the Arab region was already the highest worldwide (UNESCWA 2021a) and informal employment represented 68 per cent of total employment prior to Covid-19 (ILO 2018), the pandemic led to an unprecedented increase of 1.3 percentage points in the unemployment rate in non-GCC Arab states (ILO 2022) and left more than 39 million individuals in the region working in hard-hit sectors (UNESCWA 2021b). These figures are coupled with the highest concentration of national wealth in the world, hovering around 60 per cent of the wealth being captured by the richest 10 per cent of the Arab population (Kallas 2021). This indicates an outstanding level of inequality and implies acute forms of social vulnerability whereby poor populations have to endure constant economic hardships.

Despite this bleak status quo, the social policies of Arab states have been arbitrary and inadequate in responding to the needs and socioeconomic demands of their populations. Only 40 per cent of the total Arab population is currently covered by at

least one social protection benefit. Moreover, only 7.2 per cent of people with disabilities, 8.7 per cent of people who are unemployed, 12.2 per cent of mothers and newborns, 15.4 per cent of children, and 24 per cent of older persons have access to social protection benefits – among other vulnerable groups (ILO 2022). Public social spending remains poor in the region, being merely around 4.6 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) on social protection (excluding health care) and 3.2 per cent of GDP on health (*ibid.*). The pressing concern is, therefore, the importance of tackling the issue of fragmented and frail social protection systems in the Arab region which are leaving many behind and are – in the best-case scenario – providing community-scale social assistance instead of nationwide social security.

In order to tackle this issue and promote inclusive systems, which typically combine universal and targeted approaches of delivery mechanism, it is imperative to produce the scientific knowledge required to propose and advance feasible solutions on the level of policy and programmatic reforms, legal reforms, institutional reforms, and financing schemes, but also social and political reforms. The question of improving social protection services is complex as it necessitates addressing the politico-economic and governance factors driving Arab states away from assuming this responsibility. It also requires understanding people's awareness of the concepts of social protection as one of the human rights principles and one of the fundamentals of the social contract that ties people to states, as well as the prevalence of the culture of law amongst them and the extent to which social protection reforms might (or not) be reflected in demand-based social movements.

As such, producing research on the topic at hand in order to shape pragmatic policy recommendations and advocating the latter have proven to be a daunting task. The 'traditional' way of undertaking this task does not seem fit for purpose, as the concerted efforts of the different social actors following the pandemic have only made a slight improvement in the prevailing social protection systems, rendering these actors helpless in the face of such a significant crisis. It is therefore of primary importance to examine the challenges and opportunities of research and policy design aimed at achieving more equitable and inclusive social protections in Arab countries.

This article outlines these challenges and delves into analysing the root causes behind them, notably those related to data collection and interpretation; the adopted research methods and approaches; the researchers, research subjects, practitioners, and activists involved in these processes; the research outputs and the policy recommendations ensuing from them; and the policy spaces encountered when lobbying for the necessary reforms. It also suggests ways to overcome these hurdles and turn the trade-offs cutting across them into prospects for positive change.

The main reasoning behind our elucidations lies in the need to decolonise our research methods and methodologies in the region, as well as localise our knowledge production and tools for knowledge impact and transmission. We believe this shift could emancipate those researchers and practitioners seeking to expand social protection to vulnerable groups in the Arab region from the typical 'way of doing business' and the dictated learning and misconceptions. Such challenges have thus far constrained numerous attempts of these actors and even set them up to fail.

The presented analyses and propositions are based on the author's experience as a mid-career Arab scholar who has been working for over eight years in the field of social and development economics across the Arab region, using both quantitative and qualitative research methods. Managing relevant research projects – including one specifically on social protection in the Arab region – and synthesising their findings and processual challenges, in addition to engaging in continuous discussions with a wide array of actors in the field, the author has acquired over the years a reservoir of observations that have been counterchecked and supplemented by a thorough desk review of the existing literature for validation. The article is also informed by complementary interviews with established and junior actors in various fields. It ultimately aims to provide a hands-on practitioner think piece for those willing to rethink their approach in their struggle for social justice.

2 Data: 'bad science' practices

For reform and change, we need research; and for research, we need data. Both universal and targeted social protection programmes need comprehensive data sets to reach the intended beneficiaries. However, the Arab region suffers from data poverty (Makdissi, Marrouch and Yazbeck 2022). Countries such as Iraq and Lebanon have not had their censuses updated for more than 25 years. Only three out of 16 non-GCC Arab countries (namely Morocco, Jordan, and Egypt) have national unified social registries (UNESCWA 2019). Archives and documentation are scarce. Even when they exist, the data – whether quantitative or qualitative – is incomplete and covers limited population samples. It is often missing cross-sectional observations, data points in the time series, and/or parameters. Moreover, it is often not disaggregated (by gender or even sex; age group; social/income class; geographic distribution such as region, country, rural versus urban, and core versus periphery; by common forms of social vulnerability such as disability, informality, and legal status, etc.). The Arab region also lacks sufficient micro-level data which is usually generated by household surveys and field reviews, although these are indispensable for studies that tap into socioeconomic needs and services such as those in relation to social protection expansion.

Both the existing incomplete data and efforts to compensate for these gaps fall under the remit of mainstream experts and theorists or international organisations. This conundrum entails a pseudo-sampling dilemma whereby researchers survey or interview what they imagine are vulnerable communities. This is mainly the result of a colonial capture of perception and cognisance (Staddon 2020) whereby the scholars come into the research process with expectations from the outset, thus making them define the problem instead of letting the problem define itself (Berk 1983). Consequently, researchers end up diagnosing an issue that does not exist or surveying people that are not actually impacted, which wastes the resources allocated for the issue at hand and for those most in need.

While this dilemma does not preclude rightful identifications of forms of vulnerability (e.g. women, children, youth, the elderly, migrants, informal workers and those in precarious labour, rural populations, people with disabilities), it does not take into consideration the need to rethink our understanding of vulnerability, even though this is critical if new forms of vulnerability are to be included (forms that arise with particular shocks/crises) as well as invisible forms of vulnerability in remote and marginalised ecosystems (e.g. marine, forest, urban), which are often overlooked and unforeseen (Al Shami 2022).

In addition to the mis-sampling dilemma, existing data and data collection methods involve bad practices in soliciting, reporting, and interpreting information. Arriving with pre-learned misconceptions and stereotypes, researchers tend to look for or solicit information that does not demythologise their hegemonic beliefs. A European social scientist and field researcher operating in Lebanon, who prefers to remain anonymous, said during a key informant interview with the author: 'I felt like I contaminated the pseudo-observed with my biases.' Furthermore, according to Walid Marrouh,³ field researchers are often victims of the trade-off between the research subjects' stated preferences and revealed preferences when reporting information and interpreting data. He said,

While the former preferences are subject to the biases and perceptions of the surveyed, the latter are subject to those of the surveyor... Yet, rare are the researchers that account for both types of input and crosscheck them with each other to ensure the robustness of their analyses. In most cases, revealed preferences are considered, usually also leading to macro-level data that does not serve to inform about the most underprivileged and the left behind.

The expressions of this dichotomy are more intense in less-developed countries where people's behaviour can be misleading due to factors related to social norms, family law, religion, and security concerns, and where people are more likely

to manoeuvre livelihood-related questions as a result of poverty and aid expectations from the inquirers (Whittington 2010).

These impasses – to name a few – hinder Arab stakeholders' ability to produce context-specific and homegrown knowledge, and rather impose ready-made solutions through biased understandings and tangential interventions.

2.1 Quantitative data and indicators

Most of the data shortfalls mentioned above are more acute in the case of quantitative data and indicators compared to qualitative ones since quantification entails many operational interventions and alterations to the numbers. These can include weighting a variable by another variable, normalising the variable, standardising the variable, treating outlier observations, censoring the distribution, and capping the variable for aggregation purposes. Numbers are also calculated on the basis of many 'hypothetical' assumptions to rule out presumed 'external' factors when shaping up an indicator or establishing a relationship between two or more variables, although these factors we are controlling for might be at the core of the problem we are trying to solve. Moreover, numbers are less expressive of human facts whereas issues such as exclusion from social protection schemes are human issues that need to incubate what numerical methods eliminate and consider as 'subjective' thoughts or feelings. The problems of incomplete data sets, lack of disaggregation in the data, and lack of sufficient micro-level data are also especially accentuated when applicable to statistical information.

Quantitative indicators are therefore quality-agnostic.⁴ Whether the data that is entered into their calculation is collected on the macro or micro scale, on the national scale, or on a limited scale, quantitative indicators are predominantly macro-indicators that are defined as put forward by international financial institutions and intergovernmental organisations who prioritise the global comparative lens over the need to regard regional, national, and local context specificities (Abu-Ismaïl, Abou Taleb and Ramadan 2012). Examples of these macro-indicators in the social protection/justice arena include 'government health expenditure as a per cent of GDP', 'government education expenditure as a per cent of GDP', and 'subsidy spending as a per cent of GDP' (often disaggregated by food subsidies and energy subsidies).

These examples are illustrative of the extent to which these indicators do not reflect the differential impact of government interventions on diverse social groups and the distribution of social spending among these groups. For instance, while Tunisia's subsidy spending has long been one of the highest in the region, subsidies were proven to be significantly regressive in the country, with the two highest income quintiles appropriating the biggest share of both energy and food subsidies

(Cuesta, El-Lahga and Ibarra 2015). This suggests the need for 'creative', 'out-of-the-box' indicators that better capture the realities of vulnerable communities and which do not focus on some of these communities at the expense of others whose type of vulnerability is new, uncommon, or invisible.

Speaking about social protection more specifically, the only quantitative indicator that has been consolidated and used is Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 1.3.1, the 'proportion of population covered by social protection floors/systems, by sex, distinguishing children, unemployed persons, older persons, persons with disabilities, pregnant women, newborns, work-injury victims and the poor and the vulnerable' (UN DESA n.d.). While this indicator seems to be sensitive to the social fabric needful of social protection the most, its rationale focuses on those included and not those excluded. This is mainly the case because the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) statistics division classified it as a 'Tier I indicator' only a couple of years before the outbreak of Covid-19, on the basis that its 'data are regularly produced by countries for at least 50 per cent of countries and of the population in every region where the indicator is relevant', although these criteria do not apply to all the sub-indicators of this indicator, nor do they apply in disaggregated terms, i.e. for the data series covering the different forms of vulnerability mentioned in the indicator's label. Moreover, of the countries that do not fit these criteria, many are Arab countries, and the indicator is reported by states only every second year (UN DESA 2020).

This most recent classification is also despite the fact that the data series only cover the access of each vulnerable group to either 'at least one' or to 'strictly one' type of social benefit – whether that is social assistance, social insurance, or a labour market programme – hence looking merely at pensions for older persons, maternity benefits for women, and employment injury coverage for workers, for example, and overlooking other key needs of these social groups. Additionally, with data being collected by state institutions on the macro/national levels, this indicator provides summative proportions which offer inaccurate information that is insensitive to the multidimensionality of people's life conditions, and excludes those whose income/consumption is not reported through official government statistics such as those who are unregistered, undeclared, or who work informally.

The colonial quantitative indicators in effect are also not reliable enough for those whose objective is to support the poorest and most marginalised. The methods used to calculate these indicators, and the sub-indicators and data series out of which they are composed, yield underestimates of the levels of poverty and inequality (Sarangi *et al.* 2015). During a key in-depth interview, Adib Nehmeh⁵ mentioned that two major reasons are

behind the simplistic and underestimating measuring tools of poverty: relying on income and consumption as the sole indices of deprivation instead of the eventual ability of a person to meet their basic needs and access the opportunities they deserve; and not counting what is not measurable/quantifiable, such as human and psychosocial needs, a feeling of incapacity, and an inability to prosper. He believes that these drawbacks ignore the fact that not all aspects of life can be standardised and that what is different/divergent from the general course of the pilot contexts based on which poverty indicators were built still matters:

For instance, assuming there is a poor family that had to withdraw a child from school for not affording their education, and in order to have them work and contribute more income to the household. Assuming there is another family which has the same characteristics as the previous one but whose child is still enrolled in school. Reliance on expenditure data in poverty calculations can make the first family seem richer because of relatively higher income due to the child's work. Poverty is not merely material deprivation.⁶

Nehmeh also pointed out that not considering a family as poor just because they own a bicycle as a means of transportation, own a laptop, or even have a toilet at home is inappropriate in most Arab countries nowadays, and he stated that such miscalculations are due to the fact that poverty measures stem from least-developed country cases that do not fully apply to Arab societies.

Nehmeh likewise flagged the downside of giving all dimensions and all sub-indicators under each dimension the same weight when calculating the final multidimensional poverty index, which sometimes puts secondary aspects of life on the same level as primary ones, and vice versa. In other words, this leads to an underestimation of the education poverty threshold and an overestimation of the food poverty one, for example. Furthermore, despite acknowledging the importance of micro-level data for reasons already mentioned in this article, Nehmeh highlighted two disqualifiers associated with this type of data as it currently exists: (1) no matter how large the micro-level survey is, it remains narrow-scale and hardly generalisable and representative of the context being studied; and (2) micro-level data is usually collected through household surveys that consider the household to be the unit of observation. The second disqualifier could lead to biased estimates of the poverty level of some households due to the life conditions of only one or two individuals in these households. It also sees the household as a homogenous unit, not taking into consideration the differences in the needs, aspirations, and opportunities of the different household members (e.g. women versus men, old versus young, educated versus non-educated, people with disabilities versus people

without disabilities) as well as the social norms and inequalities manifesting between them (Clark and Steel 2002).

Finally, Nehmeh emphasised how quantitative data is sometimes falsified and used as a manipulative tool by the power holders. The fact that different agencies provide different values (in both absolute and relative terms) of the same socioeconomic variable, and the fact that different indices of the same variable sometimes lead to different conclusions, lends substantial validation to his statement. In fact, many political economists believe that an overestimation of poverty and inequality rates on the macro level is deliberately induced by international organisations who wish to later report 'achievements' in poverty alleviation and inequality mitigation (Gillie 1996).

Additionally, an awareness of this overestimation – when it exists – allows policymakers to largely evade their responsibilities. More importantly, according to Walid Marrouch, macro socioeconomic indicators are not malicious if available for large samples that enable the creation of patterns and if they are thought of as 'proxies' to inform global or regional policies. However, he noted that the approach followed by international organisations spearheading the calculation of these indicators is a Rawlsian maxi-min approach,⁷ which begins by maximising the social welfare preferences of the poorest person in society and expands this intervention to all other income groups. We believe that this model makes the rich better off as it channels resources supposedly for the poor to the well-off on the basis of equality of opportunities instead of outcomes.

2.2 Qualitative research

Although quantitative data is the most commonly used data for research related to socioeconomic issues/rights such as social protection coverage, qualitative data also has a considerable stake in this research field as it has been used since the late 1990s as an 'imaginary alternative to decolonizing research methodology' in the Arab region (Habashi 2015). The reason why we think resorting to qualitative research as a remedy is 'imaginary' is because it is driven by promoting a unified Arab discourse as a response to colonising discourses, thus not accounting for the diversity of ideas, cultures, and realities in a non-cohesive region. Qualitative research could, however, represent an important method to produce purposeful and impactful knowledge on optimising the social welfare of vulnerable groups, if one becomes mindful of the bad practices currently distorting this kind of research and make sure they are addressed (Little 2014).

One of the main shortcomings of qualitative research is that it largely relies on informant interviews (e.g. in-depth interviews, semi-structured interviews), focus group discussions, and ethnographic field studies. These methods can be very costly,

time-consuming, and labour-intensive (Miller and Salkind 2002). Therefore, conducting them on large enough samples that are representative and that generate generalisable trends/patterns is difficult and dependent on the availability of resources.

The same applies to cases where qualitative research is only meant to obtain detailed information from a small group of participants in order to later delve deeper into quantitatively investigating diverse aspects of the topic on large-scale representative samples (Emerald Publishing n.d.). This is where the role of research funding comes into play. As substantial funding is generally made available by international donors, endowments, and financial institutions, qualitative research methods and methodologies are restricted by the approach, ideologies, agendas, and ways of doing business of these international entities (Sattari *et al.* 2022; Aagaard *et al.* 2021).

This funding constraint also influences who undertakes this type of research on a wide scale: scholars studying or teaching at 'Western' academic institutions, international organisations, and privileged researchers from developed countries. When local researchers conduct this kind of research, they are also often the students, alumni, or trainees of the former group of actors or the employees of the latter two groups (Currie-Alder, Arvanitis and Hanafi 2017).

Given that qualitative research can feature experts as well as the target communities themselves, it is of primary importance for the perceptions of the former to be validated by the stories of the latter, especially when dealing with a socioeconomic issue that affects people and affects them differently. This is rarely done as, in most cases, researchers stick to either expert views or to interviews with the impacted communities (Von Soest 2022). When it is done, the process can also operate the other way around (expert opinions validate people's sufferings) (Döringer 2020).

Ethnographic studies with vulnerable groups (whether in the form of interviews, field observations, or informal conversations, etc.), to address important topics such as social protection reforms, often generate barriers that need to be broken down. The first is the language barrier between the field researchers and the interviewees, not only in terms of using English instead of Arabic but also using a lexicon and jargon that researched communities do not understand. Moreover, in many cases, vulnerable groups, especially those living in remote areas, lack digital and financial literacy as well as access to finance, to the internet, and to digital tools (Yakubi, Basuki and Purwono 2019). This prevents researchers from fully reaching these groups, compensating them (in the case of remunerated interviews), and even formulating solutions for them to benefit from social protection programmes that require either digital literacy or financial literacy or both.

It could be argued that researchers and enumerators habitually display an 'elitist' attitude during their research endeavours (Lillie and Ayling 2021). It can also be intuitive to suppose that a Western or rich researcher may observe perfectly normal behaviour with respect to the researched community as different/distinct due to dissimilar social and cultural norms. On the other hand, the research subjects are not familiar with the culture of research. Instead, many of them have 'class hatred', and thus refuse to cooperate (or cooperate enough) with those trying to help them (Ntienjom Mbohou and Tomkinson 2022).

Vulnerable groups can hardly understand why privileged and educated people who do not share their grievances would be interested in documenting and understanding their realities or would be geared up to voice their demands and advocate for them. They can barely trust the researchers and practitioners approaching them solely to collect information, as they fear that they are either journalists or members of the national intelligence office. When trust is established, it is frequently because vulnerable people think the researchers are humanitarian organisations trying to assess their situation in order to provide them with aid (e.g. cash transfers, food assistance, in-kind donations, and water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services). In this last case, interviewees tend to under-report their income, over-report their level of poverty/deprivation, and withhold information related to benefits they might be receiving from non-state actors, and so forth (Gengler *et al.* 2021).

Hela Yousfi (2021: 836) proposed the Egyptian term '*Fahlawa*' as 'a metaphor for better describing the challenges of a decolonizing research practice that privileges contestation and perpetual bricolage over formal and universal design'. The majority of the researchers who are aware of the challenges above use *Fahlawa* as a survival/resistance strategy. This technique has great potential but sometimes does not work and other times backfires. A young Egyptian field researcher in the domain of right to health mentioned during an interview with the author:

*No matter what we [the field researchers] do, no matter how we dress up, play it simple and modest, strip ourselves of valuable items, adapt our dialect, watch our language, etc., they [the research subjects] would still realise that we are different. And we would see traits of mistrust and betrayal feeling on their faces.*⁸

According to this researcher, the most asked question from targeted groups is 'Why?'. 'Why are you asking? Why do you want to help? Why this research?' Conspiracy theory is embedded in Arab cultures, especially among underprivileged Arab populations, and is mixed with a dislike of the 'well-off', the West, the White, and the different (Gray 2010).

These compounded cultural, economic, and security factors lead to mistrust on the part of the interviewees, which is sometimes justified according to a Tunisian researcher during an internal meeting.⁹ She indicated that many researchers do not abide by research ethics codes, the media socially stigmatises vulnerable communities to a great extent, and many non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have been abusing these communities. On this last point, the Tunisian researcher elaborated that in some rural areas in Tunisia, old women began to produce small handmade crafts for outfits and home decoration and sell them as a form of economic resistance during the Covid-19 pandemic. International NGOs who were there to help them survive the health crisis were buying these products with the intention of supporting these women entrepreneurs and their small businesses. These entrepreneurs later discovered that, while they were selling their crafts at cheap prices, these NGOs were reselling them at significantly higher prices as 'oriental' items, without channelling any profits to them.

Disinformation as conveyed by the research subjects is not only the result of security fears, fears of social stigma, and the culture of humanitarian aid instead of that of research but it is also the result of mis-sampling. Just like micro-surveys, ethnographic studies have a strong propensity to look at households as units of observation, sometimes interviewing the whole family altogether (Guest, Namey and Mitchell 2013). Such a praxis is blind to the family power dynamics, who the head of the household/main breadwinner is, the spillover effect of one's opinion/input on others within the family, and so on, all of which lead to biased findings. Apart from the dynamics between researchers and research subjects, researchers are also operating in securitised public spaces and amid shrinking spaces for civil society and activists in most Arab countries. This limitation was exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, especially in countries like Egypt and Jordan where the pandemic response was militarised.

Adding to the power dynamics with their employers, funders, or advisors as well, Arab researchers, like the majority of Southern researchers, are also subject to discrimination and oppressive power dynamics by their societies at large, hindering their ability to produce sound research at a constantly fast pace and impeding their participation in key research platforms, journals, and editorial teams/boards (Amarante and Zurbrigg 2022). Peer ethnography, among other forms of action research, has been suggested as an alternative that solves many of the aforementioned dilemmas. Nevertheless, effectively integrating vulnerable groups into action-based fieldwork has proved to be difficult in Arab contexts for the same reasons previously mentioned *vis-à-vis* cultural and social fragmentation, and the lack of trust between these groups and the researchers. A senior practitioner working with community-led initiatives and continuously collaborating with community-based researchers in

Jordan considers this to be one of the most harmful challenges of research and policy impact.¹⁰ Knowing that bringing vulnerable groups together with experts and policymakers collectively would further widen the gap of concern, she believes that connecting the researchers and the practitioners would be a good compromise and promise a stronger impact.

3 Approaches, methodologies, and processes: what alternatives exist?

The approaches, methodologies, and processes cutting across the depicted research methods can be summarised by the following points:

- 1 Colonial co-optation through funding mechanisms;
- 2 Research methods determining the type and quality of data instead of data determining the methods to be used;
- 3 Trade-offs within and between research methods;
- 4 Excluding what is not measurable;
- 5 Looking at a multidimensional development issue through a one-dimensional lens, with no integration of multidisciplinary research teams; and
- 6 Inability to integrate the impacted communities in the process or to fully capture their grievances.

The most flagrant trade-off that exists is that ethnographic research is perceived to lead to storytelling/anecdotal evidence that does not speak to the policymakers, who only look at quantitative data, although the latter does not fully capture the realities of vulnerable groups.

To overcome this stalemate, social actors should follow a mixed methods approach that allows for data triangulation, and for this approach to be possible, they should be ready to adopt a multidisciplinary methodology that combines social anthropology, sociology, and economics, according to Robert Chambers (Cornwall and Scoones 2022). This, in his opinion, would optimise the interaction between participatory research and (pre)established research. It would also offset the limitations, assumptions, inapplicable success stories/best practices, and lessons learned in desk reviews. The absence of e-government and open government aggravating this stalemate would also make a key entry point for alternatives and solutions. It would also turn the scattered efforts of data collection and analysis into a unified, systematic, and reliable data infrastructure that gets regularly and more frequently updated and that serves as a transparent directory for all.

Using quantitative and qualitative data properly once it is available solves another major part of the problem. For example, relying on inadequate and inaccurate numbers to run targeted social safety nets allows for the usage of the proxy means test (PMT) targeting methodology, which aims to predict a household's level of welfare and income using a statistical formula and proxy variables related to demographics, human capital, type of housing, durable goods, and productive assets – as typically used in household surveys. This methodology is used by governments, and financial and aid institutions to identify and target households who are eligible for these programmes.

However, it does not effectively address its main purpose of ensuring that the poorest members of society can access social protection. Instead, it contains built-in errors due to prediction algorithms capturing only 40–60 per cent of household income, imprecise proxies, poor survey quality, infrequent surveys, false information, and low coverage in the selected sample, thus excluding more than half of the targeted poorest households (including non-poor beneficiaries, and excluding poor non-beneficiaries) (Centre for Social Sciences Research and Action 2022; Sebastian *et al.* 2018). On a related note, the outliers we omit while cleaning numerical data sets sometimes represent those in dire need of assistance and those we should do our best to target.

The lack of data infrastructure we have outlined earlier in this section is the key driver of development actors towards this model of social protection: targeting programmes that are time-bound and do not constitute grounds for rights. This model, on the contrary, increases social tensions between beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries, and allows for political interference, especially in clientelistic and confessional contexts which are similar to Lebanon and Iraq (UNESCWA 2021c). Even worse, unlike the Progresa programme in Mexico, the Bolsa Familia programme in Brazil, and most Latin American programmes, social assistance programmes in the Arab region lack the necessary follow-up, review, and monitoring and evaluation processes, which would offer a systemic overview of the 'dos and don'ts' and the magnitude of the impact made.

When conducted, these processes are shallowly implemented, often using narrative reviews that reflect the social workers' strive for 'achievements'. While we have debunked the use of quantitative data/research to deal with social protection issues, we must now highlight the importance of quantitative impact evaluation identification strategies such as randomised control trials, difference in differences, regression discontinuities, and propensity score matching, which are still scarcely used in the Arab region. This is despite the fact that they are very precise in retrieving minimal but useful data points and are capable of establishing causalities between the interventions/treatments and the impact. Combining these strategies with rigorous

qualitative reviews can yield optimal results and assessments useful for improvement (Reed *et al.* 2021).

Thence, challenging Northern-dominated development paradigms should not be limited to blaming imperialism and capitalism for unequal opportunities to produce and access research, and for the commercialisation of knowledge through paywalls and intellectual property (IP) agreements. Rather, knowledge should be regarded as being a public good and should be shared accordingly. Social scientists working on the Arab region should consider how these paradigms continue to recreate colonial effects by imposing research methods and methodologies, and dictating what is right or wrong, good or bad. Researchers should not be afraid of following or letting go of 'mainstream' research techniques based on what they deem fit for the contexts they are examining. In the Arab region, researchers should remain conscious of the fact that socioeconomic policies, in particular, can be improved by tackling the inaptness of worldwide common research methodologies (including the lack of innovative and more inclusive qualitative tools). In addition, these policies can be improved by fighting the politico-economic structures that are deep-rooted in the way institutions – both public and private – operate within a domain of hierarchal, patriarchal linear systems nurturing the complexities of class and power dynamics (across the political regime, religions and sects, clans and tribes). It is the political economy of social policymaking that explains why data can be unreliable and, at the same time, valued as representing the facts in numbers, over and above those lived experiences on which social and economic change should be based.

4 The way forward amid closed policy spaces

This article has demonstrated the need to pursue participatory and emancipatory research that rationalises the challenges faced during the research process, in data collection, and in data analysis and interpretation. It stresses the need to follow a mixed methods multidisciplinary approach that enables the combination of credible action and quantitative research for optimum results. It invites social sciences researchers, especially those working on welfare programmes and policies, to name the politics of coloniality, be open to epistemological disruptions, and try to re-read and re-learn notions/conceptions which could break their hegemonic beliefs and praxis (Bartlett *et al.* 2007). These suggestions, laid out throughout the article, were inspired by Thambinathan and Kinsella's (2021) proposed framework of exercising critical reflexivity, practicing reciprocity and respect for self-determination, embracing 'other(ed)' ways of knowing, and embodying a transformative behaviour in research. This enables the willingness to experience new ways, experiment (scientifically) with new methods, accept the change, share results and build each other's capacity, in order to enact the ultimate knowledge production framework we call for.

On the other hand, we need to bear in mind that, once the research outputs are ready and their outcome policy recommendations are articulated, another major challenge needs to be faced in Arab countries, namely closed policy spheres characterised by illegitimate governments, political deadlocks, and/or political redlines determining who should (or should not) be included, thus excluding refugees, the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning (LGBTQ+) community, and others. Social justice advocates will also encounter a policy inaction or, in other words, a 'no-policy' policy which emanates from a political will not to change and not only a lack of political will to change. This is part of the survival strategy of the ruling classes and an intention to induce social inertia among their people by keeping them busy making a living every day. This is also part of their intention to keep their clientelistic and confessional systems active, where they – through their parties and faith-based organisations – are the providers of social services instead of the state, thus increasing their constituency base by buying the votes of the beneficiaries (Achcar 2021).

Advocacy efforts will need to meet the political will of the engaged parties, legislative authorities, and systems of reference to knowledge and expertise, which are often not integrated in a reformist position on the hermeneutics affecting people's lives. This disintegration makes of advocacy a sometimes unhelpful strategy that does not respond to the logic of the security apparatus and the clergy bylaws, all of which continue to sideline the civic arena and ignore or make irrelevant the research findings that advocates refer to (World Bank 2013).

One way out of the impasse of closed policy spaces is mobilising young scholars and activists by equipping them with the knowledge (concepts, technical awareness, evidence-based sets of pragmatic policy recommendations, etc.) and the tools/tactics for activism, advocacy, and lobbying, which are key to creating demand-based/driven social movements and 'non-social movement social movements, or everyday social movements' around social protection that can make a change (Pourmokhtari 2015: 41). Such incremental movements have, according to Asef Bayat (2013), the ability to negotiate everyday wider spaces for citizens' preferences and choices, thus breaking the infrastructure of relational power that continues to serve the ruling triangle of forces in the Arab region: the security apparatus; dogmatism and political Islam; and tribalism and sectarianism.

Mobilising these movements is possible by conducting large-scale education and training programmes for these actors. This should be accompanied by efforts to bring to the fore the voice of poor/vulnerable people during scholarly discussions, activism deliberations, and knowledge translation endeavours. However, it is critical firstly to test the legitimacy of the policy recommendations ensuing from our research among the

concerned social groups themselves, given the lack of rule of law and culture of law in the region. For instance, do informal labour workers really want to be formalised? Many studies have proven their deliberate self-exclusion out of formal processes, and even social protection programmes, in order to avoid paying taxes or contributions, becoming subject to legal frameworks, and so forth (Dibeh, Fakhri and Marrouch 2019). More importantly, tremendous efforts should be exerted to educate vulnerable groups about the concepts and principles of social protection, as well as about their rights. This is essential for them to voice their demands directly and mobilise on a nationwide level, as a way to (partially) break closed policy spheres ahead of scholars and activists.

Finally, as previously explained in this article, bridging the gap between scientific research (including action research) and practitioner/policy research is a must. This requires a will to stop working in silos but rather bring together the researchers and the practitioners, and – to the extent possible – have vulnerable communities or their representatives represented in these convenings. It is equally important to replace the dry, technical, long-form research outputs with more accessible ones which serve as more hands-on policy-oriented informative outputs that are nevertheless evidence-based. Using tools such as infographics, quotes, and reportage videos, and benefiting from the remarkable proliferation of independent media outlets in the region is also key. At the same time, scrutinising the typology of research producers and consumers ('Who writes what?' 'Who reads what?') and ensuring the timeliness of the publication of the different research output formats ('What to publish when?') promises that our research will have a greater impact.

The author hopes that this article, by integrating a decolonial perspective and taking on board the lessons learned from research conducted during/on the Covid-19 pandemic, enables a departure from a normative form of knowledge production on social policy in the Arab region to a more genuine, homegrown, and engaged form.

Notes

- * This *IDS Bulletin* was produced as part of the Covid-19 Responses for Equity (CORE) Knowledge Translation Programme, led by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), which supports the translation of knowledge emerging from the CORE initiative. Supported by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), CORE brings together 20 projects to understand the socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic, improve existing responses, and generate better policy options for recovery. The research is being led by local researchers, universities, thinktanks, and civil society organisations across 42 countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East. The views expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of IDRC or its Board of

Governors, or IDS. For further information, please contact: c19re.org.

- 1 Farah Al Shami, Senior Fellow, Arab Reform Initiative, France.
- 2 Global warming, drought, and pollution, among other consequences of climate change and environmental degradation, in addition to conflicts over transboundary water resources and the mismanagement of such resources, have all led to a global water crisis that spiked in summer 2022. This crisis materialises in scarcity of clean freshwater and safe drinking water in many European but also Arab countries, especially those where the Tigris, Euphrates, Nile, and other major rivers pass.
- 3 Professor of Economics at the Lebanese American University who has worked on many field survey studies, including the **SAHWA project 'Researching Arab Mediterranean Youth: Towards a New Social Contract'** in Lebanon, Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, and Egypt. See the **Adnan Kassar School of Business** for more information on Walid Marrouch.
- 4 They do not take into account information that can only be captured qualitatively and are therefore blind to a large part of reality.
- 5 Author of the book *Development and Poverty: A Critical Review of Concepts and Measuring Tools* (Nehmeh 2021). See **Arab NGO Network for Development** for more information on Adib Nehmeh.
- 6 Key informant interview with Adib Nehmeh, Beirut, Lebanon, September 2022.
- 7 See Mandle (2015).
- 8 Tunis, Tunisia, September 2022.
- 9 Pers. comm., Beirut, Lebanon, June 2022.
- 10 Pers. comm., Amman, Jordan, November 2022.

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نظم الحماية الاجتماعية في المنطقة العربية: التحديات أمام إجراء البحوث وسن السياسات*

فرح الشامي^(١)

ملخص: يتناول هذا المقال الفرص والتحديات التي تواجه عملية إنتاج المعرفة وسن السياسات القائمة على الأدلة، والهادفة إلى إرساء نظم حماية اجتماعية أكثر شمولية وعدالة في المنطقة العربية. ويستند المقال إلى تجارب الباحثين/ات والناشطين/ات بعد جائحة كوفيد-١٩، وبنقاش التحديات التي واجهوها خلال تلك الفترة. كما يتعمق في الأسباب الجذرية لهذه التحديات والمرتبطة بعمليات جمع البيانات وتحليلها وربطها بالوقائع، إلى جانب المنهجيات والطرق المتبعة لإجراء البحوث، والتصنيف النمطي للباحثين/ات والمواضيع البحثية والممارسين/ات والناشطين/ات والمخرجات البحثية، بالإضافة إلى التوصيات السياسية الناتجة عنهم، والمساحات العامة التي يتفاعلون معها عند محاولة كسب التأييد والمدافعة لإجراء الإصلاحات الضرورية. ويقترح المقال حلولاً لدعم المناهضة ضد نهج "عنف الحداثة" المسيطر على عمليات صنع السياسات، مع اقتراح فكرة الابتعاد عن النماذج النمطية لإنتاج المعرفة وللمناصرة من أجل الحقوق الاجتماعية والاقتصادية في البلدان العربية لتصبح نماذجاً أكثر محلية وإرتباطاً بخصوصية هذه البلدان.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الحماية الاجتماعية، المنطقة العربية، البحوث، السياسات، التحديات، تحرير المعرفة من الاستعمار، كوفيد-١٩.

١ مقدمة

كشفت جائحة كوفيد-١٩ عن وجود أوجه قصور وخلل واضحة في نظم الحماية الاجتماعية العربية، الأمر الذي جعل فكرة توسيع تغطية الحماية الاجتماعية لتشمل الفئات الاجتماعية الهشة، محوراً نقاشياً أساسياً خلال الجهود البحثية والتأيدية لإعداد وسن إصلاحات واستراتيجيات التعافي ما بعد الجائحة في المنطقة العربية. وقد أدرك الباحثون/ات والممارسون/ات والناشطون/ات أن إعداد نظم حماية اجتماعية شاملة وفعالة ومستدامة هو أمر جوهري لتمكين الشعوب العربية من التغلب على التداعيات الاجتماعية لأية صدمة سياسية أو اقتصادية يمكن أن تتعرض لها، كخسارة مصدر الرزق وسبل العيش وعدم القدرة على الوصول إلى الخدمات والسلع الأساسية.

وقد كان للآزمات المتداخلة والمتعاقبة التي صاحبت جائحة كوفيد-١٩ الأثر الأكبر في التأكيد على ضرورة توفر بنى تحتية متينة للضمان الاجتماعي، لتعزيز مرونة الشعوب وتمكينها من التكيف بشكل أفضل مع التهديدات العديدة التي قد تظال مستوى المعيشة الكريمة. وتتراوح هذه الآزمات ما بين أثر الحرب الروسية-الأوكرانية على الأمن الطاقوي والغذائي، ومشكلة جفاف الأنهار العالمية^(٢)، وغيرها من تبعات التغير المناخي، وتعرض عدد من الدول لآزمات سياسية ومالية/اقتصادية مثل العراق وتونس ولبنان ومصر. إن مثل هذه البنى التحتية ليست فقط

ضرورية للاستعداد للتعامل مع الأزمات، لكنها أيضاً تضمن كون الفئات الفقيرة والمهمشة والأقل حظاً أقل تأثراً بالظروف الاجتماعية والاقتصادية المتقلبة والمتغيرة والتي تؤثر على حياتهم اليومية بشكل عام.

وفي العام ٢٠٢٠، وقبل بداية جائحة كوفيد-١٩، أظهر التقرير العربي للتنمية المستدامة للجنة الأمم المتحدة الاقتصادية والاجتماعية لغربي آسيا (الإسكوا) (UNESCWA) أن نسبة السكان في الدول العربية ممن هم تحت خط الفقر الدولي، ما عدا دول مجلس التعاون الخليجي، والذي يبلغ ١.٩٠ دولار أمريكي في اليوم الواحد، هي تقريباً ١٦ في المئة. وبحسب تقرير الإسكوا (٢٠٢٠: ١٤)، فإن نسبة الفقر المدقع كانت أعلى من معدل الفقر الدولي وأعلى من معدل الفقر في كافة الدول النامية، ما عدا أفريقيا جنوب الصحراء. وقد وصلت نسبة الفقر متعدد الأبعاد إلى ٤١ في المئة في ١٠ دول عربية، ما يشكل حوالي ٧٥ في المئة من سكان المنطقة (المرجع نفسه). وبعد مرور ٤ أشهر على الجائحة، أعلنت اللجنة الإقليمية التابعة للأمم المتحدة أن ٨,٣ مليون نسمة إضافية سوف يندرجون تحت خط الفقر في المنطقة العربية، مما قد يزيد عدد الأفراد الذي سيعانون من سوء التغذية ليصل إلى ٢ مليون نسمة (بحسب الإسكوا ٢٠٢٠ب).

إضافة لما سبق، وفي الوقت الذي كان فيه معدل البطالة في المنطقة العربية هو الأعلى في العالم (الإسكوا ٢٠٢١أ)، وكانت العمالة غير المنظمة تمثل ما نسبته ٦٨٪ من كامل معدلات العمالة قبل بدء ظهور الكورونا (منظمة العمل الدولية ٢٠١٨) (ILO)، تسببت الجائحة في ارتفاع غير مسبوق في معدلات البطالة، وذلك بنسبة ١,٣ في المئة في الدول العربية ما عدا دول مجلس التعاون الخليجي (منظمة العمل الدولية ٢٠٢٢)، حيث تركزت ما يزيد عن ٣٩ مليون فرد في المنطقة يعملون في القطاعات الأكثر تضرراً بسبب الوباء (الإسكوا ٢٠٢١ب). وقد تزامنت هذه الأرقام مع أعلى تركيز للثروة الوطنية في العالم، حيث وقعت ما نسبته ٦٠٪ من هذه الثروة بين يدي الطبقة الأغنى في العالم العربي والتي تمثل ١٠٪ من السكان (كالاس ٢٠٢١). ويشير ذلك إلى مستوى صادم من عدم المساواة، وعلى وجود العديد من الأشكال الحادة للهشاشة الاجتماعية، حيث تضطر الفئات الفقيرة من المجتمع لتحمل الصعوبات الاقتصادية على الدوام.

وعلى الرغم من هذا الوضع البائس، إلا أن السياسات الاجتماعية في الدول العربية لا تزال تعسفية وغير كافية للاستجابة للاحتياجات والمتطلبات الاجتماعية والاقتصادية لشعوب المنطقة. وتبلغ نسبة الفئات في الدول العربية المغطاة حالياً بخدمة حماية إجتماعية واحدة على الأقل ما يساوي ٤٠٪ فقط. كما يستفيد ٧,٢٪ من ذوي الاحتياجات الخاصة، و٨,٧٪ من العاطلين/ات عن العمل، و١٢,٢٪ من الأمهات والمواليد الجدد، و١٥,٤٪ من الأطفال، و٢٤٪ من المسنين/ات فقط من خدمات الحماية إجتماعية، إلى جانب فئات أخرى ممن هم من الأكثر إحتياجاً (منظمة العمل الدولية ٢٠٢٢). ولا تزال النفقات العامة على الحماية الاجتماعية متدنية في المنطقة، حيث لا تكاد تصل إلى ٤,٦ بالمئة من الناتج المحلي الإجمالي (إلى جانب الرعاية الصحية)، و٣,٢ بالمئة على الرعاية الصحية (المرجع نفسه). إلا أن القضية الملحة هنا هي أهمية التعامل مع مشكلة أنظمة الحماية الاجتماعية المجزأة والضعيفة في المنطقة العربية، والتي تستثني العديد من السكان - وفي أفضل الأحوال - توفر معونات إجتماعية على نطاق المجتمعات المحلية بدلاً من أن تشمل كل السكان في الدولة الواحدة.

ومن هنا، بهدف التعامل مع هذه القضية الملحة وفي سبيل تطوير أنظمة حماية إجتماعية شاملة مبنية على منهجيات الشمولية وأخرى مستهدفة للآليات توفير الخدمات للمواطنين، من الضروري إنتاج المعرفة العلمية اللازمة لاقتراح وتطوير حلول مجدبة مالياً فيما يتعلق بالإصلاحات السياسية والبرنامجاتية، والإصلاحات القانونية، والإصلاحات المؤسسية ومخططات التمويل، إضافة إلى الإصلاحات الاجتماعية والسياسية. أما من ناحية تحسين نوعية خدمات الحماية الاجتماعية المقدمة فهو أمر معقد لأنه يتطلب التعامل مع العوامل السياسية-الاقتصادية وعوامل الحوكمة، مما يؤدي إلى تنصل الدول العربية من مسؤوليتها بهذا الشأن. كذلك، فإن هذا الموضوع بحاجة إلى إدراك مدى وعي المواطنين بمفهوم الحماية الاجتماعية باعتبارها أحد مبادئ حقوق

الإنسان وواحدة من أساسيات العقد الاجتماعي الذي يربط الشعب بالدولة، إلى جانب مدى انتشار ثقافة القوانين بين السكان، ومدى إمكانية (أو عدم إمكانية) إدماج إصلاحات نظم الحماية الاجتماعية بمطالب الحراك الاجتماعي العربي.

وفي ضوء ما سبق، يعتبر إعداد البحوث حول هذا الموضوع بهدف استنباط توصيات براغماتية لسياسات الحماية الاجتماعية وتأييدها مهمة صعبة. ويبدو أن الطريقة "التقليدية" لتأدية هذه المهمة لا تؤدي الغرض، لأن الجهود المبذولة بعد الجائحة من قبل الجهات الاجتماعية الفاعلة المختلفة لم تتجح إلا في إحداث تحسينات طفيفة في نظم الحماية الاجتماعية السائدة، مما جعل هذه الجهات غير قادرة على مواجهة أزمة كبيرة كهذه. ومن هنا، من المهم جدًا تفحص الفرص والتحديات التي تواجه عمليات إعداد البحوث لإيجاد نظم حماية اجتماعية أكثر شمولية وعدالة في الدول العربية.

ويوضح المقال هذه التحديات ويتعمق في الأسباب الكامنة وراءها، وخاصة تلك المتعلقة بجمع البيانات وترجمتها بشكل عملي؛ والطرق والمنهجيات المتبعة لإجراء البحوث، والباحثين/ات، والمواضيع البحثية، والممارسين/ات، والناشطين/ات في هذه الأعمال، بالإضافة إلى مخرجات البحوث والتوصيات السياساتية التي تقدمها، والمساحات العامة التي يتم التفاعل معها عند محاولة كسب التأييد والمناصرة لإجراء الإصلاحات الضرورية. ويقترح المقال طرقًا للتغلب على هذه التحديات وتحويل المقايضات التي تسودها إلى إجراءات عملية لإحداث تغيير إيجابي ملموس.

ولعلّ السبب الرئيسي من تفسيراتنا في هذا المقال هو الحاجة إلى تحرير الطرق والمنهجيات التي نتبعها من الاستعمار الفكري لإجراء البحوث في المنطقة، بالإضافة إلى ربط أدوات المعرفة المنتجة الخاصة بنا محليًا وجعلها سهلة الوصول وأكثر تأثيرًا. ومن هنا، فإننا نؤمن بأن هذه النقلة المعرفية من شأنها تحرير الباحثين/ات الممارسين/ات الساعين/ات من "طريقة عملهم/ن" التقليدية المتبعة سابقًا، مما يساعد في توسيع نطاق خدمات الحماية الاجتماعية لتضم الفئات الأكثر احتياجا في المنطقة العربية، إذ يساهم في الابتعاد عن الأفكار المغلوطة والتعاليم المفروضة المستنبطة من سياقات غريبة. فقد تمكنت هذه التحديات من ردع محاولات عدة لهؤلاء الباحثين/ات كما لكافة المعنيين بالموضوع، وأوصلت إلى أن تبوء محاولاتهم بالفشل.

إن التحليلات والاقتراحات المقدمة هنا تركز على تجارب صاحبة المقال كباحثة عربية في منتصف مسيرتها المهنية، عملت خلال السنوات الثماني الماضية في مجال الاقتصاد الاجتماعي والتنمية في المنطقة العربية، وذلك باتباع منهجيات بحثية كمية ونوعية ومن خلال إدارة عدة مشاريع بحثية ذات صلة - بما فيها على وجه الخصوص مشروعًا حول الحماية الاجتماعية في البلدان العربية - بما في ذلك تحليل المخرجات البحثية لهذه المشاريع والتحديات التي واجهتها خلال فترة تنفيذها، بالإضافة إلى الانخراط في نقاشات مستمرة مع مجموعة كبيرة من الباحثين/ات في هذا المجال. فقد مكن ذلك الباحثة من اكتساب مخزون كبير من الملاحظات عبر السنين، والتي تمت مقابلتها ومراجعتها من خلال استعراض مكتبي مكثف للواقع الحالي. ويتضمن المقال كذلك مقابلات إضافية مع باحثين/ات مخضرمين/ات وجدد في مجالات متنوعة، حيث يهدف المقال بشكل رئيسي إلى توفير معلومات عملية لكل من يرغب في إعادة النظر والتفكير في المنهجيات المتبعة في البحوث الهادفة لتحقيق العدالة الاجتماعية المنشودة.

٢ البيانات: ممارسات "العلم السيء"

من أجل القيام بالإصلاحات وإحداث التغيير المنشود، لا بد من إجراء البحوث، والتي بدورها بحاجة إلى بيانات. وتحتاج برامج الحماية الاجتماعية، الشاملة والمستهدفة على حد سواء، قاعدات كاملة من البيانات للوصول إلى المستفيدين والمستهدفين. إلا أن المنطقة العربية تفتقر إلى البيانات الكافية (مقدسي، مروش ويزبك ٢٠٢٢)، كما أن هنالك بعض الدول العربية مثل العراق ولبنان التي لم تجدد قاعداتها الإحصائية تعداداتها السكانية لأكثر من ٢٥ عامًا، حيث تمتلك ٣ من أصل ١٦ دولة عربية خارج دول مجلس التعاون الخليجي فقط (وهي المغرب، والأردن، ومصر)، سجلات اجتماعية وطنية موحدة (الإسكوا ٢٠١٩). وهناك شح في المحفوظات والوثائق، فحتى

وإن وجدت، تكون البيانات – سواء الكمية أو النوعية – غير كاملة حيث تغطي عينات محدودة من السكان وتفقر لبعض وحدات الدراسة/العينة المستعرضة أو لبعض نقاط البيانات في الفئة الزمنية قيد الدرس و/أو لبعض المتغيرات والمعايير القياسية. إضافة لما سبق، عادة ما تكون هذه البيانات غير مصنّفة حسب النوع الاجتماعي (الجنس) أو حتى الجنس، أو الفئة العمرية، أو الطبقة الاجتماعية/فئة الدخل، أو التوزيع المساحي (مثل المنطقة الجغرافية الداخلية أو حتى على صعيد الدول، والتوزيعات المنطقية المتمثلة بالريف مقابل الحضر والمركز مقابل الهامش)، أو حتى النماذج الاعتيادية للهشاشة الاجتماعية مثل الإعاقة والطابع غير المنظم للعمالة والوضع القانوني، إلخ. وفي نفس السياق، تفقر المنطقة العربية إلى كمية كافية من البيانات الميكرواقتصادية/الجزئية، والتي عادة ما يتم الحصول عليها من خلال الاستبيانات الأسرية والزيارات الميدانية، على الرغم من أن هذا النوع من البيانات لا غنى عنه للدراسات التي تعنى بالاحتياجات والخدمات الاجتماعية والاقتصادية، مثل تلك المرتبطة بتوسيع نطاق الحماية الاجتماعية.

وفي ضوء ما سبق، فإن البيانات الحالية غير الكاملة إلى جانب الجهود المبذولة لسد هذه الفجوات، تقع ضمن نطاق مسؤوليات الخبراء/الخبراء الرئيسيين/ات في هذا المجال أو المفكرين/ات النظريين/ات أو المنظمات الدولية. إلا أن هذه المشكلة المحيرة تتضمن معضلة ألا وهي دراسة العينات الزائفة، حيث يعتقد الباحثون/ات الذين يقومون بإعداد الاستبيانات أو إجراء المقابلات أنهم يستهدفون فعلاً الفئات الأقل حظاً في المجتمع. ويعود السبب في ذلك بشكل أساسي للفكر والمعرفة الاستعمارية المسبقة لدى الباحثين/ات (ستادون ٢٠٢٠)، حيث أنهم يبدؤون بإعداد البحوث وفي أذهانهم توقعات مسبقة، مما يجعلهم يحددون المشكلة بأنفسهم بدلاً من ترك المشكلة تعرّف نفسها لهم (بيرك ١٩٨٣). وكنتيجة لذلك، ينتهي المطاف بالباحثين/ات بتخصيص مشكلة ليس لها وجود من الأساس أو إرسال الاستبيانات للأفراد غير المتضررين أصلاً، مما يعني مضيعة للموارد المخصصة لحل المشكلة التي تواجه الأشخاص الأكثر احتياجاً في الحقيقة.

وبيّنا لا تمنع هذه المعضلة تحديد نماذج الهشاشة الاجتماعية بشكل منصف (مثل النساء، والأطفال، والشباب/الشابات، وكبار/كبيرات السن، والمهاجرين/ات، والعاملين/ات غير المنظمين/ات وكل من يعمل/تعمل في المهن الخطرة وفي ظروف هشة، إلى جانب السكان في المناطق الريفية، وذوي الاحتياجات الخاصة)، إلا أنها لا تأخذ في الاعتبار الحاجة لإعادة النظر في مفهوم الهشاشة الاجتماعية، على الرغم من أهمية هذا الموضوع في حال الرغبة في ضم نماذج جديدة من المستضعفين اجتماعياً إلى برامج الحماية الاجتماعية (وهي النماذج التي تظهر خلال الأزمات/الصددمات) وكذلك النماذج غير المرئية في المناطق النائية والمهمشة (مثل المناطق البحرية والغابات والمناطق الحضرية)، حيث يتم التغافل عادة عن هذه المناطق (الشامي ٢٠٢٢).

وإلى جانب معضلة جمع العينات بطريقة خاطئة، تتضمن البيانات المتاحة وطرق جمع البيانات العديد من الممارسات السيئة التي تتعلق باستقصاء المعلومات ونشرها تحليلها. وعندما يبدأ الباحثون/ات أعمالهم بأفكار نمطية ومغلوبة ومسبقة عن المشكلة، فهم يميلون إلى البحث عن المعلومات التي لا تتعارض مع معتقداتهم السائدة. وفي هذا السياق، صرّح عالم اجتماعي وباحث ميداني أوروبي يعمل في لبنان، ويفضّل أن يبقى اسمه مجهولاً، خلال مقابلة معمّقة مع الكاتبة: "شعرت بأنني لوئت المشاهدات الميدانية بتحيزي". إضافة لما سبق، وبحسب وليد مروش^(٢)، غالباً ما يقع الباحثون/ات الميدانيون/ات ضحية للمقايضات ما بين التفضيلات المصّرحة مباشرة للأفراد موضع البحث والتفضيلات التي يلاحظها/يستنتجها الباحث/ة عند إعداد التقارير وتحليل البيانات، حيث قال:

"بينما ترتبط التفضيلات الأولى بأفكار الأفراد الذين يتم توزيع الاستبيانات عليهم، إلا أنها تتأثر أيضاً بنظرة صاحب الاستبيان نفسه. ومع ذلك، ندرة هم الباحثون/ات الذين يأخذون بعين الاعتبار أنواع المدخلات هذه ويعاينونها بشكل متداخل للتأكد من صحة التحليلات التي يتوصلون إليها. وفي معظم الحالات، يتم الأخذ في الاعتبار التفضيلات المعلن عنها صراحة، ما يؤدي عادة إلى إنتاج بيانات على الصعيد الكلي/الماكرواقتصادي والتي بدورها

لا تعد مفيدة في الحصول على معلومات دقيقة عن خصوصيات الفئات المهمشة والأكثر استضعافاً في المجتمع".

وتكون هذه التناقضات أكثر وضوحاً في الدول الأقل تطوراً حيث تكون سلوكيات السكان فيها مضللة بسبب عدة عوامل مرتبطة بالعادات الاجتماعية فيها، وقوانين الاسرة، والديانة، والاعتبارات الأمنية، حيث يقوم الأفراد على الأغلب بالإجابة بطريقة مضللة والمراوغة حول الأسئلة المتعلقة بسبل كسب العيش، نتيجة حدة فقرهم وألمهم بالحصول على المعونات من الجهات التي تجري المقابلة معهم (وبينينجتون ٢٠١٠).

لقد نجحت هذه المشاكل - والتي ذكرنا بعضاً منها فقط - في إعاقة قدرات الجهات المعنية في الدول العربية في إنتاج معلومات ومعارف تتماشى وتعتبر عن السياق الاجتماعي المحلي في تلك الدول؛ وبدلاً من ذلك، فرضت حلولاً معدة مسبقاً ناتجة عن المفاهيم المغلوطة والتدخلات العرضية.

٢-١ البيانات والمؤشرات الكمية

معظم أوجه النقص في البيانات المذكورة أعلاه أكثر حدة في حالة البيانات والمؤشرات الكمية مقارنة مع حداثتها في حالة البيانات والمؤشرات النوعية، حيث أن القياس الكمي ينطوي على الكثير من التدخلات والتعديلات الحسابية في الأرقام. ويمكن أن تشمل هذه الأمور على ترجيح (وزن) متغير بمتغير آخر، وتطبيع المتغير، وتوحيد المتغير، ومعالجة الوحدات الخارجة عن النطاق الرقمي لسلسلة البيانات، وفرض أنواع من الحذف المعياري على التوزيع كتحديد الحد الأقصى أو الأدنى للمتغير لأعراض التجميع على سبيل المثال لا الحصر. يتم احتساب الأرقام أيضاً على أساس العديد من الافتراضات "النظرية" لاستبعاد العوامل "الخارجية" المفترضة عند تشكيل مؤشر أو إنشاء علاقة بين متغيرين أو أكثر، على الرغم من أن هذه العوامل المفترضة التي نتحكم فيها قد تكون في صميم المشكلة التي نحاول حلها. علاوة على ذلك، فإن الأرقام أقل تعبيراً عن الحقائق البشرية في حين أن قضايا مثل الاستبعاد من خطط الحماية الاجتماعية هي قضايا إنسانية تحتاج إلى احتضان وهذا ما نقصيه الأساليب العددية وتعتبره أفكاراً أو مشاعر متحيزة. كما أن مشاكل مجموعات البيانات غير المكتملة، ونقص التصنيف في البيانات، والإفطار إلى بيانات كافية على المستوى الجزئي/ الميكرواتي، تتفاقم وتزداد حداثتها بشكل خاص عندما تنطبق على المعلومات الإحصائية.

وبالتالي، فإن المؤشرات الكمية هي مؤشرات محايدة للنوعية^(٤). وسواء كانت البيانات التي يتم إدخالها في الحسابات تُجمع على المستوى الماكرواتي/الكلّي أو الميكرواتي/الجزئي، على النطاق الوطني أو على نطاق جغرافي محدود، فإن المؤشرات الكمية هي في الغالب مؤشرات ماكرواقتصادية/كلية يتم تعريفها من قبل المؤسسات المالية الدولية والمنظمات الدولية العابرة للحكومات، والتي تولي الأولوية لمنظور المقارنة العالمية على الحاجة إلى مراعاة خصوصيات السياقات الإقليمية والوطنية والمحلية (أبو إسماعيل، أبو طالب، رمضان ٢٠١٢). وتشمل الأمثلة على هذه المؤشرات الكلية في مجال الحماية الاجتماعية/العدالة الاجتماعية "الإنفاق الحكومي على الصحة كنسبة مئوية من الناتج المحلي الإجمالي"، و"الإنفاق الحكومي على التعليم كنسبة مئوية من الناتج المحلي الإجمالي"، و"الإنفاق على الإعانات الغذائية حسب الإعانات الغذائية وإعانات الطاقة".

هذه الأمثلة توضح إلى أي مدى لا تعكس هذه المؤشرات الأثر المتفاوت للتدخلات الحكومية على الفئات الاجتماعية المختلفة ولا تعبر عن توزع الإنفاق الاجتماعي على هذه الفئات. فعلى سبيل المثال، في حين أنّ الإنفاق على الدعم في تونس ظل لفترة طويلة من أعلى المعدلات في المنطقة، فقد ثبت أن هذا الدعم تنازلي بشكل كبير في البلاد، حيث استحوذ الخمسان الأعلى دخلاً على الحصة الأكبر من دعم الطاقة والغذاء (كويستا، اللهجه، إيبارا ٢٠١٥). وهذا يشير إلى الحاجة إلى مؤشرات "مبتكرة" وخارجة عن المألوف تعكس بشكل أفضل واقع المجتمعات الأكثر احتياجاً ولا تركز فقط على بعضها على حساب مجتمعات أخرى يكون نوع هشاشتها وتهميشها جديداً أو غير شائع أو غير مرئي.

وبالحديث عن الحماية الاجتماعية على وجه التحديد، فإن المؤشر الكمي الوحيد الذي تم احتسابه واستخدامه هو مؤشر هدف التنمية المستدامة (SDG) ١-٣-١، وهو "نسبة السكان المشمولين بأرضيات الحماية الاجتماعية، حسب الجنس، مع التصنيف بين الأطفال والعاطلين/ات عن العمل والمسنين/ات والأشخاص ذوي الاحتياجات الخاصة والنساء الحوامل والموليد الجدد وضحايا إصابات العمل والفقراء والضعفاء" (إدارة الشؤون الاقتصادية والاجتماعية - الأمم المتحدة UN DESA). وفي حين أنّ هذا المؤشر يبدو حساساً للنسيج الاجتماعي الأكثر احتياجاً للحماية الاجتماعية، فإن الأساس المنطقي لهذا المؤشر يركز على الأشخاص المشمولين وليس المستبعدين. ويرجع ذلك أساساً لأن شعبية الإحصاءات التابعة لإدارة الشؤون الاقتصادية والاجتماعية بالأمم المتحدة صنفته على أنّه "مؤشر من المستوى الأول" فقط سنتين قبل بداية الجائحة وعلى أساس أنه "يتم إنتاج البيانات ذات الصلة بانتظام من قبل ما لا يقل عن ٥٠ في المئة من البلدان ومن السكان في كل منطقة يكون المؤشر فيها ملائماً"، إلا أن هذه المعايير لا تنطبق على كل أجزاء المؤشر ولا من حيث المصطلحات المصنّفة، أي بالنسبة لسلسلة البيانات التي تغطي مختلف أشكال الهشاشة المذكورة في علامة المؤشر. ومن بين الدول التي لا تنطبق عليها هذه المعايير، فإن العديد منها دول عربية، كما يتم الإبلاغ عن المؤشر من قبل الدول بوتيرة كل سنتين فقط (إدارة الشؤون الاقتصادية والاجتماعية - الأمم المتحدة ٢٠٢٠).

وهذا التصنيف الجديد أتى بالرغم من أنّ هذه السلسلات البيانية لا تغطي سوى إمكانية حصول كل فئة ضعيفة إما على تقديرات اجتماعية واحدة فقط على الأقل، أو على تقديرات اجتماعية من نوع واحد، سواء كان ذلك على شكل مساعدة اجتماعية أو تأمين اجتماعي أو برنامج لسوق العمل وبالتالي فإنها تنظر بشكل محدود على سبيل المثال في المعاشات التقاعدية لكبار/كبيرات السن، واستحقاقات الأمومة للنساء، وتغطية إصابات العمل للعامل/العاملات فقط، وتتجاهل الاحتياجات الأساسية الأخرى لهذه الفئات الاجتماعية. وبالإضافة إلى ذلك، ومع قيام مؤسسات الدولة بجمع البيانات على المستويين الماكرواتي والوطني، يعطي هذا المؤشر أبعاداً إجمالية توفر معلومات غير دقيقة لا تراعي تعدد أبعاد الظروف المعيشية للمواطنين/ات وتستنثي أولئك الذين لا يتم الإبلاغ عن دخلهم/استهلاكهم من خلال الإحصاءات الحكومية الرسمية، مثل أولئك غير المسجلين/ات أو غير المصرح بهم/بهن أو الذين يعملون بصورة غير رسمية.

إن المؤشرات الكمية الاستعمارية المعمول بها في الواقع لا يمكن التعويل عليها بالنسبة لأولئك الذين يهدفون إلى دعم أفقر الفئات وأكثرها تهميشاً وهشاشة. والأساليب المستخدمة في احتساب هذه المؤشرات وسلسلة مؤشرات الفرعية كما وسلسلة البيانات التي تتألف منها هذه الأخيرة تسفر عن تقديرات أقل من الواقع لمستويات الفقر وعدم المساواة (سرنجي وآخرون ٢٠١٥). فخلال مقابلة معمّقة، ذكر أديب نعمة^(٥) سببين رئيسيين وراء التبسيط والخطأ في التقدير لأدوات قياس الفقر، ألا وهما: الاعتماد على الدخل والاستهلاك بوصفهما المؤشرين الوحيدين للحرمان بدلاً من قدرة الفرد الفعلية على تلبية احتياجاته الأساسية والحصول على الفرص التي يستحقها؛ وعدم حساب ما هو غير قابل للقياس (وتحديداً للقياس الكمي) مثل الاحتياجات البشرية والنفسية والاجتماعية، والشعور بالعجز عن تغيير الواقع، وعدم القدرة على الازدهار. ويعتقد أديب نعمة أن هذه العيوب تتجاهل حقيقة أنّه لا يمكن توحيد جميع جوانب الحياة وأنّ ما هو مختلف/متباين عن المسار العام للسياسات التجريبية التي استندت إليها مؤشرات الفقر هو أيضاً مهم:

على سبيل المثال، على افتراض أن هناك أسرة فقيرة تضطر إلى إخراج طفلها/طفلتها من المدرسة لعدم قدرتها على تحمّل تكاليف تعليمه/تعليمها، ليعمل/تعمل ويساهم/تساهم في زيادة دخل الأسرة. وعلى افتراض أن هناك أسرة أخرى لديها نفس خصائص الأسرة السابقة ولكن طفلها/طفلتها لا يزال/تزال ملتحقاً/ملتحقة في المدرسة. وبالتالي، إن الاعتماد على بيانات الإنفاق في حسابات الفقر يمكن أن يجعل الأسرة الأولى تبدو أكثر ثراءً بسبب الدخل المرتفع نسبياً والذي يعود إلى عمل الطفل/الطفلة، وهذا ليس دقيقاً. فالفقر ليس مجرد حرمان مادي^(٦).

كما أشار نعمة أيضاً إلى أن عدم اعتبار الأسرة "فقيرة" لمجرد امتلاكها دراجة كوسيلة للنقل، أو امتلاكها لجهاز كمبيوتر محمول، أو حتى امتلاكها مرحاضاً في المنزل هو معيار غير دقيق في معظم البلدان العربية في الوقت الحاضر، وذكر أن هذا الخطأ في التقدير يرجع إلى حقيقة أن تدابير الفقر تتبع من دراسات بنيت على حالات في الدول الأقل نمواً والتي لا تعدّ معظم المجتمعات العربية جزءاً منها.

وبالمثل، أشار نعمة إلى الجانب السلبي المتمثل في إعطاء جميع الأبعاد وجميع المؤشرات الفرعية تحت كل بعد نفس الوزن عند حساب مؤشر الفقر متعدّد الأبعاد النهائي، والذي يضع أحياناً جوانب ثانوية من الحياة على نفس مستوى الجوانب الأولية، والعكس صحيح. فعبارة أخرى، يؤدي ذلك على سبيل المثال إلى التقليل من شأن عتبة الفقر في التعليم وإلى المبالغة في تقدير الفقر الغذائي. وعلاوة على ذلك، وعلى الرغم من التسليم بأهمية البيانات الميكرواقتصادية/الجزئية لأسباب سبق ذكرها في هذا المقال، أبرز نعمة إثنين من عوامل عدم الأهلية المرتبطة بهذا النوع من البيانات كما هو عليه حالياً: (١) بغض النظر عن حجم المسح على المستوى الميكرواقتصادي/الجزئي، فإنه يظل محدوداً ويصعب تعميمه ويمثل السياق الذي يجري دراسته فقط؛ و(٢) يتم جمع البيانات على المستوى الميكرواقتصادي/الجزئي عادة من خلال الدراسات الاستقصائية للأسر المعيشية التي تعتبر الأسرة كلاً كوحدة الرصد. ويمكن أن يؤدي العامل الثاني من عوامل عدم الأهلية إلى تقديرات متحيّزة لمستوى الفقر في بعض الأسر بسبب ظروف حياة فرد أو فردين فقط في هذه الأسر. كما يؤدي ذلك إلى النظر إلى الأسرة باعتبارها وحدة متجانسة، لا تأخذ في الاعتبار الاختلافات في احتياجات مختلف أفراد الأسرة وتطلعاتهم والفرص المتاحة لهم (على سبيل المثال، النساء مقابل الرجال، كبار/كبيرات السن مقابل الشباب/الشابات، المتعلمون مقابل غير المتعلمين، الأشخاص ذوو الإعاقة مقابل الأشخاص غير ذوي الإعاقة) فضلاً عن المعايير الاجتماعية وأوجه عدم المساواة التي تظهر بينهم (كلارك وستيل ٢٠٠٢).

وأخيراً، أكد نعمة كيف يتم أحياناً تزوير البيانات الكمية واستخدامها كأداة تلاعب من قبل أصحاب السلطة. وكون أن الوكالات المختلفة تقدم أحياناً أرقاماً مختلفة (من الناحيتين المطلقة والنسبية) لنفس المتغير الاجتماعي-الاقتصادي، وكون المؤشرات المختلفة لنفس المتغير تؤدي أحياناً إلى استنتاجات مختلفة، يضيف مصداقية كبيرة على طرحه. في الواقع، يعتقد العديد من الاقتصاديين/ات السياسيين/ات أن المبالغة في تقدير معدلات الفقر وعدم المساواة على المستوى الكلي يتم عن عمد من قبل المنظمات الدولية التي ترغب في الإبلاغ في وقت لاحق عن "الإنجازات" في مجال التخفيف من حدة الفقر ومن حدة عدم المساواة (جيل ١٩٩٦).

وبالإضافة إلى ذلك، فإن إدراك هذه المغالاة في التقدير - عند وجودها - يتيح لواضعي/ات السياسات التهرب إلى حد كبير من مسؤولياتهم. والأهم من ذلك، وفقاً لوليد مروش، أنّ المؤشرات الاجتماعية-الاقتصادية الماكرواقتصادية/الكلية ليست ضارة إذا كانت متاحة لعينات كبيرة تمكّن من استنتاج الأنماط وإذا كان يُنظر إليها على أنها "بدائل" تقريبية تساعد في إثراء السياسات العالمية أو الإقليمية. بيد أنه أشار إلى أنّ النهج الذي تتبّعه المنظمات الدولية التي تقود عملية احتساب هذه المؤشرات هو نهج رولزي (Rawlsian maxi-min)^(٧)، يبدأ بتضخيم أفضلويات الرعاية الاجتماعية لأفقر شخص في المجتمع ثم يوسع هذا التمدّل ليشمل جميع فئات الدخل الأخرى. ونحن نعتقد أن هذا النموذج يجعل الأثرياء أفضل حالاً بينما يوجه الموارد التي يفترض أن تكون موجهة للفقراء إلى من هم أكثر ثراءً على أساس تكافؤ الفرص وليس النتائج.

٢-٢ البحث النوعي

على الرغم من أنّ البيانات الكمية هي البيانات الأكثر استخداماً للبحوث المتعلقة بالقضايا/الحقوق الاجتماعية-الاقتصادية مثل تغطية الحماية الاجتماعية، إن البيانات النوعية أو الكيفية لها أيضاً حصة كبيرة في هذا المجال البحثي، حيث تم استخدامها منذ أواخر التسعينيات كـ"بديل تصوّري لتحرير منهجيات البحث من الاستعمار الفكري" في المنطقة العربية (حبشي ٢٠١٥). والسبب الذي يجعلنا نعتقد أن اللجوء إلى البحوث النوعية كعلاج "وهمي" هو لأنه مدفوع بتعزيز خطاب

عربي موحد كرد على الخطابات الاستعمارية، وبالتالي فهو لا يراعي تنوع الأفكار والثقافات والحقائق في منطقة غير متماسكة وغير متجانسة. ومع ذلك، يمكن أن يمثل البحث النوعي طريقة هامة لإنتاج معرفة هادفة ومؤثرة بشأن تحسين الرفاه الاجتماعي للفئات الأكثر إحتياجاً إلى أقصى حد ممكن، خاصة إذا تم إدراك ومعالجة الممارسات السيئة التي تشوّه حاليًا هذا النوع من البحوث (ليتل ٢٠١٤).

يتمثل أحد أوجه القصور الرئيسية في البحث النوعي في أنه يعتمد إلى حد كبير على مقابلات المخبرين (مثل المقابلات المعمّقة والمقابلات شبه الموجهة) ومناقشات مجموعات التركيز البؤرية والدراسات الميدانية الإثنوغرافية. فيمكن أن تكون هذه الأساليب مكلفة للغاية وتستغرق وقتاً طويلاً وتتطلب عمالة كثيرة (ميلر وسالكيند ٢٠٠٢). ولذلك، فإن إجرائها على عينات كبيرة بما يكفي لتكون تمثيلية ومولدة لاتجاهات/أنماط قابلة للتعميم أمر صعب ويتوقف على توافر الموارد.

وينطبق الشيء ذاته على الحالات التي لا يهدف فيها البحث النوعي سوى للحصول على معلومات مفصلة من مجموعة صغيرة من المشاركين بغية التعمق لاحقاً في البحث الكمي حول الجوانب المتنوعة للموضوع في عينات تمثيلية واسعة النطاق (أمريلا للنشر ن، د). وهنا يأتي دور التمويل في التأثير على طبيعة البحوث. فيما أن الجهات المانحة الدولية والأوقاف والمؤسسات المالية الدولية توفر التمويل الأكبر بصفة عامة، فإن أساليب البحث النوعي ومنهجياته مقيّدة بنهج هذه الكيانات الدولية وأيديولوجياتها وأجنداتها وطرائق عملها (ساتاري وآخرون، ٢٠٢٢؛ آجارد وآخرون ٢٠٢١).

وتؤثر مسألة التمويل هذه أيضًا على طبيعة الجهات التي تقوم بهذا النوع من الأبحاث على نطاق واسع؛ لذلك، يغلب على هؤلاء الأكاديميون/ات الذين يدرسون أو يدرّسون في الجامعات "الغربية"، والمنظمات الدولية، والباحثون/ات المتميزين/ات من البلدان المتقدمة. عندما يجري الباحثون/ات المحليون/ات هذا النوع من البحث، فإنهم غالبًا ما يكونون أيضًا طلابًا/طالبات أو خريجين/ات أو متدربين/ات من المجموعة السابقة من الفاعلين/ات أو موظفي/ات المجموعتين الأخيرتين (حنفي وأرفانتيس وكوري-الدر ٢٠١٧).

وبالنظر إلى أن البحوث النوعية تشمل الخبراء/ات وكذلك المجتمعات المستهدفة نفسها، من المهم أن يتم التحقق من تصورات الخبراء/ات من خلال قصص المجتمعات المستهدفة، لا سيما عند التعامل مع قضية إجتماعية-اقتصادية تؤثر في الناس وتؤثر كذلك عليهم بشكل مختلف. ولكن نادرًا ما يحدث ذلك لأن الباحثين/ات، في معظم الحالات، يلتزمون إما بأراء الخبراء/الخبيرات أو بمقابلات مع المجتمعات المتأثرة (فان سوست ٢٠٢٢)، على الرغم من أن ذلك يمكن أن يأخذ العملية البحثية في الاتجاه المعاكس (أراء الخبراء/ات تثبت معاناة الناس) (دورينغ ٢٠٢٠).

غالبًا ما تولّد الدراسات الإثنوغرافية مع الفئات الاجتماعية الهشة (سواء اتخذت شكل مقابلات أو ملاحظات ميدانية أو محادثات غير رسمية، وما إلى ذلك)، والتي تهدف إلى معالجة مواضيع هامة مثل إصلاحات نظم الحماية الاجتماعية، حواجز ينبغي التغلب عليها. الأول هو حاجز اللغة بين الباحثين/ات الميدانيين/ات والأشخاص الذين تمت مقابلتهم، ليس فقط من حيث استخدام اللغة الإنجليزية بدلاً من العربية ولكن أيضًا من حيث استخدام معجم ومصطلحات لا تفهمها المجتمعات قيد البحث. وعلاوة على ذلك، في كثير من الحالات، تفتقر الفئات الضعيفة، ولا سيما تلك التي تعيش في مناطق نائية، إلى الإلمام بالشؤون الرقمية/الإلكترونية والمالية فضلًا عن قدرتها على الوصول إلى الخدمات المالية وشبكة الإنترنت والأدوات أو الأجهزة الرقمية (بركوبي، باسوكي، بورونو ٢٠١٩). وهذا يحول دون وصول الباحثين/ات بشكل كامل إلى هذه الفئات، ودون تعويضهم ماديًا مقابل المشاركة في البحث (في حالة المقابلات مدفوعة الأجر) بل وحتى دون إيجاد حلول لهم للاستفادة من برامج الحماية الاجتماعية التي تتطلب إما محو الأمية الرقمية أو محو الأمية المالية أو كليهما.

يمكن القول بأن الباحثين/ات والقائمين/ات على التعدادات والمسوحات عادة ما يظهرون سلوكاً "نخبوياً" خلال مساعيهم البحثية (بيلي وأيلينغ ٢٠٢١). كما من البديهي افتراض أن الباحث/ة الغربي/ة أو الغني/ة قد يعتبر/تعتبر سلوكاً طبيعياً تماماً من قبل المجتمع المحلي الذي يجري/تجري عليه البحوث على أنه مختلفاً/متميزاً، وذلك بسبب اختلاف المعايير الاجتماعية والثقافية. ومن ناحية أخرى، فإن الفئات المستهدفة قيد البحث لا تمتلك بثقافة البحث كذلك. فبدلاً من ذلك، إن العديد منهم لديهم "كراهية طبقية"، وبالتالي يرفضون التعاون (أو التعاون بما فيه الكفاية) مع أولئك الذين يحاولون مساعدتهم من باحثين/ات وممارسين/ات (نتننغيم مبهو وتومكينسون ٢٠٢٢).

لا تستطيع الفئات الهشة أن تفهم سبب اهتمام الأشخاص الأثرياء والمتعلمين/ات بمشاركتهم مظالمهم وتوثيق وفهم حقائقهم أو استعدادهم للتعبير عن مطالبهم والدفاع عنها. وبالطبع يمكنهم الوثوق بالباحثين/ات الممارسين/ات الذين يتواصلون معهم لمجرد جمع المعلومات، لأنهم يخشون أن يكونوا إما صحفيين أو أعضاء في مكاتب المخابرات الوطنية. أما عندما يتم بناء شكل من أشكال الثقة بين الفئتين، فغالباً ما يرجع ذلك إلى أن الفئات المهمشة قد تعتقد أن الباحثين/ات هم من منظمات إنسانية تحاول تقييم وضعها من أجل تزويدها بالمساعدات (مثل التحويلات النقدية والمساعدات الغذائية والتبرعات العينية وخدمات المياه والصرف الصحي والنظافة (WASH)). ففي هذه الحالة الأخيرة، يميل الأشخاص الذين تمت مقابلتهم إلى عدم الإقرار عن دخلهم الحقيقي (أي التقييم من كمية الدخل المعلنة) والمبالغة في الحديث عن مستوى الفقر/الحرمان الذي يعانون منه وحجب المعلومات المتعلقة بالمساعدات التي قد يتلقونها من الجهات الفاعلة غير الحكومية، وما إلى ذلك (غنغلر وآخرون ٢٠٢١).

اقتُرحت هله يوسف (٢٠٢١: ٨٣٦) مصطلح "الفهولة" المصري على أنه "إستعارة لوصف أفضل للتحديات التي تواجه البحث المحرّر من الاستعمار الفكري، إذ تنسم الفهولة بأسلوب يميل إلى التنافس والتركيب الدائم بدلاً من التصميم المنهجي الرسمي والموحد". يستخدم معظم الباحثين/ات الذين يدركون التحديات المذكورة أعلاه الفهولة كاستراتيجية للبقاء والمقاومة. فلهذه التقنية إمكانيات كبيرة، ولكنها في بعض الأحيان لا تعمل وفي أحيان أخرى تأتي بنتائج عكسية. وقد ذكر باحث ميداني مصري شاب في مجال الحق في الصحة خلال مقابلة مع الكاتبة:

مهما فعلنا نحن [الباحثون/ات الميدانيون/ات]، مهما كنا نرتدي من ملابس بسيطة ومتواضعة وننزع عنا أي أشياء ثمينة وكيف لهجتنا وننتبه للفتن، الخ... سيظلون [الفئات قيد الدراسة] يشعرون أننا مختلفون. وسنرى ملامح من عدم الثقة والشعور بالخيانة على وجوههم^(١).

وفقاً لهذا الباحث، فإن أكثر الأسئلة المطروحة عادةً من قبل المجموعات المستهدفة هي "لماذا؟". لماذا تسأل/ين؟ لماذا تريد/ين أن تساعدني/تساعديني؟ لماذا هذا البحث؟ "نظرية المؤامرة متصلة في الثقافات العربية"، وخاصة بين السكان العرب المحرومين، وهي مزوجة بكرهية لـ "الأثرياء" والغرب والبيض والمختلفين (عزي ٢٠١٠).

تؤدي هذه العوامل الثقافية والاقتصادية والأمنية المترابطة إلى انعدام الثقة لدى من أجريت معهم المقابلات، وهو أمرٌ مبرّر أحياناً وفقاً لباحثة تونسية خلال إجتماع داخلي^(٢)، حيث أشارت إلى أن العديد من الباحثين/ات لا يلتزمون بقواعد أخلاقيات البحث، وأن وسائل الإعلام تقوم بوصف المجتمعات الأكثر احتياجاً إلى حد كبير، وأن العديد من المنظمات غير الحكومية تسيء إلى هذه المجتمعات. وحول هذه النقطة الأخيرة، أوضحت الباحثة التونسية أنه في بعض المناطق الريفية في تونس، بدأت النساء المسنّات من صاحبات المشاريع والأعمال التجارية الصغيرة في إنتاج الحرف اليدوية البسيطة للملابس والديكور المنزلي وبيعها كشكل من أشكال المقاومة الاقتصادية والتعاقد خلال جائحة كوفيد-١٩. وتحت مسمى دعم هؤلاء النساء، كانت المنظمات غير الحكومية الدولية آنذاك تقوم بمساعدتهم على الخروج من الأزمة الصحية من خلال شراء منتجاتهم. واكتشفت هذه المجموعات من النساء لاحقاً أنه في حين كانوا يبيعون الحرف بأسعار

رخصية، كانت هذه المنظمات غير الحكومية تبيعها بأسعار أعلى بكثير بوصفها منتجات "شرقية" و"أنتيكية"، دون توجيه أي أرباح لصالحهن.

التضليل الإعلامي النابع عن الجهات المستهدفة من قبل البحث ليس فقط نتيجة مخاوف هذه الفئات الأمنية ومخاوفها من الوصم الاجتماعي، وليس فقط نتيجة سيادة ثقافة المعونة الإنسانية عوضاً عن ثقافة البحث، بل هي أيضاً نتيجة لاعتماد عينات بحثية خاطئة وغير دقيقة. فعلى غرار المسوحات المايكروايتية/الجزئية، تميل الدراسات الاثنوجرافية بشدة إلى اعتبار الأسرة على أنها وحدة المعايير، وتجري في بعض الأحيان مقابلات مع الأسرة بأكملها (غيست، نيملي، ميتشيل ٢٠١٣). ومثل هذه الممارسة لا تأخذ بعين الحسبان ديناميكيات السلطة وموازن القوى الأسرية في المنطقة العربية (مثل من هو/هي رب الأسرة/المعيل/ة الرئيسي/ة) والتأثير غير المباشر لرأي فرد على الآخرين داخل الأسرة، وما إلى ذلك. كل هذه أمور تؤدي إلى استنتاجات متحيزة. وبصرف النظر عن الديناميكيات بين الباحثين/ات والأفراد موضوع البحث، يعمل الباحثون/ات أيضاً في الأماكن العامة الخاضعة للمراقبة الأمنية وفي ظل التصييق على المساحات المتاحة للمجتمع المدني والناشطين/ات في معظم البلدان العربية. وقد تفاقمت هذه القيود بسبب جائحة كوفيد-١٩، ولا سيما في بلدان مثل مصر والأردن حيث تمت إدارة الأزمة عسكرياً من قبل الحكومات.

إضافة إلى الديناميكيات بين الباحثين/ات العرب وأرباب عملهم ومموليهم ومستشاريهم، فإن هؤلاء الباحثين/ات، مثلهم مثل غالبية الباحثين/ات من دول الجنوب العالمي، يخضون أيضاً للتمييز وهم ضحية موازين القوى القمعية من قبل مجتمعاتهم بشكل عام. وهذا يعوق قدرتهم/ن على إنتاج بحوث موثوقة بوتيرة سريعة وباستمرار، كما يعيق مشاركتهم/ن في منصات البحث الهامة، والمجلات الأكاديمية، وفرق/مجالس التحرير (أمارته وزوربريغ ٢٠٢٢). وقد تم اقتراح إثنوغرافيا الأقران (Peer Ethnography)، من بين أشكال أخرى من البحث الإجرائي، كبديل يحل العديد من المعضلات المذكورة آنفاً. ومع ذلك، فإن إدماج الفئات المهمشة بفعالية في العمل الميداني الإجرائي أثبت أنه أمر صعب في السياقات العربية للأسباب نفسها التي سبق ذكرها إزاء التشرذم الثقافي والاجتماعي، وانعدام الثقة بين هذه الفئات المدروسة والباحثين/ات. وتعتبر إحدى كبار الممارسات التنموية اللاتي يعملن في مجال المبادرات التي تقودها المجتمعات المحلية واللاتي تتعاونن باستمرار مع الباحثين/ات المجتمعيين/ات في الأردن أن هذا هو أحد أكثر التحديات ضرراً للبحث وتأثيره السياسي(١٠). وإدراكاً منها أن الجمع بين الفئات الأكثر احتياجاً والخبراء/الخبيرات وصانعي/ات السياسات بشكل جماعي من شأنه أن يزيد من اتساع هذه الفجوة المثيرة للقلق، فإنها تعتقد أن ربط الباحثين/ات بالممارسين/ات سيكون حلاً وسطاً جيداً وقد يُعد بتأثير أقوى.

٣ المقاربات والمنهجيات والمسارات: ما هي البدائل المتاحة؟

يمكن تلخيص المقاربات والمنهجيات والعمليات المشتركة بين أساليب البحث الموضحة أعلاه بالنقاط التالية:

- ١ "الإستحواذ" الإستعماري من خلال أليات التمويل؛
- ٢ تحديد طرق البحث لنوع وجودة البيانات بدلاً من تحديد البيانات للأساليب التي ينبغي استخدامها؛
- ٣ المقايضات داخل أساليب البحث وفيما بينها؛
- ٤ استبعاد ما هو غير قابل للقياس؛
- ٥ النظر في مسألة تنموية متعددة الأبعاد من منظور أحادي البعد، دون إدماج فرق بحثية متعددة التخصصات؛
- ٦ عدم القدرة على إدماج المجتمعات المتضررة في مسار البحث أو استيعاب مظلهمهم بالكامل.

وتتمثل المقايضة الصارخة القائمة في أن: البحوث الإثنوغرافية يُنظر إليها على أنها تؤدي إلى سرد القصص/الأدلة القولية التي لا تقنع صانعي السياسات، فيما أن هؤلاء لا ينظرون إلا إلى البيانات الكمية، رغم أن هذه البيانات لا تعبر بالكامل عن واقع الفئات الهشة.

وللتغلب على هذه المعضلة، ينبغي أن تتبع الجهات الفاعلة نهجاً مختلطاً من الأساليب البحثية ليسمح بتثليث البيانات، ولكي يكون هذا النهج ممكناً، يجب أن يكونوا مستعدين لاعتماد منهجية متعددة التخصصات تجمع بين الأنثروبولوجيا الاجتماعية وعلم الاجتماع وعلم الاقتصاد، وفقاً لروبرت تشامبرز (كورنوال وسكونز ٢٠٢٢). حيث يعتقد الأخير أن هذا النهج من شأنه أن يحسن التفاعل بين البحث التشاركي والبحوث المستقبلية، ومن شأنه أيضاً أن يعوض أوجه القصور، والافتراضات، وقصص النجاح/أفضل الممارسات غير القابلة للتطبيق، والدروس المستفادة من خلال المراجعات المكتبية. إن عدم وجود حوكمة إلكترونية وحكومة مفتوحة يؤدي إلى تفاقم هذه المعضلة، لكن يمكن لحل هذه المسألة أن يشكل أيضاً نقطة انطلاق رئيسية للبدائل والحلول من أجل تحويل الجهود المتفرقة لجمع البيانات وتحليلها إلى بنية تحتية موحدة ومنهجية وموثوقة يجري تحديثها بانتظام وبشكل أكثر تواتراً لتكون بمثابة دليل مرجعي وشفاف للجمع.

ويحل استخدام البيانات الكمية والنوعية بشكل صحيح - بمجرد توافرها - جزءاً رئيسياً آخر من المشكلة. فعلى سبيل المثال، الاعتماد على أعداد غير كافية وغير دقيقة لإطلاق شبكات الأمان الاجتماعي المستهدفة يدفع إلى اتباع منهجية تحديد المستهدفين (PMT)، والتي تهدف إلى التنبؤ بمستوى الرفاهية والدخل للأسرة باستخدام صيغة إحصائية ومتغيرات بديلة تتعلق بالتركيبة السكانية ورأس المال البشري ونوع السكن والسلع المعمرة والأصول الإنتاجية - كما هو مستخدم عادة في مسوحات الأسر المعيشية. وتستخدم هذه المنهجية من قبل الحكومات والمؤسسات المالية ومؤسسات المعونة الإنسانية لتحديد واستهداف الأسر المؤهلة لهذه البرامج.

ومع ذلك، فإن هذه المنهجية لا تعالج بفعالية غرضها الرئيسي المتمثل في ضمان توفير الحماية الاجتماعية لأفقر أفراد المجتمع. بل إنها تحتوي، بدلاً من ذلك، على أخطاء مضمنة بسبب خوارزميات التنبؤ التي لا تشمل سوى ٤٠-٦٠ في المائة من دخل الأسر المعيشية، والمتغيرات التفرقية غير الدقيقة، بالإضافة إلى رداءة نوعية الاستقصاءات وعد تواترها بالشكل الكافي، والمعلومات الخاطئة، وانخفاض مستوى التغطية للعينة المختارة، مما يؤدي إلى استبعاد أكثر من نصف الأسر المعيشية الفقيرة التي من المفترض أن تكون مستهدفة (أي تضمين منفعون/ات غير فقراء واستبعاد فقراء غير مستفيدين/ات كما يملئ نموذج التغطية) (مركز البحوث والعمل في مجال العلوم الاجتماعية ٢٠٢٢؛ سيباستيان وآخرون ٢٠١٨). وفي ملاحظة ذات صلة، فإن وحدات الدراسة الناشئة التي يتم حذفها أثناء تنظيف مجموعات البيانات الرقمية تمثل في بعض الأحيان من هم في أمس حاجة إلى المساعدة ومن ينبغي أن نبذل قصارى جهننا لاستهدافهم.

إن الافتقار إلى البنى التحتية للبيانات التي سبق أن وصفناها في هذا القسم هو المحرك الرئيسي للجهات الفاعلة نحو اعتماد نموذج الحماية الاجتماعية التالي: البرامج المستهدفة المحددة زمنياً والتي لا تشكل أساساً للحقوق. بل على العكس من ذلك، يزيد هذا النموذج من التوترات الاجتماعية بين المستفيدين/ات وغير المستفيدين/ات، ويسمح بالتدخل السياسي، وخاصة في سياقات المحسوبية والبطانة المشابهة لما هو موجود في لبنان والعراق (الإسكوا ٢٠٢١ت). والأسوأ من ذلك، وعلى عكس برنامج "بروغريسا" في المكسيك وبرنامج "بولسا فاميليا" في البرازيل ومعظم برامج أميركا اللاتينية، فإن برامج المساعدات الاجتماعية في المنطقة العربية تفقر إلى عمليات المتابعة والمراجعة والمراقبة والتقييم اللازمة، والتي من شأنها أن تقدم لمحة عامة وشاملة لـ "ما يجب وما لا يجب فعله" كما ولحجم الأثر الذي تم تحقيقه.

حتى عند تطبيق هذه الإجراءات، يتم تنفيذها بشكل سطحي، وغالباً ما تستخدم مراجعات سرديّة تعكس سعي الأخصائيين/ات الاجتماعيين/ات للترويج "لإنجازاتهم". وفي حين أننا ناقشنا استخدام البيانات/البحوث الكمية في معالجة قضايا الحماية الاجتماعية، يجب علينا الآن أن نسلط الضوء

على أهمية إستراتيجيات تقييم الأثر الكمي مثل تجارب التحكم العشوائية، وتجارب الفرق في الاختلافات، وتجارب انقطاع الانحدار، وتجارب مطابقة درجات الميل، والتي نادراً ما تستخدم في المنطقة العربية. هذا على الرغم من أنها دقيقة جداً في إنتاج نقاط بيانات جزئية محدودة لكن مفيدة وهي قادرة على إثبات العلاقات السببية بين التدخلات/العلاجات والتأثير الناتج عنها. ويمكن أن يؤدي الجمع بين هذه الاستراتيجيات والاستعراضات النوعية الدقيقة إلى نتائج وتقييمات مثلى ومفيدة للتحسين والتطوير (ريد وآخرون ٢٠٢١).

وبالتالي، فإن التلخص من نماذج التنمية التي يهيمن عليها "الشمال العالمي" لا ينبغي أن يقتصر على إلقاء اللوم على الإمبريالية والرأسمالية في التسبب بعدم تكافؤ فرص في إنتاج البحوث والوصول إليها، أو التسبب بتسويق المعرفة من خلال المنصات القائمة على الاشتراك المدفوعة وإتفاقيات الملكية الفكرية (IP). بل يجب أيضاً النظر إلى المعرفة كمنفعة عامة يشارك بها الجميع. ويتعين على علماء/عالمات الاجتماع العاملين/ات في المنطقة العربية أن ينظروا في كيفية استمرار هذه النماذج في إعادة إنتاج تأثيرات الاستعمار الفكري من خلال فرض الأساليب والمنهجيات البحثية، وإملاء ما هو صواب أو خطأ، وما هو جيد أو سيئ. يجب ألا يخشى الباحثون/ات من اتباع أو التخلي عن تقنيات البحث "السايدة" وذلك بناءً على ما يروونه مناسباً للسياقات التي يدرسونها. وفي المنطقة العربية، ينبغي أن يظل الباحثون/ات مدركين/ات لإمكانية تحسين السياسات الاجتماعية-الاقتصادية، على وجه التحديد، من خلال معالجة عدم فعالية منهجيات البحث المشتركة على مستوى العالم (بما في ذلك عدم وجود أدوات نوعية مبتكرة وأكثر شمولاً). وبالإضافة إلى ذلك، يمكن تحسين هذه السياسات من خلال مكافحة الهياكل السياسية-الاقتصادية المتأصلة في الطريقة التي تعمل بها المؤسسات - العامة والخاصة على حد سواء - في نطاق من النظم الأبوية الهرمية التي تغذي التعقيدات الطبقية وديناميكيات السلطة (عبر النظام السياسي والأديان والطوائف والعشائر والقبائل). إن الاقتصاد السياسي لعملية صنع السياسات الاجتماعية هو الذي يفسر لماذا قد تكون البيانات غير موثوقة، وتُقيّم في الوقت نفسه على أنها تمثل الحقائق بالأرقام، عوضاً عن التجارب الحية التي ينبغي أن يستند إليها التغيير الاجتماعي والاقتصادي.

٤ السبيل القادم في ضوء المساحات السياسية المغلقة

لقد أظهر هذا المقال ضرورة اتباع البحث التشاركي والتحرري من الاستعمار الفكري، الذي يعالج التحديات التي تتم مواجهتها خلال عملية البحث، سواء على مستوى جمع البيانات أو تحليلها وتفسيرها. ويشدد المقال على ضرورة اتباع نهج متعدد المنهجيات ومتعدد التخصصات يمكن من توفير توازن بين البحث الإجمالي والبحث الكمي الموثوق لتحقيق أفضل النتائج البحثية. ويدعو المقال الباحثين/ات في العلوم الاجتماعية، خاصة أولئك العاملين/ات في برامج وسياسات الضمان الاجتماعي، إلى فضح زيف سياسة الانتداب البحثي، وأن يكونوا مستعدين للتحويلات المعرفية، وأن يحاولوا إعادة قراءة وإعادة تعلم الأفكار والمفاهيم التي يمكن أن تكسر معتقداتهم الهيمنية وممارساتهم المعتادة (بارتليت وآخرون، ٢٠٠٧). حيث تم استلهاً هذه الاقتراحات، التي تم تبينها في كامل المقال، من الإطار المقترح لممارسة الانعكاسية النقدية وممارسة التبادلية واحترام تقرير المصير الذاتي، واعتناق طرق المعرفة للفئات المختلفة ومنها المهمشة، وتجسيد سلوك تحويلي في البحث، وذلك استناداً إلى مقترح ثامبيناثان وكينسلا ٢٠٢١. يتيح ذلك الاستعداد لتجربة أساليب جديدة، وكذلك لتجربة (بشكل علمي) منهجيات جديدة وقبول التغيير ومشاركة النتائج وبناء قدرات بعضنا البعض، من أجل تنفيذ الإطار الأمثل لإنتاج المعرفة الذي ندعو إليه.

من ناحية أخرى، يجب أن نضع في اعتبارنا أنه بمجرد أن تكون نتائج البحوث جاهزة وتُعتبر عن توصيات سياساتية، سيتعين علينا مواجهة تحدي كبير آخر في الدول العربية، وهو التعامل مع مساحات سياساتية مغلقة تتميز بحكومات غير شرعية وطرق سياسية مسدودة و/أو خطوط حمراء سياسية تحدد من يجب أن يُشمل (أو من لا يجب أن يُشمل)، مما يستبعد اللاجئين ومجتمعات الميم عين وغيرهم. سيواجه المدافعون/ات عن العدالة الاجتماعية أيضاً نقاعساً وتراخ سياسياً أو ما يعرف بـ "سياسة اللاسياسة"، وهو ما ينبع من وجود إرادة سياسية لـ "عدم التغيير" وليس فقط

من عدم وجود إرادة سياسية للتغيير. يعتبر ذلك جزءاً من استراتيجيات البقاء للطبقات الحاكمة ونية عند الأخيرة في التسبب باللامبالاة الاجتماعية بين الشعوب عن طريق إيقاظهم مشغولين بكسب لقمة العيش اليومية. ويعد ذلك أيضاً جزءاً من النية في الحفاظ على الأنظمة الحاكمة المعترف بها على أساس الانتماء الطائفي والزيانتي، حيث يكون الحكام - من خلال أحزابهم ومنظماتهم الدينية - مقدمي الخدمات الاجتماعية بدلاً من الدولة، مما يزيد قاعدة تأييدهم من خلال شراء أصوات المستفيدين بهذه الخدمات (أشكار ٢٠٢١).

ستحتاج جهود الدعوة إلى الإرادة السياسية للأحزاب المعنية والسلطات التشريعية والأنظمة المرجعية إلى المعرفة والخبرة، والتي غالباً ما لا تتكامل في موقف إصلاحي تجاه التأويلات التي تؤثر في حياة الناس. تجعل هذه الانفصالية من أعمال التأييد والمنصرة غير مفيدة في بعض الأحيان إذ لا تستجيب لمنطق الأجهزة الأمنية وأنظمة القوانين الدينية التي تستمر جميعها في تهميش المساحة المدنية وتجاهل النتائج البحثية التي يشير إليها المدافعون/ات (البنك الدولي ٢٠١٣).

إحدى السبل للخروج من المأزق المتمثل في المساحات السياسية المغلقة هو تعبئة العلماء/العالمات الشباب والشابات والنشطاء/الناشطات عن طريق تزويدهم بالمعرفة (المفاهيم والوعي التقني ومجموعات التوصيات السياساتية الواقعية المبينة على الأدلة، وما إلى ذلك) والأدوات/التكتيكات للناشطة والدعوة والمدافعة، وهي عناصر رئيسية لخلق حركات إجتماعية مطلبية و"اللا حركات الاجتماعية أو ما يعرف أيضاً بالحركات الاجتماعية اليومية" تدعو للحماية الاجتماعية التي يمكن أن تحدث التغيير المنشود (بورموكراتي ٢٠١٥: ٤١). تتمتع هذه الحركات التدريجية، وفقاً لأسف بيات (٢٠١٣)، بالقدرة على التفاوض على مساحات أوسع يومياً لتفضيلات وخيارات المواطنين، مما يكسر بنية السلطة العلاقاتية التي تستمر في خدمة الممثل الحاكم للقوى في المنطقة العربية: الأجهزة الأمنية، والتعصب الفكري والإسلام السياسي، والقبلية والطائفية.

يمكن تعزيز هذه الحركات من خلال إجراء برامج تعليم وتدريب على نطاق واسع لهؤلاء الفاعلين. كما يجب أن يرافق تلك الجهود المبذولة إبراز لأصوات الأشخاص الفقراء/الضعفاء خلال المناقشات العلمية ومناقشات النشطاء/الناشطات ومحاولات ترجمة/نقل المعرفة. ومع ذلك، من الأمور الحاسمة أن نختبر أولاً شرعية التوصيات السياساتية التي تنتج عن أبحاثنا بين الفئات الاجتماعية المعنية ذاتها، نظراً لغياب سيادة القانون وثقافة القانون في المنطقة. على سبيل المثال، هل يرغب فعلاً عمال/عاملات العمل غير المنظم في أن يصبحوا منظمين/ات؟ لقد أثبتت العديد من الدراسات ابتعادهم المتعمد عن هكذا إجراءات رسمية، وحتى عن برامج الحماية الاجتماعية، من أجل تجنب دفع الضرائب أو المساهمات، وأن يصبحوا مضطرين للخضوع لبعض الأطر القانونية، وما إلى ذلك (ديبة، فقيه ومروش ٢٠١٩). بل ينبغي بذل جهود هائلة لتتقيد الفئات المهمشة حول مفاهيم ومبادئ الحماية الاجتماعية، فضلاً عن كونها حق من حقوقهم. هذا أمر ضروري لكي يتمكنوا من التعبير عن مطالبهم بشكل مباشر والتعبئة على المستوى الوطني، كوسيلة لكسر - لو جزئياً - المساحات السياسية المغلقة أمام العلماء/العالمات والنشطاء/الناشطات.

في النهاية، كما تم شرحه في هذا المقال، فإن سد الفجوة بين البحث العلمي (بما في ذلك البحث الاجرائي) والبحث التطبيقي (المبني على الممارسة) والهادف لتغيير السياسات الاجتماعية ضرورة ملحة. ويتطلب ذلك إرادة لوقف العمل المنعزل وبدلاً من ذلك جمع الباحثين/ات والممارسين/ات، وأن يتم تمثيل المجتمعات الضعيفة أو ممثلهم في هذه التجمعات بقدر الإمكان. كما أنه من المهم بالمثل استبدال النتائج البحثية الجافة والتقنية والطويلة بمخرجات سياسات أكثر عملية ومفيدة وسهلة الفهم، وفي نفس الوقت مبينة على الأدلة. ويعد استخدام أدوات مثل الرسوم البيانية التوضيحية والاقتراسات ومقاطع الفيديو التقريرية، والاستفادة من توسع وسائل الإعلام المستقلة في المنطقة أمراً حيوياً أيضاً. في الوقت نفسه، تعد دراسة تصنيف منتجي/ات ومستهلكي/ات البحوث (من يكتب/تكتب وماذا يكتب/تكتب؟ ومن يقرأ/تقرأ وماذا يقرأ/تقرأ؟)

و ضمان التوقيت المناسب لنشر مخرجات البحث المختلفة (ماذا يجب نشره ومتى؟) واعدًا بأن يكون لأبحاثنا أثر أكبر.

تأمل المؤلفة أن يمثل هذا المقال، من خلال دمج منظور تحريري عن الاستعمار الفكري أثناء استعراض الدروس المستفادة من البحوث التي أجريت خلال/عن جائحة كوفيد-١٩، انطلاقًا تحول من إنتاج المعرفة النمطي للسياسات الاجتماعية في المنطقة العربية إلى صيغة معرفية أكثر أصالة ومحلية وتفاعلية.

ملاحظات

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- ١- فرح الشامي، زميلة رئيسية، مبادرة الإصلاح العربي، فرنسا.
- ٢- أدى الاحترار العالمي والجفاف والتلوث، من بين عواقب أخرى لتغير المناخ والتدهور البيئي، بالإضافة إلى النزاعات حول موارد المياه العابرة للحدود وسوء إدارة هذه الموارد، إلى أزمة مياه عالمية تصاعدت في صيف عام ٢٠٢٢. تتجسد هذه الأزمة في ندرة المياه العذبة النظيفة ومياه الشرب المأمونة في العديد من البلدان الأوروبية والعربية أيضًا، لا سيما تلك التي تمر فيها أنهار دجلة والفرات والنيل وغيرها من الأنهار الرئيسية.
- ٣- أستاذ الاقتصاد في الجامعة اللبنانية الأمريكية، عمل في العديد من دراسات المسح الميداني، بما في ذلك مشروع صحة (SAHWA) "البحث في شباب البحر الأبيض المتوسط العربي: نحو عقد اجتماعي جديد" في لبنان والجزائر وتونس والمغرب ومصر. أنظر/ي مدرسة عدنان قصار لإدارة الأعمال للحصول على مزيد من المعلومات حول وليد مروش.
- ٤- فهي لا تأخذ في الحسبان المعلومات التي لا يمكن الحصول عليها إلا من الأبحاث النوعية، وبالتالي فهي تغفل جزء كبير من الواقع.
- ٥- مؤلف كتاب التنمية والفقر: مراجعة نقدية للمفاهيم وأدوات القياس (نعمة ٢٠٢١). انظر شبكة المنظمات العربية غير الحكومية للتنمية للمزيد من المعلومات عن أديب نعمة.
- ٦- مقابلة مخبر رئيسي مع أديب نعمة، بيروت، لبنان، سبتمبر ٢٠٢٢.
- ٧- أنظر/ي ماندل ٢٠١٥.
- ٨- تونس العاصمة، تونس، سبتمبر ٢٠٢٢.
- ٩- تواصل شخصي، بيروت، لبنان، يونيو ٢٠٢٢.
- ١٠- تواصل شخصي، عمان، الأردن، نوفمبر ٢٠٢٢.

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صفحة فارغة عمدا

Humanitarian vs Pandemic Responses: Vulnerable Groups among Rohingyas in Bangladesh*

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Abstract The Rohingya diaspora is a politically sensitive humanitarian crisis for Bangladesh. The current Covid-19 pandemic poses a range of governance, demographic, and environmental policy challenges in an already fragile context. The ongoing situation combined with the pandemic requires a rethinking of humanitarian strategies to tackle the double burden of crises – humanitarian and pandemic. Drawing together evidence and experience from a mixed method participatory action research conducted among Rohingya refugees and the host community in Bangladesh, this article highlights the importance of the institutional readiness of research organisations to produce contextual interventions and targeted approaches in pandemic and humanitarian response for diverse communities. The article also reflects on the strategies researchers applied to create a knowledge network between researchers and implementers, which not only informed the study design and its selection of most vulnerable groups but also worked towards producing knowledge fit for purpose, where critical evidence was shared with key decision makers and policymakers.

Keywords humanitarian crises, pandemic response, Bangladesh, Rohingyas, refugees, policy impact, vulnerability, complex emergencies, humanitarian health, vulnerable groups.

1 Background

Humanitarian crises are at an all-time high, with prolonged crises of great magnitudes in Syria, Yemen, South Sudan (Spiegel 2017), Türkiye, and Colombia, as well as Bangladesh. As a result, the number of forcibly displaced persons, whether internally displaced or refugees, is at its highest, estimated at 89.3 million worldwide (UNHCR 2022). Also, least developed countries (LDCs), which includes Bangladesh, host 27 per cent of all people



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displaced across borders worldwide (*ibid.*). Therefore, these humanitarian issues transcend borders and have statistical importance (Cameron 2014).

Bangladesh hosts the largest refugee population in the world in Cox's Bazar District, with 855,000 forcibly displaced Myanmar nationals, commonly known as Rohingya refugees (World Vision 2020). A majority of them have taken shelter in 34 makeshift camps in Ukhia and Teknaf subdistricts in Cox's Bazar. Women, adolescents (particularly adolescent girls), the elderly, and persons with disabilities (hereafter known as the most vulnerable groups, MVGs) are further marginalised during emergencies (MSNA Technical Working Group 2020). Around 90 per cent of them depend on humanitarian assistance from the Government of Bangladesh, United Nations (UN) agencies, and national and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs/INGOs) (*ibid.*). With any crisis management in humanitarian settings, the priority initially in these camps is to provide shelter, clean water, sanitation, and prevent serious communicable diseases (such as diarrhoea, cholera, and diphtheria) (Chan, Chiu and Chan 2018). Recently, the Covid-19 pandemic has added further complexities to the health system in the Rohingya camps, where these issues intersect with a range of pre-existing governance, demographic, and environmental policy challenges.

Despite the availability of statistics on refugees and their MVGs through assessments such as the World Food Programme's (WFP) Refugee Influx Emergency Vulnerability Assessment (REVA-5) (WFP 2022) and the Inter Sector Coordination Group's (ISCG) needs assessments for persons with disabilities and the elderly (REACH 2021), there is minimal understanding of community contexts and the diverse specific vulnerabilities which have emerged or have been exacerbated as a result of the pandemic. Humanitarian decision-making often has a standardised approach for all (Clarke and Darcy 2014) and does not always consider lived experiences, differing vulnerabilities, and those who may be at high risk within the refugee population. Policies need to be tailor-made and customised, and this requires evidence to formulate localised humanitarian responses to tackle the double burden of a pandemic and humanitarian crises for MVGs.

With an aim to provide critical evidence on on-ground realities to assist policymakers and humanitarian aid agencies in evidence-based informed decision-making, the BRAC James P Grant School of Public Health, BRAC University conducted a participatory action research project in ten Rohingya camps from August 2020 to July 2021. This research employed a mixed method approach combining participatory qualitative methods and a household survey to document the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on MVGs, and formulated specific recommendations for humanitarian aid agencies targeting both humanitarian and pandemic responses.

This research identified MVGs among Rohingya refugees by triangulating findings from multiple methods, including a desk review, stakeholder consultation workshop and informal discussions, and interviews with a range of community participants (i.e. Rohingya refugees). This research also developed a gender-based vulnerability survey index (Nasar *et al.* 2022), using context-specific data to assess the level of vulnerability within MVGs. The research provides critical insights for designing localised targeted approaches/solutions. This article also reflects on the key lessons learnt by the researchers throughout the research process that can complement future research and strategies to influence policies and programmes. We presented the lessons as institutional readiness and knowledge fit for purpose. We recognised accomplished institutional readiness through multisector collaboration, stakeholder engagement in research, and timely sharing of research data. The characteristics that define knowledge fit for purpose are the co-production of contextual knowledge and the translation of evidence into action.

2 Institutional readiness for conducting research in a complex socio-political context during the pandemic

2.1 Multisector collaboration

The first case of the coronavirus (Covid-19) was detected in Cox's Bazar on 23 March 2020, and the first case in the camps was detected on 14 May 2020 (World Vision 2020); this increased to 130 cases (and six deaths) in the camps by the first week of September 2020 (*ibid.*). A lockdown was declared in the district, including the 34 refugee camps. The lockdown measures included a district-wide ban on travelling to and from the district, a ban on public gatherings, and reduced travel into the Rohingya camps (*Dhaka Tribune* 2020). As the Rohingya camps are densely populated, with approximately 40,000 people per sq. km (Amnesty International 2020), there was an initial fear of a massive spread of the virus within the camps. As a Covid-19 containment measure, the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC) instructed all stakeholders/agencies to scale down humanitarian assistance to only essential lifesaving services, which included health, food, water and sanitation, nutrition, information dissemination, cooking fuel, and limited protection services (MSNA Technical Working Group 2020). The movement of aid workers was also restricted, except for essential service providers (health facilities, ration distribution centres). To support the Government of Bangladesh and in alignment with the National Response Plan, the ISCG partners (UN agencies, NGOs, and INGOs) incorporated the Covid-19 Response Plan into the Joint Response Plan 2020 for Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis (ISCG 2020).

Humanitarian systems that address complex emergencies consist of a broad and diverse range of actors, including governments, donors, multilateral and bilateral agencies, INGOs, NGOs, community-based organisations, UN agencies, and

international agencies (Spiegel 2017), and require high levels of coordination between multiple actors. In Bangladesh, both the national and Rohingya Covid-19 response plans emphasised the importance of multisector collaboration in pandemic management (Government of Bangladesh 2020; ISCG 2020). These collaborations provided critical points of access for researchers, which enabled access to communities (as with listing the MVGs and their current experiences) and also rapid evidence-based sharing between the research organisation and humanitarian actors, who wanted information on the plight of the refugees during this period.

This created a window of opportunity for researchers, including us, to conduct research on the impact of the pandemic on the Rohingya population living in the camps in Cox's Bazar. The RRRC, UN agencies, and other humanitarian actors welcomed researchers and provided the required administrative support to our research team. For example, they provided approvals for conducting the research, allowed access to camps, participated in the research design workshop, and provided constructive feedback on research tools. Additionally, they invited the research team to share evidence gathered in the regular health sector and relevant subsector meetings.

2.2 Stakeholder engagement in research

Different crises in humanitarian settings, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, present their own unique challenges, including local political influence on health systems and lack of contextual knowledge in understanding the challenges and unique needs of MVGs among refugees. Humanitarian actors generally practise standardised approaches to assist 'all refugees', without recognising the subgroups within refugee populations, who may be more vulnerable and at greater risk and who often need more support (Odlum *et al.* 2021).

Furthermore, given the struggle for the use of health-care research in decision-making by humanitarian actors and policymakers (Ward, House and Hamer 2009), the situation of the humanitarian crisis and the pandemic is prone to biases – cognitive and confirmation biases that are common in decision-making (Blanchet *et al.* 2018). Social science research is often neglected in favour of generalised survey data to inform policies and programmes, resulting in a disconnect between policy decisions and the complex, lived experiences of people and the heterogeneity that exists in these communities. This can cause inadequate decision-making, leading to gaps and sometimes a failure to address the complex and multidimensional vulnerabilities of MVGs, as more generalised protocols are favoured.

In addition, the lack of social science research, particularly the use of participatory approaches in research, often results in producing generalised data, which is useful but also leads to the absence of

rich, in-depth, nuanced insights of complex contexts (economic, sociocultural, and political) (Fussy, Obino and Rakhmani 2022), as well as how intersectional factors, such as age, gender, sex, location, disability, religion, and so forth can affect and lead to failures and/or gaps in interventions (Rashid *et al.* 2021). Therefore, the engagement of key stakeholders in evidence generation, through participatory approaches combining social science methods with surveys, is crucial for understanding the differing needs and vulnerabilities of MVGs (Singh *et al.* 2020) and designing appropriate policies and interventions. Our research team took several approaches to ensure the participation of the community members and key stakeholders working in Rohingya camps at different stages of the research process. This started with the identification of MVGs, followed by tool development through a research design workshop, participatory data collection, and real-time dissemination of research findings to key stakeholders using existing local-level communication channels, such as health sector meetings.

For example, we applied an integrative systematic approach to identify MVGs among the Rohingya refugees: a rapid literature review to identify MVGs based on research conducted in similar settings, followed by a research design workshop with key stakeholders in Cox's Bazar and, finally, incorporating the perspectives of the Rohingya community through field visits in a refugee camp and informal discussions with the people in the community. The categories of MVGs were finalised by triangulating the results of all three steps.

2.3 Timely sharing of research data: building relationships with key decision makers

With respect to epidemics and pandemics, such as Covid-19 in the context of the Rohingya crisis in Bangladesh, public health responses need to incorporate rapid, timely decisions to ensure optimal coordination and allocation of resources and interventions. Considering complex emergencies, there is a need to act quickly with limited data, further adding to the complexity (Khalid *et al.* 2020). We acknowledged the need for timely data-sharing with key decision makers. Our researchers regularly attended health sector coordination meetings and Communications with Communities (CwC) working group meetings. At these meetings, the team shared recently collected research findings with humanitarian actors responsible for humanitarian and pandemic responses to inform as well as try to align with any immediate or long-term planning.

As data was being collected and analysed at a rapid pace, given the urgency of the Covid-19 crisis and the demands from the CwC to share evidence, the meetings provided an important channel of communication between researchers and practitioners. This approach was effective in building a trusted relationship with key stakeholders and decision makers/policymakers, and creating an

enabling environment for sharing and acceptance of real-time evidence. However, for this process to be carried out effectively, it requires willingness from the implementers and their institutions, as well as the dedication of research organisations to attend meetings and engage with various stakeholders. Experiences showed that the timely sharing of evidence increases the likelihood of the uptake of research findings into action (Ellen *et al.* 2013), if not immediately, at least in the future.

3 Knowledge fit for purpose

3.1 Co-production of contextual knowledge

The Government of Bangladesh and key humanitarian actors constantly require contextually grounded plans and strategies to mitigate the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, particularly among MVGs. There are limited and sporadic accounts of what is happening at the ground level, given the current reliance on rapid surveys with a limited in-depth understanding of the risks created by the pandemic (Mistry *et al.* 2021; Kohrt *et al.* 2019). It was critical to document the impact of the pandemic on MVGs and the humanitarian interventions in Cox's Bazar in order to integrate and design localised humanitarian responses, which would be culturally and contextually effective and accountable. Recognising the urgency to provide evidence on the ground realities, our participatory action research aimed to co-produce contextual knowledge that could inform policymakers and humanitarian agencies about the priority areas, as well as the possibility for localised solutions for both humanitarian and pandemic responses.

The central question associated with the localisation agenda revolves around the issue of capacity and what standard of service delivery is needed to respond to humanitarian crises (Wake and Bryant 2018). As the crisis became protracted, with the added vulnerabilities created by the Covid-19 pandemic, there was a recognition that robust strategies needed to be formulated to ensure greater localisation of humanitarian and pandemic responses, inclusive of both needs-based and rights-based approaches. The co-production of contextual knowledge with the affected communities and key actors on the ground can contribute to developing localised interventions targeting specific groups of the population at risk (Vincent *et al.* 2021; Schmalenbach 2019).

After the onset of Covid-19 in Bangladesh, humanitarian aid agencies and actors developed the Covid-19 Response Plan 2020 as an Addendum to the Joint Response Plan 2020, where they identified elderly people, women, adolescent girls, and youth as the groups most affected by the pandemic (ISCG 2020). However, through the co-production methods with the Rohingya community and key stakeholders (RRRC, UN agencies, local NGOs, and researchers) in our participatory research, we found five categories of MVGs – pregnant and lactating mothers

(with children under two years old), adolescent girls and boys (age 10–19 years), elderly males and females (age >64 years), people with disabilities, and single (widow/divorced/abandoned by spouse) female household heads (HHs). This finding re-emphasised the importance of co-producing knowledge that reflects the perspectives of the affected communities and humanitarian actors who directly serve those communities.

The Covid-19 Response Plan 2020 (ISCG 2020) and the Joint Response Plan 2021 (ISCG 2021a) acknowledged the adverse impact of the pandemic on food security among poor households and outlined the plans to mitigate it. Despite the combined efforts of humanitarian actors in Cox's Bazar in Covid-19 management, humanitarian responses were severely disrupted by Covid-19 containment measures. As our research findings reveal, Rohingya refugees, especially the MVGs (such as female-headed households, elderly people, and people with disabilities), who are mostly dependent on relief, suffered the most (BRAC JPGSPH 2021b; MSNA Technical Working Group 2020).

For instance, our research also found that the food supply chain in the camps had broken down because of the lockdown. The Joint Multi-Sector Needs Assessment (*ibid.*) reported that the supplementary feeding programme for pregnant and lactating mothers and children worsened during the lockdown because of human resource reduction in food distribution centres, resulting in less food consumption (*ibid.*). The WFP reduced the frequency of food distribution to minimise the risk of infection and also limited the diversity of food in the food package (*ibid.*). This not only resulted in inadequate food supplies but also the quality of food distributed among the refugees, especially during the lockdown. Our female research participants complained about receiving inadequate food rations containing rotten food. The food ration consisted of mostly dry food (rice, lentils, onions, cooking oils), but not meat, fish, eggs, or vegetables. One of the female HH participants (30-year-old, single HH) shared: 'We got rotten fish and potatoes. How can we eat those? Sometimes they did not give us onions. And the rice was not enough for the whole family. Then how can we eat properly?'

Furthermore, the Covid-19 containment measures, particularly mobility restriction, stay-at-home instructions, and strict physical distancing rules in the relief distribution centres and health-care facilities, had significant effects on elderly people and people with disabilities. Although the Covid-19 Response Plan for Rohingyas emphasised prioritising marginalised groups such as elderly people and people with disabilities in food and relief distributions and providing food at their doorsteps if needed (BRAC JPGSPH 2021b; ISCG 2021b; MSNA Technical Working Group 2020), our research participants shared their struggles in collecting food rations during the lockdown.

The movement restrictions of the pandemic policy coupled with gendered norms of mobility restrictions for Rohingya women magnified the struggles of women without husbands or sons (who can assist with family responsibilities) and female-headed households. Cultural and religious norms dictate that Rohingya women are not allowed to move outside the home without being accompanied by a male household member. Therefore, Rohingya refugee women living alone or without male family members usually depended on male relatives/neighbours to assist them to collect relief materials and rations from distribution centres, as well as to buy food or daily necessities from local markets. However, despite the protocols for food distribution and rations, these Rohingya women were unable to utilise these services, further deepening their existing vulnerabilities.

These insights demonstrate that despite the protocols in place to attend to emergencies such as the Covid-19 pandemic, understanding the day-to-day implementation process is key to identifying implementation gaps and challenges. This also further highlights the importance of contextual knowledge of the ground realities that can assist humanitarian aid agencies in taking measures to address those gaps.

3.2 Translation of evidence into action

This research generated evidence in several key areas and evidence-based recommendations were formulated to support the Covid-19 response and recovery plan for the Rohingya community. It was evident from the research findings that there was some obscurity in the Covid-19 messaging which created misconceptions, fear, rumours, and stigma among people in the community. Considering the misconceptions surrounding the Covid-19 virus and its subsequent impacts, it is important to disseminate culturally appropriate messaging and consider the perspectives of the communities to address local social, religious, and other concerns regarding Covid-19.

By considering community perspectives, we worked closely with an implementation partner, the Centre for Peace and Justice (CPJ), BRAC University. As research data was being analysed, the findings were shared with the CPJ, allowing them to develop community-based Covid-19 awareness interventions focusing on risk communication. Locally recruited and trained Rohingya youth volunteers disseminated Covid-19 awareness messages among 2,974 Rohingyas through community outreach workshops. The CPJ's experience of conducting community outreach workshops also generated important evidence for humanitarian actors to consider while designing interventions for Covid-19 response and recovery for the Rohingya community.

Guided by the research findings about the community's trusted personnel for information dissemination, youth volunteers engaged community leaders/block Majhis⁵ and other influential

people for information dissemination, especially among elderly people. The CPJ developed a pictorial booklet for people with disabilities, focusing on those who have hearing or speech impairments. Youth volunteers used this pictorial booklet in awareness sessions with people with disabilities and sometimes they tried to convey messages by drawing the information on paper. They engaged caregivers in the sessions, so that the caregivers could help participants with disabilities understand and follow Covid-19 safety measures. All of these learnings and experiences indicate that a uniform blanket approach is not suitable across groups. Awareness building/information dissemination interventions require customisation according to the type of participant.

In addition, another significant output and contribution of this research project was the research team conducting a rapid assessment and situation analysis of the fire incident that occurred in the Rohingya refugee camps in March 2021 (BRAC JPGSPH 2021a) as a response to the request from the ISCG for developing a joint action plan for post-fire response at the camps. Based on the research findings, the research team formulated crucial recommendations and shared them with the relevant subsectors and working groups. The research team, as a knowledge partner, supported the health sector in identifying better solutions for the affected community (*ibid.*).

4 Lessons learnt and reflections

Uncertain and complex situations often lead humanitarian actors to rely on heuristic forms of thinking (Comes 2016; Blanchet *et al.* 2018), which can lead to biases. Therefore, it is important to ask what determines the institutional readiness of researchers and what constitutes knowledge fit for purpose in humanitarian crises such as the Rohingya refugee crisis in Bangladesh. Over recent years, there has been an increase in rapid evidence summaries in the humanitarian aid sector which present information in a non-technical manner (Allen 2014; Clarke and Darcy 2014; Mahapatra 2014). However, rapid evidence may not always be applicable and synthesised in time for every context. In addition, synthesised and quantitative data cannot describe the on-ground realities of the affected populations (Colombo and Checchi 2018).

Rapid tools such as the Humanitarian Emergency Settings Perceived Needs Scale (HESPER) developed by the World Health Organization (WHO) and King's College London provide a quick and scientific method for assessing the serious perceived needs of people in humanitarian crises (WHO and King's College London 2011). However, even the use of these tools requires expertise in survey management, access to individuals/households, and statistical expertise to apply and analyse the tool, as well as funds to deploy surveyors (*ibid.*).

The lessons learnt from our research in the Rohingya camps suggest that the key characteristics of useful knowledge need to rely on an in-depth understanding of ground-level issues, understanding service delivery from the recipient's point of view, the usability of the research, and the integration of community perspectives. This can be achieved through the application of social science research methodologies. Such methods can be adapted and sensitive to local contexts. In this case, MVGs in our research were found to have faced unique challenges such as Covid-19 misinformation, food insecurity, disrupted economic opportunities, and inadequacies with food rations during and before the lockdown.

From our research, we learnt that for knowledge to be positioned effectively to resolve ground-level issues it required the institutional readiness of the research organisation: engaging in multisector collaboration, stakeholder participation in research, and the timely sharing of research data by researchers. This was achieved through the engagement of stakeholders within the research design, as with our tool development and participatory study design. Furthermore, linking with an implementation partner or partners can fast-track the application of research findings towards contextualised interventions. This addresses the element of collecting contextual public health information (Colombo and Checchi 2018).

Also, the sharing of research data during the research phase not only provided timely information to practitioners for decision-making but also integrated researchers within regular formal stakeholder meetings, enabling research to target all parts of the decision-making process (Barends, Rosseau and Briner 2014). This can assist in providing evidence and has the potential to reduce the gaps in present and future policy/implementation initiatives. It also creates a trust-based network of researchers, practitioners, and policymakers – which has seen some success in a maternal health initiative in the Indian state of Karnataka (Sen *et al.* 2017) – enabling knowledge mobilisation at the humanitarian level. This was further evidenced by our rapid research assessment of the fire in the Rohingya camps (BRAC JPGSPH 2021a), where rapid research was made possible through our implementation partner's outreach, and the contextual findings were disseminated to practitioners within the ISCG to inform their emergency interventions.

Regardless of institutional readiness and relevant knowledge production, the application of research findings in interventions is still subject to factors involving political will, organisational considerations, and ethical dilemmas (Gotowiec and Cantor-Graae 2017). Stakeholders' subjective convictions can still override the decision-making process, causing inaction (Colombo and Checchi 2018; Maxwell *et al.* 2014). An example of this was the food distribution system in the Rohingya camps,

which continued to be inefficient as it did not address the needs of specific groups. However, in spite of these factors, our participatory research within the Rohingya camps has shown that the state remains committed to providing for refugees, and any gaps can be minimised through the process of integrating researchers, practitioners, and policymakers, whereby research can reach the different levels of decision-making. This provides scope for rapid knowledge mobilisation in humanitarian settings, which can lead to faster decision-making and more locally appropriate interventions, addressing the needs of neglected/most vulnerable populations.

5 Conclusion

Our research experiences have established the importance of multisector coordination, stakeholder participation, timely data collection, and the generation of relevant contextual knowledge through research and the establishment of research-based networks. It should be acknowledged that Bangladesh is one of the few countries globally that has taken in refugees, despite its own resource constraints. The pandemic created massive panic in countries and often intensified vulnerabilities on top of pre-existing ones in fragile humanitarian settings. Public health emergency management in a humanitarian context requires coordination and collaboration for multiple sectors and a coordinated, comprehensive response plan involving both humanitarian and public health actors and researchers.

Evidence is critical and we argue that it is imperative to include all kinds of research methods to influence and inform policymakers. An intersectional analysis of sociocultural and contextual determinants, using social science methodologies, will also allow for the sensitisation of policymakers to the differential impacts and needs on the ground. If there are generalised approaches during a pandemic and poorer communities, for example, refugees, are all boxed into one category, there is a disconnect and an urgent need missed to look at more customised relief approaches for those who remain on the fringes due to their age, sex, disability, gender, religion, and so forth. Humanitarian and pandemic responses often take blanket approaches, which can render invisible the experiences of MVGs, such as pregnant women, female-headed households, elderly people, and people with disabilities.

While acknowledging the complexities of such settings is required, changing the context is not possible. However, the development of emergent solutions, such as the building of knowledge networks and partnerships across sectors, researchers, implementers, local NGOs, government actors, and agencies, as highlighted by our research, can work towards positioning knowledge at key points of decision-making and policy. This requires that research organisations practise institutional readiness through the engagement of multiple stakeholders and

their involvement in research. This has the potential to create a more efficient system to produce knowledge that is relevant and contextual and which can be incorporated into interventions that address the vulnerabilities of different groups.

Notes

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- 5 Designated head of block for a camp.

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Resilience in the Time of a Pandemic: Developing Public Policies for *Ollas Comunes* in Peru*

Ricardo Fort¹ and Lorena Alcázar²

Translated from Spanish by Atlas Translations

Abstract The coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic has created economic, social, and food security crises in many countries throughout the world. Faced with growing hunger in Peru, and the government's delayed and inadequate reaction, the most important response came from the citizens themselves, particularly the women, in the form of thousands of social care initiatives known as *ollas comunes* (literally 'communal pots', similar to soup kitchens, whereby local communities pool their resources to supply food for everyone in the neighbourhood). This article tells the parallel stories of the resurgence of these *ollas comunes* and the state-funded support initiatives, alongside the process followed by GRADE (Group for the Analysis of Development – Grupo de Análisis para el Desarrollo; a non-profit research centre founded in Peru) that enabled it to contribute to those institutions looking to improve access to food for the most vulnerable people. Both stories are underpinned by a common ability to adapt quickly, which is crucial for achieving objectives in uncertain and ever-changing situations.

Keywords Peru, hunger, food security, public policies, Covid-19, *ollas comunes*, impact, adaptation.

1 Introduction: The coronavirus pandemic in Peru gave rise to a food crisis that was responded to, first and foremost, by the *ollas comunes*

The pandemic was not just a health crisis; it also created a multidimensional crisis spanning economic, social, and food security concerns. Peru is one of the countries most impacted by the food insecurity triggered by the pandemic. The measures introduced to control the spread of the virus led to an economic



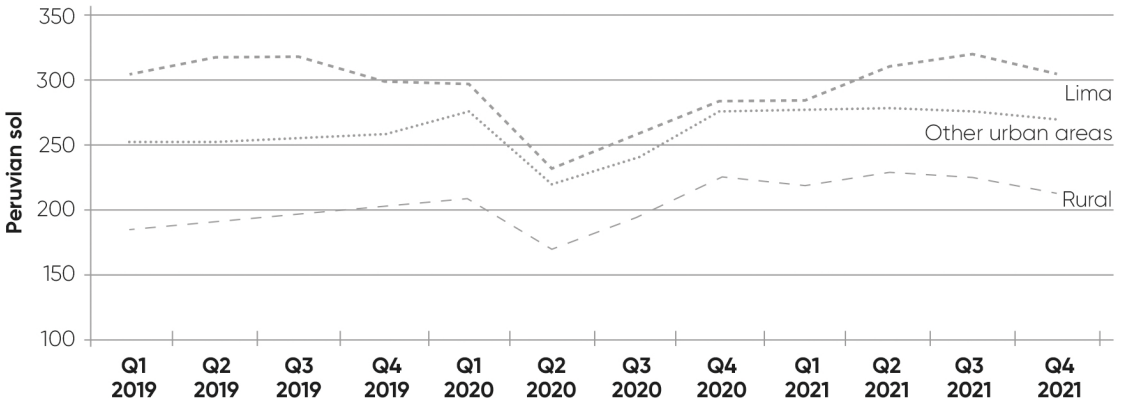
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Figure 1 Monthly food consumption by area (average value per capita in Peruvian sol, deflated)



Source Authors' own, based on data from INEI (2021)

downturn, which resulted in many families experiencing a loss of earnings and, in turn, affected their ability to purchase food. This was reflected in the recent Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations report on food worldwide (FAO *et al.* 2021), which found that 16.6 million people living in Peru were struggling with food insecurity, accounting for approximately half of the overall population.

On 11 March 2020, the government declared – by Supreme Decree No. 008-2020-SA – a state of national public health emergency and established what was known as ‘mandatory social confinement’. This lockdown was in place 16 March–26 June 2020, and involved the closure of all public and private establishments, with the exception of those related to health and food retail (other than restaurants).

These measures had a devastating impact on the Peruvian economy, which was mirrored in the population’s food consumption patterns. Figure 1 shows a significant drop in food consumption across the whole of Peru, particularly during the three months of mandatory lockdown. The fall in food consumption was greater in the capital, Lima (–21 per cent), and other urban areas (–20 per cent) than in rural areas (–18 per cent).

Faced with increasing levels of hunger across the country, one of the first and most crucial responses came from the citizens themselves, primarily in the form of the social care initiatives known as *ollas comunes*. *Ollas comunes* are self-managed neighbourhood organisations set up by local residents, mainly women, who see collective action (that is, combined efforts and resources) as an opportunity to gain access to food and band together to purchase, cook, and distribute food portions to their community. During times of crisis, a remarkable yet

Box 1 *Ollas comunes* in Peru: resilience and solidarity against a precarious backdrop characterised by limitations

As part of the support provided to the Lima Metropolitan Municipality (Municipalidad Metropolitana de Lima, MML) (details in Section 2), Group for the Analysis of Development (Grupo de Análisis para el Desarrollo, GRADE) analysed the characteristics and principal problems of the *ollas comunes* that took part in the registration scheme. This information was then supplemented through in-depth surveys and interviews conducted on a sample of 40 *ollas comunes* in three districts in the capital.

Ollas comunes emerge in the most precarious and cut-off areas of the capital, where access to basic services such as water, electricity, and drainage is scarce. Furthermore, being spontaneous citizens' initiatives without the benefit of any public support, the *ollas comunes* generally have no location of their own and emerge in improvised spaces, borrowed premises, or even out in the street. They have to contend with a severe lack of both equipment, such as cooking utensils and refrigerators, and protection measures against the pandemic: approximately half of all *ollas comunes* stated that they did not have items such as hygiene kits, masks, or alcohol. These problems create difficulties when it comes to operating and preparing food in accordance with the appropriate hygiene conditions.

The *ollas comunes* also face enormous difficulties in accessing food supplies, which affects their ability to offer a varied and balanced diet, including more nutritional foods such as vegetables and meat. In stark contrast to the soup kitchens, they are not assigned any municipal budget, which means that they are essentially dependent on their own contributions and sporadic donations to finance their spending. Owing to the economic vulnerability of their members and the unstable nature of the donations they receive, the *ollas* have no choice but to consume a high-carbohydrate diet, as carbohydrates are relatively inexpensive and, more importantly, they also tend to be the foods donated the most regularly.

Despite the scarcity of resources they face, the members contribute their own personal resources: some offer space within their home, while others lend equipment (pots, ladles, etc.), donate money, or contribute their time and effort. In addition, they attend to social cases identified by members, whereby no contribution is requested from the beneficiary. The *ollas comunes* are partially funded – in accordance with their self-managed mode of operation – through the sales of food portions (equating to, on average, approximately half of the portions prepared, according to the registration data). This does not contradict the fact that the *ollas comunes* are humanitarian organisations, as the prices they charge for each portion are fairly low (in most cases, in the region of less than 1.5 Peruvian sol (PEN) or US\$0.25 per portion).

In spite of the inherently precarious nature of the *ollas comunes*, they remain a symbol of solidarity and a response to the hunger crisis, while also representing a place of companionship and empowerment for their members, above all for women. The information collected through the survey and interviews shows that these spaces embody the sense of leadership and renewed self-worth of the women who run them. *Ollas comunes*, then, are a symbol of resistance for thousands of people who, when faced with challenges such as the illness or death of family members, the loss of their jobs, or their businesses going bankrupt, decided to unite their efforts to meet their most basic need: food.

Source Authors' own

recurring phenomenon was observed throughout Peru, and above all in Lima: the reactivation and multiplication of hundreds of *ollas comunes* in poor areas of the cities, particularly in the outskirts of the metropolitan area of Lima.

According to Lima Metropolitan Municipality (Municipalidad Metropolitana de Lima, MML) records, by February 2021 there were already over 1,700 *ollas comunes* in the city's outskirts used by almost 180,000 people. These initiatives appeared in spite of the central government grants available to those facing poverty or unemployment during lockdown. In their analysis of these so-called vouchers, the Ombudsman's Office (an autonomous government institution in Peru) reports that a lack of updates on the population's consumption patterns made it very difficult for the government to identify all those people who had recently found themselves in a vulnerable situation (Defensoría del Pueblo 2020). To compound matters further, the few existing state-run food programmes were discontinued following their interruption for several months at the start of the pandemic, which only boosted the emergence of the *ollas*. For example, the soup kitchens – state-funded social organisations supported by local governments for several decades, tasked with providing low-cost or free meals to the vulnerable city populations – were not operational during those first few months, largely due to the risk posed to the elderly women who managed them. These soup kitchens are also no longer located in the most vulnerable areas of the cities. In addition, the Qali Warma programme that provides food for children in pre-school and primary state education across the country ceased operations after the schools had closed.

Despite all the warning signs pointing to this potential food crisis, the government response was too little too late when it came to tackling the food emergency during the first year of the pandemic. The lack of recognition of and support for the *ollas comunes* was particularly apparent, as these initiatives were not taken into consideration by public policy. However, from mid-2020, the MML began to organise support initiatives for these organisations, in a move that was followed by central government support through the Ministry of Development and Social Inclusion (Ministerio de Desarrollo e Inclusión Social, MIDIS) in 2021. GRADE was able to contribute in this regard, thanks to support for the project funded by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC). This article aims to describe our journey in helping to create a strategy for the state to recognise, identify, and support these *ollas comunes*, during which our research and communication methods had to be adapted to the continually changing situation in the country.

2 The role of GRADE in designing new public interventions for *ollas comunes*

Just like the rest of the world, the Peruvian government was not prepared when it came to responding to the crisis brought on

by the pandemic, which resulted in a set of initial prevention and control measures lacking in any coherent strategy. In this context, the GRADE team began to draw up recommendations for state action, based on information and evidence gathered over the course of several years of applied research. In a particularly key move at the start of April 2020, the team published a pair of articles in national newspapers, which identified the zones in the capital most at risk of infection, as well as the wholesale food markets most likely to fuel the spread of Covid-19 (Fort and Espinoza 2020a, 2020b).

Following these publications, and thanks to a reputation borne of decades of work in rigorous applied research, GRADE began to be contacted by several public offices looking for technical consultancy support to shape the policies that were being developed to tackle the public health emergency. Between April and July 2020, the GRADE team was contacted by: the Presidency of the Council of Ministers to identify priority zones for emergency food parcel delivery; the Ministry of Economic and Financial Affairs (Ministerio de Economía y Finanzas, MEF) to select the wholesale food markets that posed the greatest risk and to develop a nationwide incentive programme to promote hygiene control in those establishments; the Ministries of Defence, Health, and Social Inclusion to design a national programme to monitor infection levels and food distribution (known locally as Operation TAYTA, or Territorial Operation for Aid for Treatment and Isolation against Covid-19) (*El Peruano* 2021; Ministry of Defence 2020); and MIDIS to evaluate the soup kitchen system in the country's main cities. This latter effort was to later become a collaboration to design a support strategy for the *ollas comunes*.

In all these cases, GRADE's contribution, which involved the technical design and support of all aforementioned initiatives, was provided free of charge. Given the substantial amount of human resources required to carry out all these tasks concurrently, GRADE's commitment was clearly not sustainable in the medium term. Fortunately, in July 2020, the IDRC granted funds to GRADE for the development of research and actions to strengthen Peru's food distribution and social protection systems. Thanks to these funds, GRADE was able to respond to and maintain all the above requests for technical support, while at the same time gaining a deeper understanding of the problems created by the health emergency, promoting the academic debate in this respect, and developing proposals for solutions for immediate application within several sectors of the Peruvian government.

2.1 First support for the Ministry of Development and Social Inclusion

As previously mentioned, the central government's response was too little too late when it came to tackling the food emergency. The first governmental strategy was essentially centred around the delivery of food parcels across the municipalities. The lack of

adequate records and procedures in the various areas meant that, in many cases, this aid did not benefit those who needed it most (Santandreu 2021). The response was extremely limited. Throughout 2020, only 9.6 per cent of homes in the whole of Peru received a food parcel. Between the months of April and September, parcels arrived at 15 per cent of homes, of which approximately 19 per cent were neither in poverty nor in a vulnerable situation (Alcázar, Rojas and López de Romaña 2021). Furthermore, the municipalities lacked the capacity for effective and targeted distribution of the parcels, which caused a variety of problems. A supervisory operation carried out by the treasury inspector's office found that 32 per cent of municipalities were facing deficiencies such as these.

The problems highlighted through that experience prompted the government to provide existing programmes and organisations with institutional support for the purchase and/or distribution of food – such as the Qali Warma feeding programme for children in state schools – and with operational support via the National Civil Defence Institute, yet questions were still being raised about the true scope of this aid. This was taking place in a wider context where the soup kitchens – social organisations offering food to vulnerable populations at low cost, with the support of MIDIS – were closed, and where the media visibility of the *ollas comunes* was starting to increase, but they were not recognised by public policy as a group needing attention.

Towards the end of June 2020, the GRADE team sought to make contact with the MIDIS team responsible for the food programme and other emergency food distribution activities to offer our support, in line with the start of the project funded by the IDRC. Arranging a meeting with them was no easy task, given the enormous pressure they found themselves under at the time. However, thanks to our previous work with both the MEF and the Ministry of Defence at the beginning of the pandemic, we managed to schedule an appointment a few weeks later. Our initial approach was essentially based on offering our technical and analytical assistance to improve the measures that were either already in operation or were in the process of being designed, instead of looking to present them with our specific research agenda. The request for support entailed producing a quick survey to characterise the current situation of the soup kitchens on a national level, with a view to designing specific support measures to enable them to reopen as soon as possible.

This was certainly an important task and work on the questionnaire began immediately. However, our previous experience of working in the city outskirts, coupled with our knowledge of social protection programmes, pointed us to the likelihood that many soup kitchens were no longer located in areas where the population was most in need of these spaces. The majority of kitchens were set up more than two decades ago and the horizontal sprawl of our cities has

meant that today's most vulnerable homes are located on the margins of this expansion (GRADE 2020).

To be able to prove this hypothesis, however, it was necessary to determine the location of the country's soup kitchens and compare this information with the available data on poverty and vulnerability levels. MIDIS had a soup kitchen database with incomplete location information, so we offered our assistance with the geographical referencing, starting with the capital. This new information, generated using an algorithm to map addresses and references to obtain coordinates, allowed us to demonstrate that the majority of soup kitchens were indeed located in more consolidated areas with medium socioeconomic levels on the outskirts of the city.

In addition to this discovery, it was necessary to identify the location of the *ollas comunes*, which were appearing in the news every day asking for some form of state support. Being temporary and self-managed initiatives, the *ollas* were not able to gain the recognition required to receive aid through public support programmes, and the MIDIS team did not have access to any formal mechanisms that would allow them to work with the *ollas*. It was clear that a deeper understanding of this new phenomenon of *ollas comunes* was necessary, and that other avenues of support should be explored.

These efforts coincided with a new political crisis that unfolded when the President of the Republic was removed from power on 9 November 2020 and the President of Congress took over the presidency. The latter had to contend with extreme citizen protests, and only managed to last for five days in power while a new transitional government was installed. This political instability, coupled with the continual changes in authorities and officials, made it all the more difficult to continue working with MIDIS on the tasks at hand.

2.2 Working with the MML

Thanks to the MML contacts established during the coordination of the TAYTA programme with the Ministry of Defence at the start of the pandemic, we discovered that a response to the food emergency had in fact been in place since August 2020. This first public initiative for *ollas comunes* involved the implementation of the programme known as *Manos a la Olla* (meaning 'Hands to the Pot'). This programme was geared towards working with the *ollas comunes* operating within the metropolitan area of Lima in four consecutive phases: recording their locations on a geo-referenced map, channelling donations to bolster their supplies, strengthening their offering via a training programme and, finally, carrying out an ongoing evaluation. The first phase sought to include the *ollas comunes* on a public register, indicating their location and other basic information relevant to being able to provide them with assistance. The second

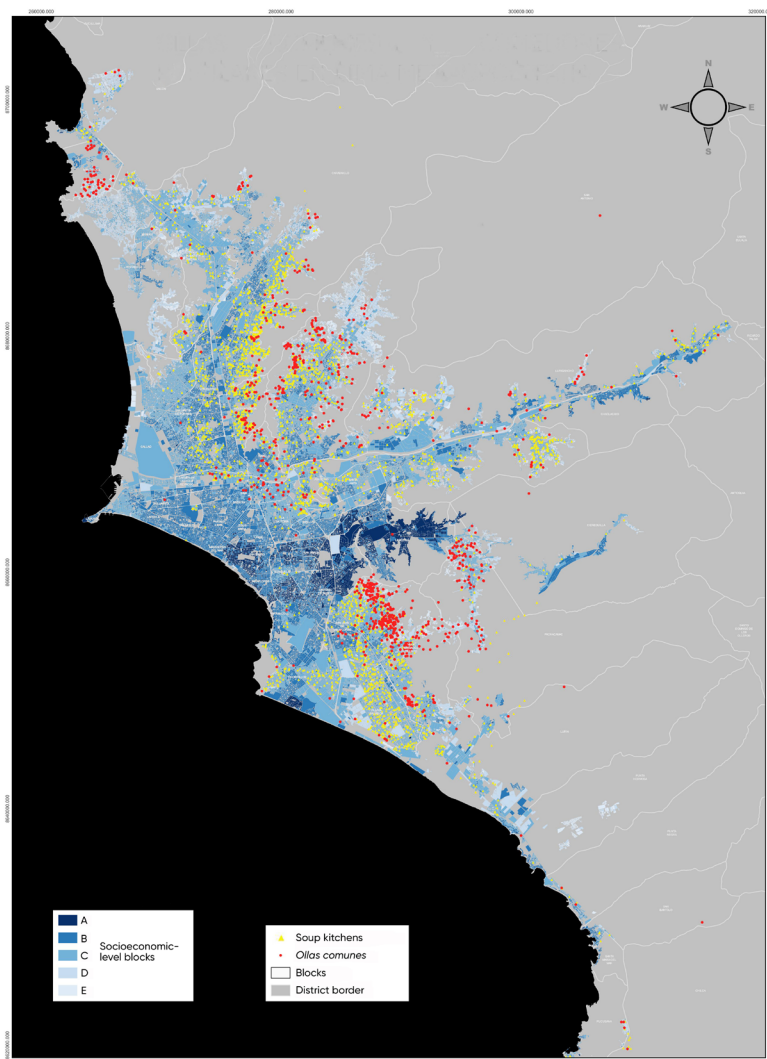
phase related to food management, which entailed securing donations for the registered *ollas* through sponsorship by private companies. The third phase was the training programme, which aimed to make the *ollas* legally competent and subsequently provide consultancy services to support their members in four key areas: nutrition, health, management, and organisation.

This initiative was led by the Gerencia de Participación Vecinal – Management of Neighbourhood Participation, a unit dedicated to promoting and coordinating neighbourhood initiatives in Peru – and our approach was once again centred around offering them our support in an open and flexible way, by first asking them what they needed before proposing what we considered to be important. In this way, after several conversations, we reached an agreement whereby we would support them in ordering and improving the *ollas* registration database and developing detailed protocol for any interventions. The first two actions proved to be very useful when it came to continuing our research process and gathering evidence in order to improve support for the *ollas comunas*. These are captured in the document by Alcázar and Fort (2022).

While the drafting of protocol was a specific requirement of the Gerencia, our support with this process led to the approval of Mayoral Decree No. 05 of 21 February 2021. Under this decree, a guide for replicating the Manos a la Olla programme (for the purposes of being rolled out by other local councils) was presented and the Gerencia was deemed responsible for advising and supporting any public or social institutions interested in implementing this programme. This guide, along with the lack of evidence regarding the locations of the *ollas comunas* in comparison with the soup kitchens, allowed us to get back in touch with MIDIS (now with a new minister, under a new government). By that time, MIDIS was also starting to explore new possible ways of working with the *ollas comunas*.

2.3 Returning to work with MIDIS

Towards the end of 2020, reports about the training and problems facing the *ollas comunas* in several areas across the outskirts of Lima were becoming increasingly frequent. At the beginning of 2021, and in line with the greater awareness of the key role played by the *ollas comunas* in food subsistence, the new central government – self-styled as the answer to dealing with the transition and emergencies – began to make changes in how the food crisis was handled. MIDIS attempted to include the *ollas comunas* among those parts of the population categorised as vulnerable to enable them to be provided with food parcels directly from local councils. In addition, it sought to carry out other regulatory modifications that would allow the *ollas* to benefit from social programmes.

Figure 2 Location of *ollas* and soup kitchens in Lima by socioeconomic level

Source Authors' own, created using QGIS

Predictably, the lack of identification and registration of the *ollas* significantly hindered progress in this regard. It was at this moment (in January 2021) that we sought to get back in contact with MIDIS to present the progress made through our work on the MML *ollas* database and the replication guide. This time it was far easier to schedule a meeting, given that we were offering information and analyses that were highly relevant to the Ministry. We also had a close connection with the new minister, who had worked with us previously on research activities in social sciences. During the first meeting, we presented this map (see Figure 2), which we produced using the information obtained on the location of soup kitchens and *ollas*. The map clearly shows that

the soup kitchens (yellow) tend to be found in more consolidated areas with medium socioeconomic levels (NSEs)³ on the outskirts of the city, while the *ollas comunes* (red) have a more marked presence in the upper parts of the hills – that is, in the city's more inaccessible zones with low socioeconomic levels.

Following the initial meetings between the Mayor of Lima, the minister of MIDIS, and their respective teams, a framework cooperation agreement between both institutions was launched and collaborative work began to set up a single register of *ollas comunes* in the city of Lima, building on the existing MML database. During the five months when the transitional government was in power, the GRADE team worked with this group to develop what was known as the Coordinated Management Strategy for Food Support within the Framework of Covid-19, which comprised five components: (1) the registration of *ollas comunes* nationwide, (2) the identification and territorial coordination of the relevant representatives, (3) supporting *ollas comunes* via the channelling of donations and supplementary budgetary resources, (4) the formation of committees to aid monitoring and transparency throughout the process, and (5) strengthening the capacities of the *ollas comunes*.

Before the transitional government era came to an end in July 2021, MIDIS had already been in communication with the 1,874 local governments nationwide about Ministerial Resolution 086-2021-MIDIS – which approved the policy documents for the strategy – with the aim of identifying the main focal points and empowering them to take action. In addition, a pilot registration scheme began in 22 districts across the country, identifying a total of 2,261 *ollas comunes* that together hosted as many as 177,000 beneficiaries. While these steps, alongside the creation of several transparency and monitoring committees, did enable better food support for those who relied on these *ollas*, a further change in government hindered this initiative's rate of progress.

Fortunately, a large part of the MIDIS team responsible for these tasks⁴ was ratified by the new government, which permitted them to make crucial progress in 2022 when it came to implementing the proposed strategy. That same year saw the implementation of a formal registration scheme for *ollas comunes* nationwide, backed by local governments. The scheme is known locally as Mankachay Perú (or '*Mi ollita Perú*', meaning 'My little pot Peru') and is available for public access.⁵ The register holds information on over 3,300 active *ollas* with more than 220,000 beneficiaries. Furthermore, 92 different transparency and monitoring committees (officially known as a Comité de Transparencia y Acompañamiento or CTA) have been established nationwide, and more than 3,200 *ollas* have been granted discount vouchers to purchase gas. In June 2022, PEN 96m was also allocated, via an emergency decree, for the purchase of food destined directly for the *ollas comunes* listed on this register.

Backed by a small number of committed members of congress, the community leaders of the *ollas* fought tirelessly and, in April 2022, their efforts were rewarded when the Congress of the Republic passed a law that recognised and supported the *ollas comunes* at state level. This law also took into consideration many aspects of the strategy developed by MIDIS with the support of GRADE (Congress of the Republic 2022). Furthermore, in June of the same year, MIDIS then approved the regulations for this law (MIDIS 2022). While these initiatives represent significant progress in the recognition and support of the vital work carried out by the *ollas comunes*, they also contain a number of proposals that are far from straightforward to implement and still require several adjustments. With the goal of continuing to discuss possible ways to improve the implementation of the law, on 16 August 2022 we joined forces with congress members Susel Paredes and Kira Alcarraz to organise an event in the Congress of the Republic to present the results of our research and discuss these possible improvements.

In addition, as part of the project in collaboration with the IDRC, we worked with the Latin American Center for Rural Development (RIMISP) research centre to identify similar phenomena in the form of community strategies aimed at tackling the fight against hunger in other countries in the region, with the ultimate aim of finding common ground to further our learning and future work. On 22 November 2022, the results of our studies on these initiatives in Peru, Uruguay, and Chile were presented during a virtual discussion, which was attended by various representatives from the *ollas comunes* in these countries as well as those responsible for public policy in each country (GRADE 2022).

3 Lessons learnt: how our research helped shape a rapid response

In this article, we have sought to combine the story of the resurgence of the *ollas comunes* during the pandemic, along with their needs and state support initiatives, with the process followed by GRADE in offering its support to the institutions that were looking to improve access to food for the most vulnerable population groups. A common thread to both these stories, perhaps, is the ability to adapt quickly, which is crucial when it comes to achieving objectives in the face of uncertain and changing situations.

In terms of our traditional research processes, that means understanding that producing evidence quickly is vital to guide better decision-making. In many cases, this involves relaxing the rigorous methodological criteria, while still adhering to a minimum standard that allows useful and appropriate recommendations to emerge. Furthermore, this evidence must be communicated in a different way to that of a traditional approach: a way that means it is able to more easily reach a wide audience in need of persuasion. In our case, for example, a simple map like the one presented in Figure 2 can be a far more useful way of

demonstrating the need for specific policies tailored to the areas where the *ollas comunes* are located, compared to the usual discussions and hypothesis testing seen in academic articles. Shared knowledge was a useful tool when it came to quickly addressing the needs that arose out of the Covid-19 crisis, providing targeted information about both the requirements and the potential of the *ollas comunes*, and contributing to finding better ways of supporting them. The research was based on a rapid analysis of secondary information – through the use of maps, for example – and the generation of primary information by means of qualitative fieldwork carried out by the institution's experts. Any shared knowledge must not only be practical and appropriate, but also reliable: a balance that is built over time spent working in research and gaining both recognition and experience.

It is also clear, though, that together with this sense of urgency when it comes to producing evidence, a great deal of flexibility is required to adapt to the needs of the decision makers against the backdrop of this crisis. Effective liaison cannot be established by seeking to impose what the researcher considers necessary in the way of support, but rather by being willing to listen and identify both the challenges and necessary support measures in a collaborative way. In turn, this involves being prepared to offer support that may go beyond our own research objectives, but that can contribute to forging links and gaining allies.

However, this strategy is only possible if this same flexible approach also underpins the relationship between the researchers and those funding their project. It was vital that the IDRC understood that, when it came to devising research proposals and action plans, very few people in the world could imagine the sheer magnitude and duration of this pandemic and its consequences. As a result, constant adaptation throughout the process was required. The biannual project reports submitted to the IDRC helped to explain these deviations from the initial proposal, as well as the required changes in time frames or even in those working on the project team.

This last point has proved to be particularly important in the case we are recounting here. While the women from the *ollas comunes* have managed to broaden their relationships with various public and private representatives in order to gain support, our team was always on hand to identify opportunities to work with not just one but all of the different institutions involved in the objectives that have been set out. In this way, faced with unforeseen changes in both people and priorities within these institutions, it was always possible to turn to others to ensure continued progress in the tasks required to reach these goals.

Finally, it is important to highlight that the impacts of research are often accumulative and can take some time to become

apparent. It is clear that a large part of everything that has been achieved during this experience was possible thanks to GRADE's previous work carried out over many years, which spanned several aspects relevant to food security, social programmes, and other fields, and which gave the team the knowledge and reputation needed to approach the authorities with credibility. GRADE has a team of multidisciplinary researchers who are not only focused on generating rigorous applied knowledge but also constantly seeking to stay close to public policy through their temporary involvement in high-level public positions, be it through advisory and consultancy roles, or contributions during consultation meetings, events, or via the media. As soon as the pandemic began, the GRADE researchers provided tailored support for various public initiatives aimed at controlling the emergency and improving the state response. This vital support is proof of that work and it also contributed to opening up opportunities for collaboration in this specific situation. The efforts, failings, and achievements that emerged from the experience of working during the Covid-19 crisis also left a legacy of the many lessons learnt: from opportunities provided by the virtual world to create and share knowledge, to ways to come together and collaborate with public officials to gather evidence and provide appropriate, practical, and reliable knowledge.

Notes

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- 2 Lorena Alcázar, Senior Researcher, GRADE, Peru.
- 3 Socioeconomic levels (known as NSEs (*niveles socio económicos*) in Peru) are categories used in Peru to classify homes according to their level of income, based on census information and home surveys. The highest level is A and the lowest is E.
- 4 In particular, the Director of Supplementary Welfare Benefits and her team.
- 5 **Mankachay Perú webpage.**

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Resiliencia en tiempos de pandemia: generando políticas públicas para las ollas comunes en Perú*

Ricardo Fort¹ y Lorena Alcázar²

Resumen La pandemia del coronavirus (Covid-19) ha generado crisis en los ámbitos económico, social y de seguridad alimentaria en muchos países del mundo. Ante el aumento del hambre en el Perú, y la reacción tardía e incompleta del Estado, la respuesta más importante vino de los propios ciudadanos, especialmente de las mujeres, a través de miles de iniciativas solidarias conocidas como ollas comunes. Este artículo combina la historia del resurgimiento de las ollas comunes y las iniciativas de apoyo desde el Estado, con el proceso que seguimos desde Grupo de Análisis para el Desarrollo (GRADE) para contribuir con las instituciones que buscaban mejorar el acceso a alimentos de las poblaciones más vulnerables. Ambas historias tienen en común esa capacidad de adaptación rápida que se requiere para lograr objetivos en situaciones inciertas y cambiantes.

Palabras clave Perú, hambre, seguridad alimentaria, políticas públicas, Covid-19, ollas comunes, incidencia, adaptación.

1 Introducción: La pandemia del coronavirus en el Perú derivó en una crisis alimentaria a la que respondieron primero y principalmente las ollas comunes

La pandemia no solo ha significado una crisis sanitaria, sino que también ha generado crisis en los ámbitos económico, social y alimentario. El Perú es uno de los países más afectados en el ámbito alimentario a causa de la pandemia. Las medidas para contener el avance del virus generaron una contracción económica que, a su vez, significó la pérdida de ingresos de muchas familias y, por tanto, afectó su capacidad para adquirir alimentos. Así, el reciente reporte de Organización de

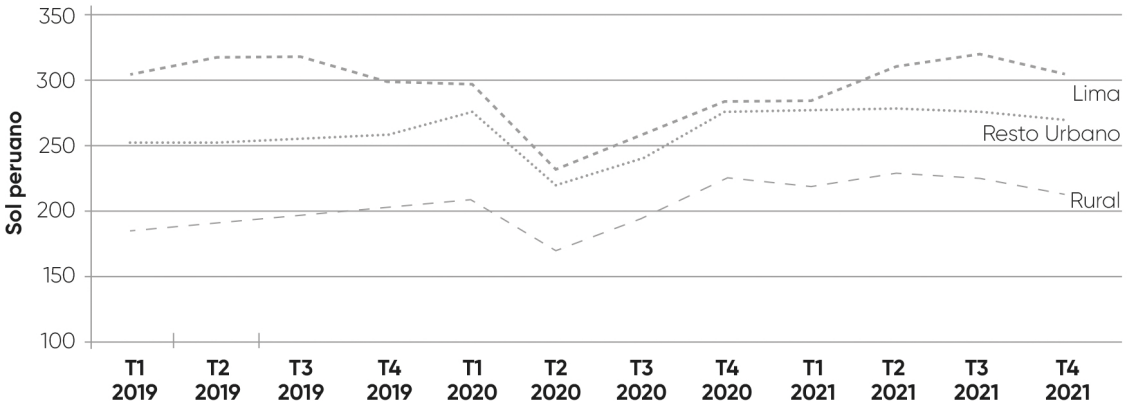


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Figura 1 Consumo mensual de alimentos, según área (valor promedio per cápita en Soles peruanos, deflactado)



Fuente Creación de los autores, basada en datos del Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática (INEI), 2021

las Naciones Unidas para la Alimentación y la Agricultura (FAO *et al.* 2021) sobre alimentación en el mundo encuentra al Perú con 16.6 millones de peruanos en situación de inseguridad alimentaria, aproximadamente la mitad de la población total.

El 11 de marzo de 2020, mediante Decreto Supremo N°008-2020-SA, se decretó el Estado de Emergencia Sanitaria a nivel nacional y se estableció el denominado ‘confinamiento social obligatorio’, que duró entre el 16 de marzo y el 26 de junio del 2020, y que implicó el cierre de todo establecimiento público y privado, con excepción de aquellos relacionados con temas de salud y expendio de alimentos (excepto restaurantes).

El impacto de estas medidas fue devastador para la economía peruana, lo que se reflejó en los patrones de consumo de alimentos de la población. El Figura 1 muestra una caída significativa del consumo de alimentos en todo el Perú, especialmente durante los tres meses de confinamiento obligatorio. La caída en consumo de alimentos fue mayor en Lima (-21 por ciento) y en las áreas urbanas (-20 por ciento) que en las zonas rurales (-18 por ciento).

Frente al aumento del hambre en el país, una de las respuestas primeras y más importantes la dio la misma ciudadanía, principalmente a través de las iniciativas solidarias conocidas como ollas comunes. Las ollas comunes son espacios auto organizados de vecinos, principalmente mujeres, que ven en la acción colectiva (reunión de recursos y esfuerzos) la oportunidad de acceder a la alimentación, y se organizan para comprar, cocinar y distribuir raciones de comida a su comunidad. Así, en el país –especialmente en Lima–, se observó un fenómeno particular pero recurrente en épocas de crisis en el país: la reactivación y multiplicación de cientos de ollas comunes en

Casilla 1 Las ollas comunes en el Perú: resiliencia y solidaridad en contexto de precariedad y limitaciones

Como parte del apoyo brindado por GRADE a la MML (detalle en sección 2), se realizó un análisis de las características y principales problemas de las ollas comunes que formaban parte del registro implementado, complementando luego esta información con la aplicación de encuestas y entrevistas en profundidad a una muestra de 40 ollas comunes en tres distritos de la capital.

Las ollas comunes surgen en las zonas más precarias y desconectadas de la ciudad, con escaso acceso a servicios básicos como agua, electricidad y desagüe. Además, como iniciativas ciudadanas espontáneas y sin apoyo público, las ollas comunes generalmente no cuentan con un lugar propio y se desarrollan en espacios improvisados, en locales prestados, o incluso en la vía pública. Enfrentan una gran carencia de implementos, tales como utensilios de cocina y equipos de refrigeración. Asimismo, enfrentan una carencia en implementos de protección frente a la pandemia: alrededor de la mitad de las ollas comunes declaró no contar con kits de higiene, mascarillas, alcohol, entre otros. Estos problemas generan dificultades para operar y preparar los alimentos en condiciones higiénicas correctas.

Las ollas comunes también enfrentan enormes dificultades para acceder a insumos alimentarios, así como para diversificar y balancear su dieta incluyendo más vegetales y carnes, que permitan una mejor nutrición. A diferencia de los comedores populares, no cuentan con un presupuesto municipal asignado, por lo que el financiamiento de sus gastos depende básicamente de sus propios aportes y de donaciones esporádicas. La vulnerabilidad económica de sus miembros y la inestabilidad de las donaciones que reciben condiciona a las ollas a consumir una dieta alta en carbohidratos que son relativamente más baratos y principalmente porque son los alimentos donados con mayor regularidad.

A pesar de la escasez de recursos que enfrentan, las integrantes aportan sus recursos personales: algunas brindan un espacio en su casa, otras prestan implementos (ollas, cucharones, etc.) o dinero, y otras aportan su esfuerzo. Además, atienden casos sociales, identificados por los miembros –en los que no se le pide ningún aporte al beneficiario. Parte del financiamiento de las ollas comunes –y que corresponde a la autogestión realizada por estas– corresponde a la venta de raciones (aproximadamente la mitad de las raciones preparadas en promedio según los datos del registro). Esto no se contradice con el hecho de que las ollas comunes sean organizaciones solidarias, pues los precios que cobran las ollas comunes por cada ración son bastante bajos (en la mayoría de los casos de alrededor de menos de S/. 1.5 o 0.25 centavos de dólar por ración).

Pese a la precariedad de las ollas comunes, estas son símbolo de solidaridad y de respuesta al hambre y representan, además, espacios de acompañamiento y empoderamiento para sus miembros, sobre todo para las mujeres. La información recogida por la encuesta y entrevistas muestra que son espacios de liderazgo y auto revaloración de las mujeres que las integran. Así, las ollas comunes son el símbolo de resistencia de miles de personas que, ante episodios de enfermedad o muerte de algún familiar, pérdida de empleo, quiebra de negocios, entre otros, decidieron unir esfuerzos para poder cubrir su necesidad más básica: la alimentación.

Fuente Creación de los autores.

zonas pobres de las ciudades, en particular en la periferia de Lima Metropolitana.

Según el registro de la Municipalidad Metropolitana de Lima-MML, solo hasta febrero del 2021 ya se contaban más de 1,700 ollas comunes en la periferia de la ciudad que atendían cerca de 180 mil personas. La aparición de estas iniciativas se da a pesar de los subsidios monetarios otorgados por el gobierno central a la población en situación de pobreza o desempleo durante el confinamiento. Como reporta la Defensoría del Pueblo en su análisis de estos "bonos", el gobierno tuvo muchas dificultades para identificar a toda la población en situación de vulnerabilidad reciente por falta de actualización de sus padrones (Defensoría del Pueblo 2020). Pero, además, las ollas surgen debido a la discontinuidad de los escasos programas alimentarios del estado, los que se interrumpen durante varios meses al inicio de la pandemia. Por ejemplo, los comedores populares, organizaciones sociales que reciben apoyo del estado a través de los gobiernos locales desde hace varias décadas y que tienen como finalidad proveer menús a bajo costo o gratuitos para la población vulnerable de las ciudades, se encontraban inoperativos en estos primeros meses debido principalmente al riesgo que significaba para las mujeres de alta edad que los gestionan. Además, los comedores populares no se encuentran en la actualidad en las zonas más vulnerables de las ciudades. De otro lado, el programa Qali Warma que provee alimentación para niñas y niños de nivel de educación inicial y primaria en las escuelas públicas del país no estaba en funcionamiento al haber cerrado todas las escuelas.

Pese a las señales y alertas sobre esta posible crisis alimentaria, durante el primer año de la pandemia, el gobierno tuvo una reacción tardía e incompleta para abordar la emergencia, y en particular para reconocer y apoyar a las ollas comunes, las cuales no estaban contempladas en las políticas públicas. Sin embargo, la MML desde mediados del 2020, y luego el gobierno central a través del Ministerio de Desarrollo e Inclusión Social-MIDIS en el 2021, empezaron a organizar iniciativas de apoyo a estas organizaciones, con las cuales contribuimos y pudimos acompañar desde GRADE gracias al soporte del proyecto financiado por International Development Research Centre (IDRC). Este artículo busca describir el camino que seguimos para poder ayudar a generar una estrategia de reconocimiento, identificación y apoyo desde el estado a las ollas comunes, adaptando nuestros métodos de investigación y comunicación a la constantemente cambiante coyuntura del país.

2 El rol de GRADE en el diseño de nuevas intervenciones públicas para las ollas comunes

Como en el resto del mundo, el Estado Peruano no estaba preparado para responder a la crisis ocasionada por la pandemia, por lo que las medidas de prevención y control

iniciales no respondían a una estrategia coherente. Es en este contexto que el equipo de GRADE comienza a producir recomendaciones para la acción estatal, en base a la información y evidencia acumulada a lo largo de varios años de investigación aplicada. En particular, a inicios de abril del 2020, el equipo publica en periódicos nacionales un par de artículos en los que se identifica zonas de la capital con mayores riesgos de contagio, e identifica a los mercados de abastos como los principales focos potenciales de expansión de Covid-19 (Fort y Espinoza 2020a, 2020b).

Tras estas publicaciones, y gracias a la reputación de décadas de trabajo en investigación aplicada rigurosa, GRADE comenzó a ser contactado por varias dependencias públicas que buscaban asesoría técnica para orientar las políticas que venían desarrollando para enfrentar la emergencia sanitaria. Así, entre abril y julio del 2020, el equipo de GRADE fue contactado por la Presidencia del Consejo de Ministros para identificar zonas prioritarias para el reparto de emergencia de canastas de alimentos; por el Ministerio de Economía y Finanzas (MEF) para seleccionar los mercados de abastos de mayor riesgo, y para desarrollar un programa de incentivos (PI) a nivel nacional que fomentara el control sanitario en estos establecimientos; por los ministerios de Defensa, Salud, e Inclusión Social para diseñar un programa nacional de monitoreo de contagios y reparto de alimentos (Operación Tayta) (El Peruano 2021; Ministerio de Defensa 2020); y por el MIDIS para evaluar el sistema de comedores populares en las principales ciudades del país. Este último esfuerzo se transformará más adelante en la colaboración para el diseño de una estrategia de apoyo a las ollas comunes.

En todos estos casos, el aporte de GRADE, que se encargó del diseño y soporte técnico de todas las iniciativas mencionadas, fue de carácter gratuito. Evidentemente, dada la importante cantidad de recursos humanos requeridos para realizar todas estas tareas de manera paralela, el compromiso de GRADE no se hacía sostenible en el mediano plazo. Afortunadamente, IDRC, en julio del 2020, otorga fondos a GRADE para el desarrollo de investigaciones y acciones para fortalecer los sistemas de distribución de alimentos y protección social del Perú. Gracias a esos fondos, GRADE fue capaz de atender y mantener todas las solicitudes de soporte técnico mencionadas, a la vez que profundizaba la comprensión de los problemas generados por la emergencia sanitaria, promovía el debate académico al respecto, y desarrollaba propuestas de soluciones de aplicación inmediata en varios sectores del Estado Peruano.

2.1 Primer apoyo al Ministerio de Desarrollo e Inclusión Social

Como mencionáramos anteriormente, el gobierno central tuvo una reacción tardía e incompleta para abordar la emergencia alimentaria. La primera estrategia gubernamental estuvo básicamente orientada a la entrega de canasta de alimentos

a través de las municipalidades, las cuales no contaban con los registros y procedimientos adecuados, lo que habría causado en muchos casos que no se llegase a beneficiar a quienes más lo necesitaban (Santandreu 2021). La respuesta fue muy limitada. A lo largo del 2020, solo el 9.6 por ciento del total de hogares en el país recibió una canasta de alimentos, y entre los meses de abril y septiembre llegó a un 15 por ciento de los hogares, de los cuales aproximadamente el 19 por ciento no se encontraban en situación de pobreza ni vulnerabilidad (Alcázar, Rojas y López de Romaña 2021). Además, se enfrentaron también diversos problemas en la capacidad de las municipalidades para la distribución efectiva y bien focalizada de las canastas. Un operativo de supervisión de la Contraloría encontró que el 32 por ciento de las municipalidades tenían este tipo de deficiencias.

Si bien luego de los problemas de esa experiencia, el gobierno se apoyó en la capacidad institucional de programas y entidades ya existentes para la compra y/o distribución de alimentos, como el programa de alimentación para niños en escuelas públicas, Qali Warma, y la capacidad operativa del Instituto Nacional de Defensa Civil, aún se mantenían los cuestionamientos sobre los alcances de esta ayuda. Esto en un contexto en que los comedores populares, organizaciones sociales de base que brindan alimentación a bajo costo a poblaciones vulnerables con el apoyo del MIDIS, se encontraban cerrados, y donde la visibilidad mediática de las ollas comunes empezaba a aumentar, pero no era incluida por las políticas públicas como grupo de atención.

Hacia fines de junio del 2020, el equipo de GRADE buscó contactar con el equipo del MIDIS encargado del programa alimentario y de otras actividades de distribución de alimentos en emergencia para ofrecer nuestra ayuda, ya en el contexto del inicio del proyecto con el IDRC. Conseguir una reunión con ellos no fue tarea fácil dada la enorme presión bajo la cual se encontraban en esos momentos, pero gracias a nuestro trabajo previo con el MEF y el Ministerio de Defensa al inicio de la pandemia, logramos agendarla después de unas semanas. Nuestra aproximación inicial se basó fundamentalmente en ofrecer nuestra ayuda técnica y analítica para mejorar las intervenciones que venían operando y diseñando, en vez de buscar plantearles nuestra agenda de investigación particular. El pedido de apoyo consistió en elaborar una encuesta rápida para caracterizar la situación actual de los comedores populares a nivel nacional con miras a diseñar apoyos específicos que les permitan reabrir lo antes posible.

Si bien esta tarea era importante, y se trabajó con ellos el cuestionario de manera inmediata, nuestra experiencia previa de trabajo en las periferias de las ciudades y el conocimiento de los programas de protección social nos indicaban que probablemente muchos de los comedores populares ya no se

ubiquen y atiendan a la población más necesitada en estos espacios. La mayoría de los comedores tiene más de dos décadas de creados y la expansión horizontal de nuestras ciudades ha hecho que los hogares más vulnerables estén ahora en los márgenes de esa expansión (GRADE 2020).

Pero para probar esta hipótesis era necesario ubicar a los comedores populares en el territorio y contrastar esta información con data sobre niveles de pobreza o vulnerabilidad. El MIDIS contaba con una base de datos de comedores populares con información de localización incompleta, la cuál ofrecimos ayudar a georeferenciar, iniciando por la capital. Esta nueva información generada, utilizando un algoritmo que mapeaba direcciones y referencias para obtener coordenadas, nos permitió mostrar que efectivamente la mayoría de los comedores populares se encuentran en espacios un poco más consolidados y de niveles socio económicos (NSEs) medios de la periferia de la ciudad.

Además de este hallazgo, era necesario identificar la ubicación de las ollas comunes que cada día aparecían en las noticias pidiendo alguna ayuda del estado. Su carácter temporal y autogestionario no les permitía ser reconocidas como posibles receptoras de programas de apoyo públicos, y el equipo del MIDIS no encontraba mecanismos formales que les permita trabajar con ellas. Estaba claro que era necesario tratar de entender mejor el nuevo fenómeno de las ollas comunes, y se debía explorar otras instancias con las que se les pudiera apoyar.

Estos esfuerzos coincidieron con una nueva crisis política por la que el presidente de la república fue removido del cargo (9 noviembre 2020) y el presidente del Congreso asumió la presidencia. Este a su vez enfrentó severas protestas ciudadanas, durando solamente cinco días en el cargo mientras se instalaba un nuevo gobierno de transición. La inestabilidad política y los cambios constantes de autoridades y funcionarios hacía aún más difícil seguir trabajando con el MIDIS en las tareas planteadas.

2.2 El trabajo con la MML

Gracias a los contactos establecidos a inicios de la pandemia con la MML en la coordinación del programa TAYTA con el Ministerio de Defensa, nos enteramos de que ésta venía respondiendo a la emergencia alimentaria desde agosto del 2020 a través de la implementación de la primera iniciativa pública para ollas comunes, el programa Manos a la Olla. Este programa estaba orientado a trabajar con las ollas comunes de Lima Metropolitana en cuatro fases consecutivas: registro en un mapa georeferenciado, abastecimiento a través de la canalización de donativos, fortalecimiento a través de un programa formativo, y evaluación continua. El primer componente buscó incluir a las ollas comunes en un registro público, indicando además de su ubicación, otros datos básicos relevantes para poder brindarles ayuda. El segundo componente era el de la

gestión de alimentos, el cual consistió en conseguir donaciones para las ollas registradas mediante el “apadrinamiento” de estas por parte de empresas privadas. El tercer componente, el programa formativo, buscaba brindar capacitaciones y posteriores asesorías de refuerzo a las socias de las ollas en cuatro temas: nutrición, salubridad, gestión y organización.

Nuestra aproximación a la Gerencia de Participación Vecinal, quien lideraba esta iniciativa, se dio, una vez más, con la apertura y flexibilidad de nuestro apoyo, preguntando qué es lo que necesitaban antes de proponer lo que nosotros considerábamos importante. De esta manera, luego de varias conversaciones, llegamos a un acuerdo para apoyarlos en el ordenamiento y mejoramiento de la base de datos de registro de ollas, y el desarrollo del protocolo detallado de la intervención. Las dos primeras acciones fueron de mucha utilidad para continuar con nuestro proceso de investigación y producción de evidencia para mejorar el apoyo a las ollas comunes, y se pueden ver plasmadas en el documento de Alcázar y Fort (2022).

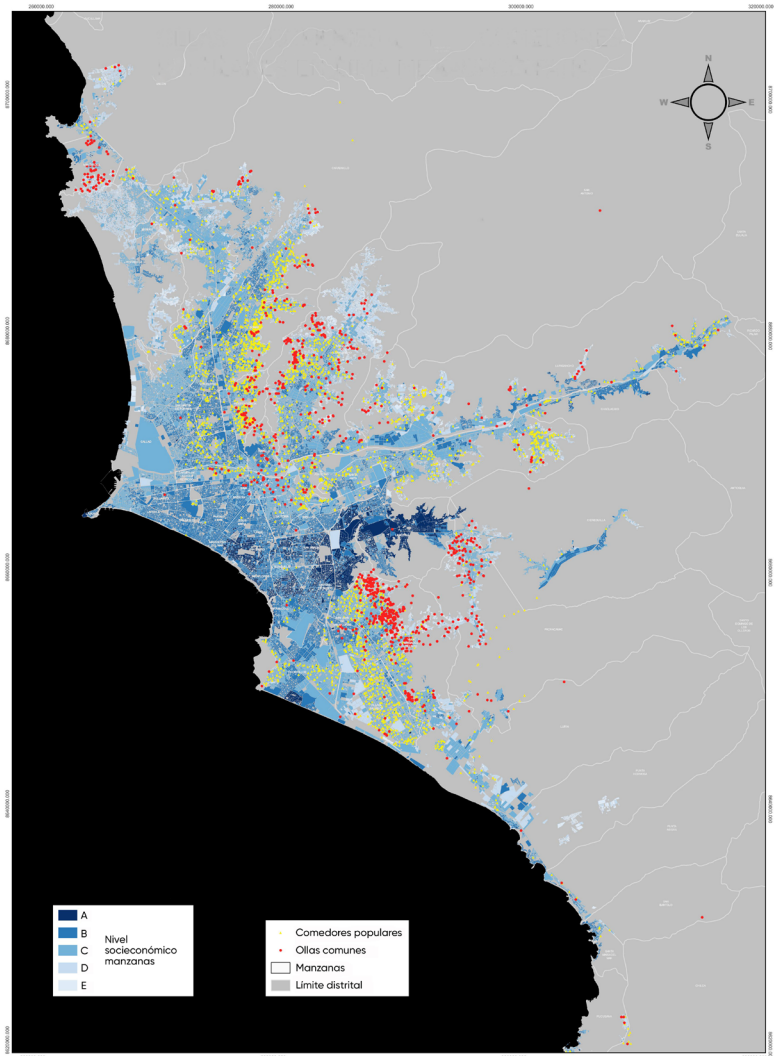
Si bien la elaboración del protocolo era un requerimiento específico de la Gerencia, con nuestro apoyo en su elaboración se logró aprobar el Decreto de Alcaldía N.05 del 21 febrero del 2021 mediante el cual se presentó la Guía de Réplica del programa Manos a la Olla (para aplicarse por otros Municipios) y se le encarga a la Gerencia de Participación Vecinal asesorar y acompañar a aquellas instituciones públicas o sociales interesadas en aplicarla. Esta guía, junto con la evidencia que nos faltaba de la localización de las ollas comunes en comparación con la de los comedores populares, nos permitieron retomar el contacto con el MIDIS (nuevo gobierno, nueva Ministra), quien además empezaba a explorar nuevas posibilidades de trabajo con las ollas comunes.

2.3 De regreso al trabajo con el MIDIS

En los últimos meses del 2020, se volvían cada vez más frecuentes los reportajes sobre la formación y problemas que enfrentaban las ollas comunes en diversas zonas de la periferia de la capital. En línea con esta mayor concientización sobre el rol de las ollas comunes en la subsistencia alimentaria, desde inicios del 2021 el nuevo gobierno central, autodenominado de transición y de emergencia, empezó a realizar cambios en la forma en la cual afrontaba la emergencia alimentaria. Desde el MIDIS se hacían esfuerzos por incluir a las ollas comunes como “población vulnerable” y por tanto poder ser directamente beneficiada en el reparto de canastas de los Municipios y, además, se buscaba realizar otras modificaciones normativas para poder atenderlas con programas sociales.

Como era previsible, la falta de identificación y registro de las ollas dificultaba seriamente estos avances. Es en este momento (enero 2021) en que buscamos retomar el contacto con el MIDIS

Figura 2 Ubicación de ollas y comedores en Lima por NSE



Fuente: Creación de autores, usando QGIS.

para presentar los avances del trabajo con la base de datos de ollas de la MML y la guía de réplica. En esta oportunidad no fue difícil conseguir una reunión dado que ofrecíamos información y análisis muy relevante para el Ministerio, y además por la cercanía a la nueva Ministra con quien habíamos trabajado anteriormente en actividades de investigación en ciencias sociales. En la primera reunión de trabajo, se presentó este mapa (Figura 2) que elaboramos con la información de ubicación de comedores y ollas, donde se aprecia claramente que los comedores populares (amarillo) suelen encontrarse en espacios un poco más consolidados y de niveles socio económicos³ medios de la periferia de la ciudad, mientras que las ollas

comunes (rojo) tienen una presencia más marcada en las partes altas de los cerros –o en las zonas más inaccesibles y de bajos niveles socio económicos de la ciudad.

Luego de reuniones iniciales entre el Alcalde de Lima, la Ministra de MIDIS y sus equipos, se puso en marcha un convenio marco de cooperación entre ambas instituciones y se empezó a trabajar en conjunto para montar un registro único de ollas comunes en la ciudad de Lima en base a lo avanzado por la MML. El equipo de GRADE trabajó durante los cinco meses del gobierno de transición con este grupo articulado para desarrollar la llamada Estrategia de Gestión Articulada para el Apoyo Alimentario en el Marco de la Covid-19, la que contemplaba cinco componentes: (1) el registro de ollas comunes a nivel nacional, (2) la identificación y articulación territorial de los actores relevantes, (3) la atención de ollas comunes mediante la canalización de donaciones y recursos presupuestales extraordinarios, (4) la formación de comités de acompañamiento y transparencia del proceso y (5) el fortalecimiento de capacidades de las ollas comunes.

Antes de culminar el gobierno de transición en julio del 2021, el MIDIS ya había comunicado a los 1,874 gobiernos locales a nivel nacional sobre la Resolución Ministerial 086-2021-MIDIS que aprobó los documentos normativos de la estrategia, designado puntos focales, y capacitando a los mismos. Además, se inició un piloto de registro de ollas comunes en 22 distritos del país, identificando un total de 2,261 ollas comunes, las cuales a su vez acogen a un total de 177,000 beneficiarios. Si bien estos avances, así como la creación de algunos comités de transparencia y acompañamiento permitieron un mejor apoyo alimentario para los beneficiarios de estas ollas, un nuevo cambio de gobierno implicó que esta iniciativa disminuya su ritmo de avance.

Afortunadamente, buena parte del equipo del MIDIS encargado de estas tareas⁴ fue ratificado por el nuevo gobierno, lo que les ha permitido lograr importantes avances en el 2022 en la implementación de la estrategia planteada. En este año se implementó el registro formal de ollas comunes a nivel nacional con el apoyo de los Gobiernos Locales (Mankachay Perú), al que se puede acceder de manera pública.⁵ El registro contiene información de más de 3,300 ollas activas con más de 220 mil beneficiarios. Asimismo, se han conformado 92 Comités de Transparencia y Acompañamiento (CTA) a nivel nacional, y se han logrado otorgar vales de descuento para compra de gas a más de 3,200 ollas. En el mes de junio de este año se aprobó además mediante Decreto de Urgencia la asignación de 96 millones de soles para compra de alimentos directamente destinados a las ollas comunes en este registro.

De otro lado, desde el Congreso de la República, la incansable lucha de las dirigentes populares de las ollas, con el apoyo de

unas pocas pero comprometidas congresistas, lograron que en abril de 2022 se apruebe una ley para reconocer y apoyar a las ollas comunes desde el Estado, la cual tomó en consideración muchos aspectos de la estrategia desarrollada por el MIDIS con el apoyo de GRADE (Congreso de la República 2022). Es más, en junio del mismo año, el MIDIS aprobó el reglamento de dicha Ley (MIDIS 2022). Si bien estas iniciativas son un gran avance en el reconocimiento y apoyo a la labor de las ollas comunes, las iniciativas contienen varias propuestas que se hacen difíciles de implementar y requieren aún de diversos ajustes. Con el objetivo de continuar discutiendo posibles mejoras para la implementación de la ley, el 16 de agosto del 2022 organizamos, junto con las Congresistas Susel Paredes y Kira Alcarraz, un evento en el Congreso de la República para presentar los resultados de nuestra investigación y discutir estas posibles mejoras.

Adicionalmente, como parte del proyecto con IDRC, hemos trabajado junto con el centro de investigación Rimisp en la identificación de fenómenos similares de estrategias comunitarias en la lucha contra el hambre en otros países de la región, con la finalidad de encontrar espacios comunes de aprendizaje y trabajo a futuro. El 22 de noviembre del 2022 se realizó un conversatorio virtual donde se presentaron los resultados de nuestros estudios sobre estas iniciativas en Perú, Uruguay y Chile, con la participación de diversos actores de las ollas comunes en estos países y los responsables de las políticas públicas en cada país (GRADE 2022).

3 Lecciones aprendidas para una respuesta rápida desde la investigación

En este artículo hemos buscado combinar la historia del resurgimiento de las ollas comunes en pandemia, sus necesidades e iniciativas de apoyo desde el Estado, con el proceso que seguimos desde GRADE para brindar nuestro apoyo a las instituciones que buscaban mejorar el acceso a alimentos de las poblaciones más vulnerables. Quizás algo que ambas historias tienen en común es esa capacidad de adaptación rápida que se requiere para lograr objetivos en situaciones inciertas y cambiantes.

En términos de nuestros procesos tradicionales de investigación, eso significa entender que se requiere mayor rapidez en la producción de evidencia que permita guiar mejor la toma de decisiones. Y muchas veces esto implica relajar los criterios de rigurosidad metodológica, pero manteniendo un estándar mínimo que permita generar recomendaciones útiles y oportunas. Además, esta evidencia debe ser comunicada de una manera diferente a la tradicional, que permita llegar más fácilmente a una audiencia amplia que requiere convencimiento. En nuestro caso, por ejemplo, un simple mapa como el presentado en la Figura 2 puede ser mucho más útil para mostrar la necesidad de políticas específicas para las áreas donde se encuentran

las ollas comunes, que las habituales discusiones y pruebas de hipótesis en artículos académicos. El conocimiento compartido fue útil en la medida que permitió abordar de manera rápida a las necesidades de la crisis del Covid-19, proveyendo información sobre focalización y sobre las necesidades y posibilidades de las ollas comunes y contribuyendo a mejores formas de apoyarlas. La investigación se basó en un rápido análisis de información secundaria, por ejemplo, con la utilización de los mapas, y en la generación de información primaria a través del trabajo de campo cualitativo de expertos de la institución. El conocimiento compartido debe ser práctico y oportuno, pero además confiable. Ello se construye a lo largo del tiempo trabajando en investigación y logrando reconocimiento y experiencia.

Ahora bien, junto con ese sentido de urgencia en la producción de evidencia, es claro también que se necesita mucha flexibilidad para adecuarse a las necesidades de los tomadores de decisiones en este contexto de crisis. No se puede establecer un vínculo efectivo buscando imponer lo que el investigador considera que es necesario como apoyo, sino más bien se debe estar abierto a escuchar e identificar de manera conjunta los retos y apoyos requeridos. A su vez, esto implica estar dispuesto a brindar apoyos que vayan más allá de nuestros propios objetivos de investigación, pero que pueden contribuir a consolidar vínculos y ganar aliados.

Pero, a su vez, esta estrategia solo es posible si esa misma flexibilidad aplica a la relación entre los investigadores y sus financiadores. Ha sido fundamental que IDRC entendiera que al momento de elaborar las propuestas de investigación-acción, muy pocos en el mundo imaginábamos la magnitud y duración que podría tener esta pandemia y sus secuelas, y por tanto había que ir adaptándose constantemente en el proceso. Los reportes semestrales del proyecto para IDRC facilitaban explicar estos ajustes a la propuesta inicial, así como cambios en los tiempos requeridos o incluso actores con quienes se trabajaba.

Esto último ha sido particularmente importante en el caso que aquí narramos. Así como las mujeres de las ollas comunes han sabido diversificar sus relaciones con diversos actores públicos y privados para conseguir apoyos, nuestro equipo estuvo siempre atento a identificar oportunidades de trabajo conjunto con diversas instituciones involucradas en los objetivos trazados, y no concentrarse solamente en una de ellas. De esta manera, ante cambios imprevistos en las personas o prioridades de estas instituciones, siempre fue posible recurrir a otras que permitiera seguir avanzando en las tareas requeridas para alcanzar estas metas.

Finalmente, es importante resaltar que muchas veces los impactos de la investigación son acumulativos y pueden tardar bastante tiempo en observarse. Resulta claro que gran parte

de lo logrado en esta experiencia fue posible gracias al trabajo previo de GRADE, por muchos años, y en varios aspectos relevantes de la seguridad alimentaria, los programas sociales y otros ámbitos, lo que le dieron el conocimiento y la reputación que facilita el acercamiento a las autoridades. GRADE cuenta con un equipo de investigadores multidisciplinario, enfocados en la generación de conocimiento riguroso y aplicado, pero que además buscan constantemente mantenerse cerca de las políticas públicas a través de su participación temporal en posiciones de alto nivel públicas, en consejos, en asesorías o aportando en reuniones de consulta, eventos o a través de los medios. El apoyo específico de los investigadores de GRADE a diversas iniciativas públicas para controlar la emergencia y mejorar la respuesta del estado, apenas iniciada la pandemia, es una muestra de ese trabajo y contribuyó adicionalmente a la apertura de espacios de colaboración en esta coyuntura específica. Los esfuerzos, fallas y logros de la experiencia de trabajo durante la crisis del Covid-19 dejaron también muchos aprendizajes, desde las posibilidades de la virtualidad para generar y compartir conocimiento, hasta formas de acercarse y colaborar con los funcionarios públicos, aportando evidencia y conocimiento oportuno, práctico y confiable.

Notas

- * Este *IDS Bulletin* se creó como parte del programa de traducción de conocimiento Covid-19 Responses for Equity (CORE), dirigido por el Institute of Development Studies (IDS), que apoya la traducción de conocimiento que surge de la iniciativa CORE. Con el apoyo del Centro Internacional de Investigaciones para el Desarrollo (IDRC), el programa CORE integra 20 proyectos para comprender los impactos socioeconómicos de la pandemia, perfeccionar las respuestas actuales y generar mejores opciones de políticas para la recuperación. La investigación está a cargo de investigadores, universidades, laboratorios de ideas y organizaciones civiles locales en 42 países de África, Asia, América Latina y Oriente Medio. Las opiniones aquí expresadas son las de los autores y no reflejan necesariamente las opiniones del IDRC, su Junta Directiva ni del IDS. Para obtener más información, póngase en contacto con: c19re.org.
- 1 Ricardo Fort, Investigador Sénior, Grupo de Análisis para el Desarrollo (GRADE), Perú.
- 2 Lorena Alcázar, Investigadora Sénior, GRADE, Perú.
- 3 Los niveles socio económicos (NSE) son categorías que se utilizan en Perú para clasificar a los hogares según su nivel de ingresos, en base a información Censal y de encuestas de hogares. El nivel más alto es el A y el más bajo es el E.
- 4 En particular la Directora de Prestaciones Sociales Complementarias y su equipo.
- 5 **Página web de Mankachay Perú.**

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(Re-)Thinking a Collaborative Research Model After Covid-19: Introducing Colabora.Lat*

Jennifer Cyr,¹ Matías Bianchi,² Ignacio F. Lara³ and Florencia Coda⁴

Abstract Colabora.Lat is a project that examines the promise and the utility of collaboration for crafting better public policy in response to dynamic, complex problems such as the Covid-19 pandemic. Ultimately, in addition to being a project on collaboration, we found that the project itself was best carried out with our partners in a collaborative way. In this article, we identify four lessons that we learned as we sought to oversee a project on collaboration in a more collaborative way. These lessons should be applicable to any context that, like a pandemic, is unstable and dynamic in nature.

Keywords collaboration, collaborative governance, pandemic policy, policymaking, public policy, Latin America.

1 Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic produced a major disruption in every aspect of our lives. Governments around the world were forced to act in a context of great unpredictability, straining state capacity and aggravating existing situations of vulnerability. Although global in nature, the pandemic affected Latin America disproportionately (ECLAC 2022). In response, granting institutions sought to better understand how a global pandemic interrupted 'normal' policymaking in Latin America.

Along these lines, Asuntos del Sur, an organisation dedicated to promoting political innovations that can foster more equal, inclusive, and participatory democracies, received a generous grant from Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC) to analyse governmental and non-governmental policy responses to the pandemic. The primary goal was to learn from those responses as a way to identify more effective governance strategies for other problems that are equally as complex as a



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pandemic. This article details our experiences as managers of a multi-year, multi-actor, multisectoral project.

In our project, called *Colabora.Lat*, we chose to study collaboration as a potentially powerful approach to pandemic governance. It was also a **means** for carrying out the project – a tool, in other words, for approaching project management in general. The following pages outline some of the lessons learned as we sought to navigate a project on collaboration in a more collaborative way. In section 2, we speak to the role that collaboration played in the policymaking processes we studied then in section 3 we address how collaboration became, ultimately, vital to how we **managed** the project during a pandemic. In section 4, we identify four lessons regarding the utility of collaboration for undertaking a project in a complex environment such as a pandemic. We end in section 5 with some concluding thoughts.

2 Centring collaboration as a policymaking tool

Colabora.Lat was founded to understand how countries in Latin America responded to the Covid-19 pandemic, especially when it came to their most vulnerable populations. We asked the following questions. Were governments effective in protecting citizens in situations of extreme vulnerability? What type of response had the most impact? Could this response be modelled such that governments could replicate it when dealing with problems as complex as a pandemic, including climate change or forced migration?

An obvious concern for the project initially was finding a central theme or phenomenon to anchor the multi-year, multi-country, multi-actor project. Approaches to policymaking are multiple. As we began reading the literature and exploring initial cases, we identified one approach – collaboration – as a potentially vital tool for producing effective policy responses to the pandemic. A collaborative approach to policymaking – called collaborative governance – brings together multiple actors from distinct areas, including but not limited to different levels of government, non-governmental organisations, the private sector, and social organisations, to share the difficult work of crafting policy. In a collaborative governance model, each actor should have influence; any perceived positional hierarchies should be mitigated; and all participants should be there of their own volition.⁵

Collaborative governance is particularly well suited to treat a 'wicked' problem such as a pandemic (Emerson and Nabatchi 2015). Like other wicked problems, the pandemic was and is complex and multidimensional. It has affected multiple policy areas, including health, education, and the economy, and has crossed jurisdictional borders both within and across countries. We hypothesised that more effective policy responses to the pandemic would involve bringing together distinct actors

Table 1 The communities and geographic areas under consideration in Colabora.Lat

Country	Institutional affiliation of research team	Geographical area(s)	Community/group
Argentina	National University of San Martín	San Martín, Tres de Febrero, Quilmes, Avellaneda	N/A – territorial focus
Bolivia	FES Bolivia	La Paz, El Alto	Women street vendors
Chile	University of Santiago de Chile, Catholic University of Chile	Renca, Cerro Navia, Maipú, La Pintana (Metropolitan region)	N/A – territorial focus
Colombia	Icesi University	Cali, Puerto Tejada, Buenaventura	Afro-Colombian youth
Guatemala	Diálogos	Mazatenango, Cobán, Amatitlán	Urban youth
Mexico	Nosotrxs	Mexico City, northern border	Migrants, domestic women workers

Note FES – Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

Source Colabora.Lat.

associated with each policy area and jurisdiction. Each actor could offer unique resources, interests, and expertise as policies were negotiated. Working collaboratively, we thought, policymakers could forge more nuanced responses to the pandemic that would be better attuned to the challenges that communities in situations of vulnerability face. A collaborative response is therefore best positioned to respond to the pandemic.

Our intuitions about the importance of collaboration were sustained by the literature (Ansell and Gash 2008; Bingham 2011; Emerson and Nabatchi 2015). The project, consequently, sought to examine the role of collaboration in the different responses to the pandemic. Did collaboration matter? To what extent were government responses collaborative? Were those collaborative responses more effective? What did communities do when faced with a weak government response? Did collaboration matter in **their** efforts? Our initial quantitative analysis suggested that there was a relationship between collaborative policymaking and a reduction in the worst health outcomes associated with Covid-19 (Cyr *et al.* 2021). Nevertheless, we did not understand **how** and **why** collaboration took place, **who** were the actors involved, and **what** the challenges to collaboration might be.

To answer these more substantive questions, we worked with teams of researchers in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Guatemala, and Mexico. Each team was tasked with identifying communities in situations of vulnerability in their country and then talking to community members, national and local government officials, civil society, and the private sector to

assess governmental and non-governmental responses to the pandemic and the extent to which collaboration helped shape those responses. Table 1 summarises the different groups and geographical areas studied in each country.

While the project still has one year left to go, Colabora.Lat has completed data collection and undergone an initial analysis of the policy responses to the pandemic. In general terms, the six case studies revealed that the pandemic disproportionately affected the selected communities. Additionally, government responses targeting those communities were weak or non-existent. Collaboration was rarely pursued in the (few) governmental policies designed to address the specific needs of the communities we studied.

The general lack of a government-led response to address the specific needs of vulnerable groups has meant that these communities struggled during the worst of the pandemic to access necessary goods and services, including preventive health care and educational resources. This was the case especially compared to the rest of the population in each country. Yet, collaboration by non-governmental actors **was** consequential in assisting groups in vulnerable situations. Often, these collaborative efforts emerged in the absence of a government-led response and were driven by the need to pool resources across different groups. These examples of **social collaborative governance** (Cyr *et al.* 2021) appeared in all six countries.

Colabora.Lat will yield conclusions about the potential and the limitations of collaborative governance in a region such as Latin America, where institutions tend to be weak and government resources are scarce. These conclusions will principally be derived from the extended data collection process that took place over several years in the six countries listed in Table 1. One question, implicit from early on, was how to create and oversee a multi-year, multidimensional project that benefited from the expertise, knowledge, and interests of each of the consortium members, while also privileging a set of previously defined themes that were central to the overall project. In addition to being the substantive focus of the project, collaboration ultimately became crucial to our approach to project management, as we outline in more detail in section 3.

3 Managing our project collaboratively

Colabora.Lat is made up of a team at Asuntos del Sur as well as researchers from universities and/or thinktanks in six different countries. We organised the team formally into a consortium, where Asuntos del Sur serves as the executive coordinator of the project and the consortium's legal representation. Colabora.Lat also has an Academic Board, where several internationally renowned scholars are available to consult on the overall research design of the project.

From the beginning, we wanted Colabora.Lat to be collaborative in nature, but we also recognised that this kind of international development project inherently includes hierarchies that would limit the 'democratic' or deliberative nature of the collaboration that takes place. For example, the funder's goals necessarily become the project's principal objectives. These goals are typically not open to discussion or feedback. Collaboration on the overall arc of the project is not typically possible. Moreover, although a project may strive to treat partners as equals, in practice, only some individuals actually manage the project. Those individuals are responsible for ensuring that the terms of the project are fully realised and must, consequently, work to keep partners on track as months and years go by.

Given the impediments to adopting a comprehensively collaborative approach – what Ramirez and Kora (2020) might call an 'integrative' approach – to our project, the Asuntos del Sur team sought to incorporate collaboration where we could. This involved, for us, establishing a channel of constant communication and exchange with the other consortium members. We worked collectively to determine how we would achieve each of the project's principal objectives. We solicited feedback and discussed problems as a group. We invited our partners to serve as peer reviewers of each other's work. Ultimately, we strived to ensure that all research participants felt invested in the project's goals and the work we collectively produced. We sought to ensure that everyone had a voice. Ultimately, our project included many of the indicators associated with a 'collaborative arrangement', as outlined by Ramirez and Kora (*ibid.*).

In our attempt to flatten the hierarchies underpinning our project, we took away four lessons that will undoubtedly shape how we think about collaboration moving forward. These lessons should allow us to more easily apply a collaborative approach to project management for other types of complex, multidimensional problems in the future. Collaboration can breed collaboration, providing a kind of institutional readiness for those groups that work to establish collaborative relationships.

4 Lessons learned

Lesson 1: Collaboration is vital for project management during a pandemic

Our research has revealed that collaboration can be incredibly useful for crafting effective policy responses to a pandemic. Our work on the project suggested that collaboration can also be vital for managing a project during a pandemic. This was our first key lesson. We initiated our project in August 2020, during what we would later call the first of multiple 'waves' of contagion. At that time, however, we did not know how the pandemic would evolve. Indeed, research during a pandemic is marked with unpredictability.

Nevertheless, we began our project with the idea of undertaking more traditional, face-to-face data collection, including surveys, interviews, and focus groups, as soon as the 'worst' of the pandemic had passed. The pandemic raged on, however, and we came to understand that talking to people on the ground was going to be ethically and practically unfeasible for an unpredictable amount of time. What data collection, we asked, could be done during the first year of our project without risking the health of our team and also the communities we sought to study?

In a (virtual) meeting with the consortium, we discussed how to adapt the first year of our project. Asuntos del Sur arrived at the meeting with a proposal to undertake a cross-national study of 18 countries. We subsequently assigned three different countries to each of the six teams and asked them to analyse the vaccine acquisition process. Our goal was to systematically compare and understand why some governments in those 18 Latin American countries were better than others at obtaining vaccines. In discussion with our consortium members, we ultimately decided that each member would carry out more intensive case studies not only on vaccine acquisition, but also on vaccine distribution and in some cases vaccine development. They would do this in one country, not in the three we had originally proposed.

Collaboration was crucial to this early adaptation to our project. Asuntos del Sur wanted the consortium members to undertake a new activity that was not included in the original terms of agreement. Without a consensus on the proposed change to the project, it is not clear that the adaptation would have been successful. Collaboration, we argue, was crucial to obtaining that buy-in so early on in our project.

It is difficult to predict the obstacles that might emerge while overseeing an international development project. The pandemic, however, raised the level of uncertainty considerably. The context in which we were operating was extremely volatile.

Quarantine policies, including the rules for travel or for simply circulating in one's own community, were in flux. Our collaborative approach to Colabora.Lat provided a space where we could work through this unpredictability collectively.

Lesson 2: Collaboration requires trust. Yet trust is harder to build in a pandemic setting

Our research with vulnerable communities in Latin America revealed the importance of trust for forging collaborative relationships between different actors. A lack of trust, in particular, was a key impediment to fruitful collaborations between state and non-state actors. For example, conversations with community leaders in Chile, Guatemala, Colombia, and Mexico revealed that they were sceptical of collaborating with their

government. The state had, for so long, seemed incapable or unwilling to work with them and to address their needs. Why should they, as community members, believe that collaboration in response to the pandemic would be any different?

Trust is vital for collaborative project management as well. Partners must feel safe in a collaborative space to communicate their opinions, express disagreement, push another member on a point, or hold someone accountable. During a pandemic – where mobility is restricted – it is harder to build the kind of trust that is necessary for partners to participate fully in a project. This is because, among other reasons, more conventional mechanisms for fostering trust are unavailable.

For example, social interactions and face-to-face encounters between consortium members were not possible during the first two years of our project. Virtual communication was the sole channel for interactions of any kind. Indeed, virtual communication became the cornerstone of how we operated at Colabora.Lat. To compensate for a lack of face-to-face interaction, we set up multiple channels of virtual communication. We organised monthly virtual meetings, for example. These helped us communicate advances in the project, and allowed consortium members to ask questions, share experiences, and resolve any issues they might have. The regular meetings represented moments, not only for checking in, but also for articulating suggestions, expressing doubts, and modifying plans.

We also set up a WhatsApp group, where we could share individual accomplishments or circulate news items or articles associated with our project. We made time for bilateral meetings with each consortium member. We encouraged different members to work with each other on facets of the project. Finally, we created a monthly newsletter for sharing our work and to include project-specific announcements and deadlines. For better or for worse, the computer screen became the primary site for trust-building in Colabora.Lat. We decided to open up multiple channels for communication in the hope that more spontaneous interactions and collective sharing might take place in at least some of them.

Despite these efforts, building a sense of trust and community amongst the consortium members was not easy. Virtual encounters are not really conducive to bonding, building friendships, and communicating more spontaneously. This was especially the case with those partners with whom Asuntos del Sur had not worked in the past. With these partners, we had no previous relationship or experience to indicate how our collaborative relationship within Colabora.Lat might unfold. We had to take a sort of collective leap of faith that we would all be equally engaged and dedicated to the project, and we had to work to make that happen once everyone had signed on to the project.

Given the difficulties of building trust in complex, dynamic contexts such as a pandemic, project managers that seek to work collaboratively may reasonably decide to work with partners with whom they have already successfully worked in the past rather than forge new relationships with well-qualified but unknown individuals or groups. And, just like the community members in Chile, Guatemala, Colombia, and Mexico, who resisted collaborating with the state during the pandemic given their previous negative experiences with government, project managers will likely **refuse** to engage with actors or organisations with whom they did not easily work in the past. The restricted opportunities for trust-building during a pandemic may, over time, impede the creation of new and potentially fruitful partnerships. On the other hand, the pandemic may help to consolidate existing relationships, enabling partners to more easily activate and collaborate on problems in the future.

Lesson 3: The virtual realm, while vital for research during the pandemic, must be viewed as one of many tools for the successful development of a collaborative project

During the pandemic, virtual spaces were indispensable for working through and carrying out our collaborative project. Indeed, the pandemic revealed the real advantages of carrying out at least some development work online. Project teams can organise a meeting with relative ease, regardless of each individual member's location. They can bring together notable activists, leaders, researchers, and so forth, without incurring outrageous costs or investing much time or energy in logistics that are particular to an in-person activity.

Indeed, virtual events can be a useful format for meeting new people. For example, we held the first regional (virtual) event of Colabora.Lat, at the end of the first year. Our Colombian partners invited two scholars to the event who spoke movingly and compellingly about the specific challenges that Afro-Colombians faced along the country's Pacific coast. We later recruited one of those scholars to write about a successful instance of collaboration that emerged in response to those challenges, called the Pacific Task Force. If that event would have been in person, it is unlikely these scholars would have attended. The virtual space can be hugely impactful in eliminating distance and bringing different types of actors together. Indeed, moving forward, it is likely that research projects in general will retain some sort of hybrid modality.

Nevertheless, online fatigue is real, and the internet, while expanding some opportunities in access is also, ultimately, limited in its reach. A wholly virtual approach to a project would inevitably exclude individuals and groups who lack access to the internet. Given these challenges, project managers should carefully consider how much of a project can and should be carried out online. This seems especially germane to collaborative

projects, which depend upon the participation and engagement of the entire team and also strive to be inclusive.

Indeed, while virtual spaces are crucial for coordination and collaboration, especially during a pandemic, the value of face-to-face contact for creating community and solidifying common goals should not be underestimated. In Colabora.Lat, the pandemic limited the extent to which we could organise in-person activities, as mentioned above. Despite our best efforts to open up lines of communication with and for our members, our inability to meet in person earlier in the project likely stunted our ability to coalesce as a group.

Our inability to meet in person also likely stymied the progress we achieved as a group. For example, well into our second year of the project, our consortium partners, in a monthly meeting, raised questions about the definition of collaboration we were using in the project. This was not a small issue, given that our project was on collaborative governance. Yet the consortium had grounded its early research in the literature on collaborative governance, where definitions are explicit. Moreover, circulating a definition prior to actually measuring how collaboration worked on the ground seemed unnecessary – and even counterproductive – to our goal of inductively developing a conceptualisation of collaborative governance for Latin America. Nevertheless, after some discussion as a group, we agreed to write up, circulate, and solicit feedback on an explicit conceptualisation of collaborative governance with which we would work moving forward. That short document became a valuable reference tool for us – indeed, it would have been useful to have had it sooner. If we had had opportunities to meet and socialise in person during the first years of the project, it is possible that lingering, unspoken, but ultimately shared concerns would have been revealed and resolved sooner.

Given the limitations of virtual work, a more comprehensive collaborative approach to project management may only be possible with at least periodic, in-person encounters that allow member relationships to grow and connect beyond the specific exigencies of the project. Indeed, as pandemic restrictions lifted, Asuntos del Sur began to make short site visits with consortium members. These in-person meetings were vital for creating (face-to-face) moments of negotiation on process and outcomes. They also shortened the distance between actors and added much-needed humanity to our largely virtual relationship.

Lesson 4: Membership autonomy is key to collaborative project management during a pandemic

Collaboration works because each actor brings their resources, expertise, and knowledge to the table. A collaborative management style must work to maximise that diversity. It is key to accessing the gains that collaboration provides. In practice,

how this diversity is maximised is likely to depend on the people involved and the context in which a project takes place.

In Colabora.Lat, it became clear that a certain amount of membership autonomy was the best and perhaps sole way to nurture the different skillsets and expertise of our consortium members. On the one hand, the pandemic demanded that we relax any sort of organisational hierarchies we may have attempted to impose as a way to effectively oversee the project. Our consortium members lived in six different countries, with six distinct (and often dynamic) sets of quarantine rules. They operated under very different levels of contagion threat. Their personal levels of risk acceptance varied. Additionally, given that we could not meet directly with our partners on the ground, it made sense to embrace membership autonomy from the beginning.

But our members also clearly valued autonomy from a research perspective as well. Asuntos del Sur could provide a set of general questions for members to keep in mind as they spoke with people on the ground. We could remind our members of the issue areas we had decided to prioritise as we studied policymaking. Beyond that, however, it made little sense to manage or oversee how each partner actually carried out their part of the research project. Different members had specific research interests and areas of expertise that they (quite reasonably) sought to utilise for this project.

For example, rather than work with **groups** in situations of vulnerability, our Chilean and Argentine partners chose to study **municipalities**, leveraging their expertise in, among other things, territorial politics. This choice required the project managers to rethink how all six cases – four of which studied groups plus two that studied geographic areas – would cohere. We also had to adapt our expectations regarding with whom these research teams would speak and in terms of the overall scope of their findings. In the end, the project has clearly benefited from the geographic focus that the two countries adopted. Because their focus was less on groups and more on jurisdictional units, the conclusions that were drawn shifted away from government responses to unique community problems (which we sought to understand initially) and turned to more general findings, such as the role that schools played as spaces for social contention and how intersectionality was key for elaborating any kind of response to the pandemic.

5 Concluding thoughts

Colabora.Lat is a project that has strived to incorporate collaboration **as a tool** with which the project might more effectively study collaboration **as an end goal** when it comes to more responsive governance. Over the past few years, we have learned valuable lessons in terms of how to approach project

management and also how to approach policymaking in the face of 'wicked' problems, such as a pandemic. Yet, the four lessons presented in section 4 are likely to apply to any project that takes place in more dynamic, unstable contexts, such as a pandemic.

As we have suggested above, collaboration can be a useful tool for project management in these rapidly changing contexts. Collaboration works through an explicit engagement with the individual expertise, knowledge, and resource-set of all the actors involved. This kind of 'crowdsourcing' becomes incredibly useful in less stable and more fluid contexts, which are often unpredictable and may require adaptability, such as when we had to delay traditional data collection during the first year. In a more collaborative set-up, the burdens of unpredictability and adaptability can be shared. Collective responses to these burdens will benefit from the wisdom and experience of all involved. In this sense, the sum of a collaborative project, such as our consortium, can be greater than the individual parts.

Notes

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- 5 For more information, see the [Colabora.Lat website](http://Colabora.Lat).

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(Re)pensar un modelo de investigación colaborativa después del Covid-19: presentación de Colabora.Lat*

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Traducido del inglés por Atlas Translations

Resumen Colabora.Lat es un proyecto que examina la promesa y la utilidad de la colaboración para elaborar mejores políticas públicas en respuesta a problemas dinámicos y complejos como la pandemia de Covid-19. En última instancia, además de ser un proyecto sobre colaboración, descubrimos que el desarrollo del proyecto en sí fluía mejor si trabajábamos con nuestros socios de forma colaborativa. En este artículo, identificamos cuatro lecciones que aprendimos al intentar supervisar un proyecto sobre colaboración de una forma más colaborativa. Estas lecciones deberían ser aplicables a cualquier contexto que, como una pandemia, sea de carácter inestable y dinámico.

Palabras clave colaboración, gobernanza colaborativa, políticas de pandemia, elaboración de políticas, políticas públicas, América Latina.

1 Introducción

La pandemia de Covid-19 produjo un gran trastorno en todos los aspectos de nuestras vidas. Los gobiernos de todo el mundo se vieron obligados a actuar en un contexto de gran imprevisibilidad, poniendo a prueba la capacidad del estado y agravando las situaciones de vulnerabilidad existentes. Si bien fue de carácter mundial, la pandemia afectó de manera desproporcionada a América Latina (Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe [CEPAL] 2022). En respuesta, las instituciones que conceden subvenciones trataron de



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comprender mejor la forma en que la pandemia interrumpió la elaboración "normal" de políticas en América Latina.

En esta línea, Asuntos del Sur, una organización dedicada a promover innovaciones políticas que puedan fomentar democracias más igualitarias, inclusivas y participativas, recibió una generosa subvención del Centro Internacional de Investigaciones para el Desarrollo (IDRC) de Canadá para analizar las políticas de respuesta a la pandemia gubernamentales y no gubernamentales. El objetivo principal era aprender de esas respuestas como forma de identificar estrategias de gobernanza más eficaces para otros problemas igual de complejos que una pandemia. Este artículo detalla nuestras experiencias como gestores de un proyecto plurianual y multisectorial que contó con la participación de múltiples actores.

En nuestro proyecto, llamado Colabora.Lat, elegimos estudiar la colaboración como un enfoque potencialmente poderoso en relación con la gobernanza durante una pandemia. También era un **medio** para llevar a cabo el proyecto, es decir, una herramienta para abordar la gestión de proyectos en general. En las páginas siguientes se describen algunas de las lecciones aprendidas al intentar llevar adelante un proyecto sobre colaboración de una forma más colaborativa. En la sección 2, hablamos del papel que desempeñó la colaboración en los procesos de elaboración de políticas que estudiamos y, a continuación, en la sección 3, abordamos de qué manera la colaboración se volvió, en última instancia, fundamental para la forma en que **gestionamos** el proyecto durante una pandemia. En la sección 4, identificamos cuatro lecciones relativas a la utilidad de la colaboración para emprender un proyecto en un entorno tan complejo como una pandemia. Terminamos en la sección 5 con algunas reflexiones finales.

2 Centrar la colaboración como herramienta de elaboración de políticas

Colabora.Lat se fundó para entender cómo respondieron los países de América Latina a la pandemia de Covid-19, especialmente en lo que respecta a sus poblaciones más vulnerables. Hicimos las siguientes preguntas. ¿Fueron los gobiernos eficaces a la hora de proteger a sus ciudadanos en situaciones de extrema vulnerabilidad? ¿Qué tipo de respuesta tuvo más impacto? ¿Podría modelarse esta respuesta de tal modo que los gobiernos pudieran replicarla a la hora de afrontar problemas tan complejos como una pandemia, incluidos el cambio climático o las migraciones forzosas?

Al principio, una de las preocupaciones obvias del proyecto era encontrar un tema o fenómeno central que sirviera de base para un proyecto plurianual, multinacional y con múltiples actores. Los enfoques para la elaboración de políticas son múltiples.

Cuando empezamos a leer la bibliografía y a explorar los casos iniciales, identificamos un enfoque (la colaboración) que serviría como herramienta potencialmente vital para producir políticas de respuesta eficaces a la pandemia. Un enfoque colaborativo a la elaboración de políticas (denominado gobernanza colaborativa) reúne a múltiples actores de distintos ámbitos, incluidos, entre otros, distintos niveles de gobierno, organizaciones no gubernamentales, el sector privado y organizaciones sociales, para compartir la difícil tarea de elaborar políticas. En un modelo de gobernanza colaborativa, cada actor debe tener influencia, por lo que cualquier percepción de jerarquía posicional debe mitigarse; y todos los participantes deben estar allí por voluntad propia.⁵

La gobernanza colaborativa es especialmente adecuada para tratar un problema "perverso" como una pandemia (Emerson y Nabatchi 2015). Al igual que otros problemas perversos, la pandemia era y continúa siendo una situación compleja y multidimensional. Ha afectado el desarrollo de políticas de diferentes ámbitos, como la salud, la educación y la economía, y ha traspasado las fronteras jurisdiccionales tanto dentro de países como entre estos. Nuestra hipótesis era que las políticas de respuesta a la pandemia más eficaces implicarían reunir a distintos actores asociados a cada ámbito político y jurisdicción. Cada actor podría ofrecer recursos, intereses y conocimientos únicos a la hora de negociar las políticas. Pensamos que, al trabajar de forma colaborativa, los responsables del desarrollo de políticas podrían forjar respuestas a la pandemia más detalladas y mejor adaptadas a los desafíos que enfrentan las comunidades en situación de vulnerabilidad. Una respuesta colaborativa es, por tanto, la mejor posicionada para responder a la pandemia.

Nuestras intuiciones sobre la importancia de la colaboración se vieron respaldadas por la bibliografía (Ansell y Gash 2008; Bingham 2011; Emerson y Nabatchi 2015). En consecuencia, el proyecto pretendía examinar el papel de la colaboración en las distintas respuestas a la pandemia. ¿Importaba la colaboración? ¿En qué medida fueron colaborativas las respuestas de los gobiernos? ¿Fueron más eficaces estas respuestas colaborativas? ¿Qué hicieron las comunidades ante la débil respuesta gubernamental? ¿Tuvo la colaboración un papel importante en **sus** esfuerzos? Nuestro análisis cuantitativo inicial sugería la existencia de una relación entre la elaboración colaborativa de políticas y la reducción de los peores resultados sanitarios asociados al Covid-19 (Cyr *et al.* 2021). Sin embargo, no entendíamos **cómo** ni **por qué** se producía la colaboración, **quiénes** eran los actores implicados y **cuáles** podían ser los desafíos para la colaboración.

Para responder a estas preguntas más sustanciales, trabajamos con equipos de investigadores de Argentina, Bolivia, Chile,

Tabla 1 Comunidades y zonas geográficas consideradas en Colabora.Lat

País	Afiliación institucional del equipo de investigación	Área(s) geopolítica(s)	Comunidad/Grupo
Argentina	Universidad Nacional de San Martín	San Martín, Tres de Febrero, Quilmes, Avellaneda	N/C – foco territorial
Bolivia	FES Bolivia	La Paz, El Alto	Mujeres vendedoras callejeras
Chile	Universidad de Santiago de Chile, Universidad Católica de Chile	Renca, Cerro Navia, Maipú, La Pintana (región metropolitana)	N/C – foco territorial
Colombia	Universidad Icesi	Cali, Puerto Tejada, Buenaventura	Jóvenes afrocolombianos
Guatemala	Diálogos	Mazatenango, Cobán, Amatitlán	Jóvenes de áreas urbanas
México	Nosotrxs	Ciudad de México, frontera norte	Migrantes, trabajadoras domésticas

Nota FES – Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

Fuente Colabora.Lat.

Colombia, Guatemala y México. A cada equipo se le encomendó la tarea de identificar comunidades en situación de vulnerabilidad en su país y, a continuación, hablar con los miembros de la comunidad, los funcionarios de gobierno locales y nacionales, la sociedad civil y el sector privado para evaluar las respuestas gubernamentales y no gubernamentales a la pandemia y el grado en que la colaboración ayudó a dar forma a esas respuestas. La Tabla 1 resume los distintos grupos y zonas geográficas estudiados en cada país.

Si bien al proyecto aún le queda un año de trabajo, Colabora.Lat ha completado la recogida de datos y ha realizado un análisis inicial de las políticas de respuesta a la pandemia. En términos generales, los seis estudios de casos revelaron que la pandemia afectó de forma desproporcionada a las comunidades seleccionadas. Además, las respuestas gubernamentales dirigidas a esas comunidades fueron débiles o inexistentes. Rara vez se buscó la colaboración en las (pocas) políticas gubernamentales diseñadas para abordar las necesidades específicas de las comunidades que estudiamos.

La falta general de una respuesta gubernamental para atender las necesidades específicas de los grupos vulnerables ha hecho que estas comunidades hayan tenido que luchar durante lo peor de la pandemia para acceder a los bienes y servicios necesarios, incluida la atención sanitaria preventiva y los recursos educativos. Sobre todo en comparación con el resto de la población de cada país. Sin embargo, la colaboración de los agentes no gubernamentales **fue** decisiva para ayudar a los

grupos en situación de vulnerabilidad. A menudo, estos esfuerzos de colaboración surgieron en ausencia de una respuesta dirigida por el gobierno y estuvieron impulsados por la necesidad de aunar recursos entre diferentes grupos. Estos ejemplos de **gobernanza colaborativa social** (Cyr *et al.* 2021) pudieron verse en los seis países.

Colabora.Lat aportará conclusiones sobre el potencial y las limitaciones de la gobernanza colaborativa en una región como América Latina, donde las instituciones suelen ser débiles y los recursos gubernamentales escasos. Estas conclusiones se derivarán principalmente del amplio proceso de recopilación de datos que tuvo lugar a lo largo de varios años en los seis países enumerados en la Tabla 1. Una cuestión implícita desde el principio era cómo crear y supervisar un proyecto plurianual y multidimensional que se beneficiara de la experiencia, los conocimientos y los intereses de cada uno de los miembros del consorcio, y priorizar, a la vez, un conjunto de temas previamente definidos que eran fundamentales para el proyecto en general. Además de constituir el eje central del proyecto, la colaboración acabó siendo crucial para nuestro planteamiento de la gestión del proyecto, como explicamos con más detalle en la sección 3.

3 Gestión colaborativa del proyecto

Colabora.Lat está formado por un equipo de Asuntos del Sur e investigadores de universidades o laboratorios de ideas de seis países diferentes. Organizamos el equipo formalmente en un consorcio, en el que Asuntos del Sur actúa como coordinador ejecutivo del proyecto y representación legal del consorcio. Colabora.Lat también cuenta con un Consejo Académico, en el que varios académicos de renombre internacional están disponibles para asesorar sobre el diseño general de la investigación del proyecto.

Desde el principio, quisimos que Colabora.Lat fuera de carácter colaborativo, pero también reconocimos que este tipo de proyecto de desarrollo internacional incluye intrínsecamente jerarquías que limitarían la naturaleza "democrática" o deliberativa de la colaboración que tiene lugar. Por ejemplo, las metas del patrocinador se convierten necesariamente en los objetivos principales del proyecto. Estos objetivos no suelen estar abiertos al debate ni a comentarios. La colaboración en el arco general del proyecto no suele ser posible. Además, aunque un proyecto se esfuerce por tratar a los socios como iguales, en la práctica, solo algunas personas gestionan realmente el proyecto. Estas personas son responsables de garantizar que los términos del proyecto se cumplan plenamente y, por consiguiente, deben trabajar para mantener a los socios en el buen camino a medida que pasan los meses y los años.

Dados los impedimentos para adoptar un enfoque de colaboración integral (lo que Ramírez y Kora [2020] podrían

denominar un enfoque "integrador") en nuestro proyecto, el equipo de Asuntos del Sur trató de incorporar la colaboración siempre que fuese posible. Esto supuso, para nosotros, establecer un canal de comunicación e intercambio constante con los demás miembros del consorcio. Trabajamos de forma colectiva para determinar cómo alcanzaríamos cada uno de los principales objetivos del proyecto. Pedimos opiniones y debatimos los problemas en grupo. Invitamos a nuestros socios a actuar como revisores del trabajo de los demás. En última instancia, nos esforzamos por garantizar que todos los participantes de la investigación se sintieran incluidos en los objetivos del proyecto y en el trabajo que produjimos colectivamente. Procuramos que todos pudieran hacer oír su voz. En definitiva, nuestro proyecto incluía muchos de los indicadores asociados a un "acuerdo de colaboración", tal y como lo describen Ramirez y Kora (*ibid.*).

En nuestro intento de desdibujar las jerarquías en las que se basaba nuestro proyecto, pudimos extraer cuatro lecciones que sin duda influirán en nuestra forma de concebir la colaboración en el futuro. Estas lecciones deberían permitirnos aplicar más fácilmente en el futuro un enfoque colaborativo a la gestión de proyectos para otros tipos de problemas complejos y multidimensionales. La colaboración puede engendrar más colaboración, y proporcionar así una especie de disposición institucional para los grupos que trabajan para establecer relaciones de colaboración.

4 Lecciones aprendidas

Lección 1: La colaboración es vital para la gestión de proyectos durante una pandemia

Nuestra investigación ha revelado que la colaboración puede ser increíblemente útil para elaborar respuestas de políticas eficaces ante una pandemia. Nuestro trabajo en el proyecto sugirió que la colaboración también puede ser vital para gestionar un proyecto durante una pandemia. Esta fue nuestra primera lección clave. Iniciamos nuestro proyecto en agosto de 2020, durante lo que más tarde llamaríamos la primera de múltiples "olas" de contagio. Sin embargo, en aquel momento no sabíamos cómo evolucionaría la pandemia. De hecho, la investigación durante una pandemia está marcada por la imprevisibilidad.

No obstante, comenzamos nuestro proyecto con la idea de emprender una recopilación de datos más tradicional, de forma presencial, que incluyera encuestas, entrevistas y grupos focales, tan pronto como "lo peor" de la pandemia hubiera pasado. Sin embargo, la pandemia continuó y comprendimos que hablar con la gente sobre el terreno sería ética y prácticamente inviable durante un período tan impredecible. Nos preguntamos qué recopilación de datos podría hacerse durante el primer año de nuestro proyecto sin poner en peligro la salud de nuestro equipo ni de las comunidades que pretendíamos estudiar.

En una reunión con el consorcio llevada a cabo de manera virtual, debatimos cómo adaptar el primer año de nuestro proyecto. Asuntos del Sur llegó a la reunión con la propuesta de realizar un estudio transnacional de 18 países. Posteriormente, asignamos tres países diferentes a cada uno de los seis equipos y les pedimos que analizaran el proceso de adquisición de vacunas. Nuestro objetivo era comparar y comprender de forma sistemática por qué algunos gobiernos de esos 18 países latinoamericanos tuvieron más éxito que otros en la obtención de vacunas. Tras debatirlo con los miembros de nuestro consorcio, finalmente decidimos que cada uno de ellos llevaría a cabo estudios de casos más intensivos no solo sobre la adquisición de vacunas, sino también sobre su distribución y, en algunos casos, sobre su desarrollo. Lo harían en un solo país, no en los tres que habíamos propuesto inicialmente.

La colaboración fue crucial para esta adaptación temprana a nuestro proyecto. Asuntos del Sur quería que los miembros del consorcio emprendieran una nueva actividad que no estaba incluida en los términos originales del acuerdo. Sin un consenso sobre el cambio propuesto en el proyecto, no queda claro si la adaptación hubiera tenido éxito. En nuestra opinión, la colaboración fue crucial para conseguir esta aceptación en una fase tan temprana del proyecto.

Es difícil predecir los obstáculos que podrían surgir al supervisar un proyecto de desarrollo internacional. La pandemia, sin embargo, elevó considerablemente el nivel de incertidumbre. El contexto en el que operábamos era extremadamente volátil.

Las políticas de cuarentena, incluidas las normas para viajar o simplemente para circular en la propia comunidad, eran cambiantes. Nuestro enfoque colaborativo de Colabora. Lat nos proporcionó un espacio en el que pudimos trabajar colectivamente para superar esta imprevisibilidad.

Lección 2: La colaboración requiere confianza. Sin embargo, es más difícil establecer la confianza durante una pandemia

Nuestra investigación con comunidades vulnerables de América Latina reveló la importancia de la confianza para forjar relaciones de colaboración entre distintos actores. La falta de confianza, en particular, fue un impedimento clave para una colaboración fructífera entre actores estatales y no estatales. Por ejemplo, las conversaciones con líderes comunitarios de Chile, Guatemala, Colombia y México revelaron que se mostraban escépticos a colaborar con sus gobiernos. Durante mucho tiempo, el Estado había parecido incapaz o poco dispuesto a trabajar con ellos y a atender sus necesidades. ¿Por qué deberían ellos, como miembros de la comunidad, creer que la colaboración en respuesta a la pandemia sería diferente?

La confianza también es vital para la gestión colaborativa de proyectos. Los socios deben sentirse seguros en un espacio de colaboración para comunicar sus opiniones, expresar su desacuerdo, pedir explicaciones a otros miembros u obligar a alguien a rendir cuentas. Durante una pandemia, cuando la movilidad se ve restringida, es más difícil generar la confianza necesaria para que los socios participen plenamente en un proyecto. Esto se debe, entre otras razones, a que no se dispone de mecanismos más convencionales para fomentar la confianza.

Por ejemplo, durante los dos primeros años de nuestro proyecto, las interacciones sociales y los encuentros cara a cara entre los miembros del consorcio no fueron posibles. La comunicación virtual fue el único canal para interacciones de cualquier tipo. De hecho, la comunicación virtual se convirtió en la piedra angular de nuestro funcionamiento en Colabora.Lat. Para compensar la falta de interacción cara a cara, creamos múltiples canales de comunicación virtual. Por ejemplo, organizamos reuniones virtuales mensuales. Estas nos ayudaron a comunicar los avances del proyecto y permitieron a los miembros del consorcio hacer preguntas, compartir experiencias y resolver cualquier problema que pudieran tener. Las reuniones periódicas representaron momentos, no solo para llevar un control del proceso, sino también para articular sugerencias, expresar dudas y modificar planes.

También creamos un grupo de WhatsApp, donde podíamos compartir logros individuales o difundir noticias o artículos relacionados con nuestro proyecto. Hicimos tiempo para celebrar reuniones bilaterales con cada miembro del consorcio. Animamos a los distintos miembros a colaborar entre sí en las distintas facetas del proyecto. Por último, creamos un boletín mensual de noticias para compartir nuestro trabajo e incluir anuncios y plazos específicos de cada proyecto. Para bien o para mal, para Colabora.Lat, la pantalla de la computadora se convirtió en el principal lugar de creación de confianza. Decidimos abrir varios canales de comunicación con la esperanza de que, al menos en algunos de ellos, se produjeran interacciones más espontáneas e intercambios colectivos.

A pesar de estos esfuerzos, no fue fácil crear un sentimiento de confianza y comunidad entre los miembros del consorcio. Los encuentros virtuales no favorecen realmente el establecimiento de vínculos, la creación de amistades y una comunicación más espontánea. Este fue especialmente el caso de aquellos socios con los que Asuntos del Sur no había trabajado en el pasado. Con estos socios no teníamos ninguna relación ni experiencia previas que nos indicaran cómo podría llegar a desarrollarse nuestra relación de colaboración dentro de Colabora.Lat. Tuvimos que dar una especie de salto de fe colectivo en el que todos estaríamos igual de comprometidos y dedicados al proyecto, y tuvimos que trabajar para que así fuera una vez que todos hubiéramos firmado el proyecto.

Dadas las dificultades para generar confianza en contextos complejos y dinámicos como una pandemia, los gerentes de proyectos que pretendan trabajar de manera colaborativa pueden decidir, razonablemente, trabajar con socios con los que ya hayan trabajado con éxito en el pasado en lugar de forjar nuevas relaciones con personas o grupos bien cualificados, pero desconocidos. Y, al igual que los miembros de las comunidades de Chile, Guatemala, Colombia y México, que se resistieron a colaborar con el estado durante la pandemia debido a sus anteriores experiencias negativas con el gobierno, es probable que los gerentes de proyectos **se nieguen** a colaborar con organizaciones o actores con los que no trabajaron fácilmente en el pasado. Las escasas oportunidades para establecer confianza durante una pandemia pueden, con el tiempo, impedir la creación de asociaciones nuevas y potencialmente fructíferas. Por otro lado, la pandemia puede ayudar a consolidar las relaciones existentes, ya que permite a los socios comprometerse y colaborar más fácilmente en problemas futuros.

Lección 3: El ámbito virtual, aunque vital para la investigación durante una pandemia, debe considerarse como una de las muchas herramientas para el éxito del desarrollo de un proyecto de colaboración

Durante la pandemia, los espacios virtuales fueron indispensables para trabajar y llevar a cabo nuestro proyecto de colaboración. De hecho, la pandemia puso de manifiesto las ventajas reales de realizar al menos parte del trabajo de desarrollo en línea. Los equipos de proyecto pueden organizar una reunión con relativa facilidad, independientemente de la ubicación de cada miembro. Pueden reunir a destacados activistas, líderes, investigadores, etc., sin incurrir en costos desorbitados ni invertir mucho tiempo o energía en la logística propia de una actividad presencial.

De hecho, los eventos virtuales pueden ser un formato útil para conocer gente nueva. Por ejemplo, celebramos el primer evento regional (virtual) de Colabora.Lat, a finales del primer año. Nuestros socios colombianos invitaron al acto a dos académicos que hablaron de forma conmovedora y convincente sobre los desafíos específicos que enfrentan las personas afrocolombianas en la costa pacífica del país. Luego, pedimos a uno de esos académicos que escribiera sobre un ejemplo de colaboración fructífera que haya surgido en respuesta a esos desafíos, llamada Fuerza de Tarea del Pacífico. Si ese acto hubiera sido presencial, es poco probable que estos académicos hubieran asistido. El espacio virtual puede tener un enorme impacto a la hora de eliminar distancias y reunir a distintos tipos de actores. De hecho, de cara al futuro, es probable que los proyectos de investigación en general mantengan algún tipo de modalidad híbrida.

Sin embargo, la fatiga en línea es verdadera, y el internet, aunque amplía algunas oportunidades de acceso, también tiene, en última instancia, un alcance limitado. Un enfoque totalmente

virtual de un proyecto excluiría, inevitablemente, a personas y grupos que no tienen acceso al internet. Ante estos desafíos, los gerentes de proyectos deben considerar detenidamente qué parte de un proyecto puede y debe realizarse en línea. Esto parece aplicarse especialmente a los proyectos de colaboración, que dependen de la participación y el compromiso de todo el equipo y también se esfuerzan por ser inclusivos.

De hecho, aunque los espacios virtuales son cruciales para la coordinación y la colaboración, especialmente durante una pandemia, no debe subestimarse el valor del contacto cara a cara para crear una sensación de comunidad y consolidar objetivos comunes. En Colabora.Lat, la pandemia limitó la posibilidad de organizar actividades presenciales, como ya se ha mencionado. A pesar de nuestros esfuerzos por abrir líneas de comunicación con nuestros miembros y para ellos, la imposibilidad de reunirnos en persona durante las primeras etapas del proyecto probablemente mermó nuestra capacidad de cohesionarnos como grupo.

Nuestra incapacidad para reunirnos en persona probablemente también obstaculizó los avances que logramos como grupo. Por ejemplo, bien entrado el segundo año del proyecto, durante una reunión mensual, nuestros socios del consorcio plantearon dudas sobre la definición de colaboración que utilizábamos en el proyecto. No se trataba de un problema menor, dado que nuestro proyecto versaba sobre la gobernanza colaborativa. Sin embargo, el consorcio había basado sus primeras investigaciones en la bibliografía sobre gobernanza colaborativa, en la que las definiciones son explícitas. Además, hacer circular una definición antes de medir realmente cómo funcionaba la colaboración sobre el terreno parecía innecesario, e incluso contraproducente, para nuestro objetivo de desarrollar, de forma inductiva, una conceptualización de la gobernanza colaborativa para América Latina. No obstante, tras debatirlo en grupo, acordamos redactar, distribuir y pedir comentarios sobre una conceptualización explícita de la gobernanza colaborativa con la que trabajaríamos en el futuro. Este breve documento se convirtió en una valiosa herramienta de referencia para nosotros; de hecho, habría sido útil haberlo tenido antes. Si hubiésemos tenido la oportunidad de conocernos y socializar en persona durante los primeros años del proyecto, es posible que las inquietudes tácitas y persistentes, pero en última instancia compartidas, se hubieran revelado y resuelto antes.

Dadas las limitaciones del trabajo virtual, un enfoque colaborativo más completo de la gestión de proyectos solo puede ser posible con encuentros periódicos en persona que permitan que las relaciones entre los miembros crezcan y se conecten más allá de las exigencias específicas del proyecto. De hecho, al levantarse las restricciones por la pandemia, Asuntos del Sur empezó a realizar breves visitas sobre el terreno

con los miembros del consorcio. Estas reuniones en persona fueron vitales para crear momentos de negociación cara a cara sobre el proceso y los resultados. También acortaron la distancia entre los actores y añadieron un muy necesario grado de humanidad a nuestra relación, que era en gran medida virtual.

Lección 4: La autonomía de los miembros del equipo es vital para la gestión de proyectos durante una pandemia

La colaboración funciona porque cada actor aporta sus recursos, experiencia y conocimientos. Un estilo de gestión colaborativo debe trabajar para maximizar esa diversidad. Esto es clave para acceder a los beneficios que proporciona la colaboración. En la práctica, la forma de maximizar esta diversidad dependerá probablemente de las personas implicadas y del contexto en el que se desarrolle un proyecto.

En Colabora.Lat, quedó claro que otorgar a los miembros cierta autonomía era la mejor manera, y quizá la única, de fomentar las distintas competencias y conocimientos de los miembros de nuestro consorcio. Por un lado, la pandemia nos exigió relajar cualquier tipo de jerarquías organizativas que hubiéramos intentado imponer como forma de supervisión eficaz del proyecto. Los miembros de nuestro consorcio vivían en seis países diferentes, con seis conjuntos distintos (y a menudo dinámicos) de normas en relación con la cuarentena. Operaban bajo niveles muy diferentes de amenaza de contagio. Sus niveles personales de aceptación del riesgo eran variados. Además, dado que no podíamos reunirnos directamente con nuestros socios sobre el terreno, tenía sentido abrazar la autonomía de los miembros desde el principio.

Pero nuestros miembros claramente valoraban también la autonomía desde el punto de vista de la investigación. Asuntos del Sur pudo proporcionar una serie de preguntas generales para que los miembros las tuvieran en cuenta al hablar con la gente sobre el terreno. Lo que hicimos fue recordarles a nuestros miembros las áreas temáticas que habíamos decidido priorizar al estudiar la elaboración de políticas. Más allá de eso, sin embargo, no tenía mucho sentido realmente gestionar o supervisar la manera en que cada socio llevaba a cabo su parte del proyecto de investigación. Los diferentes miembros tenían intereses de investigación específicos y áreas de especialización que (razonablemente) trataron de utilizar para este proyecto.

Por ejemplo, en lugar de trabajar con **grupos** en situación de vulnerabilidad, nuestros socios chilenos y argentinos optaron por estudiar **municipios** y aprovechar así su experiencia en política territorial, entre otras cosas. Esta elección obligó a los gerentes del proyecto a replantearse cómo cohesionar los seis casos, de los que cuatro estudiaban grupos y dos, zonas geográficas. También tuvimos que adaptar nuestras expectativas en cuanto a con quién hablarían estos equipos de investigación y en cuanto

al alcance general de sus conclusiones. Al final, el proyecto claramente se ha beneficiado del enfoque geográfico que adoptaron los dos países. Dado que se centraban menos en los grupos y más en las unidades jurisdiccionales, las conclusiones que se extrajeron se alejaron de las respuestas gubernamentales a problemas comunitarios únicos (que inicialmente buscábamos comprender) y se orientaron hacia hallazgos más generales, como el papel que desempeñaban las escuelas como espacios de contención social y de qué manera la interseccionalidad era clave para elaborar cualquier tipo de respuesta a la pandemia.

5 Reflexiones finales

Colabora.Lat es un proyecto que se ha esforzado por incorporar la colaboración **como una herramienta** que el proyecto puede analizar **como objetivo final** a la hora de lograr una gobernanza más receptiva. En los últimos años hemos aprendido valiosas lecciones sobre cómo enfocar la gestión de proyectos y también sobre cómo abordar la elaboración de políticas ante problemas "perversos", como una pandemia. Sin embargo, las cuatro lecciones presentadas en la sección 4 pueden aplicarse a cualquier proyecto que tenga lugar en contextos más dinámicos e inestables, como una pandemia.

Como hemos sugerido antes, la colaboración puede ser una herramienta útil para la gestión de proyectos en estos contextos tan cambiantes. La colaboración funciona a través de un compromiso explícito con la experiencia, el conocimiento y el conjunto de recursos individuales de cada actor implicado. Este tipo de colaboración masiva (*crowdsourcing*) resulta increíblemente útil en contextos menos estables y más fluidos, que a menudo son impredecibles y pueden requerir adaptabilidad, como cuando tuvimos que retrasar la recopilación tradicional de datos durante el primer año. En un entorno más colaborativo, la carga de la imprevisibilidad y la adaptabilidad pueden compartirse. Las respuestas colectivas a estas cargas se beneficiarán de la sabiduría y la experiencia de todos los implicados. En este sentido, la suma de un proyecto de colaboración, como nuestro consorcio, puede ser mayor que las partes individuales.

Notas

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universidades, laboratorios de ideas y organizaciones civiles locales en 42 países de África, Asia, América Latina y Oriente Medio. Las opiniones aquí expresadas son las de los autores y no reflejan necesariamente las opiniones del IDRC, su Junta Directiva ni del IDS. Para obtener más información, póngase en contacto con: c19re.org.

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- 5 Para obtener más información, consulte el [sitio web de Colabora.Lat](http://sitio.web.de).

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Glossary

- AeT** Asiye eTafuleni [South Africa]
AfDB African Development Bank [Côte d'Ivoire]
CDRI Cambodia Development Resource Institute
CEO Chief Executive Officer
CEPR Centre for Economic Policy Research [UK]
CGE computable general equilibrium
CGSRHR Centre of Excellence for Gender, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights [Bangladesh]
CLMV Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam
CMP Common Minimum Programme
CORE Covid-19 Responses for Equity
CPJ Centre for Peace and Justice [Bangladesh]
CPRsouth Communication Policy Research South [Sri Lanka]
CSO civil society organisation
CTA Comité de Transparencia y Acompañamiento [transparency and monitoring committee, Peru]
CwC Communications with Communities
CZI Confederation of Zimbabwe Industries
ECLAC Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean [Chile]
FAO Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations [Italy]
FES Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung [Bolivia]
FIT Federation of Informal Workers of Thailand
FPAR Feminist Participatory Action Research
GCC Gulf Cooperation Council [United Arab Emirates]
GDP gross domestic product
GRADE Grupo de Análisis para el Desarrollo [Group for the Analysis of Development, Peru]
HESPER Humanitarian Emergency Settings Perceived Needs Scale
HH household head
ICT information and communications technology
IDRC International Development Research Centre [Canada]
IDS Institute of Development Studies [UK]
IHVAG Informal Hawkers and Vendors of Ghana
IMF International Monetary Fund [USA]
INEI Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática [National Institute of Statistics and Information, Peru]
INGO international non-governmental organisation
IP intellectual property
ISCG Inter Sector Coordination Group [Bangladesh]
J-MSNA Joint Multi-Sector Needs Assessment
JPGSPH James P Grant School of Public Health [Bangladesh]
LDC least developed country
LGBTQ+ lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning
MBO membership-based workers' organisation

MEF Ministry of Economic and Financial Affairs [Ministerio de Economía y Finanzas, Peru]
MIDIS Ministry of Development and Social Inclusion [Ministerio de Desarrollo e Inclusión Social, Peru]
MML Lima Metropolitan Municipality [Municipalidad Metropolitana de Lima, Peru]
MoUs Memoranda of Understanding
MVGs most vulnerable groups
NGO non-governmental organisation
NMSJ National Movement for Social Justice [Sri Lanka]
NSEs *niveles socio económicos* [socioeconomic levels]
OPC Office of the Presidency and Cabinet [Zimbabwe]
PEN Peruvian sol
PEP Partnership for Economic Policy [Kenya]
PMT proxy means test
REVA-5 Refugee Influx Emergency Vulnerability Assessment
RIMISP Latin American Center for Rural Development
RRRC Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner
SDG Sustainable Development Goal
SEWA Self Employed Women's Association [India]
SINACTRAHO Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores y Trabajadoras del Hogar [National Union of Domestic Workers, Mexico]
SMP significant market power
TAYTA Territorial Operation for Aid for Treatment and Isolation against Covid-19
UN United Nations [USA]
UN DESA United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs [USA]
UNDP United Nations Development Programme [USA]
UNESCWA United Nations Economic and Social Commission for West Asia [Lebanon]
UNHCR United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [Switzerland]
UNU-WIDER United Nations University-World Institute for Development Economics Research [Finland]
WASH water, sanitation, and hygiene
WFP World Food Programme [Italy]
WHO World Health Organization [Switzerland]
WIEGO Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing [UK]
ZEPARU Zimbabwe Economic Policy Analysis and Research Unit
ZNCC Zimbabwe National Chamber of Commerce
ZTA Zimbabwe Tourism Authority

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Knowledge in Times of Crisis: Transforming Research-to-Policy Approaches

Issue Editors **Andrea Ordóñez Llanos** and **James Georgalakis**
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Introduction: Lessons for Locally Driven Research Responses to Emergencies

Introducción: Lecciones para la investigación sobre respuestas a emergencias impulsada a nivel local

Introduction : Leçons issues des recherches menées localement en réponse aux situations d'urgence

Andrea Ordóñez Llanos and James Georgalakis

Co-Modelling for Relief and Recovery from the Covid-19 Crisis in Zimbabwe

Ramos E. Mabugu, Hélène Maisonnave, Martin Henseler, Margaret Chitiga-Mabugu and Albert Makochekanwa

Research During the Covid-19 Pandemic: Crucial Arms for Struggle

Ana Carolina Ogando

Policy Influence in Crisis: Reflections from a Southern Thinktank

Helani Galpaya, Gayani Hurulle and David Gunawardana

Lessons Learned from Mobilising Research for Impact During the Covid-19 Pandemic

Benghong Siela Bossba

Arab Region Social Protection Systems: Research and Policy Design Challenges

نظم الحماية الاجتماعية في المنطقة العربية: التحديات أمام إجراء البحوث وسن السياسات

Farah Al Shami

Humanitarian vs Pandemic Responses: Vulnerable Groups among Rohingyas in Bangladesh

Sameen Nasar, Bachera Aktar, Muhammad Riaz Hossain and Sabina Faiz Rashid

Resilience in the Time of a Pandemic: Developing Public Policies for Ollas Comunes in Peru

Resiliencia en tiempos de pandemia: generando políticas públicas para las ollas comunes en Perú

Ricardo Fort and Lorena Alcázar

(Re-)Thinking a Collaborative Research Model After Covid-19: Introducing Colabora.Lat

(Re)pensar un modelo de investigación colaborativa después del Covid-19: presentación de Colabora.Lat

Jennifer Cyr, Matias Bianchi, Ignacio F. Lara and Florencia Coda

'Rapidly mobilised Southern-led research response to the Covid-19 pandemic is challenging traditional research methods and has refreshed approaches to using knowledge and engagement to inform policy and practice.'