

Highlights from the Participatory Research Workshop: Experiences and Learning in and with the 'Global South'

*Blog piece co-authored by Adunola Bello, Aneeta Shajan and Geoffrey Bwireh**

On the 30th of March 2023, Northumbria University's [Global Development Futures Interdisciplinary Research Theme](#) (IDRT) organised the "Participatory Research Workshop: Experiences and learning in and with the 'Global South'" which was attended by over 35 participants as part of Northumbria's [Open Research](#) activities. Participants included professional services staff, representatives from Non-Governmental Organisations, academic staff and students from across faculties, who were set to explore the conceptualisation and use of participatory approaches in research, guided by the following questions:

- *What is meant by participatory research across different disciplines and in different contexts?*
- *What is the value of participatory research to our research, partners and participants?*
- *Which of our previously held assumptions do we need to challenge when embarking on a participatory research project?*
- *What are issues of equity, global justice and ethics that need to be considered when conducting participatory research?*
- *What are the challenges of participatory research?*

The workshop was facilitated by Dr Reem Talhouk, Prof Matt Baillie Smith, Dr Bianca Fadel, and Leah Maughan, with the support of Adunola Bello, Aneeta Shajan, and Geoffrey Bwireh. The day was divided in different blocks of interactive activities, allowing participants to connect for peer-to-peer learning and discussions around the three GDF IDRT thematic areas: **Community Action and Innovation**; **Mobilities and Displacement**; and **Climate, Crisis and Displacement**. In the opening remarks, Prof Baillie Smith explained how the Global Development Futures IDRT focuses on enabling and promoting research that enhances understandings and supports livelihoods, economies and environments in the global South. He also informed the attendees about the upcoming **Global Development Future IDRT Research Sandpit**, scheduled for the 25th of May 2023 (for more information please [join the GDF IDRT e-mail group](#)).

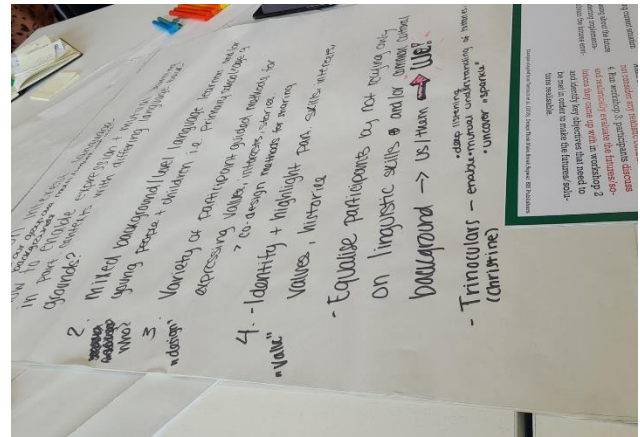
Following the event opening, all attendees were prompted to discuss their understandings of 'participation' in small groups in order to construct a joint definition of participation in the context of research. Facilitators adopted the 2-4-8 method for this activity to progressively enable conversations across the groups, after which each group of 8 people were asked to share their



definition of participation with the room, and each group's definition was placed on a common board. During this activity, one of the groups defined participation as "Collaborating with communities and other stakeholders towards a shared or common goal in an engaging, open, and ethical manner to give voice to issues and concerns affecting them". This brainstorming exercise allowed workshop participants to explore other people's perspectives of participation, helping unpack participatory research as a collaborative process of knowledge production, research and action.

* Adunola Bello is a MSc International Development Graduate (2021-22) and currently undertaking an internship at the [Centre for Global Development \(CGD\)](#); Aneeta Shajan and Geoffrey Bwireh are [PhD Researchers](#) at the CGD.

During the second session, Dr Reem Talhouk and Dr Bianca Fadel introduced key concepts related to the participatory spectrum, participatory design (PD) and participatory action research (PAR) approaches, along with highlights from two case studies adopting participatory methodologies in the global South, namely the 'Syrian Refugees & Food Insecurity' and the 'Refugee Youth Volunteering Uganda' projects. Furthermore, smaller group discussions took place, during which participants were encouraged to ideate participatory research projects by creating a research question of common interest and to develop a participatory study design strategy. This provided a valuable opportunity for participants from different disciplines and backgrounds to connect and share their views on the value of participation in the context of their research ideas, as well as the potential challenges in this process from different perspectives.



The third and final session of the workshop commenced with a fun exercise where attendees were motivated to stand up and form a circle, and each person said a word that they related to 'participation', after which they passed the microphone on to a different person, who then responded with another word building from what was previously said. Following this interactive activity, Jack Palmer from the Research and Innovation Services (RIS) gave a presentation and answered questions on Northumbria's **Participatory Research Fund** which the university makes available for promoting research works utilising participatory methods. Afterwards, each group was asked to generate a set of data collection tools that can facilitate participation based on their previously selected study design and definition of participatory research. During this activity, attendees were aided with examples of participatory methods which included **Brainstorming**; **Scenarios**; **Codesign workshop**; **Photovoice**; **Cultural Probes**; **Brainwriting**; **Future Workshops**; and **Bodystorming**. To close the day, attendees shared their take-aways from the workshop and keywords related to 'participation' (see image below).



are more impactful and useful to the research output users. This relates to wider discussions on how participation can enable research participants and stakeholders to voice their own concerns and needs, opening up conversations on the importance of conducting research in ethical and purposeful ways to the benefit of all involved.

The ideas shared by participants opened up a final wider discussion about learnings and challenges related to participatory research and how to balance different interests and ideas in a research project. Some key take-aways from this event showed how the meanings and implications of participation vary to different people across disciplines and contexts, prompting attendees to reflect on how the use of participatory approaches can facilitate research outcomes that