



# Doing Research Differently: Reshaping research in the time of Covid-19

A webinar organised by the Oxford Forum on Research for Development (OX4RD)  
15.00-16.00 30th June 2020



In the time of Covid-19, development research teams and projects must adapt rapidly in order to ensure that their research can continue and delivers impact. Covid-19 has disrupted many traditional research practices – while this presents challenges to existing research projects, it also offers opportunities to review and revise research approaches. How can we pivot existing research projects, and reshape research activities in the future to ensure that development research projects better support equitable partnership, empower and build the capacity of southern researchers, and deliver tangible outcomes? Organised by the Oxford Forum on Research for Development (OX4RD), this webinar used 2 case studies of recent research project adaptations to stimulate discussion, idea sharing and debate.

## Remote participatory research with adolescents

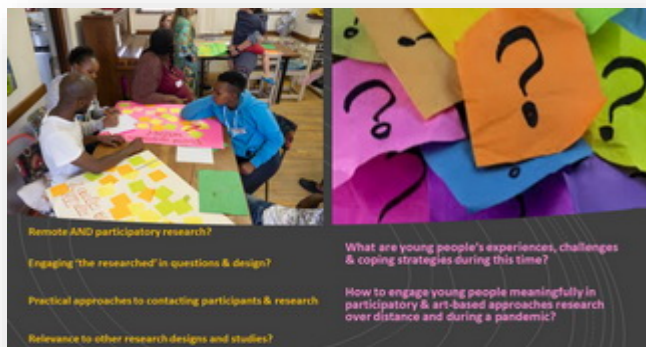
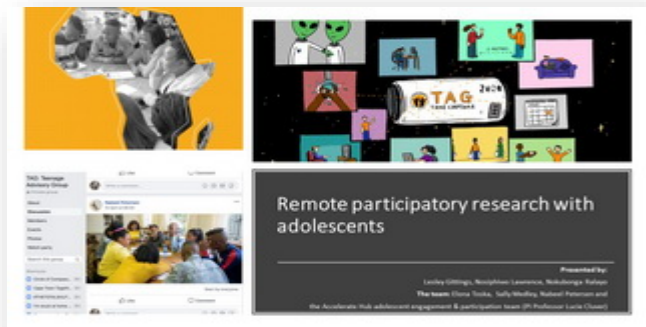
Lesley Gittings, Nosiphiwo Lawrence, Nokubonga Ralayo

In this presentation we are going to describe some emergent participatory research with adolescents, how we designed it and some practical challenges we have faced. We'll describe the context, methods, and results of implementation so far. This is part of a much longer term programme with young people with well established relationships and a long history of on-the-ground research, and thanks to COVID-19, we suddenly we had to try to do it remotely. The key question we had before we started was: is it possible to do participatory research with adolescents remotely, and if so how?

The Teenage Advisory Group (TAG) research project is a long-standing research project under the UKRI GCRF Accelerating Achievement for Africa's Adolescents Research Hub. It started 12 years ago with groups of adolescents in the Western Cape, and now is working with 3 groups in the Western Cape, Eastern Cape and Kisumu, Kenya. The project was keen to remain in touch during the COVID-19 crisis and find out if they are experiencing any additional challenges due to COVID-19. We had 2 questions:

- What are young people's experiences, challenges & coping strategies during this time?
- How to engage young people meaningfully in participatory & art-based approaches research over distance and during a pandemic?

It is clear that adolescents have needs which are not being met by existing programmes. To deliver more effective programme to meet their needs we need to shift power towards



adolescents and young people and engage them actively in research programme. We are not presenting a gold standard about how to do this. We are just sharing some results and lessons learned so far.

The participatory approach aims to build on existing relationships and ask the young people themselves for their advice on what topics they would be interested in, what research methods might work, and how they would like to be involved.

The initial research design was done through exploratory 25 minute semi-structured phone interviews with 6 young people – 3 men and 3 women:

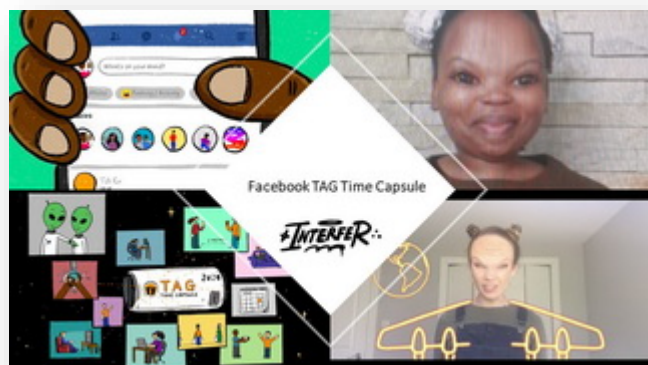
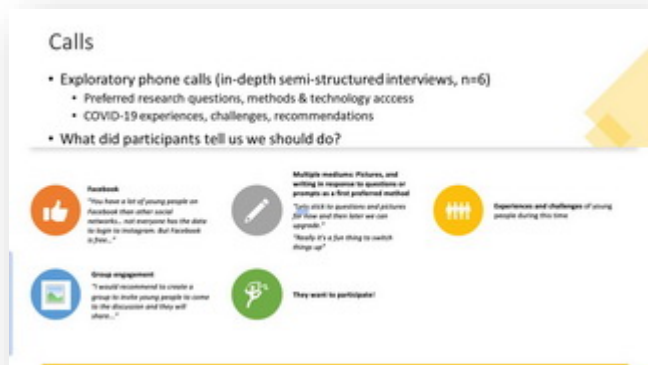
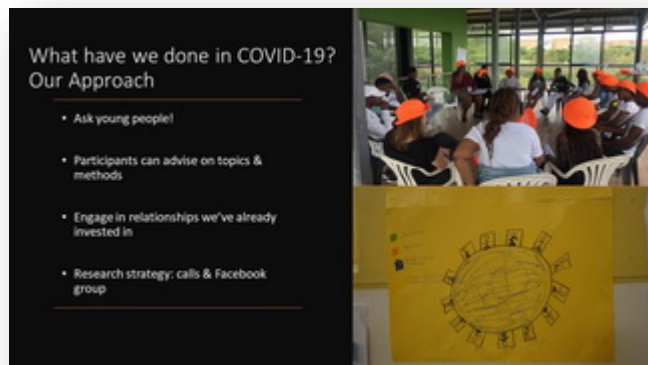
- Do they have the interest and time to do this research?
- What would they like to do research about?
- What ways should we do the research?
- What technology do they have access to?
- What else would they need to be able to participate?
- How much time do they have to do this?
- How often would they like to do this?

We were originally think we'd use WhatsApp for the research, but through these interviews we discovered that many young people are using facebook and because they can then use data for free, and if didn't have a phone, they could participate by borrowing a phone from a friend or a relative.

We wanted to use multiple media including visual and textual to keep it fun and engaging. We wanted to do it in groups. And we wanted to explore the challenges and experiences of young people at this time from their perspective. So we developed a 2-pronged strategy through individual in-depth interviews over the phone, and though participation in a Facebook Group.

For the telephone interviews we wanted to start the conversation with broad questions which encouraged them to share their own experiences:

- “If you could write a letter to yourself three months ago giving you advice on how to handle this time. What would you advise yourself and why?” - which was good for finding out about their experiences and resilience and coming mechanisms.
- “What do you think the world needs to know about what young people in South Africa are experiencing right now?” and “Imagine for a second that you are an advisor to President

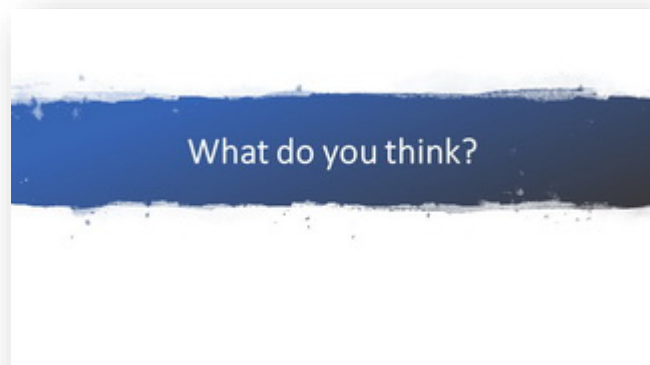
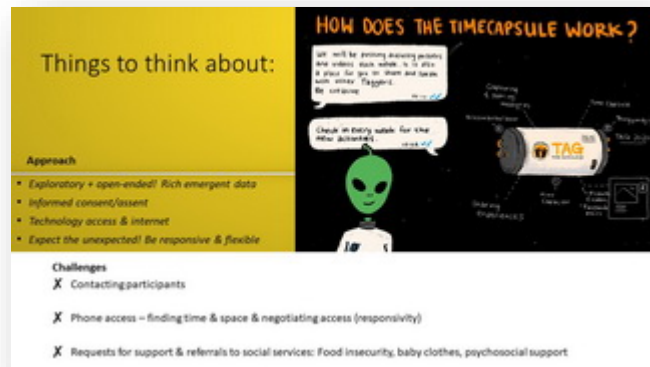


Ramaphosa. What would you tell him needs to be done?” – which is a favourite in many of the Hub portfolio case studies to elicit their expert opinion.

- And lastly “If COVID-19 was an animal what would it be and why?” - many young people said a snake because COVID-19 is a dangerous thing that can sneak up on you and is very difficult to spot.

Our facebook strategy was also based on what they told us. We wanted it to be fun and playful and create a space that was a bit removed from their lives. We decided to structure it around the idea of a time capsule which young people can fill up with their experiences and challenges from this time. The concept is that aliens who want to be helpful can use it so they can figure out how to support young people in South Africa and over the rest of the world? We created an introductory video, with researchers with “spacy” faces to encourage young people to participate (this was produced by Nabeel Peterson from Intifer). Then we had a series of different weekly group activities which participants could contribute to for example: sharing highlights and lowlights from the week; producing object-based narratives and timescapes, doing household interviews and “storytelling from my former self”.

We learned a lot of lessons about how to engage with young people: use open ended questions; be led by them; how to get informed consent over the phone (from parents if minors); take account of technology access problems; find the right time to contact them and make sure they can find a quiet space to talk to you; and have a well-developed strategy to be able to respond if ask for help and support; and to always expect the unexpected.





# School Health Promotion among adolescents in Northern Nigeria

Ahmed Sarki and Andy Nobes

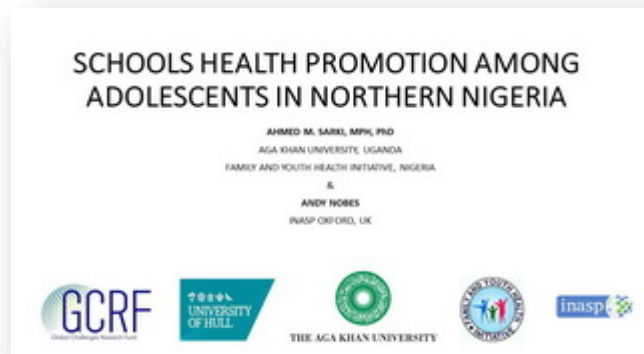
With the increasing access to technology and online learning platforms, the gap between researchers in the global South and global North is shrinking. The latter are becoming increasingly knowledgeable and conscious of the nature of partnerships they seek with colleagues from the global North.

This presents an opportunity for real and effective collaborations between the two groups unlike the 'parachute model' of collaborations that existed in the past—where researchers from the global North come in to countries in the global South, collect data and return to their abodes with little or no demonstration of impact nor sustainability of the project or intervention.

Our Schools-based Health Promotion Project (SHP) is a demonstration of an equitable partnership and collaboration between Family and Youth Health Initiative (Nigeria), Aga Khan University (Uganda), the University of Hull (UK), and INASP (UK).

The project is working closely with local staff from the Ministries of Education and Health, teachers and staff from local health centers to co-produce a health literacy / health promotion intervention for adolescents in Northern Nigeria delivered in after school health clubs involving peer health champions and peer-to-peer learning.

The first stage in 2018-2019 involved a survey of adolescents, covering physical activity, anxiety and menstrual hygiene, and a series of stakeholder engagements with youth, schools, ministries and national and international NGOs.



## Background

- Family and Youth Health Initiative (FAYOHI)- a public health non-governmental organization based in Jigawa State, Nigeria, and Professor Lesley Smith (University of Hull, UK) are working **collaboratively** to develop a 'School-Based Health Promotion Project' in Jigawa and Kano States, Nigeria.
- The project is implemented within the framework of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and in accordance with already existing policies in Jigawa and Kano States.

## Nigeria

- 203 million people in 2018 estimated to be 392 million in 2050.
- Over 41% of Nigeria's population was <15 years of age.
- Ethnic groups: Hausa 27.4%, Igbo (Ibo) 14.1%, Yoruba 13.9%.
- 53% of population is in the north which has:
  - Poor health indices
  - Low socioeconomic status,
  - The highest number of deaths and diseases compared with the Southern regions of Nigeria

## Aim of SHP

- Our ultimate aim is to co-produce a health literacy/health promotion intervention for adolescents in Northern Nigeria delivered in after school health clubs and involve peer health champions and peer-to-peer learning.
- The exact content of the intervention will be developed with input from pupils and key stakeholders to ensure that is culturally relevant and acceptable. We envisage it covering topics on physical (incl. reproductive) and mental health.

That concluded with a local Symposium in April 2019 bringing all stakeholders together, where all agreed to carry on working together to develop a programme which would have a lasting impact for improving adolescent health in Northern Nigeria, including a sustainability framework where local early career researchers will benefit from capacity building on research writing/scientific communication.

That's when INASP became involved, and the original plan was to launch the second phase through an intensive 5-day series of events in March 2020 to review the results of the research, provide training in policy engagement and research communication and a research writing workshop for researchers.

And that's when COVID-19 hit, and we had to pivot everything online. The research writing bit was easy. INASP has been running online research writing MOOCs for years. The series of interactions – especially with the senior decision makers in Kano was more difficult.

Our original hugely overambition plan to combine asynchronous with synchronous online interactions using a Delphi approach, gradually evolved as we learned more about the infrastructural, health social and political realities on the ground in Kano into a much more realistic approach combining email-based comments on a draft report, with two online webinars. That is due to start in July. We will let you know what happens.

**Activities- Research & Stakeholder Engagement**

- **Research:**
  - Survey with 1096 adolescents in 4 schools
  - Physical Activity Questionnaire
  - Generalized Anxiety Disorder
  - Menstrual Hygiene Questionnaire
- **Stakeholder engagement:**
  - Local Community Based Organizations,
  - INGOs (e.g. DFID funded projects)
  - Jigawa and Kano State Ministries of Health, and Education, Science & Technology,
  - Traditional leaders




**Research Symposium**

**Planned Phase 2:**  
 "Towards an equitable knowledge ecosystem for adolescent reproductive health in Northern Nigeria"

**5-day event in Kano:**

- A series of workshops and seminars with different stakeholder groups
- Training in policy engagement & research communication training,
- Training for fieldworkers in data collection;
- and a research writing workshop for researchers.



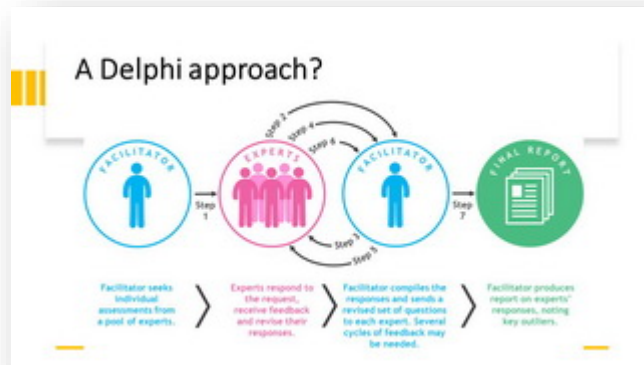

**'Pivoting online'**

Adolescent health researchers were able to join our Research Writing in the Sciences MOOC

The other thing which the COVID-19 crisis has brought to the surface is a growing recognition among southern researchers that they can, and have to take more ownership of the research process in their own countries. Not only that, but they also have invaluable experience of how to do research with impenetrable/hard-to-access populations such as BAME.

A personal example from Ahmed was the central role he played in setting-up a Patient and Public Involvement (PPI) group in 2017 through 2018 at the Oxford Institute for Nursing, Midwifery and Allied Health Research (OXINMAHR) at Oxford Brookes University.

Based on his own ethnic and religious background he was able to win the trust of local BAME communities and facilitate meetings with members of various faith groups in the OX4 postcode area of Oxford including Sikhs, Christians from African Descents, Muslims, and find out much more about their concerns and access to health services than could other colleagues at OXINMAHR.



### Adapting to contextual knowledge

Initial plan using Moodle to:

- Store live iterations of the documents
- Record the Delphi-style evolution of ideas

More realistic plan:

- Reduce the iterations
- Initial comments on report by email
- One Advisers' workshop at start
- One wider stakeholder workshop at end

THANK YOU!