

**Title:** Building Inclusive Community Activism and Accountable Relations Through an Intersecting Inequalities Approach

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**More details/abstract:**

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Building inclusive community activism and accountable relations through an intersecting inequalities approach

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### Abstract:

Community development interventions can generate collective identities, foster community activism and build more accountable relations between marginalised groups and duty-bearers<sup>1</sup> (Cislaghi 2018, Transparency International 2019). Yet, our previous research (Howard and Vajda 2017; Shaw 2015; Burns, Howard, Levy, Lopez Franco, Shahrokh and Wheeler 2013) shows meaningful inclusion of the most disadvantaged groups is not sustainable unless the intersecting inequalities at the root of poverty and marginalization are understood and addressed. This paper draws on participatory action research (PAR) processes conducted between 2016-17 in Egypt, Ghana, India, South Africa and Uganda, which worked through local partners to engage directly with groups affected by deep inequalities and unaccountable dynamics. Collaboratively we explored how intersecting inequalities play out in people's everyday lives to drive poverty and marginalisation, and the elements necessary for participatory processes to catalyse community activism and build pathways towards accountability. In this paper, we operationalise the concept of intersecting inequalities, in order to understand the complexity of 'community' in different contexts, and the contribution of this approach to inclusive community development. Finally, we draw lessons about how to navigate the intrinsic tensions between recognising difference and building community activism for accountability.

## Introduction

For decades there have been calls for a return to the transformative roots of longer-term radical community development (e.g. Popple 1995, Parfitt 2004, Ledwith 2005). The struggle to preserve the fundamental importance of building collectivity in the UK 'austerity' context of severe service

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<sup>1</sup> Duty-bearers are defined as decision makers at all levels who, through their capacity as informal/traditional authority, government officer or elected representative, have a duty to protect and respond to citizens in their constituencies or communities

cuts, linked with individualising citizen-responsibility narratives and victim-blaming, is well-documented (e.g. Scott 2011, Edmiston 2018). There are parallel global critiques of the co-option and de-politicising of participation to cut costs (Mansuri and Rao, 2004), and to mitigate the impact of neoliberal social policies in the global south (Escobar 1995). Focusing on individual capacity-building can generate competition between people, and breed social division (e.g. Mayo et al. 2007). By comparison, working together to achieve common goals increases the feeling of belonging (Douthwaite 1996); and is a crucial step in addressing exclusionary dynamics because it builds collective agency and greater leverage, as a foundation for marginalised people to claim influence (Burns et al. 2015). However, the way that participatory community interventions often bypass the most marginalised is also well evidenced (Cooke and Kothari 2001). Inclusion and accountability are motivating ideals for community development practitioners, including those engaged in community organising and mobilisation, participatory action research (PAR) and community-led change processes. Yet, these buzzwords are so prevalent that the power dynamics they encompass can easily be obscured and overlooked (Cornwall 2007), particularly when people face multiple and intransigent inequalities. It is vital to think critically about how oppressive local and structural dynamics operate, and how they can genuinely shift in reality, to avoid maintaining the *status quo* of power relations.

This article is based on findings from a research project co-designed with partners in Egypt, Ghana, India, South Africa and Uganda from 2016-2017: in order to generate evidence on how intersecting inequalities deepen marginalisation; and understand how participatory processes that recognise, rather than invisibilise, these inequalities can build the capacities of highly marginalised group to claim accountability (Howard, López-Franco and Shaw 2018). In a general sense, by intersecting inequalities, we refer to injustices produced through socio-cultural and identity-based exclusions and discrimination, as well as through economic, political, cultural, environmental, spatial and knowledge-based inequalities (WSSR 2016). This research was the most recent undertaken with members of the Participate initiative; a network of organisations co-convened in 2012 by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) and a global civil society campaign Beyond 2015 to bring the knowledge of people living in extreme poverty to the high-level deliberations on the post-2015 development agenda (Howard and Wheeler 2016, Shaw 2015). Since the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were agreed, our subsequent research has focused on deepening understanding of accountability meanings (Burns, Ikita, Lopez Franco and Shahrokh 2015); piloting approaches to building accountability for groups ‘left behind’ in the implementation of the SDGs (Howard, López-Franco and Wheeler 2017, Shaw 2017); and in this latest phase we adopted an intersecting inequalities approach to understanding processes of marginalisation and empowerment.

This most recent research (2015-17) involved collaborating with partners on participatory research processes<sup>2</sup> in 5 contexts: The **Centre for Development Services** (CDS, Egypt) worked with children and adults living with HIV/Aids, using visual methods, focus groups and interviews, in order to raise awareness, and develop collaborative solutions with NGOs and government actors. **Praxis** (India) worked with members of the De-notified and Nomadic Tribes (DNT), who collected stories and statistics about their situation, and then analysed these in Ground-Level Panels, before articulating recommendations for authorities (see Dheeraj & Narayanan 2020, this issue). **Radio Ada** (Ghana) supported landless women saltwinners' collective *Yihi Katseme* to develop their voice and claim accountability over access to and management of the Songor Lagoon – their ancestral and main livelihood source, which is increasingly threatened by privatisation and environmental degradation. They used a mix of folk traditions and PAR methods to organise, mobilise and develop an advocacy plan for the Lagoon's sustainability - all amplified by the power of community radio. The **Soroti Peace and Justice Commission** (SOCAJAPIC, Uganda) worked with 'vulnerable categories'<sup>3</sup> of people living in rural North-Eastern Uganda: they used action research to build their capacities to engage with local government planning, monitoring and accountability mechanisms (i.e. *barazas*) using radio talk shows and forum theatre (for more on Ghana and Uganda cases see Lopez Franco et.al. 2020, this issue). Finally, the **Sustainable Livelihoods Foundation** (SLF, South Africa) worked with young people and community activists living in extreme urban insecurity: they used identity-mapping and visual story-based methods to generate evidence of the violence affecting their daily lives, and then leverage spaces for dialogue towards accountability with the police and city government (see Black et.al. 2020, this issue).

In these contexts and using an intersectionality framework, we explored the 'wicked' or intractable problems produced through multiple forms of marginalisation (Cole 2009). Inequalities produced through gender, ethnicity, sexuality, disability, health status and age were found to be exacerbated by: the privatisation and degradation of communal resources; failure of private subcontractors to deliver quality services; closure of civic spaces and repression of protest; spatial and economic segregation; institutional discrimination and state violence. We worked with partners to use the intersectional lens as a political tool to support groups in identifying and carrying out actions, and to investigate how community-led efforts to build accountable relationships can be fostered (Bilge 2013).

Embedded in PAR processes, our intersecting inequalities approach was supported through the

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<sup>2</sup> These timeframes represent the PAR processes informing this article, but it is important to note all the organisations have longer-term relationships with these groups and are engaged in supporting ongoing community-led collaborations.

<sup>3</sup> These categories were set by the Ugandan government and include: at-risk youth, elderly people, people with disabilities, and people with chronic illnesses such as HIV-AIDS and TB. For more: <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/106621535139248782/Vulnerable-and-Marginalised-Groups-Framework-for-Uganda>

sequencing of participatory methods, often visual, performative or embodied, in order to progressively build knowledge, empathy and collaboration. The activities undertaken were adapted to local contexts, with partners facilitating stages of: i) building confidence within the group, ii) deepening contextual understanding, iii) promoting dialogue between citizens and duty-bearers, and iv) developing working alliances between groups and agencies. These processes evolved slowly and iteratively, requiring careful attention to building trust and enabling constructive relational dynamics (Howard et al. 2017). The multiple forms of marginalisation experienced by individuals within groups meant that there were significant barriers to overcome in taking collective action. Following Greenwood's (2008) argument that acknowledging the multiple foundations of identity can increase the possibility of accepting difference, we propose working with an intersecting inequalities lens helped build solidarity by promoting awareness across difference.

Our central argument is that an intersecting inequalities approach makes visible the complexity of exclusion, and how this constrains individual and collective agency. While this approach uncovers differences that can create tensions, we find that bringing it to PAR can enable a more power-aware reflection and response, which can then increase collective agency and influence. We highlight the importance of iterative group work in navigating the tensions arising in these contested contexts, and share some practice insights about how to negotiate discriminatory social norms, and re-frame them as more positive collective identities. The processes discussed here require emotional and political work for all involved, but also demonstrate the potential to grow the individual and collective agency needed to challenge structural inequalities within the group and beyond.

Although this paper draws on analysis synthesised in our collective analysis workshops from across the five contexts, the specific examples provided in this article focus on Egypt and Uganda. Praxis' work with Denotified and Nomadic tribes in India is discussed in detail by Dheeraj and Narayanan (2020, this issue); SLF's experience in South Africa is discussed by Black, Liedermann and Rajklif (2020, this issue); and the work of SOCAJAPIC (Uganda) and Radio Ada (Ghana) is discussed with a focus on performing arts and community radio (Lopez Franco *et al.* 2020, this issue). After this introduction, Section 2 presents theoretical concepts of community emergence, intersecting inequalities and the structure – agency dyad; these provide lenses for exploring how to navigate the dynamics between building collective agency and influence, and perpetuating marginalisation. Section 3 outlines the methodology used for this research. Section 4 covers our key findings and their contribution to community development practice. Finally, section 5 reflects on the main implications for collaborating with local people to build inclusive and accountable relations in contexts of marginalisation.

## Transformative and inclusive community emergence

Research and practice which aim to build the capacity and collectivity of marginalised groups, require critical reflection and power-aware facilitation. Building collective identities across new associations generally requires facilitated processes (Ledwith and Springett 2010); especially when bringing together people from marginalised groups who do not identify with each other, due to underlying exclusionary dynamics. *Community* is thus situated, dynamic and fluid, and our approach aims to support *community emergence* through bringing people together to share experiences, and find common ground as a basis for action. Facilitation input must begin where people are, and take time to build trust and capacities to be effective (Shaw 2016).

Building mutual purpose while avoiding the risk of perpetuating marginalisation, also requires critical thought about this conceptualisation of community. Approaching communities as if homogenous, masks relative disadvantage and excludes those with low status (Dinham 2005). Homogenising categories are often applied by powerful agencies to contain people, and experienced as imposed and limiting labels such as the ‘poor’ or ‘vulnerable’, which create an ‘*us* and *them*’ dynamic (Giddens 1991), and deny people’s agency. Comparably, political identities are mobilised by less powerful groups to claim rights but, these social constructions can function to essentialise identities (Moran 2018), and within them exclusions persist due to relative and unacknowledged inequalities (Dheeraj & Narayanan 2020, this issue).

Our process of fostering community emergence through PAR begins with people’s lived realities, and supports them in thinking critically about assumptions, unpicking damaging stereotypes and purposively forming more generative collective identities. This contributes because these bonds counter the societal fragmentation of late-capitalism (Habermas 1984), and the ‘identity-based’ divisions that prevent people from forming the alliances across difference needed for transformative change. Framed by the idea of community emergence, we apply the concepts of intersecting inequalities, and structure-agency to deepen our understanding of these dynamics.

### **a. Intersecting Inequalities**

*Intersectionality* assists understanding of the complex ways that different aspects of identity interact to shape life experiences; specifically, how socially constructed identities such as race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, ability and age, function in mutually reinforcing ways to open or constrain opportunities (Collins 2015). It is valuable for understanding the dynamics of both privilege and marginalisation (Howard & Vajda 2017); but also critiqued for a tendency for policy to interpret it as generic ‘equalities’ (see Christofferson 2020, this issue), or reinforce essentialising identity politics, as it further reduces from one identity to a particular combination as the ‘real’ experience (Walby 2006). However, others argue that intersectionality helps in moving beyond identities to focus on the intersecting systems producing inequality. Following Moran (2018), the

essentialising<sup>4</sup> issue in identity approaches can be overcome 'if what are viewed as intersecting are not people's "identities", but rather complex inequalities, social structures, or forms of oppression'.

We define *intersecting inequalities* as the compounded effect of these identity factors, plus other layers of disadvantage faced by marginalised people such as economic and spatial inequality, which further constrain people's opportunities (Burns *et al.* 2013). Where these inequalities overlap with each other, 'they give rise to an intersecting, rather than an additive, model of inequality, where each fuses with, and exacerbates, the effects of the other' (Kabeer 2016: 58). Understanding the interplay of structural inequalities, and people's agency to challenge and overcome these, is fundamental to supporting community emergence and in turn transformative community development praxis.

## **b. Structure and agency**

*Structure* refers to the systemic social dynamics that enable or constrain people's opportunities; including macro-scale cultural, political and economic dimensions, mezzo-scale organisational services and networks and systems, and social norms that play out in attitudes and behaviours (Musolf 2003). Structure establishes boundaries through these mutually reinforcing dynamics, which are sustained through micro-level practices and everyday relations. *Agency* refers to people's capacity to act (Giddens 1979), individually or together, and can be exercised through action and decision-making, and also inaction and other subtle influences (Lukes 2005). The interconnected concepts of structure-agency are central to understanding the possibilities and challenges of achieving transformative social change.

Structure and agency are interlinked because in its operation, structural power generates contradictions which are the starting point for resistance (Foucault 1990). Paradoxically, collective agency makes possible the transformation of social structures, yet structural inequalities constrain collective action and overcoming this requires that the critical awareness, capacities and influence (agency) of those involved is increased (Connor 2011). This conundrum is expressed in 'habitus' (Bourdieu 1990), which explains how the values, norms and rules in people's social worlds, however unjust, become internalised. Habitus is shaped and sustained through everyday interactions, and it is this aspect that moves the focus from oppression to the potential for change, through changing dynamics by micro-level interaction (Hook 2010).

We argue that this shift can be enabled through group (micro-level) processes which explore and question experiences and assumptions, and build critical awareness. These micro-level processes

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Moran identifies the tendencies of identity politics towards essentialism, recognition (over redistribution), particularism, and call-out culture.

can also catalyse meso-level exchange, through which, accountable relations may be forged. At the same time, the structure-agency dyad can assist as an analytical device to understand why building sustainable inclusion and accountability from the margins is necessarily a complex and non-linear journey. The methodological approach which opens up possibilities for micro- and meso-level critical engagement and exchange, is PAR.

## PAR methodologies

PAR methodologies involve people exploring and making sense of their own realities (Chambers 1997), prioritising their knowledge and worldviews. PAR processes take an iterative approach which can build in-depth and trial-and-error knowledge of situated and emergent social practices (Bradbury 2015), unearth social aspects behind exclusion missed by other methods, and catalyse community-led actions for change.

All research partners had previous experience using PAR. In 2017 we (three UK-based female researchers, two British and one Mexican), convened an inception workshop, hosted by our South African partner, to establish shared understanding of intersectionality and co-design the research processes. We then provided accompaniment, learning and exchange opportunities to our partners as they carried out their research and engagement activities, and finally brought partners together in a collective analysis workshop (2018) to identify the core findings of the research. These were synthesised initially in a [video output](#) (Shaw, Robertson and Zajac 2018 with IDS and *Participate*) and later in a written report (Howard *et.al.* 2018).

All five partners developed action plans containing methods, tools and activities around six elements:

- 1) Group engagement and capacity- building
- 2) Exploring common experiences and developing trust for dialogue
- 3) Deepening understanding of intersecting inequalities through collective sense-making and research
- 4) Challenging mainstream perceptions of their identity;
- 5) Building allies and/or wider community engagement; and
- 6) Tackling or identifying accountability gaps through engagement with duty-bearers.

These elements interplayed and looped within each process, in response to local circumstances and requirements, and were also adapted as contextual dynamics and relationships shifted over time (*ibid.* 2018). To illustrate in context, we present the following two examples:



In Egypt, CDS built on previous work using visual methods to explore issues of health service provision for children and adolescents living with HIV-AIDS and the role of support NGOs (Howard et.al. 2017). In this phase, they (1) extended the process to include adults living with HIV-AIDS (PLWHA), and (2) brought them and key NGOs together in orientation, rights-awareness and visual methods workshops. Focus group discussions (FGDs) with adults in Greater Cairo, Minya and Sharkia were followed by in-depth interviews, and the development of case studies to explore different experiences according to socioeconomic, gender and other identity-based factors (3). To challenge mainstream perceptions (4), they published a report showing the importance of identifying HIV as a social rather than medical issue, and showcased video materials to relevant duty-bearers. However, while CDS tried to reach out to other actors to build alliances (5), PLWHA themselves were not yet ready to fight openly for accountability, a situation that constrained wider community engagement activities. Furthermore, the relationship with relevant health authorities – initially positive - weakened over time, and while accountability gaps were identified (6), no significant commitments for change were achieved.

SOCAJAPIC in North Eastern Uganda initiated their process by reaching out to ‘vulnerable’ groups in marginalised communities to form and train a team of community-based facilitators (CBFs). They sought the most marginalised by continuously asking, ‘*who is not here who is in a worse situation than you?*’ (1). Facilitators were trained on rights awareness, power and participation, forming a tight-knit group despite their inherent differences (2). These CBFs explored issues affecting themselves and their particular ‘vulnerable group’ (youth, elderly, women, PLWHA, people with disabilities (PWD), and built solidarities across these vulnerabilities (3). They gathered stories from within their communities, and then, in order to raise awareness, they dramatised the identified issues through forum theatre (4). The play was shown in a weekly *baraza*<sup>5</sup> which also involved CBFs presenting the results to local authorities and service providers, and all stakeholders planning solutions to address the problems identified (6). Bi-weekly radio shows were key to disseminate the results further afield. This was complemented by pictures and videos of the *barazas* edited and shared with various stakeholders and platforms. Since inception, SOCAJAPIC remained in constant communication with relevant sub-county authorities to build relationships needed for the evolution of the process (5).

The methods used by each partner for each of these elements varied, according to their meaning in context, the partners’ facilitation experience, and each group’s desire to be more/less visible and exposed. In particular, partners complemented traditional qualitative methods by using visual, story-telling and performative methods to explore participants lived realities, as these can enable insight into the emotional, relational and dynamic factors at the root of marginalisation (Lewin and Shaw 2020 forthcoming; Shaw 2017b). They also provide a motivating rationale and the means

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The term *baraza* is a word that could be translated as a council. For our Uganda partners it represented a public encounter between the community and duty-bearers at the village level.

for people to explore and share experiences, and then stand back and reflect critically on deeper meanings.

The methods unfolded iteratively with learning at each stage informing the next round of action. The emphasis on iteration: i.e. looping as well as layering the six elements listed above, meant that visual, narrative and performative methods were used both to build inclusive dynamics within a group and across communities *and* later contribute to opening pathways to influence, as they helped to foster accountable relationships between marginalised people and external powerful actors. Key insights from these processes are described in the next section.

## Key findings on supporting community emergence with an intersecting inequalities approach

Participatory processes to build and support community emergence using an intersecting inequalities approach can be divided into two aspects: internal group processes (elements 1-3 in previous section), and external engagement processes (elements 4-6). We now discuss what we learned about how to navigate these aspects, highlighting examples from Egypt and Uganda, as well as learning synthesised across all five processes.

### **Part 1: Internal group processes**

The internal group processes involved facilitating activities with groups of people living common and differential experiences of marginalisation. These activities enabled: progressively building trust, encouraging inclusive group dynamics to increase individual and collective agency; sharing stories to hear and respect different experiences; prompting critical dialogue (including reflection on examples of structural injustices and power within individual stories); and identifying collective actions.

Our key learning on how this ‘intersecting inequalities aware’ approach enabled or constrained community emergence is as follows. There are challenges in engaging highly marginalised people in any context due to general and internalised stigma; and they often face additional geographical, capability, health or social barriers. Hence, involving them meaningfully requires appropriate time and thought. In Uganda, prevailing societal attitudes towards youth, women, elderly people and those with disabilities and chronic ill-health compounded the problems. Partner SOCAJAPIC first brought together representatives from these groups in each participating village or parish, and then worked with them to involve and/or gather stories from others more disadvantaged who would not otherwise have participated.

In order to build group cohesion, the participatory processes brought differently marginalised participants together starting with a focus on what they shared; despite their different backgrounds, participants found many common experiences of discrimination. SOCAJAPIC staff, supported by a highly experienced trainer from Radio Ada in Ghana, ran a workshop with community-based facilitators who represented different ‘vulnerable categories’ and came from different villages across the Teso sub-region. The carefully facilitated process supported the group to find mutual ground across their differences; through telling stories of exclusion or stigma, they recognised shared injustices and developed a sense of group identity and ‘*kojen apedor!*’ – knowing our power/rights.

‘Power within’, or dignity, awareness, confidence and self-efficacy is a basic requisite for people to assert their views, access opportunities and influence decisions (Veneklasen and Miller 2002). However, power-within is undermined by internalised stigma resulting from systemic disrespect, lack of recognition, and discriminatory social norms. For example in Uganda, PLWHA are described as ‘walking coffins’, and the elderly are criticised, or accused of stealing resources from the younger generations, if they ask for support from the state, especially where access to medicine or social protection is minimal and difficult to access. Parents of children living with HIV in Egypt face different challenges – they often chose not to disclose their child’s condition due to the high risk of discrimination at school. Participatory activities in all cases aimed to increase power-within by creating opportunities to learn new skills and practise speaking up in *safe* (confidential and internally focused) group spaces, in order to progressively build confidence for future action. The participatory visual and performative methods (e.g. dance, drama, singing, digital stories, creative video) contributed as accessible means to enable self-expression and expand the group’s sense of *can-do*. Partners also found input on constitutional rights helpful for building collective agency, because it generated an increased sense of entitlement.

To avoid perpetuating exclusion of the less vocal and/or confident (e.g. women), it was important to understand nuances in experiencing inequalities. This meant there was a practical balance to achieve between group and individual focus, which played out back-and-forth between considering the group’s shared experiences and the differences between individual experiences. These ‘practice balances’ evolved in different ways according to the make-up of the group and the different contexts. In Egypt, PLWHA participants critically analysed their situations through gender, poverty and cultural lenses, which illuminated why some face greater discrimination. For instance, men who contracted HIV through sex with other men were more stigmatised than drug users, who were in turn more so than those infected by blood transfusion. HIV+ women were largely invisible, with additional age-dependent pressures such as pregnancy, disclosure risks and family disruption. Barriers to public expression such as self-stigma and the fear of exposure, were highlighted for all.

The internal group processes contribute to community emergence by developing the crucial pre-conditions of increased power-within, solidarity and collective agency, which are necessary for the following externally-focused actions to be possible, and inclusive.

## **Part 2: External engagement processes**

These external processes aimed to enable collective action towards accountability by bringing marginalised communities into dialogue with duty-bearers. This is a particularly challenging step to take for groups which have been systematically excluded from decision-making and have confronted multiple forms of discrimination, including state-driven oppression and violence. Two key aspects identified were: changing societal perceptions about marginalised groups; and finding champions amongst duty-bearers, who could leverage opportunities for dialogue. A further aspect relates to the iterative work between the groups and the facilitator organisation; to collaboratively identify gaps, assess risks, and adjust action plans; whilst putting people's views at the centre (see final section).

Influential decision-makers often lose touch with the realities of people living in poverty and marginalisation - often their information comes from data-sets that depersonalise, and they rarely spend time with communities. The participatory processes used variations of story-telling and narrative building to re-frame understandings. Across all five contexts, *all* the groups challenged others' perceptions about them, and used creative and performative methods to construct and communicate *counter narratives* and *alternative images* (see also Wheeler, Shaw and Howard 2020, this issue). In Uganda, community theatre was used as part of the *baraza* to represent the experiences of people categorised by law as 'vulnerable' when trying to access services. This dramatization opened up discussion in the audience about the issues, who themselves were able to identify how some commonly-held prejudices were damaging and unjust. This prepared the ground for the community facilitators themselves to speak up for the first time, and to engage duty-bearers in discussion about potential solutions. The messages were further amplified through radio broadcasting (more in Lopez Franco et al. 2020, this issue).

Participatory communications and performative methods can expose, challenge, and potentially shift the relational dynamics which perpetuate inequalities, and hence the relative balance between the possibilities of individual and collective agency and structural constraints. However, shifting this balance by bringing marginalised groups' views into the public sphere, and challenging the perceptions and behaviours of the more powerful, can lead to negative exposure and backlash. Each group carefully considered how to mitigate this risk ethically. In Egypt, CDS worked with parents and carers of children living with HIV-Aids, to develop a process which would not put them at risk. Separate groups were formed so that the parents and carers could discuss the inequalities arising from HIV-AIDS status, while the children (unaware of their condition) discussed their experience of the health system. To influence policymakers, a short animation was

made, which dramatized the issues and individual stories through graphics with an actor providing the voiceover, to ensure participants' anonymity.

Our partners in Ghana and South Africa also developed creative and interesting strategies to manage growing tensions with duty-bearers documented in other articles of this special issue (Lopez Franco et.al. 2020 and Black et.al. 2020). In Ghana, there were tensions connected with exposing the traditional leaders as complicit in the privatisation of a lagoon which is the main source of livelihood for marginalised women saltwinners. These were - at times - eased through using traditional cultural forms such as dance and song as the communicative medium. In South Africa, the group showed films on township insecurity to Cape Town officials who supported further dialogue at province level, but the Police Authority reacted badly to the film *Gangsters in Uniform* and targeted group members aggressively. Partner SLF reflected on the alienation of a potential ally, and the need to think critically and prepare for either challenging audiences or to foster greater understanding.

Finding champions within decision-making spheres is also key to influencing debates and advocacy; understandably, there is a mistrust of dutybearers within the historically most stigmatised, neglected and worst violated communities, which must be tackled before dialogue is possible. In addition to building self-confidence and agency during the internal processes, it was also necessary to broker relationships with champions with decision making power. In all sites, partners worked from the outset to identify potential allies and build relationships with local authorities. In Egypt, this included strengthening relationships with existing contacts within the Ministry of Health; however, after initial positive responses from key ministers, a new administration changed priorities, which halted shared plans for improving service delivery for people living with HIV/AIDS. In Uganda, SOCAJAPIC approached local authorities to request access, and to invite them into the process.

To sum up, in some cases, the participatory processes in our research were successful in achieving significant progress in building collective agency. Community emergence works as the process through which a group with differences as well as common experiences of marginalisation build trust, hear and respect each other's experiences. Sharing stories enables people to find common ground, and through critical engagement with these stories, the structural injustices become visible, and collective agency can emerge as the group begins to identify and take collective actions. Finally, we also learnt that building relationships with champions amongst the duty-bearers was key for opening up local pathways to accountability. However, the transformation of the powerful remains a huge challenge, as a founding member of Radio Ada in Ghana reflected:

*'The women can talk to the chiefs now which seemed impossible at the start, but is this enough? We are certain that these processes have tremendous transformative power in supporting the empowerment of those who are most disadvantaged. But it has not done so well in facilitating the transformation of those in power, those with vested interests'.*

## Facilitating inclusion across intersecting inequalities

As the previous quote illustrates, in these PAR processes *a critical role was played by the facilitator organisation* working with the marginalised groups. Our partner organisations supported the emerging ‘communities’ as they grew the communication skills, cohesion and confidence to take actions. The intersectional power differentials within the groups, called for sensitive facilitation skills. In Egypt, CDS needed to navigate between groups which held negative perceptions of each other according to gender and sexuality. The facilitators in Uganda needed to navigate the power differentials according to gender, age, health and disability status, and enable a dialogue which allowed people to discover commonalities and build a collective identity. But it was not always possible to do so: Dheeraj and Narayanan (2020, this issue) describe how patriarchy has profoundly constrained women's participation and any possibilities of leadership.

The facilitator organisations also supported groups to engage with the media and other key stakeholders. For example, in Uganda, SOCAJAPIC trained group members in public speaking, ensured that local government officials were contacted and appropriately briefed before the *barazas*, and worked with the diocese community radio to broadcast the *baraza* discussions. This drew interest from neighbouring municipalities, and extended the impact of the *baraza* discussions. Knowing when to step *in*, to provide organisational support, advice, or leverage; or to step *back*, to give groups sufficient time to reflect on risks, plan to act, or not act and form their own relationships with champions, without imposing an externally-driven agenda or timescale, required flexibility and thoughtful facilitation.

Together we learnt about the importance of maintaining accountability to the communities we work with, which meant being critically reflective about every aspect of the process, as well as about our positioning. This is because, organisations who are highly experienced at community-level interaction risk losing their connection with the grassroots once they enter the vortex of engaging with stakeholders at higher levels. To maintain both, requires careful work throughout these internal and external processes. Our partners advised: *‘maintain an inclusive reflex! Keep checking to make sure who is with us and who is excluded – were the poorest of the poor included?’*.

## Final reflections: Understanding the processes through which community emergence and collective agency are fostered, organised and sustained

In this article, we have highlighted two important contributions of an intersecting inequalities approach to generating community activism for accountability: 1) a deeper understanding of inclusion *as an iterative process and a necessary ‘reflex’* throughout the community emergence process; 2) a fuller understanding of how and in what circumstances this *recognition and*

*navigation of difference can enable group cohesion*, which builds greater collective agency of marginalised groups to engage with duty-bearers, in contexts of low-levels of accountability.

Firstly, the intersecting inequalities approach in this research has enabled a deeper understanding of the potential of PAR processes to contribute to ‘leaving no one behind’ due to hidden discrimination, blind spots or marginalising group dynamics (Chambers 2017). The internal group processes enabled structures of power to be made visible, and individual and collective agency to emerge: not without discomfort, tensions and some enduring blind spots, but within a more consciously inclusion-aware process. An intersecting inequalities approach also brought attention to risk: the risk of surfacing tensions between different identities and lived experiences (gender, ethnicity, but also age, sexuality, livelihood strategies, disability, and health status). Learning about facilitation in these settings has emphasised the importance of taking time: to allow moments of acknowledging difference, by sitting with the difficulties, and not enforcing consensus or silencing conflict. Navigating between difference and commonalities generates tensions that cannot always be resolved.

In particular, we have identified the importance of intersectionality *in practice* (Choo and Ferree 2010): for recognising the particular, individual and subjective experiences of the intersections of identity-based and other inequalities, and moving from this knowledge to generate shared identities and collective agency. We have also highlighted the risks involved in this process, and suggest that this fundamental tension – between recognising difference and building common purpose - is at the heart of community development and participatory research (see also Langdon *et al.* forthcoming; Fisher and Ponniah 2003). We have demonstrated that iterative PAR approaches to building inclusion have an important role to play in navigating differences, and can, thus, contribute to strengthening group cohesion as a foundation for engaging more influentially with duty-bearers.

According to some research, raising awareness of intersecting inequalities may increase identification across difference, and the likelihood of collective action or ‘activism for social change (Curtin, Stewart and Cole 2015). Moreover, a common purpose which incorporates marginalised or hidden issues, as well as other community perspectives and priorities, can convey a more compelling message to duty-bearers. This was experienced at the Ugandan *barazas* where issues raised by the most marginalised groups resonated across the whole community, articulating shared concerns about access to services, corrupt practices by service providers, and unchallenged cases of gender-based violence. This navigation of difference alongside building common purpose for collective action, is also the negotiation between structure and agency needed to shift ‘habitus’. When intersecting inequalities can be recognised and understood as structural, then solidaristic political action is possible across different identity groups (see Moran 2018). Sensitive facilitation can open and nurture a space of dialogue and critical reflection which builds a relational understanding of power (and intersecting inequalities) (Ledwith and Springett 2010).

An intersecting inequalities power lens draws attention to the interaction of structure-agency, which helps to illuminate why the practical back-and-forth is necessary. In particular, these research processes have revealed how *cycles* (of PAR) are needed to nurture agency, but that the group must be supported through these cycles to move back-and-forth between building collectivity (e.g. to challenge structural constraints and claim accountability), and acknowledging individual subjectivities and their own particular positionality. Moreover, the essentialism problem as suggested by Moran (2018) dissolves through approaching intersecting inequalities as a practical resource to guide exploration of the way systemic factors play out through micro-interactions, to recognise exclusions; and then to use this knowledge to work progressively and inclusively to identify and take actions, assess what happened, plan and take further actions; and in this iterative way to gradually shift constraining power dynamics over time. This grounds community emergence in the lived realities of intersecting inequalities, and generates a dynamic and responsive process which prioritises both building capacities for inclusion, and the relational conditions for accountability. We have therefore shown how these two linked processes are necessarily navigated in the fluid interactive spaces between individual and collective agency and the intersecting constraints of social structure.

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