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# The Knowledge for Change Consortium: a decolonising approach to international collaboration in capacity-building in community-based participatory research

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## ABSTRACT

Two questions guide this work: (1) How can academics and community-based knowledge workers contribute to the achievement of the UN SDGs through the co-creation of knowledge that is locally contextualised and globally significant? (2) What are the practical challenges of creating university-community research and training partnerships aimed at developing research skills and capacities that will help address the UN SDGs through participatory approaches to knowledge creation? We answer these questions by analysing the Knowledge for Change (K4C) Consortium on training community-based participatory research. We present lessons and challenges associated to the development of K4C and provide recommendations to help create effective community-university research partnerships that contribute to the attainment of the UN 2030 Agenda.

## RÉSUMÉ

Deux questions guident ce travail: (1) Comment les universitaires et les travailleuses et travailleurs communautaires du savoir contribuent-ils à la réalisation des ODD des Nations Unies par le biais de la co-création de connaissances contextualisées au niveau local et significatives au niveau global? (2) Quels sont les défis pratiques de la création de partenariats de recherche et de formation universitaires-communautés visant à développer les compétences et les capacités de recherche qui permettront de contribuer aux ODD par des approches participatives à la création de connaissances? Nous répondons à ces questions en offrant une analyse du consortium *Knowledge for Change* (K4C) qui travaille sur la formation à la recherche participative communautaire. Nous présentons les leçons et défis associés au développement de K4C, et nous présentons des recommandations pour aider à créer des partenariats de recherche universitaires-communautés qui contribueront à la réalisation du Programme de développement durable à l'horizon 2030 des Nations Unies.

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## Introduction

In September 2015, the Heads of State and Government members of the United Nations adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 associated targets (United Nations 2015). The SDGs provide a timely framework for social change across various development areas that matter most to our communities: ending poverty and hunger, achieving gender equality, confronting climate change. The Agenda represents a revolutionary global consensus that all sectors and nations across the world need to work together to achieve economic, environmental and social sustainability. As the UN Economic and Social Council (2017) states, if we are to succeed in meeting the UN SDGs, we must work in partnerships across regions and sectors, including academia, local communities, local/regional governments and other relevant actors.

Civil society organisations (CSOs) play a constructive role in achieving these goals by (i) translating global agendas into national priorities that reflect provincial, regional and local needs; (ii) bringing citizens' voices to national debates and the development of national strategies; and (iii) assisting governments with effective SDG implementation (Bizikova and Reilly-King 2017; Salamon and Haddock 2015; Edwards and Ross 2016). CSOs also have a crucial role in monitoring progress by collecting and providing citizen-generated data that can complement stand-alone national-level SDG tracking processes and systems.

Empirical evidence and a rich literature illustrate the numerous advantages for policy- and community-change agendas that occur when university-based academics come together with frontline civil society organisations in participatory processes to co-create knowledge around society's most pressing issues (Aniekwe, Hayman, and Toner 2012; Stevens, Hayman, and Mdee 2013; Tandon and Hall 2014; Cornish, Fransman, and Newman 2017; Grau et al. 2017a; Winterford 2017; Hall, Lepore, and Bhatt 2018; Martel, Reilly-King, and Baruah *forthcoming*). Israel et al. (1998, 175) describe participatory approaches to knowledge creation – community-based research (CBR) in particular – as “research that will benefit the participants either through direct intervention or by using the results to inform action for change”. This approach to research recognises civil society or community as a source of knowledge about complex issues. Thus, it disrupts the traditional Western concept of the researcher-participant relationship and bridges theoretical perspectives and disciplines, creating synergies between traditional, popular, practitioner knowledge and academic, theoretical and empiricist knowledge (Tandon 1981; Vio Grossi 1981; Hall 1982; Bizikova and Reilly-King 2017; Szabo 2017).

Surprisingly, the UN official documents exclude any particular mention of community-based participatory research as a strategy to achieve the SDGs, although it is an approach to knowledge creation, learning and action able to generate practical responses to the issues and challenges articulated by the community itself. Participatory research has, in fact, a strong track record in creating positive changes in the fields of health, environmental sustainability, Indigenous child welfare, water governance, poverty reduction and gender justice (see, for instance, Chuenpagdee, Fraga, and Euan-Avila 2004; Minkler and Wallerstein 2008; Wiber et al. 2009; Trimble and Berkes 2013; Flicker et al. 2015; Stack-Cutler, Schnirer, and Dare 2017). All of these are key strategic areas for achieving the SDGs; however, the case for linking research, public awareness,

community engagement, knowledge mobilisation, social learning and action – the key strengths of community-based participatory research – is only now being made. For instance, the call from the Global Symposium on Health Systems Research for engaging local citizens in research on the SDGs stated that “there was consensus in the room on the need for strengthening inclusive dialogue and ensuring that the SDGs are not just a conversation amongst the elite. The goals should not just be for citizens, but worked on with citizens” (Szabo 2017, para. 3). Similarly, the European Commission (2016) has expressed support for a broad vision of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in the post-2015 framework, noting that science, technology and innovation should not be centred on the transfer of existing technology but on involving all partners in innovative collaboration. Howard and Wheeler (2015, 555) point out that

if the SDGs are to realize their promise of reconceptualizing development so that it is inclusive of all people [...] this challenge cannot be met without a sustained approach that supports the less powerful to build alliances and develop strategies for change.

The critical role of local stakeholders in achieving the SDGs has been emphasised from the outset of the 2030 Agenda, with the 2015 agreement including a pledge to “work with local authorities and communities to renew and plan our cities and human settlements so as to foster community cohesion and personal security and to stimulate innovation and employment” (United Nations 2015, declaration 34). Utilising the SDG framework, therefore, helps to show responsiveness to what local residents want (UN SDSN 2016). In fact, nearly all of the 17 SDGs have specific targets that depend on local action.

Given the centrality of local solutions for the 2030 Agenda and the important role that community-based organisations and higher education institutions play in co-developing such solutions, it’s therefore worth asking:

How can academics and community-based knowledge workers contribute to the achievement of the UN SDGs through the co-creation of knowledge that is locally contextualised and globally significant? What are the practical challenges of creating university-community research and training partnerships aimed at developing research skills and capacities that will help address the UN SDGs through participatory approaches to knowledge creation?

To answer these research questions we analyse the creation and development of the *Knowledge for Change (K4C) Consortium*, an international partnered training initiative of the UNESCO Chair in Community-Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education (UNESCO Chair CBR-SR, from now on). The K4C Consortium aims to develop research capacities for the co-creation of knowledge through collective action by community groups and academics working together in training hubs around the world on issues related to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, such as Indigenous wellbeing, water governance, poverty and inequality, climate action, gender equality and violence against women. K4C accomplishes this through a decentralised training structure. There are currently 14 K4C hubs in Indonesia, India, Malaysia, Ireland, Italy, Canada, South Africa, Colombia, Cuba, Uganda and Tanzania (UNESCO Chair CBR-SR 2020). We decided to use the K4C Consortium as the focus of our study because its overall objective is the generation of new co-constructed knowledge to address critical issues facing local communities in line with the UN SDGs; community-based experiential training and research capacity development is its strategy for

achieving that. Studying K4C will thus let us gain deeper understanding of the specific practices, norms and values of intellectuals and their partners that are in play in academic and community settings as they work together to co-create knowledge.

The goal throughout the K4C Consortium includes also a commitment to a de-colonising approach to knowledge creation in education systems still dominated by a Eurocentric epistemology that stipulates what knowledge is and how it is produced and validated based on particular conventions and practices. The Eurocentric perspective proclaims that its scientific truths are universal and “valid across all of time and space” (Wallerstein 1997, 95). A decolonising approach, on the contrary, builds the capabilities of knowledge workers within and outside the academia by inducting them effectively into different approaches to knowledge production and their underlying ontological and epistemological assumptions. The goal is to equip community-based researchers with historical, cultural and scientific understanding to interpret past and present, and to cultivate in them the expertise, competencies and skills required to contribute productively to economic, social and technological change at local/regional level (Badat 2017). At K4C, this is achieved by giving attention and support to the visibility and use of Indigenous and Eastern knowledge systems, subaltern knowledges of excluded and marginalised groups and use of Mother Tongue languages in each of the K4C hubs. The emphasis on locally contextualised and participatory community-led knowledge creation is a means to challenge the hegemonic dominance of Eurocentric and other dominant knowledge systems (Hall and Tandon 2017).

This article provides readers with a theoretical background of CBR, notes on the creation of the UNESCO Chair CBR-SR, the initiation of the Knowledge for Change Consortium and its Mentor Training Programme model, its underlying pedagogical principles and the challenges of putting K4C into practice. By understanding how the K4C was born, has evolved and currently operates, we will be able to answer the research questions above and provide recommendations that can help create effective community-university research partnerships that will contribute to the attainment of the UN 2030 Agenda.

### **Theoretical approach: CBR and knowledge democracy**

We draw on more than 35 years of scholarship in the theory and practice of community-university engagement, knowledge democracy and community-based research, whose roots are found in the emancipatory origins of participatory action research in the Global South (Vio Grossi 1981; Hall 1982, 1985, 1992, 2005; Swantz 1982; Brown and Tandon 1983; Fals-Borda 1987, 2006; Tandon 1988, 2005; Fals-Borda and Rahman 1991; Chambers 1983, 1994) and in the early contributions of feminist and critical race theorists (Fanon 1982; Lorde 1984, 1990; Harding 1987; Haraway 1988; Hooks 1989, 2003; Brown and Strega 2005; Reid and Gillberg 2014). Here, with Strand et al. (2003, 5), community-based research (CBR) is defined as:

research done by community groups with or without the involvement of a university. In relation with the university, CBR is a collaborative enterprise between academics and community members. CBR seeks to democratize knowledge creation by validating multiple sources of knowledge and promoting the use of multiple methods of discovery and

dissemination. The goal of CBR is social action (broadly defined) for the purpose of achieving (directly or indirectly) social change and social justice.

There exists a variety of different terms to describe CBR, which reflect the diversity of academic traditions and social contexts within which these terms have gained popularity. Etmanski, Hall, and Dawson (2014, 8) identify 28 terms and traditions associated with CBR (for example, action learning, engaged scholarship, participatory action research, collaborative inquiry), and note that “there are two defining characteristics of this body of research: it is action-oriented and it is participatory”. Here we use CBR as an umbrella term for a diverse set of concepts and practices that: support ethical and respectful co-creation of knowledge; are context-specific, participatory and interactive in nature; and foster social change, transformation or resistance by those whose knowledge has been marginalised or excluded. Essentially, CBR builds on the way that engagement between practitioners/communities and researchers generates opportunities to bring very diverse resources to understanding causes of, and solutions to, wicked societal problems. We, therefore, refer to CBR as both a body of research that benefits participants through action and as a diverse set of participatory research methods that facilitate knowledge production, knowledge mobilisation and community participation.

Since social justice is central to this type of research, the achievement of social transformation as a collective learning phenomenon is a recurrent theme across different conceptualisations of CBR. However, the degree to which knowledge production is collective, what the politics of the collective are, and which transformations the research aspires to can differ in the various streams of CBR (Glassman and Erdem 2014). Nonetheless, an important underlying common element among different types of CBR is the perceived need to construct an alternative to positivist forms of research as a response to the urgent demand for a more socially just world (Freire 1970; Hall 1975; Kindon, Pain, and Kesby 2007). CBR can be seen as an activity that gives a competitive, yet collaborative advantage to those institutions that promote such a participatory approach to research. It can serve to develop trans-disciplinary research skills, provide students with “real world” experiential learning, promote the academy’s “public purpose” and even attract funding from philanthropic donors. Very real issues – especially salient in the light of the SDGs – add a note of urgency to current attempts to generate local, national and transnational platforms for CBR as part of the university’s broader engagement mission (Munck 2014).

Community-driven research involving a diversity of participants within and outside academia is the catalytic element for transformation towards the decolonisation objectives of CBR processes. Following the radical adult education tradition of Paulo Freire (1970) and others, K4C leaders recognise that change begins at the community level through engagement and action on issues that women, men, children and youth living in those communities find compelling. CBR itself is a method of engagement, learning and empowerment that disrupts colonised structures and knowledge regimes.

One of the most powerful ways to support a decolonisation process in higher education institutions (HEIs) is not necessarily through some kind of elegant theoretical intellectual argument. Empirical community-based partnership research that involves academics, students, Indigenous community partners, traditional knowledge keepers and community and academic leaders in action-oriented projects can contribute to

substantial changes in HEIs in both research and academic programming. The work of the K4C hubs points in this direction.

One way of making these changes is through efforts to decolonise curricula. The call for curriculum decolonisation can be viewed as a means to: recognise and include historically disadvantaged and marginalised social groups; respect and embrace diversity; acknowledge disparities rooted in structural inequalities of wealth; make possible the participation of excluded groups within the diverse spaces of universities; and transform institutional and academic cultures by rethinking the social and education purposes and roles of universities (Badat 2017). Decolonising university curricula relates to profound questions of values, epistemology, ontology and knowledge production and dissemination in a context of unequal social relations (Battiste 2002; Moll 2004; Tuck and Yang 2012; Mbembe 2016; Badat 2017; Hall and Tandon 2017; Hall, Bhatt, and Lepore 2017). Thus, the modalities and processes by which curriculum transformation occurs are as important as the content of the curriculum itself. Questions related to curriculum decolonisation have to be the objects of vigorous, open, creative and sustained engagement among key actors concerned with higher education (Badat 2006). Serious attention needs to be given at institutional levels to ensuring the participation of all key actors in curriculum decolonisation.

By promoting epistemic diversity, social transformation and decolonisation processes within HEIs, CBR contributes to knowledge democracy through the co-creation of knowledge by universities and community partners working together. Some authors have described the discourse on knowledge democracy as a new openness in the representation of knowledge towards the subjects of knowledge creation (Gaventa 2005; Hall et al. 2013; in't Veld 2010; Visvanathan 2009). Knowledge democracy is the discourse that we have found best encompasses the various approaches, values and practices of participatory research. Knowledge democracy embraces a number of principles: (1) recognition of a multiplicity of epistemologies and ways of knowing beyond the Western canon (such as Indigenous, Eastern, local, popular and practitioner knowledges); (2) an openness to assembling, representing and sharing knowledge in multiple forms, including traditional academic formats but also a range of community- and arts-based approaches; (3) recognition that knowledge emerging from the daily lives of excluded persons is an essential tool for social movements and other transformational strategies; and (4) sharing research findings in a free and open manner, while protecting the ownership of knowledge held by communities (Hall 2016; Tandon, Singh, et al. 2016; Hall and Tandon 2020).

At least two reasons explain the emergence of the discourse of knowledge democracy in recent years, which help us understand the relationship of knowledge to a more equitable world. On the one hand, the need to move beyond the concepts of knowledge economy and knowledge society, and to discuss the critical role of knowledge in action for social justice. On the other hand, a more general loss of confidence in the capacity of Western white male Eurocentric science to respond to the profound challenges of our times. Knowledge democracy thus refers to an interrelationship of phenomena. Firstly, it acknowledges the importance of the existence of multiple epistemologies or ways of knowing (such as organic, spiritual and land-based systems), a diversity of conceptual frameworks arising from social movements and the “subaltern knowledge” of marginalised or excluded social groups. Secondly, it affirms that knowledge is both



created and represented in multiple forms (including text, image, numbers, story, music, drama, poetry, ceremony, meditation and more) and underscores the importance of making knowledge products available free of charge to all through the dissemination of open access resources. Finally, it understands knowledge as a powerful tool for taking action to deepen democracy and to struggle for a fairer and healthier world.

In a nutshell, knowledge democracy is about intentionally linking values of democracy and action to the process of producing and using knowledge. The principles of knowledge democracy underpin the training and research work in the K4C hubs. They support a decolonising practice in a variety of ways depending on the land, politics and institutional structures where the hubs are located.

### **Creation of the UNESCO Chair CBR-SR**

The UNESCO Chair in Community-Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education was inaugurated in 2012, after the UNESCO Higher Education World Conference held in 2009 called for more attention to aspects of social responsibility within post-secondary education institutions. Co-directed by Drs. Budd Hall (University of Victoria, Canada) and Rajesh Tandon [Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), a CSO based in India], the Chair aims to work with other global networks to support capacity building in the fields of participatory approaches to research and social responsibility in higher education through South-South and North-South-South partnerships.

The UNESCO Chair CBR-SR works within a framework of knowledge democracy, as explained above. The search for practical ways to make institutional change that honours a knowledge democracy and decolonising spirit led the Chair to carry out two major studies over a period of four years. The first project was a study titled “Mainstreaming Community-University Research Partnerships”, supported by the International Development Research Centre of Canada (IDRC). Among other findings, it indicated that while policies and practices regarding the creation of structures to facilitate community-university research partnerships are emerging within and outside the academia and there is a rich literature on the methodology of CBR, little research has been done at a global level on the training opportunities for building capacities in CBR within universities and community organisations (Hall, Tandon, and Tremblay 2015).

This led to the second project, “Building the next generation of community-based researchers” (also known as the Next Gen<sup>1</sup> project), which analysed the current state-of-the-art in pedagogies and strategies for building CBR capacities. Funded by the Social Science and Human Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), this project helped understand where and how people in various parts of the world have been learning to do CBR and what recommendations for policy makers and CBR practitioners might be derived from these diverse locations (Tandon, Hall, et al. 2016).

The evidence provided by these two global studies shows that democratic knowledge partnerships, where community action is united with academic knowledge, have the potential for social transformation in ways that the narrow application of university scientific knowledge solutions cannot achieve. They also show that: (a) despite high demand for training and learning about doing CBR, formal, structured training opportunities are scarce; (b) university training in CBR offers little practical exposure; and (c) the community training is weak on reflection and theory. Generally speaking, there is a



major difference between the CBR training provided at HEIs and CSOs. In academia, the training is usually a subset of research methodology that does not emphasise change orientation, only “exciting new knowledge creation”. On the contrary, learning to do CBR through practice at CSOs is closely linked to desirable changes being sought with an emphasis on making an impact, not just search for the “scientific truth”.

Overall, both research projects provided evidence that more training is needed not only on participatory research methodologies and theories, but also on knowledge mobilisation and dissemination, consultation and community engagement, research ethics and equity in interdisciplinary partnerships (see Hall, Tandon, and Tremblay 2015; Tandon, Hall, et al. 2016). The Knowledge for Change (K4C) Consortium for training in community-based research is the practical and institutional strategic vision for responding to the challenges that the UNESCO Chair CBR-SR has found through its research.

### **K4C pedagogical framework**

Five pedagogical principles emerged from the synthesis of the findings of the two research project described above. The principles underpin the pedagogy of CBR across disciplines, institutional settings and geographically, politically and culturally diverse settings. In a context lacking clear and systematised information on how to teach and learn CBR, the five pedagogical principles lend some coherence to the commonalities that exist within the sets of practices, commitments, priorities and agendas which make up the pedagogy of CBR. In a field of research where terms are often debated and the relationship between them is often unclear (see Etmanski, Hall, and Dawson 2014), identifying common elements of the pedagogy of CBR seems to be helpful. The proposed principles have the potential to enrich the pedagogy of CBR by inviting discussions and reflections among practitioners and potential learners looking to refine their training and teaching practices in CBR.

K4C’s pedagogical framework is made up of the following five pedagogical principles that are robust and theoretically well founded, but also flexible and simple enough to be readily translated into effective pedagogical strategies and practices in geographically, politically and culturally diverse contexts. The principles serve as the basis of the curriculum contents delivered at the K4C’s local training hubs.

### ***An orientation towards research ethics and values***

This first principle emphasises the importance of focusing community-based researchers on ethics and values in a research process. The ethical aspect of CBR is fundamental and thus precedes any other rules, procedures, processes of research training. There is usually a discrepancy between the emphases on ethics in the CBR literature and the lack of explicit mention in CBR training offerings. The ethical considerations in conducting CBR are not merely about the quality and rigour in the research process, but also focus on the nature of relationship between the researcher and others involved in the research process. Most training programmes, however, tend to ignore examining this relationship. Ethical considerations emerge in a host of different ways in the practice of CBR: confidentiality of data, protection of respondent identity, leveraging community knowledge, use of findings and control over research process and resources. Teaching CBR requires

exploring ethical dilemmas and value conflicts as an integral part of building participatory research capacities.

### ***The development of a deep understanding of power and partnerships***

CBR is a collaborative process, but this collaboration has several subtle and dynamic underpinnings, the most important being awareness of the existing power structures and differentials between stakeholders in the process. This principle emphasises equalising power relations and building mutual trust before embarking on a CBR project as also demonstrated by Toukan (2020) in another paper published as part of this special issue. As a collaborative process between communities and researchers, the co-construction of knowledge by using CBR methodology implies a redefinition of power relations between research funders, research team members (from leaders to assistants) and the participating communities. Building relationships of mutual trust before initiating a CBR project is an essential enabling condition for co-construction of knowledge. Explorations of power dynamics and its relevance to partnerships need to be an integral part of the pedagogy of CBR.

### ***The incorporation of multiple modes of enquiry***

A collaborative approach to research necessarily involves multiple sources of knowledge generation as well as multiple methods to capture such knowledge. Accordingly, action- and affect-based modes of data collection (such as art, drama, photovoice, role-plays and story-telling) need to be treated on a par with other cognitive methods. CBR is not a single method calling for a single means of co-creating knowledge. The challenges of complex societal issues call for openness to many forms of knowledge creation, analysis and dissemination. The epistemology of CBR entails multiple modes of knowing – this is, thinking, acting and feeling – therefore, learning to design, use and conduct participatory research also needs to be learnt in a diversity of modes. Preparing a broad repertoire of competencies amongst researchers will enable them to feel equipped in diversity of research methods and tools.

### ***Participation in learning CBR and ensuring a balance between classroom (theory) and field (practice)***

The dynamism of CBR processes requires the researcher to listen and decode oral traditions and histories, and to actively think about, record and present multiple interpretations of reality according to the needs and assets of the local community they are working with. All these skills cannot be developed if the teaching process is one-way, from the instructor to the student. CBR training processes need to be participatory, with the instructors participating in the process of learning as much as the trainee. This fourth principle calls for a balance of classroom sessions and field activities so that the trainees participate as active stakeholders in their own learning process. Teacher-centric training needs to be replaced with a learner-centric pedagogy in participatory approaches to research. Field immersion, rather than field exposure, is necessary

to understand the community-based researcher's own values, attitudes, motivations, hang-ups and their relationship with the involved participants.

### ***Developing critical and reflexive researchers***

The fifth principle goes beyond building individual research capacities and skills sets. It is about developing self-awareness and the ability to make interventions that facilitate the collaborative research process amongst diverse partners. It talks about forming community-based researchers in a way such that they develop a deeper understanding of their own existence. In order to listen to practical knowledge, to enable understanding different points of views, to integrate diversity of meanings and to build relationships of trusts, community-based researchers have to become “facilitators”. In order to learn skills of communication, listening, respecting, enabling, sharing and synthesising, the training of community-based researchers must include a range of social and interpersonal skills that are essential in any process of co-construction of knowledge. Unlearning exploitative and extractive approaches to research is crucial for developing a deeper understanding of one's existence and building interpersonal skills that are essential in any CBR process.

These five pedagogical principles are the starting point from which to conceptualise and design effective CBR training programmes at the K4C Consortium and its local training hubs. The principles relate to various practical aspects and dimensions involved in training community-based researchers within and outside the academia. The five principles are grounded in theories of knowledge that recognise the value of linking community-based knowledge with academic knowledge in the creation of knowledge democracy. Not only can this pedagogical framework help in developing the skill sets of the trainees and be transferable in a variety of settings and disciplines. It also promotes the development of a true aptitude for research that is conducted in a holistic manner by bringing together the worlds of practice and research to produce new knowledge and social innovations.

### **How the Knowledge for Change (K4C) Consortium works**

The K4C Consortium is a specific structure growing out of the University of Victoria-PRIA agreement that supports the UNESCO Chair CBR-SR. It is a strong global trans-disciplinary partnership between HEIs and CSOs that share training and research goals and responsibilities, and have a solid plan for building research capacity to address locally pressing societal challenges, such as the UN SDGs. Based on the pedagogical principles described above, K4C expands individual and institutional research training capacities, builds and mobilises new knowledge on the processes of participatory research and community-university engagement and the pedagogies of training CBR in diverse cultural contexts. The Consortium is also aimed at strengthening its trainees' individual research capacities and professional skills to support their transition to the workplace in academic and non-academic settings.

In line with Goal 4 of the UN 2030 Agenda, the K4C Consortium conceives of education, and in particular higher education, as essential for eradicating poverty, reducing social and economic inequalities, promoting prosperity and well-being for all and

protecting the planet. As an international partnered education initiative that seeks new ways of learning and creating the conditions needed for innovative models of research and research training programmes to flourish, the key goals of the K4C Consortium are: (1) to develop an internationally accredited curriculum for CBR training with competency mapping and learning outcomes; and (2) to create local training hubs in various parts of the global South and the excluded North to develop research capacity in local languages using local learning materials. Each K4C local hub is made up of at least a HEI and a CSO collaborating on strengthening individual research capacities and professional skills using a variety of training methods, such as classroom-based instruction, professional development workshops, open online courses, field research projects and individual mentorship.

The local training hubs support trans-disciplinary research partnerships that provide practical experience to students and co-create and mobilise knowledge to university and community members, and to local, national and international policy makers. The hubs are focused on the development of local teaching courses on the co-construction of knowledge and its application to the solution of community issues linked to at least one of the UN SDGs. Local hub instructors design research training programmes for local community-based researchers within and outside the academia adapting the K4C curriculum and pedagogy to their local contexts.

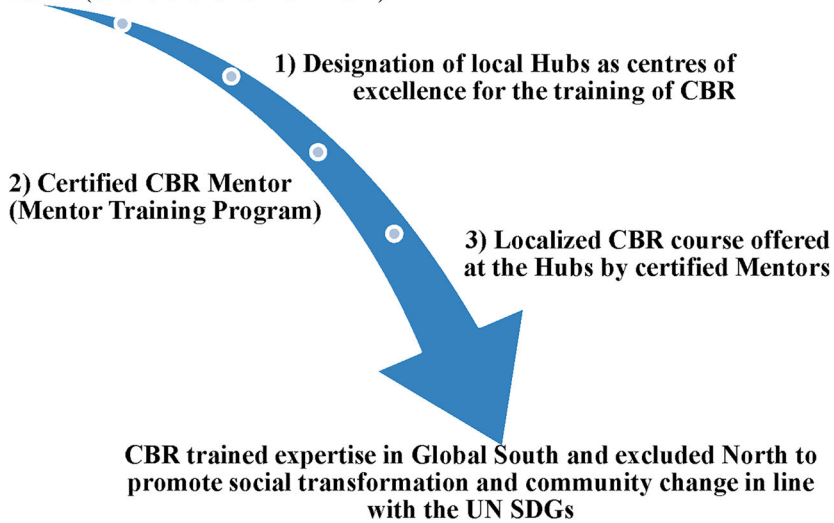
Following a cascade training model, the K4C Consortium developed a 21-week Mentor Training Programme (MTP) based on online learning activities, a two-week face-to-face learning workshop and a field work component to be carried out locally under the guidance of a local supervisor. The mentors trained under the supervision of the UNESCO Co-Chairs are given a certificate under the joint seal of the UNESCO Chair CBR-SR, PRIA International Academy (PIA) and the University of Victoria (UVic). A local hub cannot implement the K4C curriculum and pedagogy without a number of its mentors taking the MTP and being certified by the UNESCO Chair CBR-SR. Upon successful completion of the MTP, the certified mentors are expected to play a key role in the development of the local hub, including the creation of teaching curriculum and the development of research capacities in the local/regional hubs.

### **K4C's cascade training model**

Training at K4C is based on a cascade model made up of three components that incorporate the pedagogical principles described above: (1) institutional designation of local hubs as centres of excellence for CBR training; (2) certification of CBR trainers through the Mentor Training Programme; (3) localised training courses adapted and offered by certified mentors based on a centrally designed standard curriculum developed by the UNESCO Chair CBR-SR based on the five pedagogical principles above (Figure 1).

### ***Institutional designation of local hubs as centres of excellence for the training of CBR***

In order to participate in the K4C initiative, each local training hub must: be established as a formal partnership between a HEI and a CSO; have programmes that combine thematic content in line with the UN SDGs and general CBR topics based on the five

**K4C Co-Directors (UNESCO Chair CBR-SR)**

**Figure 1.** K4C's cascade training model.

pedagogical principles; enrol trainees from university and community; and offer experiential, transformative training linked to field opportunities and built-in knowledge mobilisation. Local hubs need to develop a formal partnership agreement between a HEI and a CSO to provide training, a student recruitment and marketing plan, a knowledge mobilisation plan, a financial sustainability plan and an evaluation plan to assess the programme's effectiveness and students' experience. Each hub commits to adapt the UNESCO Chair CBR-SR's pedagogical framework for CBR training to their local context and develop training materials in the local language.

The UNESCO Chair CBR-SR designates local hubs as "centres of excellence" to deliver CBR training after assessing the available infrastructure, institutional commitment and the marketing, communication and sustainability plans. Before a hub can be designated as a K4C training centre it must have: (i) at least three to five certified CBR instructors from both the university and community settings, who have successfully completed the Mentor Training Programme; (ii) identified the localisations required in the adjustable modules of the local course; (iii) agreed to provide the product of the projects completed by learners in their hub as part of its knowledge mobilisation plan; and (iv) agreed to provide any translated materials and localised content for knowledge sharing. As a designated centre of excellence, a hub has access to: MTP content as the development of the cascade training occurs; localised content and materials from other hubs for their local course; and a global team of experts to assist with customisations and guidance on how to incorporate the MTP materials and their localised course into their academic setting.

### ***CBR Mentor Training Programme (MTP)***

In this component, CBR mentors (experienced researchers drawn from partners in the hubs) are coached, trained and supervised by the holders of the UNESCO Chair CBR-

SR to become certified training facilitators. The MTP is a 21-week non-credit certificate that is offered through the Division of Continuing Studies of the University of Victoria. The course is open to any trainee nominated by the hubs who can demonstrate previous experience in conducting CBR and admissibility to the University of Victoria non-credit programmes. This normally involves graduation from post-secondary institution, although mature and community applicants who do not meet this requirement are considered on the basis of previous academic or work experience.

In this programme, future K4C mentors learn methods of training, coaching and mentoring the next generation of community-based researchers in their hubs. The MTP is a course on how to teach CBR, which combines the theoretical and foundational aspects of participatory research, supervised field practices and personal critical reflections with peers in cohorts of 20–25 mentors each year. Foundational modules delivered online are focused on theory, history, examples of CBR and steps in designing a participatory research project. The field practice includes community-based research projects (individual or in small teams) aimed at identifying and developing agreements with local partners, discussing research topics of interest to various parties, formulating relevant research questions and undertaking action steps learned in the course. Instructors and community focal persons supervise this component of the MTP and provide trainees with real-time feedback.

In the synthesis phase of training programme, trainees and instructors jointly reflect on the experience of undertaking the research project, presenting in the classroom their research design, practice, findings and impacts. Further deliberations focus on issues of ethics, personal beliefs and commitments, self-analysis of learning and orientations to transformative change. Feedback from peer students and instructors helps to systematise learning and cycles back into future course enhancements and development to improve the whole training process.

### ***Localised CBR training course***

In this component, and using the aforementioned K4C pedagogy in CBR, hub mentors design the locally relevant courses and learning resources to ensure compliance with the UNESCO Chair CBR-SR standards. The co-holders of the UNESCO Chair, Hall and Tandon, coach and certify each hub course so designed that will then be delivered to students recruited by the hubs. A variety of learning methods (online, face-to-face, field research practicum) will ensure learning of required competencies in the trainees' own contexts and languages. The local courses contain at least the following: core components of CBR; "locally customised components" that meet established learning outcomes and are contextually and thematically relevant (in line with the UN SDGs); and a set of "recommended components" to cover final learning outcomes, which can be locally modified to meet students' training needs. Local students undertake a participatory research project on topics relevant to local communities. Their reports on their findings and community impacts are compiled as case studies for future cohorts of training. The outcomes of the practical portion of the course are also cycled back into future training enhancements and development.

The pedagogical framework and the cascade training model described above help K4C trainees to develop knowledge-, awareness- and skills-based learning competencies that

are adapted to and included in modular curricula at the local hubs. Knowledge-related elements use cognition best supported through reading, discussions and lectures. Trainees are expected to acquire knowledge on: the historical evolution of concepts and methodologies of knowledge for transformative change; theoretical frameworks of knowledge, its production, dissemination and control; multiple sites of contemporary knowledge production and plurality of knowledge cultures; designing research project in co-construction with community; and methods and tools of knowledge mobilisation in community-university research partnerships.

Awareness-related elements are best learned through experiential approaches. Own and others' personal experiences are the basis of such learning, guided by sensitive facilitation and coaching. Trainees are expected to develop the following competencies: strong ethical orientation; commitment to values of integrity and diversity; understanding of personal and professional motivations, potential conflicts between them and coping strategies; personal disposition to plurality of cultures, perspectives, status and hierarchy; exploration of personal orientations to authority, power and powerlessness; and interpersonal dispositions to sharing with and trusting dissimilar others.

Skills-related elements can only be learned through practice. Supervised field practice in a safe learning environment with supportive, critical and regular feedback from peers and mentors is essential to the acquisition and strengthening of skills in participatory research. K4C trainees are expected to know how to: build partnerships of mutual respect and benefit with dissimilar others; facilitate the articulation of knowledge and community engagement in the research process; demystify theories, access to secondary data and learn macro perspectives; sensitively listen to, and communicate authentically across, diverse cultures; bridge leadership and collaborative teamwork to jointly influence research partnerships; critically reflect on personal and partners' experiences to deepen learning during research; creatively design methods of data-collection and analysis that use qualitative, quantitative, arts-based and action-oriented approaches; present research results to multiple audiences (community, non-profits, policy-makers, business leaders, academic peers) in appropriate usable and understandable forms; and manage research project in a flexible, inclusive and partnership-based approach.

## **The Knowledge for Change Consortium in action**

Evidence showing how K4C members have co-created knowledge that is locally contextualised and globally significant and how the community-university partnerships within the hubs help to address the UN SDGs is just emerging. The hubs are at different stages of development, while some are ready to start offering their localised CBR course in the fall of 2020 (like the Salish Sea Hub in western Canada), others are just initiating the curriculum planning stage. It will take time to generate a collective synthesis and analysis of the diverse experiences and practical challenges that the hubs have encountered and how they have been able to address them. Nevertheless, it is possible to highlight three illustrative examples that provide preliminary evidence of K4C's current work and its contribution to the discourse of knowledge democracy.

First, the K4C Training hub based at the MS Training Centre for Development Cooperation in Arusha, Tanzania, is offering learning and community dialogues combined in a pedagogy of praxis in community locations. Such pedagogy is based on the



African Indigenous knowledge of the Borana, the Turkana and the Rendile, the epistemological sophistication of the pastoralists who have been living in that region for millennia and the knowledge of women that arises from their specific engagement in rural life (see Nkatha 2020).

Second, members of the K4C Colombian hub located at the University of Ibagué are working in the village of Gaitania in the Andean foothills, near where the FARC guerilla movement began. They entered into an agreement to work with the Nasa Wes'x Indigenous community, 150 ex-combatants and an association of coffee producers on a community enterprise project that created a new brand of coffee, called the Third Agreement, which is now marketed in towns in Colombia. An important contribution to knowledge democracy is their creation of several words in Spanish that articulate principles of knowledge democracy in quite a powerful way. For instance, the word *plandisposición* combines planning and disposition. *Escuchacción* combines the Spanish words for active listening and action. *Sentipensar-actuar* combines acting, thinking and feeling (see Lopera-Molano and Lopera-Molano 2020).

The importance of creative invention in languages other than English is seen also in the K4C hub located at Gulu University in Northern Uganda, our third example. Their work is underpinned by African epistemologies and Acholi knowledge. Like the Tanzanian hub's work on pastoralist epistemology, they raise up their work as an Acholi contribution to the body of knowledge available for those interested in contributing to social betterment. Three interesting experiences showcase the work at the Gulu hub. The first one is the work done by a local CSO to help youth move forward. The young people create ideas for their futures through dance, stories, theatre and the arts. The second is the experience of an environmental activist working with communities concerned about the cutting of trees for charcoal production. Eighty per cent of the villagers were opposed to the tree cutting that resulted in profits for the charcoal makers. While this situation had been going on for a long time and the story is not over, their work has succeeded in getting the local council to ban tree cutting. The final experience reports on how Gulu University created a new degree programme in water engineering. Rather than take a blueprint from some Western university model of what a water engineering programme should look like, they brought various ministries, CSOs and community members together to imagine what the curriculum should be. The university leaders were amazed at the quality of the contributions and the high interest of the community in registering for the course (see Monk et al. 2020).

To further explore the extent to which the K4C Consortium has been able to develop effective trusting and egalitarian community-university research partnerships, in October 2020 the UNESCO Chair CBR-SR will initiate a two-year global study funded by SSHRC. The overarching goal of the study is to analyse how the K4C hubs understand knowledge, its creation, validation and use; what challenges they have faced in working across both trans-disciplinary and community-university boundaries; and what the hubs have done to date to help bridge different knowledge systems at HEIs and CSOs. This will contribute to strengthening and developing the K4C Consortium itself by engaging the hubs in a research and reflection exercise on the processes of partnership development that they have undertaken. It will also help to develop a framework and practical recommendations to be used by other similar community-university research partnerships.

## Practical lessons and challenges

In this final section, we will provide answers to the two research questions that guide this work. In terms of ways to better addressing the SDGs through co-creation of knowledge, we highlight the following lessons that have emerged since the launch of K4C in December 2017.

First, community-university engagement networks and research partnerships are particularly useful for sustainable social and ecological development as they can mobilise the knowledge, skills and assets of both universities and communities. Such institutional arrangements use rigorous research, community leadership and university expertise to democratically find solutions to contemporary challenges. In line with the evidence provided by the two recent global studies of the UNESCO Chair CBR-SR (Hall, Tandon, and Tremblay 2015; Tandon, Hall, et al. 2016), the emergence of the K4C shows that democratic knowledge partnerships, where community action is united with academic knowledge, have the potential for social transformation in ways that the narrow application of university scientific knowledge solutions cannot achieve.

Second, finding sustainable local solutions to global societal challenges requires the active engagement of a variety of stakeholders. What in the literature is known as “multi-stakeholders engagement” is a process based on mutual understanding and co-creation of solutions that can lead to shared responsibility, system innovation and social learning, thus making sustainability challenges more manageable (Peterson 2013). Multi-stakeholder engagement is key to providing results that would never have been obtained by either of the involved parties individually. It is therefore critical for research training partnerships and networks to be effective in promoting and stimulating co-creation of knowledge among HEIs and other social actors. Effective multi-stakeholder engagement allows the integration of various value sets and orientations, and creates the conditions for developing a participatory environment, shared responsibility, collective learning and commitment (Tremblay, Singh, and Lepore 2017). Such engagement encourages governance arrangements – as the K4C Consortium – that are different from a purely instrumental managerial logic and a traditional approach to research and knowledge creation.

Third, in a context where tensions between global and local goals and interests are evident, the experience of the K4C hubs to date suggests that the engagement of HEIs and community partners can be seen as local catalysts that give visibility to and strengthen local action, support funding opportunities and research partnerships, and better connect academic work to community needs. It also shows that linking local research agendas to collective challenges, such as climate change and sustainability, could have a great impact on the shared future and, at the same time, make evident connections between academic activity and the big societal needs.

Regarding the second research question, a series of obstacles challenge the K4C’s goal of achieving knowledge democracy through participatory research capacity building. First, K4C is operating on a de-centralised funding model where the costs associated with providing the training for the mentors is borne by the local hubs themselves. This is an important break from the traditional donor-driven, charity-model of development funding, which creates immediate financial sustainability issues when the funding provided by major development actors (for instance, national development aid agencies,

multilateral organisations, large global philanthropists and foundations) ends. On the contrary, the K4C model is based on a revenue generating scheme where the hubs, on the one hand, pay for the costs of the MTP for their own nominated mentors and, on the other hand, can charge fees to those enrolled in their local courses. The hubs, therefore, have a strong stake in the success of their local training programme in order to be financially sustainable. The main challenge, however, is that CSOs and universities are not equally funded in all parts of the world. Universities in emerging economies of India, Malaysia, Indonesia and so forth are able to fairly cover the costs of their hub training. But the universities in most of Africa are not so well off. And even in Latin America, where the economies are fairly robust, federal governments have cut back deeply into higher education and civil society budgets. We acknowledge that the fact that CSOs, both in the North and Global South, have less financial capacity than HEIs to take part in the hubs – and they likely have to rely on their HEI partners to afford the tuition fees of the K4C training – can replicate the project donor-recipient dynamic of international development that the K4C Consortium is trying to overcome.<sup>2</sup>

Second, one of K4C's objectives is to support the emergence of training hubs that operate in their own local languages and Mother Tongues. The reality, however, is that this is a long term challenge as the domination of English language (and in a lesser degree of Spanish as well) in the production of original texts in this field is quite overwhelming. Access to expensive text books or paid subscription to electronic journals is sometimes limited in the Global South even at institutional level. The lack of high quality open access publishing venues indeed constrains many of K4C partners. This is why the Consortium requires its training hubs to develop open access training material in local languages. This is also a way to contribute to its decolonising vision against the power of the global ranking systems that push knowledge workers toward producing materials in English for European and North American publishers and journals.

Third, civil society in many parts of the world has been disconnected from academia, and the other way around. It has been observed from the incipient experience of the K4C Consortium that many grassroots practitioners are still hesitant to engage with university-based researchers. Their past experiences of unequal power dynamics and paucity of resources for undertaking research partnerships are one of the reasons for the same. In addition, conflicting worldviews and traditions of different cultures usually lead to privileging one knowledge system over others. Such conflicts are based on divergent views of ownership of the research process (this is, knowledge creation, validation, use and dissemination), which have an impact on the research outcomes and their control and use by community partners. Even though many institutions have adopted language, published books and designed toolkits for participatory and trans-disciplinary approaches, the problem persists (Wakeford and Rodriguez 2018).

We recognise that not enough is known about the differences between knowledge systems and how to bridge such differences, not just in the K4C Consortium but also in more general terms. The lack of this in-depth understanding can generate structural barriers and power dynamics that prevent mainstream research institutions collaborating effectively with community groups, including pressures on universities to value very particular types of research and research outputs and/or to take control of the whole research process.<sup>3</sup> Sullivan and Skelcher (2002, 40) refer to such practices as “pessimist collaboration”, a term that indicates one party’s “attempts to control or influence the other’s

activities”, thus emphasising that power “resides implicitly in the other’s dependency”. The upcoming 2020–2022 global project of the UNESCO Chair CBR-SR is aimed at reducing the likelihood of unequal collaborations among K4C partners and promoting their formal engagement at every stage of the research process.

Fourth, one of the main challenges associated with research networks and partnerships like K4C is the lack of strong evidence about how local community-based solutions might be built into a number of policy actions. Claims about the effectiveness of networks and partnerships in dealing with sustainable development problems tend to be theoretical and/or conceptual rather than empirical (Tremblay, Singh, and Lepore 2017). While the literature shows a strong bias that tends to conceive community-university partnerships and networks as naturally better or even ideal – and certainly more promising forms of governance to achieve the goals of sustainable development –, there is not a great deal of attention to the complex reality where such local solutions have to be embedded. In fact, a variety of obstacles can hamper the effectiveness of partners institutions in the university and community settings, for instance: rivalry and competition among global, national, regional networks, coalitions or alliances all claiming status in particular policy areas; different temporal objectives that can be impossible to reach under limited financial, physical and human resources; insufficient funding opportunities; fundamental spatial and political disparities; and “partnership fatigue” and lack of interconnectivity that lead to confusion, inaction and/or networks where information is not fully shared and common interests are hard to agree (Tremblay, Singh, and Lepore 2017). As a consequence, there is a considerable discrepancy between the acclamation and attention networks and partnerships receive in the literature, and the lack of empirical knowledge and understanding of the processes and dynamics of their overall functioning (for example, the process by which certain network conditions lead to various network-level outcomes).

The K4C Consortium is not exempt from this problem and we still need to find ways to demonstrate the impact the hubs are making locally and how they contribute to a global agenda. It is worth mentioning, in this regard, that far from assuming that there is always alignment and cohesion between globally identified challenges, such as the SDGs, and the priorities of local communities, K4C partners acknowledge that societal challenges have both a local and a global dimension. This means, for instance, that the natural focus on action by HEI and CSO partners in response to local demands can lead to a winners-and-losers scenario (zero-sum competitive game), with the possibility of a somewhat negative impact on global issues (Grau et al. 2017b). Every K4C hub simultaneously exists in locally specific cultural, political and organisational contexts but is also affected by global forces. The dilemma for members of the K4C Consortium is to find a balance between, on the one hand, local realities and aspirations within a global context that calls for a different role for partnering HEIs and CSOs, and on the other hand, strong demands that come from political and economic actors seeking to increase their own regional/national competitiveness.

Fifth, knowledge is usually seen as an instrument of power and control used by dominant, hegemonic classes and/or coalitions to maintain the status quo. Knowledge, however, can also be a strategy for changing relations of power when dominant ideas are challenged through subaltern voices that represent expressions of collective alternative realities. Lived experiences and practical knowledge accumulated in local

communities and larger social groups provide the collective platform for such voices to be spoken and amplified, thus becoming a source and trigger of social change and transformation. Dominant knowledge (usually referred to as Western, scientific knowledge) thus fuels the power required to maintain control by established authorities, while alternative knowledge (local, traditional, Indigenous, Eastern knowledges) provides the breeding ground for transforming extant power relations. It is important to note in this regard that the process of co-construction of knowledge by using CBR methodologies – as the ones supported by K4C’s teaching courses – implies in itself a redefinition of power relations between the researcher and the researched communities.

It is the necessary corollary to doing and teaching CBR that attention must always be paid to one’s own personal power relations and dynamics with others (including research funders and participating communities), how research is conducted, who is authorised to do research, who owns the results of such research and how findings are reported and by whom. The exploration of power dynamics in research partnerships needs to be an integral part of the pedagogy of CBR, as well as the understanding of existing power relations within the community where the CBR project will take place.

## Notes

1. This paper is published as part of a special issue entitled Next Generation of Knowledge Partnerships for Global Development (Martel, Reilly-King, and Baruah [forthcoming](#)) also known as the NextGen program. The “Building the next generation of community-based researchers” initiative refers to a different project than the one supporting this special issue.
2. We thank Reviewer #2 for bringing this point to our attention.
3. We appreciate the comments of Reviewer #1 on this matter.

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