

Diaspora Engagement in Peace-Building and Development in Home and Host Countries

Toolkit for Community-Based Research (CBR) Practitioners

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This CBR tool is developed for use by community-based organizations and researchers interested in engaging with diaspora communities to examine their role in, and contribution to, peace-building and development efforts in both their home and host countries. It outlines the major challenges faced in the conduct of CBR among diaspora communities and suggests possible remedies to some of the recurrent issues.

Developing strong and effective research partnerships¹ is a core component of CBR. Successful partnerships enrich research through the opportunity they provide to examine issues and explore solutions from diverse perspectives. They also help to reduce researcher bias. Common barriers² to developing effective partnerships include difficulty to communicate openly and directly on a topic as sensitive as is diaspora engagement in peace-building and development; lack of trust; inter-generational and other tensions and capacity gaps. The clear definition of each partner's role and responsibilities throughout the entire research process as well as effective trust-building practices are most useful in countering some of these barriers.³

The genuine and effective involvement of community participants⁴ from various segments of the diaspora group under study is another key aspect of CBR. In this regard, the major challenges⁵ cited are: reluctance on the part of community members to be involved in research; time constraints in ensuring truly collaborative research practices; lack of information on the composition of the community under consideration; challenges associated with translating and discussing fluid and complex concepts such as peace-building, conflict resolution and diaspora engagement; and difficulty targeting specific segments of the diaspora, including women and youth. Measures that seek to ensure inclusive and effective community participation⁶ include clarification, from the outset, of what exactly 'community participation' entails; efforts to overcome community members' lack of enthusiasm for research through the use of various transparent and creative methods; intense and wide-ranging outreach activities throughout various segments of the community; and the organization of focus groups tailored to the needs of targeted sub-groups within the larger diaspora community. The question of trust – or lack thereof – is a central one that impacts on most aspects of effective and inclusive

¹ See Section 3.1 – Developing Effective Research Partnerships (p.11)

² See Section 3.1.4 – Barriers to Building Effective Partnerships (p.12)

³ See Section 3.1.5 – Strategies to Promote Effective Partnerships (p.13)

⁴ See Section 3.2 – Ensuring Effective Participation and Representation of Various Segments of the Diaspora Community (p.15)

⁵ See Section 3.2.1 – Barriers to Effective and Inclusive Community Participation (p.15)

⁶ See Section 3.2.2 – Methodologies to Effective and Inclusive Participation (p.18)

community participation. Related issues,⁷ with a focus on strategies to promote trust-building, are thus addressed separately.

Identifying the research question,⁸ or even deciding how to approach the subject of diaspora engagement in peace-building, can prove a complex task, especially when considering the need to balance the realities and priorities of the communities under study with the research groups' own organizational capacities and needs. While various methods of establishing the research focus may be used, it is especially important that community participants be involved at the needs assessment stage to ensure a fit between the community's priorities and the issues chosen for consideration. This also holds true when data collection instruments are being developed and questions formulated. A basic framework⁹ – comprised of various lines of inquiries that may be explored by community-based researchers engaging with diaspora communities on their role in peace-building – is provided to assist with the development of specific research questions.

Effective dissemination practices are central to countering community members' strongly-held view that research results generally are neither communicated to participants nor have any practical discernible positive impact on the community. In this regard, a review of community-oriented dissemination activities¹⁰ reveals a wide range of means through which community participants can be meaningfully implicated in the final stages of the research process and even beyond.

In addition to the above, other issues for consideration when conducting CBR in diaspora engagement in peace-building include the advantages and disadvantages of involving researchers from the same community as the one under study;¹¹ the challenges of ensuring complete responses to written questionnaires and best practices to minimize non- or short responses;¹² and the persistent view that CBR lacks the scientific rigor¹³ necessary to be fully accepted as a valid method in mainstream research circles.

However, despite these various challenges, CBR– given the appropriate support – can be an effective means of empowering diaspora communities as they become increasingly aware of the contributions to peace-building and development in their home and host countries that they are uniquely positioned to make.

⁷ See Section 3.2.3 – Issues Related to Trust and Trust-Building (p.21)

⁸ See Section 3.2 – Identification of Research Priorities and Question Development (p.23)

⁹ See Section 3.3.4 – Framework for Suggested Research Questions and Lines of Inquiry (p.26)

¹⁰ See Section 3.4.1 – Dissemination Practices – Selected Examples (p.28)

¹¹ See Section 3.5.1 – Implications of Researcher Being from the Community under Study (p.30)

¹² See Section 3.5.2 – Non-Response or Non-Elaboration of Information Provided (p.32)

¹³ See Section 3.5.3 – Negative Perception of CBR (p.34)