



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

**TOOLKIT FOR COMMUNITY-BASED
RESEARCH (CBR) PRACTITIONERS**

Commissioned By
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Objectives

In 2006, the Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation provided a grant to the United Nations-affiliated University for Peace (UPEACE) in support of a series of community-based research (CBR) projects on diaspora¹ communities' engagement in peace-building and development. These exploratory studies – targeting 5 diaspora communities² in the Greater Toronto Area – played an important role as background papers for UPEACE's High Level Expert Forum on *Capacity Building for Peace and Development: Roles of Diaspora* held in Toronto in October 2006. Among the topics of deliberation at the conference was the need to go beyond research on diaspora engagement carried out solely by academics and other third parties and to move toward a community-based approach that promotes the active involvement of diaspora members in the conduct of studies in their own communities. Indeed, such CBR projects would not only shed light on diverse communities' perspectives – the results of which could be useful and relevant to policy-makers – but also allow for a more effective transfer of research methodologies and findings to the countries of origin. Thus, one of the recommendations to come out from the UPEACE conference was the need to develop CBR capacity-building tools and strategies that would effectively facilitate the engagement of other diaspora organizations and researchers in studies similar to those undertaken by the 5 groups.

One of the priorities of the Global Citizenship Programme of the Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation is to “*seek and support initiatives that foster a better understanding of the opportunities implicit in the emergence of transnational diaspora communities in Canada.*”³ In support of this objective and as a follow-up to the UPEACE conference project, the Foundation commissioned the development of this CBR tool for the use of 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.

This CBR tool – which is principally based on the experiences and learnings of the 5 groups that conducted the UPEACE diaspora studies – exposes the major challenges faced in the conduct of CBR among diaspora communities and suggests possible remedies to some of the recurrent issues. It is to be noted that time constraints were the

¹ In this document, the term ‘diaspora’ refers to “*a self-identified ethnic group, with a specific place of origin, which has been globally dispersed through voluntary or forced migration.*” (Metropolis World Bulletin, September 2006, Volume 6 – quoted in The Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation – Global Citizenship Programme (Diaspora and Transnational Communities), website.) The terms ‘diaspora’, ‘refugee’ and ‘immigrant’ are commonly used interchangeably; however, it is useful to note that ‘diaspora’ is used here to refer to immigrants only in the context of their transnational interests and involvement in development (including peace-building) with their home countries.

² These include the Afghan, Colombian, Eritrean, Ethiopian and Jamaican communities in the Greater Toronto Area.

³ The Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation – Global Citizenship Programme (Diaspora and Transnational Communities), website.

major issue across board for the 5 groups as they were allocated only 3 months for the entire process, from start to finish. However – despite the increased challenges this presented for partnership development, trust-building, community outreach, etc. – they managed to produce unique studies that are rich in lessons learned as well as best practices to be shared.

As a CBR tool that seeks to support research on diaspora engagement in peace-building and development, this is a unique product which, it is hoped, will prove practical and useful. With this purpose in mind, this reference manual has been kept short and focused on the issues inherent to conducting diasporic research in this particular field; however, where appropriate, links to additional resources on CBR and the research process in general have been included.

1.2 Target Audience

While occasional enquiries from diverse groups interested in conducting CBR studies similar to those completed for the UPEACE conference provided, in part, the impetus for the Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation to commission the development of this tool, its use is not limited to those approaching the Foundation for financial support. The intended audience of this tool is any organization or researcher interested in applying the CBR approach to engage with diaspora communities and examine their participation in peace-building and development activities.

1.3 Methodological Aspects

The empirical data used in the development of this tool was gathered through in-depth interviews with the researchers involved in the diaspora studies commissioned by UPEACE. These were supplemented with information gleaned from insightful conversations and interviews the author held with several CBR expert practitioners as well as other researchers that work in the field of diaspora engagement. A complete list of persons and organizations consulted may be found in Appendix 1.

In addition, a thorough review of the 5 UPEACE-commissioned diaspora studies – with a particular focus on methodologies used – was conducted with the aim of extracting lessons learned from the experiences of these community-based researchers. Moreover, literature addressing various aspects of the CBR approach was also examined. All secondary sources consulted are listed as references at the end of the document.

1.4 Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank all the diaspora community researchers and other CBR experts who took the time to participate in the interviews despite their own hectic schedules. The ideas and insights they provided as well as the various experiences and perspectives they so generously shared are deeply appreciated. The development of this

tool would simply have been impossible without their active participation and support. Moreover, their feedback on the draft tool is gratefully acknowledged.

The author would also like to express her most profound appreciation to Marjan Montazemi – Manager of the Foundation’s Global Citizenship Programme – for her patience, understanding and unwavering support during the development of this tool. Additionally, sincere congratulations go to the Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation for taking the lead in facilitating research on diaspora engagement in peace-building and development originating from Canadian-based diaspora communities.

1.5 About the Author

Bathseba H. Belai is an independent researcher and writer. Her work has thus far mainly centered on issues related to the effective and sustainable participation of the African diaspora in the continent’s development efforts, with a focus on Ethiopia. She has also worked with various community-based organizations in Montreal and Ottawa both as a researcher and board member.

Bathseba is interested to deepen her understanding of CBR as a tool to facilitate social change and to further examine challenges associated with applying this approach to research and bringing it into the mainstream. Discussions and exchanges on these issues as well as on other topics germane to the application of CBR in various fields, including that of diaspora engagement in home country capacity development, are welcomed at DiasporaCBR@gmail.com. Feedback on this tool would also be greatly appreciated.

1.6 Acronyms Used

AWO	Afghan Women’s Organization
CBO	Community-Based Organization
CBR	Community-Based Research
SPN	Selam Peacebuilding Network
UPEACE	University for Peace
YD	Young Diplomats

2. INTRODUCTION TO COMMUNITY-BASED RESEARCH

2.1 Introduction to Community-Based Research

Community-based research (CBR)⁴ is gaining increasing attention as a novel approach to research that recognizes communities as important stakeholders in the conduct of studies that take place in their midst. This interest has, in recent years, been manifest in the drive – led by certain academics, funders and other mainstream research players as well as by community members themselves – to engage meaningfully and effectively community groups and individuals in the various stages of the research process.

CBR is not a fixed methodology but rather a “*set of underlying beliefs and principles about the ways in which research ought to be conducted.*”⁵ In a very general sense, CBR is an approach that challenges conventional methods of top-down research – dominated by academics and other supposed ‘neutral’ third parties – and seeks to bring the research process to the grassroots community level. CBR thus aims to move away from a research paradigm where communities are exploited by mainstream researchers pushing their own agendas to one in which they are brought on-board as collaborative partners. In this manner, CBR seeks to enrich the research process with the ‘lived experience’ and unique insights and knowledge that community partners bring in order to improve the accessibility, authenticity, relevance and practical impact of a piece of research. This, in turn, has the potential to lead to the formulation and application of policies and programs that are more considerate of the communities concerned and more responsive to their needs.

Successful CBR partnerships lead to trusting and mutually satisfying relationships that promote accountability as well as providing opportunities for co-learning and capacity-building. However, it is important to note that CBR is not an either/or proposition but rather takes place along a wide spectrum of possible partnering and collaborative practices. These run the gamut from cases in which outside research experts perform the actual work while the community partners are only involved as advisors to those where they may be more actively involved in certain aspects of the research process, such as recruitment of participants and dissemination of study results. At the other extreme end of the continuum, it is also possible to see – though quite rare – an entirely community-led research project in which academics, funders and other mainstream players are not involved at all. Thus, ‘community participation’ is a relatively fluid concept that differs in application from case to case. Accordingly, each research partnership must establish the level and type of participation of different stakeholders that is appropriate to achieve its stated objectives and goals, keeping in mind practical constraints such as time and other resources.

⁴ Although certain nuances are made by CBR experts and practitioners, the terms ‘participatory action research’ and ‘community-based participatory research’ are also commonly used to refer to CBR.

⁵ Flicker and Savan, 2006:9.

While the benefits of CBR are many, it is a particularly challenging endeavor as it has to appeal both to community partners as well as to the wider community of mainstream academics, funders and policy-makers. Moreover, lack of adequate funding, lingering perception that it is not as rigorous as traditional research as well as the time-consuming nature of collaborative research continue to hinder the further development and application of CBR. Funding structures that are more attuned to the particularities of CBR (e.g., need for start-up funds to establish solid partnerships), increased opportunities for capacity-building, greater institutional support and more efforts to publicize CBR as a credible approach to research would help facilitate CBR in various fields.

In the specific case of diaspora communities, CBR is of particular importance as – despite the vast array of studies produced by the international research community exploring the contribution of diaspora communities to peace-building and, more generally to development, both in their home and host countries – diaspora communities themselves remain only marginally, if at all, involved in these research activities. Thus, increased institutional recognition of the value-added of effectively involving diaspora communities in diaspora-related activities (including research) – supported by practical and accessible mechanisms and tools that facilitate the financial, human and organizational capacity-building of diaspora organizations – is needed to further promote CBR in diaspora engagement.

2.2 Resources for Further Research

The following selected resources⁶ provide a more complete treatment of CBR, including its principles, benefits, requirements for and barriers to its effective use, as well as issues related to its application at each stage of the research process. As CBR is most widely used in the field of health-research, the resources are predominantly from that sector. Moreover, because the largest number of CBR collaborations involve community-academic partnerships and academics tend to be the ones to reflect on and write about the issue, the majority of CBR literature originates from the academic world.

2.2.1 Selected Works

Access Alliance Multicultural Community Health Centre (AAMCHC.) (Fall/Winter 2004/5.) *“Innovating Research, Strengthening Communities”*: A Forum on Community-Based Research. Forum Summary Report. Toronto: AAMCHC.
<http://www.accessalliance.ca/media/3.5.2 & 6 - Innovative Research, Strengthening Communities Forum Report.pdf>

Canadian Aboriginal Aids Network (CAAN). (October 2005.) *Getting Started in CBR*. Ottawa: CAAN.
[http://depts.washington.edu/ccph/pdf files/Getting Started in CBR.pdf](http://depts.washington.edu/ccph/pdf_files/Getting_Started_in_CBR.pdf)

⁶ A list of additional CBR resources is provided in Appendix 3.

- Flicker, S. *et al.* (July 2007.) *Ethical Dilemmas in Community-Based Participatory Research: Recommendations for Institutional Review Boards*. Journal of Urban Health: Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine 84 (4):478-93
- Flicker, S.; Savan, B. (June 2006.) *A Snapshot of CBR in Canada*. Toronto: Wellesley Institute.
http://wellesleyinstitute.com/files/CBR_snapshot.pdf
- Jewkes, R.; Murcott, A. (1998.) *Community Representatives: Representing the “Community?”* Social Science and Medicine 46 (7):843-858.
- Ritas, C. (July 2003.) *Speaking Truth, Creating Power: A Guide to Policy Work for Community-Based Participatory Research Practitioners*. Seattle: Community-Campus Partnerships for Health.
http://depts.washington.edu/ccph/pdf_files/ritas.pdf
- Wallerstein, N.B.; Duran, B. (July 2006.) *Using Community-Based Participatory Research to Address Health Disparities*. Health Promotion Practice 7 (3):312-323.
This article is particularly useful in terms of exposing issues related to the researcher being a community insider/outsider.

2.2.2 Selected Websites

CBRnet.org

<http://www.cbrnet.org/index.html>

Community-Based Research Network of Ottawa

http://www.spcottawa.on.ca/CBRNO_website/home_cbrno.htm

Community-Campus Partnerships for Health

<http://www.ccph.info/>

The ‘Community-Based Participatory Research’ section under ‘Resources’ is particularly useful.

Community Tool Box

<http://ctb.ku.edu/en/>

While not solely focusing on CBR, it offers information on capacity-building for community work, including research, such as grant writing, community assessment, leadership and facilitation skills, youth engagement, evaluation and advocacy.

Examining Community-Institutional Partnerships for Prevention Research Group (The) – Developing and Sustaining Community-Based Participatory Research Partnerships: A Skill-Building Curriculum.

www.cbprcurriculum.info

Institute for Community Research

<http://www.incommunityresearch.org>

Wellesley Institute – Community-Based Research Practice

<http://wellesleyinstitute.com/research/cbr-practice>

3. COMMUNITY-BASED RESEARCH ON DIASPORA ENGAGEMENT: EXPERIENCES, CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

In addition to issues for consideration in the conduct of CBR in general, CBR on a topic as novel, complex and sensitive as is diaspora engagement in peace-building and development presents its own particularities and challenges. The following guide covers the most recurrent issues in conducting CBR among diaspora communities, including common practices and challenges as well as suggestions for future studies. This tool principally draws from the experiences of the researchers of the 5 UPEACE-mandated diaspora studies as well as on learnings from other relevant studies and CBR practitioners.

3.1 Developing Effective Research Partnerships

Research partnerships are a core component of CBR. Strong and effective partnerships can dramatically raise the quality of the research as well as allow for a wide range of perspectives to be considered, simply by virtue of involving in the research process team members from different age sets, genders, various backgrounds (ethnic, religious, social, economic, education, etc.) and who possess diverse life experiences and skill sets.

3.1.1 The Power of Diversity

The power of partnerships comes from this inherent diversity which provides the opportunity to look at issues and explore solutions from multiple angles. This is especially important when conducting CBR in diaspora engagement as one of the main challenges it presents is that of ensuring that various segments of the diaspora community are involved as participants in the research.⁷ Having research team members that are representative of these various sub-groups within the larger diaspora community can thus facilitate the acceptance of the research among participants and the community at large. A perfect example is provided by one of the researchers from Young Diplomats (YD), the youth-led organization that carried out the Ethiopian case-study and which focused on the youth of the community:

“A lot of youth studies are done by middle-aged researchers and we had a definite advantage because we were close to [the participants] in age. I think we got a lot of valuable information because of that.”⁸

In this case, having youth involved as researchers helped demystify the research process, making it seem less threatening and formal and thus, more accessible to potential participants. This means that the youth would not only feel more comfortable participating and sharing their views frankly but also – seeing other young people such as

⁷ This is dealt with in detail in the Section 3.2.

⁸ Interview with Alpha Abebe.

themselves in charge of the process – feel they have a stake in the research; that they will be understood and taken seriously.

3.1.2 Controlling for Researcher Bias

Another major benefit of research partnerships is in helping reduce researcher bias. In an area as sensitive as is diaspora engagement – and particularly as it relates to peace-building, conflict resolution, etc. – **the importance of having internal checks and balances to minimize such bias cannot be overstated.** Researcher bias can be introduced at all stages of the research process, from problem identification and question development to analysis, interpretation and dissemination of findings. Thus it is important that researchers continually return to their own perceptions and interpretations throughout the entire process. Working as a group brings this issue to the foreground as partners question and challenge each other's thoughts and actions.

3.1.3 A Myriad of Partnership Possibilities

CBR partnerships may involve various stakeholders and take many different forms. Thus, beyond those established between members of the research team, partnerships may be formed (1) between researchers and community-based organizations (CBOs) – who may or may not be directly involved in the conduct of the research itself but, for example, provide contacts within the community or facilitate focus groups, etc; (2) between researchers and community participants; and (3) between researchers and funders as well as other institutional partners. **The needs and requirements of each case would dictate the type and level of partnerships considered.**

For instance, partnerships between community-based researchers and other experts can serve to fill capacity gaps and thus effectively remove technical barriers to conducting research that many diaspora communities face. Thus, the Afghan Women's Organization (AWO) – which conducted the UPEACE-mandated case study on the Afghan Community in Toronto – chose to partner with a native English speaker so as to benefit from her English language and writing skills in the development of the final research report.⁹ In this manner, this specific study was able to draw on the strengths of having both a research coordinator from the community – who has the advantage of familiarity with the community under study, including knowledge of both Pashto and Dari which proved crucial at the data collection stage – and outside expertise which filled a specific capacity gap identified in ensuring effective dissemination at the later stages of the process.

3.1.4 Barriers to Building Effective Partnerships

Forming effective partnerships is a challenge in any type of collaborative research work. The fact that the issue under consideration is peace-building and development among diaspora communities and thus one that needs to be handled delicately – especially when

⁹ Interview with Adeena Niazi.

the researchers themselves may be from the same community as the one being examined – presents particular challenges. The most common difficulties cited by the researchers involved in the UPEACE diaspora project in developing effective work partnerships include:

- **Communicating openly and directly** on a sensitive topic that concerns the researchers themselves personally. Thus, the diverse roles and identities that team members bring to the table, while enriching the research process, may also complicate communication;
- **Fostering and maintaining trust;**
- **Managing inter-generational relationships;**
- **Lack of resources, and especially time**, to devote to proper partnership development; and
- **Capacity gaps**, i.e., need for training, workshops, even simple awareness of the different issues associated with ensuring productive partnerships.

3.1.5 Strategies to Promote Effective Partnerships

Suggestions of actions that can be taken by community-based researchers to help remedy the first three challenges listed¹⁰ revolve around the need to clearly set out each partner's role and responsibilities as well as trust-building.

Creating and Assigning Distinct Roles and Responsibilities

Defining clear roles and responsibilities is essential to ensuring solid team-building and effective operations. This allows members to contribute to the best of their ability, based on their areas of expertise, skill sets and experiences, and with minimal energy wasted on competition and power struggles. Members of the Selam Peacebuilding Network (SPN)¹¹ – the group that worked on the Eritrean case-study – interviewed for this project report that they quickly realized the importance of creating distinctions around roles in order to ensure a smooth process throughout the research. Thus, for example, one member – a youth herself – was assigned to work with youth members of the Eritrean diaspora community while the older and more experienced members of the research team provided support as required. In this manner, they were able to contribute their different perspectives, experiences and skills while at the same time being careful to give the youth the space and latitude they needed to produce their best work.

¹⁰ The last two barriers cited are better addressed in collaboration with outside partners such as funders and other institutional actors.

¹¹ Interview with 3 members of the SPN research team (Amanuel Melles, Helen Tewelde and Tsehay Said.)

Establishing Relationships of Trust¹²

The promotion and development of trust among all partners involved is at the core of the CBR approach and **the successful conduct of the entire research process depends heavily on effective trust-building.** This is especially important and challenging in cases where the research partners have only come together to work on the project at hand, with no prior experience of collaboration, such as was the case for SPN members:

“[For us] this meant that in the span of 3 months, we had to build trust quickly. Not easy to do. Not easy to do. And, central to CBR is trust. [...] And it couldn't have been achieved without all of us putting our cards on the table. [...] The readiness to have difficult conversations was important. [...] As a group, we're dealing with peace-building and conflict, and 5 people working on this, we never had the discussion 'where do you stand on this issue in relation to your country of origin?' So we gelled as a group by focusing on the deliverables of the research project but we didn't shy away from having these frank discussions about our own individual placement and relationship management.”¹³

Thus, the fact of having all views and issues out in the open served to quickly consolidate this partnership and give the various members the comfort of knowing that all were acting and working in good faith to achieve the stated goals of the study with no ulterior motives other than those expressed. This also opened the way for honest and direct communication that permitted the team members to freely question and challenge each other, which in turn helped provided effective checks and balances throughout the entire research process.

It is important to note, however, that the experiences of various groups reveal that **there are different ways that trust-building among team members and control of researcher bias may be achieved.** While one group may choose to – as we have seen above – simply lay out all the issues in the open, others may find it more productive to designate certain subjects – deemed irrelevant to the task at hand – as being off limits. Thus, in the case of the Ethiopian study, YD's approach was that the researchers' individual views on Ethiopian politics were not to be brought up for discussion so as to ensure that these did not shape, in any way, the research questions or the research more generally.¹⁴ In this instance, this also helped avoid unnecessary friction between members.

¹² The issue of trust is a central one and permeates the entire CBR process. Please refer to Section 3.2.3 for a more in-depth treatment of the issue as it relates to the full and genuine participation of community members in research on diaspora engagement in peace-building and development.

¹³ Interview with Amanuel Melles.

¹⁴ Interview with 2 members of the YD research team (Alpha Abebe and Eskender Mekonnen.)

3.2 Ensuring Effective Participation and Representation of Various Segments of the Diaspora Community

The genuine involvement of community participants in CBR – including the effective representation of the relevant segments of the specific group under study – lies at the heart of this collaborative approach to research. In fact, it is precisely what differentiates CBR from traditional, top-down research practices.

While ensuring genuine and wide-ranging participation is a major challenge in CBR in general, it is made even more difficult within the context of diaspora engagement in peace-building and development as – as revealed by the experiences of the various groups that conducted the 5 UPEACE-mandated community case-studies – diaspora communities tend to be fragmented along political, ethnic, religious, regional and other lines. Diaspora communities also tend to be racialized and marginalized communities faced with many immediate challenges as they seek to adapt to, and survive in, their countries of settlement. These issues add layers of complexity to the already formidable task of ensuring successful participation from different segments of a given community.

The experiences of various groups involved in diasporic research – including lessons learned from those that were involved in the UPEACE project – reveal that, while a certain level of community involvement may be automatically ensured simply by virtue of having researchers from the same community as the ones under study leading the projects, this by no means suffices to ensure real and widespread community participation in, and acceptance of, said research projects.

In examining the issue of community participation, it is useful to note that we are looking at two different, albeit closely connected, aspects. These are:

- **Inclusiveness**, which refers to efforts to recruit participants from as wide a range of segments of the diaspora population as is possible; and
- **Effectiveness of participation**, meaning that those selected for participation do so in a useful and meaningful manner.

3.2.1 Barriers to Effective and Inclusive Community Participation

Community Members' Reluctance to Participate in Research

The major barrier to wide-ranging and inclusive participation in CBR is **the disinclination of community members to be involved in research.** This is due to various factors, including:

- The perception that they are not 'important' or knowledgeable enough to participate in research;
- 'Discussion fatigue': this is especially prevalent among those who have been actively involved in community affairs for a certain period of time – the very people whose support such a project would most benefit from – and who might be unwilling to participate in what they perceive as yet another 'talk' exercise that leads to no tangible change or benefit in the community; and

- Lack of trust and scepticism as to the stated objectives of the research and how its findings will be utilized.

Time Constraints

Community members face real time constraints due both to personal and professional obligations and may simply be unable to ‘indulge’ in research. This is **particularly noted in the case of newcomers** who are busy trying to settle in, and adapt to, a new environment while often being under important economic pressures as well. **Lack of time is also a barrier to the involvement of leaders and members of CBOs**, whether they are called upon to participate themselves or to facilitate the participation of others in the community. This is especially true for service providers who are already underpaid, overworked and tight for time.

Time is also a major issue for community-based researchers. Indeed, the quality and intensity of the outreach and trust-building activities necessary to ensure community buy-in and effective participation in CBR projects requires a lot of time as well as extra care throughout the entire research process. These researchers – who often pursue research work on small stipends or honoraria and in addition to other professional obligations – thus find themselves trying to somehow balance the time spent on efforts to genuinely involve community participants in the research process with real and constant resource limitations.

Lack of Information on the Community

Lack of centralized and reliable information on the community, its composition and various features make it difficult to be as inclusive as is wanted as researchers may not even know who to target for involvement or how to go about reaching various sub-groups. This is a recurrent issue with implications at the information dissemination stage as well.

Lack of Common Understanding of Key Concepts

Another barrier to the effective participation of community members are the challenges associated with translating and discussing complex concepts such as peace-building, conflict resolution, diaspora, diaspora engagement and development in the context of each community. Part of the challenge is that research is often times designed and formulated in English and thus, when the researchers approach potential participants, it is difficult to settle on a common terminology that allows for meaningful discussions with the average community member. Even beyond translation challenges, **the very complexity and fluidity of the key ideas under consideration make them difficult to grasp and have common exchanges on.**¹⁵

¹⁵ Issues related to misunderstandings of these central concepts and their effect on non-response or incomplete response to written survey questionnaires are discussed in Section 3.5.2.

Issues Related to the Participation of Women and Youth

Among certain segments of diaspora communities, women can be quite active and vocal participants in the community, occupying leadership roles that were once reserved for men only. However, in other cases, women may occupy more traditional, domestic roles which may lead to their being underrepresented in community discussions related to diaspora engagement. Thus, for instance, obligations at home, added to work-related duties, make these women's involvement in CBR particularly difficult. Moreover, even when they are included in the research, this does not always translate in their voices really getting heard as cultural and other barriers may hinder their active participation.

The same reasons why younger members of the community tend to be less involved with their communities of origin may also lead to difficulties in engaging them in CBR. For example, one barrier to youth engagement in community-related affairs could be inability to speak the language(s) of the home country which often leaves them separated from other segments of the diaspora group, such as the newcomers, elders, etc. However, it is important to reach out to the youth in diaspora communities – and especially on issues related to conflict resolution and peace-building – as this group tends to be less burdened with the history and 'baggage' brought over from the homeland that continues to divide the older generations.

Indeed, as noted in the findings of the Afghan study,

“Women and youth tend to be on the forefront of organized diaspora activities. The urban and literate women of the diaspora started forming women's NGOs in their new countries of residence, establishing women as important civil society actors. Women tend to be less divided on ethnic and political lines; they remain more focused on issues of human rights.”¹⁶

Thus, it is essential that women and youth be targeted for inclusion in CBR on diaspora engagement **as they can serve as facilitators of peace-building and development within their communities.**

Difficulty of Ensuring a Representative Participants' Pool

In addition to targeting women and youth for participation in research, particular care need be taken to ensure that participants from other segments of the population are represented. Challenges to ensuring a representative mix of participants include lack of information as to the composition of the community and the severe time constraints under which community-based researchers often operate. Thus, for the sake of practicality, participant recruitment practices often heavily depend on the researchers' existing networks. This tends to skew the composition of the participants group in favor of the groups of people the researchers have contact with. Thus members of the community that are from different ethnic backgrounds or social circles might be excluded or

¹⁶ AWO, p.8.

underrepresented. Alternatively, a CBO may favor recruiting participants from its client base which, while convenient, may also result in an unrepresentative pool.

Another major difficulty is in trying to reach those who are completely disengaged from the community. This group of people is of particular interest in light of the topic under consideration. Indeed, it would be useful to find out why they choose not to be involved with their communities of origin and what would entice them to do so as this would have implications for diaspora engagement in peace-building efforts both in their homelands and their adopted countries. However, the challenge remains in identifying such potential participants, locating them and interesting them in getting involved in the research.

Other Practical Barriers

Other practical barriers to wide community participation in CBR include:

- Linguistic barriers, which remain an important challenge even for larger CBOs with dedicated research units;
- Transportation constraints; and
- Travel and participation constraints such as unavailability of childcare, for instance.

3.2.2 Methodologies to Effective and Inclusive Participation

Operationalizing ‘Community Participation’

The first key step in implementing methodologies to effective and inclusive participation is the **clarification of what exactly ‘community participation’ means** – in practical terms – within the context of the specific study and community under consideration, its intended purpose and resources available. Thus, CBR teams should start by explicitly addressing the following questions:

- What does ‘community’ mean?
- Who is the community?
- What are the relevant segments to be considered?
- What exactly does ‘participation’ involve in this case? Who participates? And in what capacity do they participate?
- What level and type of participation permits effective community engagement and achievement of the study’s objectives while balancing it with other key considerations such as availability of time and other resources?

‘Selling’ CBR in Diaspora Engagement

Suggestions to help counteract community members’ reluctance to participate in research are many and varied. These include:

- **Making efforts to demystify the research process and explaining the CBR approach.** This will help alleviate some of the issues that stem from the general perception, among diaspora communities, that research is the domain of

academics and other educated elites, with no apparent practical relevance for community members themselves.

- Explaining clearly and transparently what the purpose of the research is as well as the important role community participants' involvement plays in its successful conduct. **It is imperative that potential participants know exactly what value their participation adds to the study, what it entails in terms of commitment from all parties concerned, and what the community can gain from the results of this exercise.** Of course, it is easier to hook the interest of research participants if there are tangible and action-oriented plans to make use of the results in the service of the community; however, even when that is not the case, it is important to spell out how the type of information gleaned from the research can be put to the use to the community. This will not only lead to community members being more inclined to take part in the study but also facilitates a more effective and meaningful participation (more complete and thoughtful answers, active participation in discussions, etc.)¹⁷
- **Establishing relationships of trust.**¹⁸
- Getting creative! Where possible, it is helpful to **use various media to get potential participants interested in the topic under consideration.** These could include television or radio shows, short movies, websites, music and traditional stories. These are powerful tools as they are more widely accessible to community members. They may also produce strong personal impact and can help convey certain concepts and ideas much more clearly and immediately than other more traditional means of communication. Thus, a short relevant film or TV segment could be shown in a community setting to try and spark the interest of potential participants or a focus group discussion be preceded by a relevant documentary, for example.

Intense and Wide-Ranging Outreach Activities

The research groups studied for this project suggested the use of various avenues to help reach different segments of diaspora communities, both at the data collection and results dissemination stages. These include:

- Community media outlets (radio and television stations, magazines, newspapers, etc.);
- Umbrella organizations that gather different types of CBOs;
- Specialized CBOs such as youth and women's associations, those catering to seniors, faith-based organizations, organizations serving those from specific regions or ethnic backgrounds;

¹⁷ The importance of clear and honest communication will be revisited further down in Section 3.2.3 on trust-building.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

- Word of mouth, which is of particular importance in this setting as it helps establish social acceptability of participating in a study and facilitates trust-building;
- Making use of researchers' own formal and informal networks of contacts;
- Specifically targeting community members that are actively involved in the affairs of the community. Such individuals are not only valuable as key informants in interviews but also as links to various community networks;
- Community events such as festivals, sporting events, etc.;
- University students' associations;
- Housing cooperatives; and
- Community e-mail listservs or online groups.

The importance of being flexible and even using counterintuitive methodologies to ensure best results needs to be highlighted. **No possible avenue of recruitment should be automatically disregarded.** In the Colombian case, for example, the researchers – faced with the difficulty of recruiting the minimum number of participants they had planned to involve – approached the Colombian Consulate in Toronto to allow them to administer questionnaires on its premises. While there was initial concern in involving the home government as this could have potential fall-out within the community, this course of action proved, in this case, useful in adding to the number of those already recruited through other means (community media, Colombian associations, personal and professional networks, etc.)¹⁹

Some useful and common segmentation variables for consideration by community-based researchers, depending on the specific objectives of a given study, include:

- Gender
- Age (youth; seniors)
- Length of stay in host country (newcomers vs. old comers)
- First/second (or more) generation immigrants
- Education level
- Income level
- Language
- Ethnic background
- Regions of origin
- Political affiliations
- Religion (approach religious institutions – church groups, mosques, and others)
- Role in the community (religious authorities, business leaders, community leaders, etc.)
- Immigration status

Researchers need also be aware of segmentation variables of significance that are specific to each community and consider their application in ensuring a representative participant pool. For instance, the Colombian case-study examined separately those members of the Colombian diaspora who arrived in Canada before and after 1979. This pre- and post-1979 divide is meaningful for this particular community as it involves immigrants drawn

¹⁹ Interview with Gustavo Neme Lozano.

from different populations in their homelands and who went through dissimilar immigration and settlement processes. These differences in experiences are thus assumed to have an implication for how they may currently engage in peace-building and development activities.²⁰ Another example is that of the Eritrean case-study in which, among other, Eritreans born or raised in Ethiopia were targeted as a separate and relevant sub-group within the larger diaspora population.²¹

Organizing Focus Groups Composed of Participants with Shared Characteristics

One of the most effective ways to ensure the meaningful and active participation of traditionally marginalized members within a given community is to organize focus groups that are solely dedicated to them. These could be women-only focus groups aiming to enhance the input provided by those who might be too intimidated to speak in mixed-gender groups; groups targeting younger members of the community; or newcomers who might, for example, not feel confident enough in their ability to express themselves in the dominant language or might otherwise face cultural barriers to public participation. Focus groups gathering participants with shared characteristics can be effective participation tools as they can be tailored to suit the needs of each group.

Reducing Other Practical Barriers to Participation

The following should be adopted as standard practice to alleviate the burden of participation:

- Provision of childcare services – this is especially important to promote female participation;
- Translation and interpretation as required. These include the translation of data collection instruments as well as final results; and
- Strategies to relieve transportation constraints. These may include holding sessions in various locations, favoring easily accessible locales within walking distance of public transportation, etc.

3.2.3 Issues Related to Trust and Trust-Building

The issue of trust comes into play at various stages of the research process, including in community members' decision to participate or not as well as on the extent to which the study benefits from the genuine and complete participation of those involved. It is treated separately in this section as it is a central issue that touches on most aspects of effective and inclusive community participation.

²⁰ Interview with Gustavo Neme Lozano.

²¹ Interview with members of the SPN research team.

Lack of Trust

Lack of trust within fragmented diaspora communities as well as suspicion of those conducting research is a pervasive problem. The issue of trust is made even more salient by the fact that the topic under consideration is peace-building and development among populations that originated from experiences of conflict, war and displacement. Researchers involved in the 5 UPEACE-mandated community case-studies were confronted with one or more of the following expressions of mistrust in their quest to recruit participants from their respective communities:

- Doubt regarding the real intention of the researchers and use of results, including fear – in some cases – that information provided would be shared with the home country government;
- Wariness of getting inadvertently involved in political issues;
- Fear that the information would be used to portray their community or their country of origin negatively;
- Deep-rooted mistrust of institutions involved. Thus, in certain instances, UPEACE's affiliation with the United Nations was not well received; and
- General skepticism as to the tangible benefits their communities' would gain from such an exercise.

Strategies to Promote Trust-Building

Methods that can be used to achieve relationships of trust between researchers and community members are many and varied. Common suggestions from diaspora CBR practitioners and other researchers include:

- **Paying special attention to how the project is presented to potential participants as well as to the wording of the research questions.** It is important to note that, while information provision can be difficult in general, it is even more so among such populations that have lived and left difficult situations in their countries of origin. There is thus a real need to be sensitive in how potential participants are approached. The careful selection and wording of questions is essential if the perception that the researchers are favoring one segment of the diaspora over another is to be avoided. This is even more significant when the researchers are also from the community under study as they must appear to be as objective as possible.
- **Getting project buy-in from highly visible, respected and trusted members of the community.** Thus, it is important to identify, contact and get the public support of such community members. Especially new and emerging groups are encouraged to associate well-known community organizations or individuals to their project so as to make the entire research process smoother.
- **Making the research process as transparent as possible at each and every one of its stages.** This includes provision of clear and complete information regarding:

- The individual or group conducting the research: who they are, what their background is, how they came to be involved in such an endeavor, who they are working for as well as what they are gaining from the research;
 - All community-based, independent or institutional project partners involved, including funders. Contact information for all should be readily available;
 - Involvement, if any, of governments, and especially that of the home country;
 - The purpose of the research as well as the exact manner in which the information collected is going to be used;
 - The end result of the research and implications for the community under study, including policy advocacy, programme formulation and implementation, etc.; and
 - The CBR approach, including the lead roles played by community-based researchers and CBOs as well as the opportunities for meaningful community participation.
- **Consulting with the community throughout the research process.** Establishing long-term relationships of trust require that researchers do not ignore the participant community's views and input once they have secured their participation and collected the necessary data. It is important, both as a trust-building exercise as well as to stay true to CBR's participatory nature, that the community is involved in various stages of the study as well as kept informed of relevant developments. It is especially good practice to present the findings to the community and seek their feedback before these are released in the wider research community. This is not meant to 'massage' study results to fit the communities' views but rather to make sure that clarifications are made as needed and to enrich the final output. More importantly, **this is a simple matter of respect and courtesy.**

3.3 Identification of Research Priorities and Question Development

3.3.1 Establishing the Focus of the Study

Deciding which specific issues to address or, even more generally, how to approach the subject of diaspora engagement in peace-building can be a complex task. There are a number of possible approaches as evidenced by the variety of issues covered by the 5 research groups in their case studies. Indeed, the breadth and depth of the issues included as well as the multiple approaches and methods used to fulfill their mandate from UPEACE illustrates quite well how the same topic may be addressed from different perspectives so as to fit the realities and priorities of the communities under study as well as the research groups' own organizational capacities and needs.

Various means to facilitate the identification of a research focus include:

- Community needs assessment. These examine what is happening in the community, assess its strengths and weaknesses and identify areas that require priority attention;
- Surveying areas of interest and of concern expressed by the community; and
- Reviewing information on, and assessments of, the community produced by other community-based researchers, CBOs, government agencies, international organizations, etc.

Where possible, it is useful to involve community participants at the needs assessment stage to ensure there is a fit between the community's priorities and the issues chosen for consideration.

3.3.2 Considerations Related to the Choice of Research Methods

As with all types of research, a variety of qualitative (interviews, focus groups, questionnaires) and quantitative (surveys/questionnaires) research methods²² may be used in CBR; the choice of methodology depends on the type of information sought as well as time and other resource constraints. However, the experiences of those engaged in diasporic research reveal the following lessons learned.

- Where possible, **the use of a combination of methods is encouraged** as this allows for the strengths and weaknesses inherent to each data gathering tool to balance one another out. Thus, while an online survey provides the opportunity to cast a wider net, it has the disadvantage of being limited to those who are computer-literate and have access to the Internet. Supplementing it with a paper-based survey would allow for the inclusion of those that cannot be reached via this medium. More importantly – and especially so in the context of research on sensitive issues such as peace-building, conflict resolution, etc. – **different methods can be employed to elicit information of varying degrees of sensitivity.**
- **Personal Reflections on peace-building and development** by researchers – a unique method used by the group working on the Eritrean case-study – have proved particularly interesting, not only because they provided an additional source of valuable information, but also because the reflection entailed helped clarify the issues under consideration for the researchers themselves and allowed them to nuance their approaches. This also helped with recognizing thought patterns expressed by participants as the researchers could relate them to their own. Finally, Personal Reflections facilitated trust-building as the researchers' personal thoughts on these sensitive issues were expressed openly and shared

²² The Research Methods Knowledge Base offers a comprehensive treatment of the entire research process from research question formulation to data analysis and write-up. The various qualitative and quantitative research methods as well as their particular features and uses are well covered in this tool which can be accessed online at <http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/index.php>.

freely with the community.²³ This is certainly a method that merits serious consideration by future researchers working on the complex issue of diaspora engagement in peace-building and development.

- The use of various media – **including unconventional one such as films, photographs, story-telling, radio and television shows** – to gain insight into the community under study and some perspectives on peace-building, conflict resolution, social conditions in the community, etc. is also recommended.
- Focus groups are popular and particularly useful in promoting active and dynamic discussions. However, they present certain **important limitations that researchers need be aware of:**
 - o Focus group discussions work best in small groups of a maximum of 8-10 people. This keeps the group manageable and allows for meaningful participation by all present.
 - o Focus groups are notoriously difficult to organize due to the time constraints of potential participants and the challenge of agreeing on a mutually suitable date and time to meet. Researchers thus need to be flexible and prepared to accommodate meeting postponements and cancellations.
 - o Effective discussion management and strong facilitation skills, combined with sensitivity in approach, are a must to promote focused and meaningful interactions that elicit meaningful participation from all participants. Otherwise, there is risk of wasting a lot of time in order to get the relevant information or having a few individuals dominate the exchange.

3.3.3 Community Involvement in Question Formulation

The meaningful involvement of potential community participants at the question development and formulation stage is important in ensuring that issues considered fit with the concerns and priorities of the community under study. The validity and clarity of each question can also be thus pre-tested. This is a crucial step when dealing with concepts such as peace, peace-building, conflict, etc. which may be understood in myriads of ways. It is especially important to involve lay members of the community in the question design and testing phase to ensure targeted participants can capably answer the questions asked and provide information that is relevant and usable.

Community participants' active involvement in this phase of the research process may take varied forms. Some examples include:

- Test runs of questions developed by researchers among a smaller yet representative sample of targeted participants;
- Involvement of volunteers recruited from the community in question formulation;
- Organization of an initial focus group solely dedicated to identifying issues to be considered. Questions would then be designed based on the results of discussions.

²³ Interview with members of the SPN research team.

An essential issue for consideration when seeking participants' contribution in question development is to strike the proper balance between getting useful input and knowing where to intervene so as to keep a certain focus, which would (ideally) have been previously agreed in a consultative manner. Thus, **while researchers must take care not to impose their own vision of what the research focus and questions should be, they need also be able to effectively and practically guide the process.** This is a delicate balance to achieve and maintain. However, even the fact of community-based researchers becoming aware of this issue can be helpful in achieving this balance.

3.3.4 Framework for Suggested Research Questions and Lines of Inquiry

One of the needs expressed by community-based researchers engaging with diaspora communities on their role in, and contributions to, peace-building and development is for a basic framework that would guide the type of questions asked while being flexible enough to accommodate the particularities of each case study's research focus and stated goals. General recommendations that would help inform the researchers' own understanding are presented, followed by general lines of inquiry that may be considered.

General Recommendations to Inform Researchers' Approach

- **Ensure that researchers are clear on the various concepts involved as well as on how to convey them effectively to community participants.** For example, based on the types of participants targeted, the focus of the research as well as its intended outcomes, there may be a decision to be made as to whether direct or indirect questions would be most effective in eliciting the information sought. For instance, YD – the group that studied the case of Ethiopian youth in Toronto – quickly realized the difficulty its mainly high-school aged participants would have to conceptualize the issue of peace-building and thus saw no merit in asking a question such as *'Do you participate in peace-building activities?'* Thus, it sought answers to that question in a more roundabout manner, asking about levels of connectedness to the community, practices such as following news from the homeland, etc.²⁴ Of course, in other cases – and given the necessary clarifications related to the various concepts at issue are provided – it might make perfect sense to directly inquire about peace and peace-building activities. **The most important aspect is that the approach be tailored to each case.** Another example is provided in the Colombian case, where 'development' rather than 'peace-building' language was used as the issue of peace is a particularly emotionally charged one for this community. Thus, focusing on the term 'peace-building' would have been ineffective as it would simply have added to potential participants' reluctance to participate.
- **Establish a solid understanding of how a particular diaspora group came to be, including the nature and length of the conflict it originated from; a snapshot of**

²⁴ Interview with members of the YD research team.

the current situation (political, economic, social) in the country of origin; length of establishment in the host country; current condition of the community; the various waves of immigration and their composition. The latter is significant as who immigrated as well as when and why they immigrated is likely to have implications for engagement in peace-building and development activities. It is especially important when the researcher is a community outsider – but even when that is not the case – to remember that “*diasporas are not identical, nor monolithic – as such, it is important to understand the specific social, political, and historical context(s) from which a diaspora community has emerged.*”²⁵

- It is also useful to look at **lessons that can be learned from other diaspora groups**, especially those that originate from similar experiences in the home country or are from the same region (such as diasporas from Horn of Africa countries for example.) This is generally a step that is overlooked and unfortunately, much is lost in terms of experiences shared, lessons learned as well as mutual support that could have been provided. Diaspora groups – regardless of how disparate their experiences may appear at first look – generally face similar experiences, situations and difficulties, especially in the country of settlement, and would gain enormously from working together and learning from each other’s experiences.

Framework for Suggested Research Questions and Lines of Inquiry

Based on the major themes to emerge from the findings of the various studies as well as discussions with the researchers, some lines of inquiry for consideration when conducting CBR on the topic of diaspora engagement in peace-building and development are presented.

- **Demographic aspects of the community under consideration**
 - Gender, age, family situation, income/education levels, language, occupation, own/rent house, etc.
- **Health and effectiveness of the diaspora community in the host country**
 - Dynamics within the community, including fragmentation, lack of trust, etc.
 - Assessment of strengths and weaknesses; inventory of skills and assets at a community-level
 - Visibility of the community in the larger society
 - Level of community involvement
 - Factors that facilitate or hinder community involvement
- **Assessment of type and level of involvement in activities related to the country of origin as well as in the diaspora**
 - Community connectedness (including membership and participation in various organizations, networks, etc.)

²⁵ AWO, p.5.

- Connectedness to the country of origin (family links, remittances, travel, awareness of new developments, etc.)
 - Willingness to participate in peace-building and development
 - Capacity to participate in peace-building and development, including organizational/associational capacity to engage in such activities
 - Personal and institutional connections
 - Opportunities and barriers to diaspora engagement
- **Examination of experiences of immigration to, and settlement in, the host country**
- Integration in mainstream society
 - Access to political, economic and social resources
 - Influence of Canadian ‘values’ on various segments of a given diaspora community
 - Institutional and organizational support for diaspora engagement
- **Examination of conflict, conflict resolution and the dynamics of peace-building in home and host countries**
- Traditional methods of conflict resolution and peace-building such as story telling
 - Modern methods of conflict resolution and peace-building and issues related to their effective application
 - Views on approaches that facilitate or hinder conflict resolution and peace-building
 - Community networks that facilitate or hinder peace-building processes
 - Inter-generational and other social dynamics (gender, religious diversity, ethnic politics, etc) as they impact conflict resolution and peace-building
 - Strengths and limitations of diaspora actors in these processes in both home and host countries

3.4 Research Dissemination Practices

One of the barriers to community participation in research is the **widely-held view among members of communities under study that the results will not be disseminated in the community or acted upon in any tangible manner and will, in effect, have no discernible positive impact on the community.** In CBR, it is vital that community members be clearly and honestly informed of the goals of a piece of research as well as its expected outcomes. This is important to avoid disappointment and loss of trust if researchers under-deliver on their promises to community participants or create unintended expectations due to miscommunication regarding the study’s objectives.

3.4.1 Dissemination Practices – Selected Examples

The results of the 5 UPEACE-commissioned diaspora studies were presented at UPEACE’s High Level Expert Forum on *Capacity Building for Peace and Development:*

Roles of Diaspora. In addition to that, community-oriented dissemination activities undertaken by the researchers include:

- Circulating the final report among community members, including study participants;
- Sharing and discussing the findings of the study via community radio programs. In the Colombian case, an open line mode was used to ensure audience participation, with listeners calling in with questions, comments and suggestions;²⁶
- Publishing related articles in community newspapers;
- Organizing community meetings to present results, followed by question and answer sessions to exchange ideas and receive feedback. SPN, for instance, presented the final findings of the research to community participants before sharing it at UPEACE's expert forum to ensure that the end product presented at the international conference would benefit from the community's evaluation and feedback;²⁷
- Sending the final report to relevant governmental, academic and other non-governmental institutions in the country of origin, in the hope they may be able to make use of the findings. Thus, the findings of the Jamaican case study were sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Jamaica as well as circulated among various university professors;²⁸
- Sharing the results with high profile members of the community – and even those who might not be from the same community of origin but may have a particular interest in the country or region under examination. This is to raise the visibility of the research and its results as well as getting buy-in for future related studies or programs.
- In quite an efficient, rapid and proactive case of direct research application, the group working on the Ethiopian case-study established and started running a youth mentorship program based on the recommendations of the study.²⁹

3.4.2 CBR: an Imperative for Action?

For some practitioners, direct action outcomes for the community based on the findings of a research are a hallmark of CBR. However, others believe that it is possible and legitimate to conduct research that genuinely and respectfully engages the community and brings forth relevant and interesting research answers without necessarily establishing what the action consequences of these may be in the immediate.

In this regard, it may be useful to differentiate between **research 'output'** – concrete products, programs and policies – and **research 'outcome'**, which refers to less tangible benefits. The latter may include community-capacity building (for example, in the Eritrean case, the research team recruited and trained 10 youth volunteers from the

²⁶ Interview with Gustavo Neme Lozano.

²⁷ Interview with members of the SPN research team.

²⁸ Interview with Ron Cunningham.

²⁹ Interview with members of the YD research team.

community to administer questionnaires);³⁰ a sense of empowerment that flows from community groups and individuals' active and meaningful participation in the research process; and the transformative effect, on members of research teams, of the journey to establishing effective partnerships and relationships of trust. Thus **the practical effects of CBR should not simply viewed through the lens of actual programs established, funds received and services expanded, but should rather include a wider view of associated tangible and intangible products.**

Moreover, considering the dearth of CBR in the field of diaspora communities' engagement in peace-building and development, the fact that there now exist a few cases whose findings may serve to inform other similar works or may be built on in future research is extremely significant.

3.5 Other Issues for Consideration

3.5.1 Implications of Researcher(s) Being from the Community under Study

In community-based studies engaging diaspora communities, one issue that comes up is that of the opportunities and challenges associated with the researchers' conducting the study being from the same community as the one under examination. In the case of the 5 UPEACE-commissioned diaspora studies, all the researchers were from the same country of origin as the communities selected for the case-studies. Their experiences in that regard reveal the following as being the most common related advantages and disadvantages.

Advantages

- **Pre-established contacts and relationships within the community** which helps facilitate access to networks within the community. Familiarity with the community leads to easier access to material resources and relevant people as well as facilitating the process of identifying and locating specific persons of interest or segments of the community. Thus, where an outsider to the community may not be aware of community e-mail listservs or small festivals that could serve as avenues of recruitment and results dissemination, the community insider would be better positioned to take advantage of such access points.
- In certain cases where the researcher is already active in the affairs of the community, the **research may benefit from the visibility, credibility and relationships already established.** In other cases, however, this can prove to be more of a liability as the fact that the researcher is known to the community may generate even more suspicion.

³⁰ Interview with members of the SPN research team.

- Study participants, especially in cases of oral interaction (be it in one-on-one interviews or focus group discussions), **do not have to explain some difficulties on issues that can be emotional for them.** This is especially relevant to research focusing on diaspora engagement in peace building and development as this is a particularly sensitive topic often involving participants who come from experiences of conflict, insecurity and hardship.
- Being from the same community also affords **sensitivity to the cultural context of study participants.** For example, knowing how to talk to elders, the appropriate forms of address, or knowing how to approach certain sensitive issues and how to word questions.
- **Working in one's own community also allows one to benefit from the knowledge and understanding of the issues that stem from familiarity.** There are thus advantages to be gained from having insider's insight on the community, intimate understanding of the culture and thought patterns, shared experiences in the home country as well as in the host country, similar exposure to the community's dynamics, etc. For instance, it is easier for a community insider to contextualize participants' answers than for an outsider as the former can have a nuanced approach and is aware of the sensitivity needed. A community outsider would thus be more challenged in getting a deep understanding of the intricacies and complexities of the relations of conflict inherent to the community, the history of settlement, etc. This level of understanding is difficult to glean from readings; it comes from personal experience.
- Having researchers from the community who speak languages native to their countries of origin is an **asset in countering linguistic barriers to participation.**

Disadvantages

- Diaspora communities – and especially those born from conflict in the country of origin – tend to be fragmented along ethnic, religious, political, regional and other lines. Thus, depending on the nature of the conflict in the country of origin and the present status as well as the dynamics within the diaspora community, **a community outsider might – in certain instances – prove more effective in engaging various groups within a given diaspora community.**
- Even in the absence of divisions such as the ones mentioned above, study participants may simply be **uncomfortable sharing personal and sensitive information with a community insider** as these communities tend to be rather small and participants do not want others in the community 'knowing their business.'
- There is also **the risk of inadvertently introducing researcher bias based on personal views.** This can happen at all stages of the research, from problem identification and question development to data analysis and interpretation of

findings. Thus it is important that researchers continually revisit their own conceptions and perceptions.

- Another potential problem is that of **over-familiarity and false generalization** leading the researchers to think their feelings and perspectives on issues affecting the community are held by the community at large. For instance, they might not feel the need to go through the exercise of involving potential participants in the question development stage, erroneously assuming they already know what the priority issues that need to be addressed are.
- Being known to the community or simply being from the community, **the researcher may not be taken as seriously as an outsider might be.** For example, a research assistant working with the Filipino diaspora in Toronto observed that study participants were less formal and ‘serious’ with her –of Filipino descent herself – than they were with her colleague who is not from the community.³¹
- The report could also be undermined, to some extent, because of **envy and other such power and influence struggles within the community.**
- **Insecurity associated with being from the community and resulting self-censorship** so as to avoid offending members of one’s own community may also prove a liability.

3.5.2 Non-Response or Non-Elaboration of Information Provided

Challenges of Ensuring Complete and Meaningful Responses

While non-response or short ‘empty’ responses – most prevalent in written questionnaires – is not a problem particular to CBR and is commonly encountered in traditional research as well, the fact of addressing the sensitive and complex issue of diaspora engagement in peace-building presents its own challenges. Thus, such responses may be symptomatic of community participants’ reluctance to go beyond superficial answers which could be due to a number of problems including:

- Lack of trust;
- Fear of divulging their real situations and opinions;
- Being self-conscious about what they say and how they say it; and
- Questionnaires that may be too long or too complex.

Practices to Minimize Non- or Short Responses

- **Clear and thorough explanation of concepts such as peace-building, conflict resolution, diaspora, diaspora engagement, and development.** While translating questions into the participants’ native languages certainly helps

³¹ Interview with Anna Lisa Candido.

remove barriers to effective participation that are strictly language-related, it does not guarantee that participants have a solid handle on the various concepts involved. In fact, as mentioned previously, the very act of translating certain concepts from English to other languages often adds another level of complexity.

- Where practicable, **use alternate words or explanations that more readily resonate with the population being surveyed.** For example, in the Colombian case, realizing that about 90% of the participants in a focus group did not know what the term ‘diaspora’ meant, the researchers stopped using that term, instead referring to ‘the community’ or ‘the Colombian community who lives in Canada.’ The researchers also came up with a list of definitions which was used to explain the various concepts to community participants.³² SPN members reiterated the need to work with and use simplified explanations and definitions, even at the risk of being reductionist.³³ However, it is important to note that, in certain instances, researchers avoid giving any type of definition as part of their objectives is, precisely, the examination of what peace and peace-building means to the community. As notes the researcher of the Jamaican case-study:

“Having a general idea of what it should be and finding that some might not necessarily be providing what my pre-conceived ideas were, I still would listen to them, we’d talk about it, talk around it, even to some extent, without trying to sway, I would infer what others might conceive the topic to be. Consequently, [being] able to extract from them a revised, clarified, or totally new definition after they had seen a different perspective. But it’s not something that was just cut and dry. It came out of a discussion; there are different levels and understanding of the terms. [...] I guess in my mind, that’s part of the whole idea of community-based participatory research.”³⁴

- Facilitators should **clearly communicate to research participants the importance of providing full answers and how this affects the results of the research.** Thus, emphasis should be put on the benefits of providing useful, usable and indicative responses that genuinely reflect the participants’ feelings and views.
- There is also a struggle between wanting to ask thorough questions that cover multiple aspects of an issue and the risk of causing fatigue among participants through use of long questions and even longer questionnaires. An effective questionnaire design:
 - o Is limited to asking **one question per question**, meaning no multi-part questions;

³² Interview with Gustavo Neme Lozano.

³³ Interview with members of the SPN research team.

³⁴ Interview with Ron Cunningham.

- **Has follow-up questions that are as explicit as possible.** Researchers should not assume that the participant will elaborate on what can easily be answered with a yes or no;
 - **Uses clear, straightforward and short sentences.** It is important to make the survey as accessible as possible, eschewing unnecessarily complicated words or convoluted phrasing;
 - Divides the questionnaire into **various short and clearly labeled parts**;
 - **Uses a mix of open- and close-ended questions** interspersed throughout the questionnaire in order to offer respite from providing long answers; and
 - Keeps the length of questionnaires manageable, especially considering that the issues under consideration require careful thought and consume a lot of time. If needed, it is better to supplement questionnaires with interviews and group discussions in order to elicit more in-depth answers rather than making the questionnaires longer. **Ideally a written questionnaire should not take longer than 10-15 minutes to complete.** And, especially for long surveys, participants should be informed ahead of time of the length of the questionnaire as well as estimated time to complete it.
- **Administering the questionnaires in small groups** of a few participants at a time helps get a higher quality response as facilitators can capably provide assistance to those seeking explanations and clarifications.

3.5.3 Negative Perception of CBR

Despite its increasing popularity, CBR continues to suffer from the persistent perception that it lacks rigor and objectivity – and thus credibility – as a valid research approach. This originates from a general disregard for qualitative, exploratory-type research, often compared unfavourably with the more rigorous scientific methods of large-scale, quantitative research.

However, an assessment of CBR research across Canada has shown that “... *CBR practitioners are engaged in research that is productive, efficient and making meaningful change in Canada and beyond in a wide range of fields and disciplines.*”³⁵ An even-wider scale assessment of CBR cases from across North America also conclusively established that – properly applied – **CBR is an incomparable research tool, especially in terms of effectively bringing out the real issues and concerns of traditionally marginalized groups.**³⁶ This is of particular significance to diaspora communities, and especially so when considered in the context of such a novel field of exploration as is diaspora engagement in peace-building and development.

³⁵ Flicker and Savan, 2006:20.

³⁶ Viswanathan *et al.*, 2004.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Despite the challenges inherent to any genuinely collaborative process – including the significant investment in time that it requires – CBR can be a powerful tool to help address some of the issues faced by diaspora communities as they become increasingly aware of their unique roles in, and contribution to, peace-building and development in their home and host countries.

It is particularly useful to note that despite the many barriers to CBR, these tend to lessen in severity as the researchers' experience increases, “... *indicating that those who stick with CBR work in spite of the challenges it presents are able to develop strategies to overcome many of the barriers which deter less experienced researchers.*”³⁷ Thus, CBR – in this specific field or another – requires a high level of commitment and patience; however, given the proper support and full recognition of the value-added it brings to diasporic research, **CBR has the potential to genuinely put research at the service of those who are most directly affected by it.** In this regard, the interest of bodies such as UPEACE and the Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation to fund and advance CBR in the field of diaspora engagement in peace-building and development is particularly encouraging.

³⁷ Flicker and Savan, 2006:20.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

PERSONS AND ORGANIZATIONS CONSULTED³⁸

Alpha Abebe	Researcher (Ethiopian Case-Study) & Youth Outreach Worker – Young Diplomats
Anna Lisa Candido	Research Assistant – VSO Study on Filipino Diaspora Volunteering and Philanthropy in Canada
Ron Cunningham	Researcher (Jamaican Case-Study) & President – Citizens for the Advancement of Community Development
Eskender Mekonnen	Researcher (Ethiopian Case-Study) & Managing Director – Young Diplomats
Amanuel Melles	Researcher (Eritrean Case-Study) – Selam Peacebuilding Network
Gustavo Neme Lozano	Researcher (Colombian Case-Study) – Romero House & Hispanic Development Council
Adeena Niazi	Executive Director, Afghan Women’s Organization (Afghan Case-Study)
Ted Richmond	Team Leader, Research and Evaluation, Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration, Immigration Branch
Tsehay Said	Researcher (Eritrean Case-Study) – Selam Peacebuilding Network
Yogendra B. Shakya	Research and Evaluation Coordinator, Access Alliance Multicultural Community Health Centre
Pierre Terver	Independent Consultant & Member of the UPEACE Conference Organizing Team
Helen Tewolde	Researcher (Eritrean Case-Study) – Selam Peacebuilding Network; Co-Founder – Eritrean Youth Coalition
Robb Travers	Scientist & Director of Community-Based Research – Ontario HIV Treatment Network

³⁸ The list is organized by alphabetical order based on last names.

Appendix 2

DIASPORA ENGAGEMENT IN PEACE-BUILDING AND DEVELOPMENT – SELECTED ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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Appendix 3

CBR RESOURCES – SELECTED WEBSITES

CBRnet.org

<http://www.cbrnet.org/index.html>

CERIS – The Ontario Metropolis Center

<http://ceris.metropolis.net/>

Community-Based Research Network of Ottawa

http://www.spcottawa.on.ca/CBRNO_website/home_cbrno.htm

Community-Campus Partnerships for Health

<http://www.ccpb.info/>

Community Tool Box

<http://ctb.ku.edu/en/>

Examining Community-Institutional Partnerships for Prevention Research Group (The) –
Developing and Sustaining Community-Based Participatory Research Partnerships: A
Skill-Building Curriculum.

www.cbprecurriculum.info

Institute for Community Research

<http://www.incommunityresearch.org>

Metropolis Project

<http://canada.metropolis.net/>

Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada – Funding for Community
and Non-Profit Organizations

http://www.sshrc.ca/web/apply/organizations_e.asp

Toronto CBR Network

<http://torontocbr.ning.com/>

Wellesley Institute – Community-Based Research Practice

<http://wellesleyinstitute.com/research/cbr-practice>