

Advocating beyond the academy: dilemmas of communicating relevant research results

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Abstract

Drawing from experiences in Northern Indigenous Canada, Uganda, and Vietnam, we discuss the challenges encountered while trying to communicate relevant results to local communities with whom we work. Wavering between participatory and advocacy research, we explore how we grapple with finding the right audience with whom to share results, our attempts to craft communication to be relevant within specific contexts, and dilemmas over self-censorship. We also document our struggles to manage our own expectations and those of the communities with whom we work regarding the ability of our research to broker change. This article emerged from our frustration at wanting to be accountable to our interviewee communities, but finding few academic articles that go beyond ideals to examine how researchers often struggle to meet these expectations. While participatory approaches are increasingly mainstreamed in social science work, we argue that advocacy research can be a more appropriate response to community needs in certain cases.

Keywords

advocacy research, giving back, Global South, participatory research

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Introduction

Academic journals have been the recognized venue for scientists to validate their work and establish their reputations while making research results available to the academic community and, in theory, the public, since the introduction of *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* in 1665 (Guedon, 2001). In the intervening years, an estimated 50 million or more academic journal articles have been published (Jinha, 2010). However, journal subscription costs limit the ability of the general public and researchers, non-profits and governments in the Global South to access research results (Guedon, 2001), prompting calls for alternative avenues to disseminating findings (Sidaway, 1992). In principle, the advent of open access journals has improved accessibility, yet only 10 per cent of journals are currently open access (Laakso et al., 2011).

While open access is beginning to change the landscape of academic publishing (Guedon, 2001), research published in journals – open-access or subscribed – remains ‘a conversation of “us” with “us” about “them”’ (Cahill and Torre, 2007: 196). As Kindon et al. (2007: xxiii) aptly note: ‘In this era of neoliberal politics and funding, many academics feel pressured by the ambitions and needs of their universities to prioritize rapid publication of theoretical research in high status academic journals’. Such research is written up as a ‘meta-narrative’, conforming to the specific styles and structures mandated by the academic discipline (Blaufuss, 2007). Yet, to many research *participants*, the journal article as a form of communication is unsuitable, ineffective, and accentuates the power differential between the ivory tower academic and local communities (Sidaway, 1992).

In addition, years of extractive research in Indigenous and Global South communities with little attempt to share results has led to distrust and resentment of researchers by many local peoples (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). As a result, regardless of the ethical position of individual researchers, policies for undertaking ethical research with many Indigenous communities now codify requirements to share data and results with participants (Castleden et al., 2012). We argue that ideally, the communication of research results needs to be transformed into a ‘partnership of knowledge systems’ (Chilisa, 2012: 297) that places results within the local context, in native languages, and in a usable form for both participants and academics (cf. Cahill and Torre, 2007; Willox et al., 2012). Communicating findings clearly and openly also helps researchers to member check or validate their work, builds trust with participants, and may facilitate future collaborations through increased willingness of communities to participate (Chavis et al., 1983; Minkler, 2004; Tuhiwai Smith, 2005). It also underlines the research relationship as ideally based on a two-way exchange of information (Loppie, 2007).

Nowadays, many social scientists, especially those guided by participatory theoretical frameworks, argue that researchers have an ethical obligation to share results with participants in order to disseminate information to help address social injustices (Cahill, 2007; McIntyre, 2008). In these frameworks, researchers see the researched community as their primary responsibility, and ask participants what outputs are desired from the research process and to which audience to direct results (Minkler, 2004). However, the different agendas of the academy and participatory research practice can make it difficult to return results to communities, due to lack of time, funding, or pressure to publish

(Castleden et al., 2012). In addition, although returning results to participants may address concerns of reciprocity, power, and justice, the potential that disclosure might cause harm and ‘a fundamental lack of clarity about “what” to disclose undermines any generalised ethical obligation’ (Miller et al., 2008: 212).

Despite these debates, participatory research is considered an opportunity to disrupt traditional hierarchies of knowledge production, and through the dissemination of findings, to advocate for excluded or less represented groups (Cahill, 2007). Some believe returning results is only the first step: the activist, transformative, or praxis-oriented researcher believes taking a neutral stance on a research topic, and is expected not only to communicate results, but to facilitate and work for action that leads to social change (Chambers, 1994; Chilisa, 2012; Mertens, 2009). Laudable as these expectations may be, trying to live up to these ideals can be daunting, while Indigenous researchers caution that ‘sharing knowledge is about empowering a process, but the community has to empower itself’ (Tuhivai Smith, 2005: 98).

Drawing from our experiences in Northern Indigenous Canada, Uganda, and Vietnam, we discuss the challenges we have encountered while trying to communicate relevant results to research communities. We explore how we initially wavered between participatory and advocacy methods and grappled with the dilemmas of self-censorship, finding appropriate audiences, and making our communication relevant to local contexts. We document our struggles with managing expectations – our own and those of the communities we work with – regarding the ability of our research to broker change for the less represented. Positioned as three white, educated females, we are more than aware that we come from privileged backgrounds when working in these research sites. This paper has emerged from wanting to ‘do the right thing’ but being frustrated by our difficulties in doing so, as well as published accounts of ideal scenarios and somewhat sanitized positive experiences. Have other researchers struggled to meet such expectations? What are their ways forward? From informal conversations with other social scientists, it appears that we are not alone in debating how to give back meaningfully. Our intent with this paper is to foster greater discussion regarding the difficulties of putting theory into practice regarding returning research in relevant ways.

Giving back in theory: participatory and advocacy research

In recent decades, as social science researchers have reflected on the potency of their research, participatory approaches have become more common and respected in academia (Staeheli and Mitchell, 2005; but see Kuokkanen, 2007, for difficulties still faced in academic environments). As opposed to more extractive modes of research, participatory approaches aim to make research processes and results accrue directly to participants, while seeking to empower local people (Kendon et al., 2007). Earlier participatory approaches included rapid rural appraisal (RRA), widespread in the late 1970s and 1980s, and participatory rural appraisal (PRA) starting in the 1990s. RRA was one of the first approaches to recognize that for development planning and decision making to work effectively, the poorest members of society had to be included in discussions (Chambers, 1994; Corbett, 2010). RRA and PRA have grown into participatory learning and action (PLA) and its sibling, participatory action research (PAR; Corbett, 2010; although some

consider PLA to have a longer history, see Kindon et al., 2007). Much like PLA, participatory action research (PAR):

encourages a levelling of hierarchical boundaries between the researcher and the researched and active involvement of participants as a means of ensuring that the goals of the research will be relevant, respectful, and useful to the community represented in the participant sample. (Haviland et al., 2008: 249)

There exist many cases of PAR's ability to meaningfully include and represent participants in the research process. Particularly successful PAR projects seek to challenge structural disadvantages as part and parcel of the research process (see Cahill, 2004). They often include participants engaging with all facets of the research, especially research design, in order to make the research process more relevant to community members (see Bagnoli and Clark, 2010; Buettgen et al., 2012). Yet one must avoid romanticizing PAR and consider whether participation is a means or an end (Nagar, 2009). As a means, a participatory approach can become a 'tick the box' formula for funding agencies to judge that research has engaged with local communities, while local communities remain solely providers of information. As an end, 'participation can become an effective democratic process, enabling intellectual empowerment and collective social agency' (Nagar, 2009: 604). While including disparate voices and marginalized groups is one of the central objectives of participatory research, differences can nonetheless be obscured as results are often presented using a single 'community voice', while researcher reflexivity is often ignored (Pain, 2004). Minority groups can also become further disenfranchised if majority stakeholders take control, directing research questions, results, and applications, with outside researchers oftentimes unaware that this is occurring.

Participatory research requires time, organizational skills and a strong commitment to outcomes that are often impossible to guarantee in advance (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1993). Moreover, challenging structural inequalities through participatory research, especially in cross-cultural settings, requires 'decolonizing methodologies' (Cahill, 2004; Chilisa, 2012; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999) to find appropriate postcolonial and anti-racist strategies (Kobayashi and Peake, 2000).

Advocacy research stems from a range of 'liberating' research methodologies, including PAR, feminist research, and reflexive approaches (Haviland et al., 2008; Williams, 2004). However, advocacy research differs from participatory approaches in at least three ways: first, participants do not always control the research (research can stem from the community or be researcher-initiated); second, it is not always possible to know in advance what outcomes might be useful to affect social change; and third, advocacy research results in political action of some form, but not necessarily in the community where the initial research took place (Haviland et al., 2008; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1993). Advocacy research incorporates 'empirical investigations of social problems by people who are deeply concerned about those problems', placing a concern for social justice and a call to action front and centre in the research project (Gilbert, 1997: 101).

Advocacy research recognizes that community members in the Global South might not necessarily have the time, financial resources or willingness to be involved in research design. A participatory approach can include numerous meetings and discussions, taking

time away from livelihood needs and family and community commitments. By entering into participatory research relationships, locals also often place themselves in asymmetrical power relations *vis-à-vis* privileged researchers, regardless of the best intentions of the latter (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1993). Although there are broader positive and empowering outcomes possible with participatory approaches, we have found – given the contexts of our research, our positionalities as researchers, and some of the critiques of participatory action research outlined here – that researcher-initiated advocacy often best meets our own objectives to support positive change for the communities with whom we work, as explored below.

Research contexts

Our research contexts lie within what is broadly categorized as the Global South. While Julia works in northern Canada, several scholars have drawn parallels between the socio-economic, environmental, and political dynamics in northern and Indigenous community contexts in Canada and communities in the more ‘mainstream’ Global South (see Schroeder et al., 2006; Young, 1995); both contexts have experienced decades of researchers ‘parachuting’ into communities, only to leave without reporting back on research findings (Brant Castellano, 2004; Caine et al., 2009; Sidaway, 1992).

Julia has conducted research in the Northwest Territories (NWT) since 2003, and was also born and raised in the territory. Therefore, both personal and professional ties guide her motivations to ensure her work produces relevant outcomes for northern communities, including Inuvialuit, Dene, and Métis. Julia’s research mainly focuses on Indigenous experiences of home, homelessness, and housing in the Canadian North, where questions about the roots and outcomes of homelessness have only recently captured the attention of policymakers and academics. The overall aim of Julia’s work is to understand the particular geographies of homelessness in the Canadian North, as well as to examine the socio-cultural dimensions of northern Indigenous homelessness.

Julia employs three strategies to contribute back to communities and individual participants through her research: policy, sharing, and advocacy. First, during early consultations, community groups and research participants identify policy-related expectations and deliverables. During preliminary fieldwork consultations for her doctoral research, community groups requested Julia submit yearly progress reports and highlight emerging themes, as well as write a final policy report, in order to best inform ongoing research policy channels. In addition, community groups requested she organize a series of feedback workshops to discuss preliminary findings and maintain a dialogue with community advisors (cf. Maiter et al., 2013). Second, Julia shared results beyond those directly involved in her research through public presentations at the beginning and end of the project. In an effort to contribute to the community beyond the research project, Julia gave several lectures at local Aurora College campuses on conducting social science research in the North, including qualitative methods, northern housing, and social determinants of health. Third, Julia was asked by homeless research participants to advocate on their behalf by delivering her findings to local media and to particular local politicians whom they felt would benefit from more information regarding their experiences. Julia

also sits as an advocate on the Yellowknife Homelessness Coalition, which allows her to maintain communication channels for her research findings.

Catrina employs qualitative, quantitative and Geographic Information Science methods to investigate benefits and losses accrued by local communities due to the existence of protected areas in sub-Saharan Africa. Her focus is to understand if these outcomes influence conservation attitudes and behaviours so that she can advocate for effective conservation incentives that benefit local communities and mitigate conservation-based losses. Since 2008, she has conducted research in 25 villages bordering Uganda's Kibale National Park, a protected habitat for chimpanzees and 12 other primate species. Management of the park by the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) couples exclusion policies with community outreach programs, including negotiated access for non-threatened park resources, and sharing tourism revenues with local governments to fund community projects. Most residents in neighbouring villages are subsistence farmers from the Batooro or Bakiga tribes, and crop raiding by park-protected animals is the most substantial loss – for which no direct compensation is available – that these farmers accrue as a result of living next to the park.

Catrina directs her efforts to return relevant information through three channels: advocacy, policy recommendations, and supporting non-governmental organizations (NGOs). First, by presenting her results to local government officials, Catrina lobbies to use revenue sharing funds for crop raiding defences and income generating activities. She also supports UWA and conservation organizations in their efforts to find additional funding for human-wildlife conflict mitigation. Second, Catrina has recommended changes to UWA to improve the revenue sharing process to make the distribution more equitable and relevant for local communities. Third, since children are held back from school to guard crops against park-protected animals, Catrina conducts voluntary research to support NGOs trying to improve primary education near the park.

Sarah has worked in upland northern Vietnam and southwest China with ethnic minorities, especially Hmong (Miao) and Yao, since 1999. These socialist spaces are home to over 70 million people belonging to geographically dispersed and politically fragmented minority populations. Chinese and Vietnamese state authorities have long considered these upland margins as frontier regions where 'inconsequential peoples' trail behind national standards (World Bank, 2009). Sarah's work focuses on upland livelihoods, food security, and environmental decision making in an attempt to improve understandings of the activities, interactions, and power relations that occur among upland minorities such as Hmong and Yao, and Kinh (lowland Vietnamese) and Han Chinese. She hopes that her research, and that of collaborators and graduate students, will help reduce discrimination and shape relevant policy through better understandings of how upland ethnic minority residents have adapted their livelihoods through antagonistic political circumstances and why they resist certain development policies that claim to improve local livelihoods.

In Vietnam, Sarah attempts three broad approaches to giving back: sharing, advocating, and education/mentoring. First, in upland villages, she tries to provide support for ethnic minority individuals by sharing specific information that might be relevant to their household livelihoods and well-being. Second, she devotes time to supporting a local Hmong-run social enterprise that provides schooling and job training to ethnic minority

youth, helping the enterprise gain international funding through drafting applications and budgets, providing information, and coordinating an advisory group of overseas volunteers. Third, she gives presentations at research institutes and universities in Hanoi to disseminate research results and discuss qualitative methods and ethical debates regarding social science research with ethnic minorities. She mentors a number of students from Vietnam completing degrees there and overseas. Apart from Sarah's immediate aim to give back to local community members with whom she works, her other approaches have developed somewhat organically as opportunities have emerged, melding into a diverse, ongoing strategy to advocate for ethnic minority voices. Indeed, for all three of us, the development and modification of strategies form the basis of our critical reflections on returning relevant research to participants, which is outlined next.

Trying to return relevant research

To whom should we and can we return the results?

There are probably as many ways of disseminating results as there are results to return. Our desire to help the research communities within which we work makes us reflect especially carefully on whom we can and should share our research findings with. In reality, we find returning results to be a participatory, iterative activity, with our audiences and contexts influencing discussions and redirecting our advocacy efforts (cf. Maïter et al., 2013). In this way, returning results becomes a continuation of the participant validation process, where findings are strengthened through discussion and debate (cf. Turner and Coen, 2008). It follows that if our work is meant to advocate for research participants, we should listen carefully to participants' advice on how to disseminate results so as to best represent their needs (Cahill, 2007; Minkler, 2004).

After completing her PhD, Catrina returned to Kibale National Park in 2012 to present her research findings to participating communities and the UWA. Her dissertation, published papers, and a presentation were given to UWA wardens and rangers. Catrina had also planned to return her results to the 25 communities where she conducts her research. This was no small task, as these villages have no electricity and are only accessible by poor roads; the only area for public assembly is each village's small mud and wattle church into which 80 to 100 people can squeeze. Using a portable power pack, projector and a white sheet, Catrina and her research assistant and translator, Peter, gave two village presentations. The information was well received, and village members noted 'there is good alignment between what we told you and what is in your report'. The chairperson at one meeting thanked Catrina for returning with the results: 'You are the first researcher to return and provide results to the village, even though many researchers have worked in this village'. However, as Catrina was setting up at one of the presentations, she heard women grumbling that they would rather be in their fields than at the meeting, and although most people raised their hands to indicate the presentation was of interest, less than half seemed to be listening. Many of the audience's questions focused on people's distrust of the sub-county government, with one man asking: 'How can you help us get our revenue sharing money instead of it being taken by higher levels of government?' During the post-presentation discussion, people suggested that it was more

important for the research to be delivered to the sub-county council so that findings could guide local government decisions that benefited the people.

Catrina soon realized that giving the remaining 23 village presentations and returning the results to 25 village, 11 sub-county, and three district councils was perhaps not the most useful approach for local farmers, and was going to be impossible in her remaining time in the field. Based on feedback from the first two village meetings, she decided to convert the presentation into a bound report with versions in English, Ratooro, or Rakiga, and to deliver and discuss the report with each village, sub-county, and district council chairperson. Chairpersons at all three levels of government thanked her for doing so. Village and sub-county chairpersons were particularly pleased to have a paper copy in their own language that they could keep and continue to use: 'I [a village chairperson] will use this report with my sub-county chief'; 'I [a sub-county chairperson] will take the report and call a meeting with all the village chairmen to discuss'. Although not her original plan, returning written reports to local government allowed the results to be directed where the villagers wanted them to go and helped their voices to be heard by government officials.

For Sarah, undertaking officially authorized fieldwork in Vietnam requires a research visa and a variety of 'red stamps' obtained through a state research institution or local university (cf. Turner, 2013). To give back to these sponsoring organizations, Sarah has prepared research seminars and mentors local students. However, Vietnamese professors and state researchers, paid low salaries (US\$250–\$350 per month) compared to private sector opportunities, often find themselves on a funding treadmill, tutoring privately and applying for external funding and contracts to make ends meet (see also Zink, 2013). Consequently, they do not necessarily have the time, mental energy, or incentive to discuss results outside the specific contract upon which they are engaged. Sarah finds that seminars to discuss her findings remain a fairly one-way delivery of results. Local students, in turn, are not used to an environment in which they can voice different opinions and often shy away from raising their own experiences or interpretations. Nonetheless, this has been changing as the state relaxes travel for overseas study and conferences, allowing local scholars access to non-state endorsed interpretations and spurring more meaningful discussions. One-on-one conversations with local students allow for more open dialogue, reminding Sarah that, although time consuming, these interactions are important for two-way information flows.

Relating to NGOs working on projects in the uplands is more difficult. Despite offers to share findings and initial enthusiasm from international and local NGO staff, there are seldom follow-up discussions. Similar to local academics, NGO workers acknowledge the significant pressure they face to complete fieldwork (often RRA), write reports, and quickly apply for the next funding cycle, while often on short-term contracts. One international NGO working in the same province as Sarah was initially keen to have a Master's student involved with their work on food security, but the NGO director was due to complete her contract a few months after initial discussions and no follow-up occurred in time. A local NGO was also enthusiastic for Sarah to talk to their staff about research methods, but the event did not transpire due to the NGO's other deadlines in the six weeks Sarah was available. Being an overseas researcher in the field for relatively short periods each year clearly adds to these constraints for meaningful engagement.

It is also difficult to find relevant ways to give research results directly back to Hmong and Yao communities. With many illiterate individuals, written reports are not helpful and can open local communities to unwanted scrutiny from officials (see below). Sarah has found that holding discussions with ethnic minority farmers in one village about opportunities elsewhere or another village's experiences (such as hybrid seeds that failed in certain locations or healthcare available elsewhere) is well received and appreciated. But this still leaves her wondering how she can give back in a more meaningful manner.

Conflicts between institutional/professional demands and community expectations are present in Julia's case. As a graduate student, university requirements often do not mesh with the time required for active community engagement. To nurture community relationships adds significant time, which can extend a student's program substantially. Though this did not prevent Julia from completing her PhD in a timely fashion, she often felt she was unable to fulfil community expectations to the extent she would have liked, given pressure to complete her program. Similarly, writing policy reports and delivering community feedback workshops are not prioritized to nearly the same degree in conventional academic culture as peer-reviewed journal articles and conference presentations (cf. Kindon et al., 2007). Julia once received advice from a more senior scholar that it was best to save such forms of public engagement for after one had secured tenure; until then the only form of academic currency is peer-reviewed articles in journals with high impact factors. This pressure is palpable now that Julia has completed her graduate studies and is on the job market, where the number of peer-reviewed articles often means the difference between a CV that makes the long list and one that does not.

Answering 'to whom should we deliver the results?' is not always straightforward. The community is a multifaceted entity (cf. Pain, 2004), and delivering results should be a multifaceted process as well. In the case of Julia's research, the community leaders in charge of granting community approval, though often interested, are usually not the community members with the most at stake in the research. Instead, those who have the greatest stake are community organizations involved in service provision and advocacy for homeless people, as well as homeless people themselves. At the same time, the community-at-large needs to be informed of research findings, particularly because Julia and the organizations with whom she works hope that greater awareness will lead to increased public support for government funding and programs toward homelessness interventions. Therefore, Julia works to ensure her research makes a positive contribution to the community by developing multiple strategies that meet as many different needs as possible.

Managing messages and self-censorship

Ethnic minorities in the Sino-Vietnamese borderlands frequently endure state officials probing into their private lives, often with serious consequences regarding land rights and permitted agricultural practices. Given the breadth of state intervention, researchers in Vietnam (and China and Laos) walk 'in the footsteps of the Communist Party' (Hansen, 2006: 82). At the most fundamental level, Sarah's ability to access local voices in this context depends on trust and respect. More than once, she has been humbled by a Hmong

or Yao elder noting, 'you're not like the others who come here [state officials], you listen to us'. The disempowerment felt by these individuals fuels Sarah's drive to have their opinions heard through academic and non-academic channels, but it also reminds her of the care she must take while doing so. Repeated visits to the region have facilitated long-standing trust with individuals ranging from official gatekeepers from whom Sarah gains authorizations to Hmong and Yao interviewees. This trust allows her specific insights into ethnic minority livelihoods (cf. Michaud, 2010). For instance, only after hours of informal conversations, shared meals, and marketplace gossip did she start hearing stories of the complex concerns minority individuals have with state officials over land rights, education and healthcare access, distrust of state market officials, the impact of bans on opium and tree felling, concerns over cross-border kidnappings, and so on. But as an overseas researcher, the tensions between official procedures for maintaining field access versus the desire to publish local voices and concerns can lead to concessions regarding published interpretations. If Sarah publishes findings that criticize government policies and a senior official reads them, it is highly likely that access will be denied – for herself, her associates, or future foreign scholars (see Saleminck, 2013). Often, distinguishing what counts as a 'controversial' finding is problematic in itself. Elements that might not initially appear sensitive (one's sampling strategy or visiting a certain village) can turn perilous when political and economic interests change. There are also consequences for Vietnamese researchers if Sarah, as their collaborator, publishes critical research. These concerns result in self-censorship, which at times boils down to judging who is in an audience and when it is better to dampen critique or stay quiet.

For Julia, the need to self-censor relates to ethical dilemmas as a result of the small size of the NWT population and the subsequent ease with which research participants can be identified in research outputs. She therefore must find ways to describe the experiences of homeless research participants without betraying their anonymity – easier said than done when the population of Inuvik is just over 3,000 and that of Yellowknife just over 19,000. When one further limits the participant pool to men and women accessing emergency shelter services, it becomes even easier to link a pseudonym to an actual participant. Not only could this be damaging to the research participant, but it could also create opportunities for already-existing personal bias to cloud a community member's response to data and analysis. In order to protect anonymity, Julia is selective in choosing quotes from interviews that will not identify participants. She also has to change identifying details that, collectively, could identify a participant. The downside to this careful culling means that the overall picture of an individual experience suffers. In order to still illustrate 'pathways to homelessness' (Fitzpatrick, 1999) in full, Julia aggregates common experiences among homeless men and women through a process of 'research storytelling', whereby she uses creative writing to fictionalize shared 'pathways' (Christensen, 2012). This approach allows her to highlight important structure-agency linkages for policy makers while also leaving out details that would otherwise identify a specific research participant. Most importantly, it is a communications strategy that reflects the significance of narrative within the Indigenous cultural context of her research (cf. Pualani Louis, 2007).

Catrina also struggles with what to say and not to say due to ethical dilemmas resulting from the subject matter of her research. Like Minkler (2004: 693), she agrees that: 'Although many academics argue that scientists have a duty to make all of their findings

public, the value base underlying CBPR [community based participatory research] suggests that our primary responsibility is to the community'. To test the effectiveness of conservation incentives to foster improved conservation behaviours, she collects data about illegal resource extraction through a survey and by physically counting illegal trails, harvested trees, and poaching snares inside the park close to each village. When returning results, she has to consider protecting participating villages from possible prosecution from the UWA. Catrina also worries that if villagers realize other villages extract more resources from the park, they might be tempted to extract more, potentially damaging the park's protected habitat, killing endangered animals, or putting themselves at a higher risk of arrest. To address these concerns, she does not identify participating villages in any presentations, reports or journal articles, and refers to more generalized park border areas as having high, medium, or low illegal extraction, allowing for general trends to be discussed. Although this trade-off protects local people, aggregating and smoothing data weakens the ability of the UWA to spatially target management strategies to reduce resource poaching. Since protecting wild chimpanzees was the main reason Catrina decided to engage in conservation research, this data masking leaves her ethically conflicted.

Managing expectations of and by the researcher

In Canada, especially in the north, Indigenous communities have a long and complicated history with researchers. Through social and research activities, Julia often encounters community members who struggle to accept the relevance of social science research, given the difficulties the community has experienced in the past with researchers who 'dropped in' to conduct research of their own design, only to leave and never return with results for the community (cf. Castleden et al., 2012). Many ask: 'what is this going to do for the people of our community?' One woman explicitly noted to Julia, 'We are tired of giving our knowledge to researchers only to never see the reports or be able to benefit from the research.' In these cases, Julia tries to assure them that something meaningful will result from this work, giving examples of possible outcomes that community partners have identified. However, there is often nothing that can take away the scepticism some people feel.

In contrast, participants, particularly those who are homeless, are often enthusiastic about Julia's research. As marginalized members of their communities, they have rarely been approached for their perspectives by researchers or the media. Thus, while she encounters resistance from some corners, Julia sometimes feels overwhelmed by the hopes and expectations of homeless research participants.

As research participants trust her with their experiences and perspectives, Julia is tasked with the responsibility to ensure their stories are communicated to the 'powerful' people they feel distanced from. At the very least, she acts as a facilitator, securing in-person meetings with politicians and policy makers. However, Julia frequently feels disheartened by politicians' reactions, as everything ultimately comes down to money and jurisdiction. While research participants are often hopeful about the impact the research could have, the findings are subject to the same political negotiation as everything else. Still, there is inherent value and worth in using research to link people who feel excluded to those who are in positions of decision making power.

Julia has also had to temper her own expectations, particularly concerning collaboration with community organizations that lack the time to collaborate as fully as Julia might hope. People working in advocacy and social services are often incredibly overworked, and the reality is that other responsibilities must, understandably, come first. Likewise, homeless men and women, most of whom face significant challenges in their relationships, health, and other areas of their personal lives, are also very busy navigating the complex chain of support services. These challenges have forced Julia to re-evaluate not only her aims for collaborative, participatory community-based research (Caine et al., 2009), but also the anticipated research outcomes. While community groups and homeless people are instrumental in the development of research objectives and wish to be consulted throughout, Julia has taken responsibility for designing and conducting fieldwork and interpreting data. Her emphasis on policy recommendations fits neatly under the umbrella of advocacy research, combining action-oriented goals with research that aims to tread lightly by being community-grounded but also cognizant of limitations in terms of time and resources.

When speaking with villagers in Uganda, Catrina is typically asked what she will do to make their lives better. Installing crop raiding defences and improving livelihood opportunities around Kibale National Park are beyond her own financial resources, but by advocating for change with the Ugandan government, UWA, and NGOs she feels she might be able to help local villagers. However, she questions her right as an 'outsider' to speak on the villagers' behalf (Alcoff, 1991). Her fears have been allayed during meetings with village councils while discussing the report: 'You have been coming here for several years now. Your findings show what is truly being faced by people next to the park. You and the chairman can always find the ones who lose most. UWA should be using you instead of going through the sub-county'. Time and again, the councils authorize Catrina to speak on their behalf to UWA and higher levels of government, validating her desire to work for positive change.

In the end, Catrina feels she has met her own expectation of getting her research results to the people who are in a position to institute change for the villagers living next to Kibale National Park. Her interactions with UWA indicate her results will be considered when developing management policies. However, she feels that other socio-economic pressures will quickly take over government agendas when she returns to Canada and is no longer there to make crop raiding and revenue sharing topics of conversation for local leadership. She questions whether her work can ever really institute change (Cahill, 2007), but is humbled that she is perceived as a partner by the people she is working with in Uganda:

You got the books and we people who stay close have got the experience. I saw the elephant and you recorded it and produced this report. You are not like those who, say, discovered Lake Victoria. What about the ones who were staying there? What about the ones who took them there?

The expectations that Sarah encounters in the field range from financial support for a hospital visit, to grant application brainstorming, to student supervision. From ethnic minority research participants as a whole, expectations remain low. While individuals

appear to appreciate Sarah's attempts to give back via information sharing and gifts, they are extremely pragmatic about the racialized political environment and socialist state context in which they struggle to make a living. They are well aware that it is not in their interests to become more vocal or directly confront state development agendas or agricultural policies. This stance is part of an everyday politics that sees uplanders overtly agreeing to follow state directives, while covertly maintaining decades-old agricultural techniques, traditional ecological knowledge practices, and educational norms (Turner 2012). Sarah argues that true participatory action research regarding upland livelihood coping strategies would, in the current political climate, be potentially dangerous, exposing these households to unwanted attention and possible sanctions by state officials. Sarah's expectations of how to give back have had to become carefully moulded to fit this context and local concerns. Instead of participatory action research, advocacy research allows for generalizability (when necessary) to protect individual informants and for findings to be couched in terms more acceptable to official ears; it also acknowledges that informants are extremely busy with their livelihoods. Yet, like Catrina, Sarah asks, 'who am I to come into this environment and advocate on behalf of others?' The only reason she feels it acceptable to do so presently is because individuals continue to ask her to. When that stops, hopefully because they will have gained the freedom of expression to advocate on their own behalf, she will more than willingly reconsider her role (cf. Alcoff, 1991).

Conclusions

Amidst the challenges we have encountered in communicating our research results in a relevant manner to local communities, several interesting themes emerge. First, it is clear across our experiences that effective communication of results is multifaceted, involving both short- and long-term strategies, including returning results to different groups in different ways. Indeed, 'relevance [when returning results] is not easily measured, and it may not be directly observable' (Staheli and Mitchell, 2005: 357). For all three of us, the true potential for advocacy in our research is through long-term commitment, recognizing that the role of the researcher-advocate is best fulfilled by maintaining relationships over time rather than limiting 'results' to one project in particular. We have all found strategies to contribute in ways that extend beyond one project. Instead, we are making long-term investments through ongoing research agendas and positive relationships with communities that see value in the research we do. Similarly, the process of returning results has further illuminated the heterogeneity of 'community'. One approach does not suffice; instead, we have each developed strategies to speak to different sectors of the community in order to ensure the broadest reach for the research. At times, this has meant careful managing of messages and self-censorship in order to ensure that research participants are protected and that their needs are met.

Second, we have seen that while research findings and representations are 'dynamic [phenomena]' (Maiter et al., 2013: 209), so too is the dissemination process. In our experiences, effective communication of results involves extending the dialogical potential of our qualitative research rather than taking a uni-directional approach. By formally or informally soliciting feedback from participants on how and to whom to disseminate

results, our research dissemination plans have been made more relevant to both research participants and broader communities. Moreover, through research dissemination, our analyses are evaluated and validated; new ideas came to the fore through community discussions, allowing the research to extend beyond our grasp as researchers and instead be put into motion in diverse ways.

Third, our experiences demonstrate that advocacy comes in all shapes and sizes. We have each voiced fears that our work might not make the broad impact hoped for by community members – or ourselves – yet we are buoyed by feedback that returning results in useful, community-directed ways is a significant step in the right direction. While institutional barriers at the university and community levels can ultimately limit the potential impact of advocacy research, we are each motivated by signs that we are seen as allies by the community members we seek to represent through our work. Most importantly, we have become researcher-advocates through being asked officially or unofficially to use our research to advocate on behalf of the individuals and communities with whom we work. Though ‘researcher-initiated’, the advocacy we practice is given real meaning by the support of community members. The return of relevant results is therefore an absolute priority in our work, and is not only critical to advocacy research in Global South contexts, but merits adoption by the institutional language and practice around qualitative research more generally. In sum, we have found in three quite diverse settings that advocacy research is more feasible and appropriate for local individuals than participatory approaches, facilitating the return of relevant results through a broad range of community avenues. While participatory approaches are increasingly mainstreamed in social science work and can have a number of positive outcomes, we suggest more attention should also be paid to advocacy research in its multiple forms.

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