

Young people in the lead: Global Young Researchers designing, implementing, and analysing their own research in local contexts, as part of a global research project

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Abstract

From Rhetoric to Action: Towards an Enabling Environment for Child and Youth Development in the Sustainable Development Goals is a report that investigates current conditions for young people at the beginning of the new global development agenda, including “Considerations for Action”. The research aimed to achieve a balance between understanding global trends in child and youth development, and capturing the experiences and voices of young people and those who work with them at the local level. It did this by using a youth-led participatory approach as the centerpiece of the research, alongside a global survey, and case studies on children and youth organisations.

18 Global Young Researchers took the lead in designing, undertaking and analysing a research topic of their choice relating to the thematic focuses of participation, protection or livelihoods. This paper explores this youth-led participatory research process within the context of Participatory Action Research (PAR) and its conceptualisations in recent literature. It critically reflects on the youth-led research component of *From Rhetoric to Action*, providing lessons learned for future projects, and provides insights on the PAR methodology when scaled up for the purposes of global research.

Introduction

In international development, there is growing consensus on the need for participatory processes involving local populations. Participatory research is no exception. Participatory action research (PAR) places the ability to generate knowledge in the hands of those affected by it most. It believes that local actors can provide unique insight into issues not possible by others, can transform previously unequal power structures by changing who has the validity to produce knowledge (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2001), and is pedagogical, allowing local actors to “develop knowledge and skills and identify and confront challenges in their lives” (Rodriguez & Brown, 2009). Participatory action research has the aim of generating social change towards greater equity and justice.

This paper focuses on PAR and its use in the 2015 global research project, *From Rhetoric to Action*, which had as its showcase research methodology 18 Global Young Researchers (GYRs) from all 5 regions of the world, taking the lead in the design, delivery, and analysis of their research in their home locations. Three youth organisations based in the UK – Restless Development, War Child UK, and Youth Business International – launched *Case for Space*, a “global research and advocacy initiative that seeks to understand and strengthen the conditions and environment for child and youth development in three focus areas: youth participation, child protection, and youth livelihoods”. The resulting report, *From Rhetoric to*

Action: Towards an enabling environment for child and youth development in the Sustainable Development Goals, is a piece of global research combining quantitative, globally-focused research with qualitative locally-focused research. It intends to “provide food for thought and action for the child and youth sector, and stimulate discussion and action by decision-makers [and] serves to inform the strategic thinking, programming and practice” of the three commissioning organisations (Youth Policy Labs, 2015). Within the *Case for Space* initiative, the first phase is research of which *From Rhetoric to Action* is the main output, and the second phase is advocacy, conducted by the three commissioning organisations.

The central research question was: “What is the enabling environment (necessary conditions and structures) that ensures children and young people can influence decisions, have access to their rights, and have improved livelihoods?” The three themes of participation, protection, and livelihoods were selected as entry-points into the overarching theme of child and youth development, and also reflect the thematic foci of the commissioning organisations.

The research and resulting report was led by Youth Policy Labs, a global think tank based in Germany focusing on youth, operating “at the junction of research and journalism, producing high-quality and well-researched knowledge with the aim of improving public policies that affect the lives of young people” (Youth Policy Labs, 2016). The research methodology had three main components: (a) a global survey of practitioners working with and/or for children and young people in youth organisations and movements; (b) national level case studies of the three commissioning organisations; (c) youth-led local level research projects by 18 Global Young Researchers (GYRs) from all 5 regions of the world. Each component provided data inputs, which were then synthesised and analysed together to form the main findings of the report, and informed the recommendations (“Considerations for future action”.)

The youth-led participatory methodology with the GYRs will be the main focus of this article.

Participatory research, participatory action research, and with youth

Rather than a distinct set of methodologies, participatory research is an “orientation to inquiry” (Reason & Bradbury, 2008), where the research process is geared towards working *with* the people who are under study, as opposed to *on* them. It recognizes that those who are directly affected by a research problem must also participate in it, as all knowledge is socially constructed and embedded in local contexts. As such, it is an epistemological alternative to positivist knowledge production, which maintains that for research to be credible, it must remain objective and value-free (Brydon-Miller, Greenwood & Maguire, 2003).

Participatory research has the possibility of addressing structural power inequities, as knowledge is power, determining “definitions of what is conceived as important, as possible, for and by whom” (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2001). Participatory research therefore involves the democratisation of knowledge generation, breaking the monopoly of expert knowledge producers, and empowering others who are not typically the power holders to construct their own knowledge. Local stakeholders as co-researchers can help to gain new and deeper

insights to social phenomena, situating it within its specific context and capturing its inherent dynamism (Bergold & Thomas, 2012). It validates and legitimates the knowledge of local communities, and their authority to determine truth (Rodriguez & Brown, 2009).

For participatory research to fulfill its emancipatory potential, it should seek to not only communicate new voices or uncover new knowledge, but to encourage mobilisation and action (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2001). Therefore participatory research is often conceptualised together with action research, which itself includes participation as a basic tenet of its definition:

[A] participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview which we believe is emerging at this historical moment. It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities. (Reason & Bradbury, 2001 cited in Brydon-Miller, Greenwood & Maguire, 2003)

Participatory action research (PAR) builds from and intersects with critical studies, in its focus on complex and intersectional power relations, oppression and injustice, with the aim of contesting and transforming systems and institutions to produce greater justice and improve social conditions (Camarota & Fine, 2008). This change is brought about both through the knowledge produced by the research, and through the research act itself, based on the fundamental idea that only through trying to change the social world can it be understood (Brydon-Miller, Greenwood & Maguire, 2003).

Knowledge production itself can become a form of mobilisation, through an iterative process: “through action, knowledge is created, and analyses of that knowledge may lead to new forms of action...It is through such a process that the nature of action can be deepened, moving from practical problem-solving to more fundamental social transformation.” (Hall, 1981, cited in Gaventa & Cornwall, 2001). Therefore in producing knowledge that is normally hidden or undiscovered, participants themselves develop their own consciousness and change their worldview, becoming self-sufficient researchers (Stoecker, 1999) and gaining more authentic knowledge as a basis for action (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2001).

Many authors explore participatory action research specifically with young people (Amsden & Van Wynsberghe, 2005; Berg, Coman & Schensul, 2009; Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Driskell, 2002; Foster-Fishman et al, 2010; McCartan, Schubotz & Murphy, 2012; Rodriguez & Brown, 2009). Youth PAR engages young people as experts, inverting their positioning in “regular life” where they are considered to lack the skills, knowledge, and legitimacy to be experts (McCartan, Schubotz & Murphy, 2012). Fundamentally, youth PAR is about “engaging youth in learning and inquiry – not as information receptacles or data sources as whole human beings – to help them improve the quality of their lives” (Rodriguez & Brown, 2009). Therefore young people not only study social problems, but also play a role in determining the solutions (Camarota & Fine, 2008).

Practical guidance on working with youth (Amsden & Van Wynsberghe, 2005; Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Driskell, 2002; Rodriguez & Brown, 2009) include general principles of youth PAR, building on principles of conducting PAR generally:

- **Research is situated and inquiry-based:** reflects real-life problems, issues, and needs of young people; tends to be critical and intersectional, analysing power relations through multiple lenses with a focus on marginalised youth; perspectives of youth are respected
- **Processes are participatory and collaborative:** youth draw on personal experiences and understandings, to connect them to others and broader theories; working together with other youth, as well as with “adult allies” (Amsden & Van Wynsberghe, 2005); youth are given decision-making roles within the research processes
- **Emphasis on building the capacity of youth:** supporting unique insight and experience of youth with technical research skills such as training and mentoring in qualitative research methods
- **Transformative and active:** research leads towards ideas, actions, and strategies to transform knowledge and practices, push for social change and develop the community

Youth in the lead and in collaboration: *From Rhetoric to Action* research process

GYRs were selected from a global open call for young people between the ages of 18 and 35. The GYRs took “the lead in the design, delivery and analysis of research in their home locations” with two twin purposes: “to conduct research and analysis that is firmly embedded in the vastly different political and economic realities of diverse young people, and to build the research capacity of emerging young researchers and leaders in five different regions around the world” (Youth Policy Labs, 2015). The process involved a combination of training, independent research, peer support, and directed support by the editorial team of Youth Policy Labs, as laid out in the Figure 1 below:

Global Young Researchers — research process

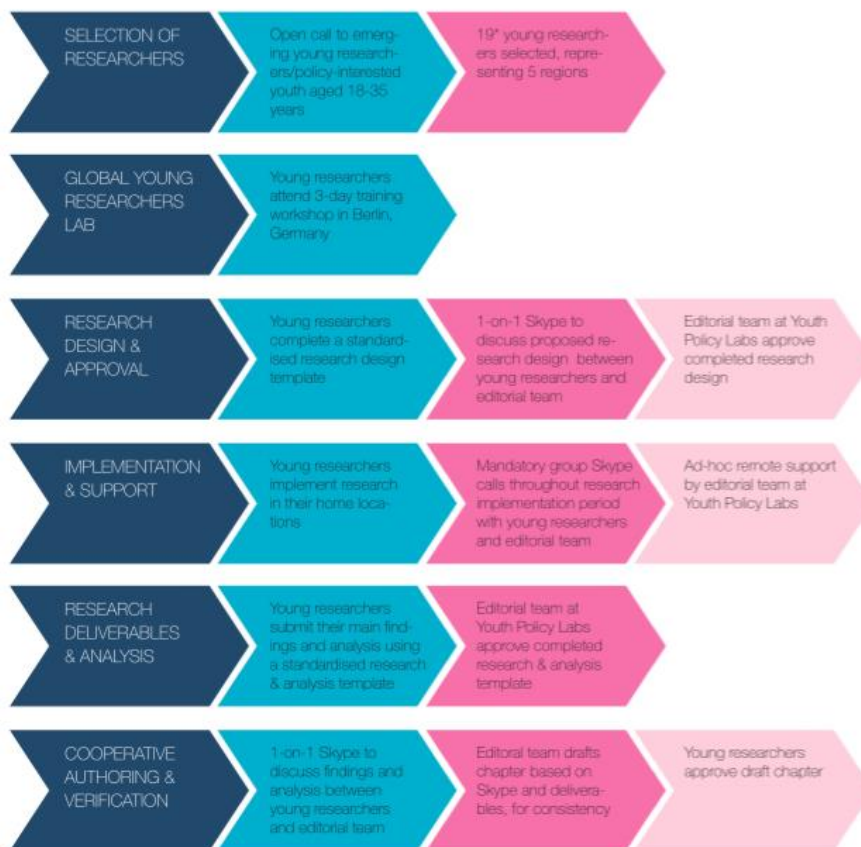


Figure 1: Global Young Researchers – research process. Image from Youth Policy Labs. 2015. “From Rhetoric to Action: Towards an Enabling Environment in the Sustainable Development Goals”. Figure 2. *The Case for Space Initiative*. Youth Policy Press: Berlin.

Areas of responsibility and collaboration

Stoecker (1999) notes that many participatory action research projects are often not spontaneous initiatives of community members, but rather involve academics or scholars involved in initiating the project, and/or providing technical expertise to the project to be combined with the community perspectives of the participants. Stoecker identifies six “decisional points” in the research process¹, where the respective roles of the scholars versus the community members need to be defined. Each will be examined in turn as it applies to the *From Rhetoric to Action* project, to explore the participatory research process in more depth:

(1) Defining the research question

The overarching research question was defined by the commissioning organisations and Youth Policy Labs at the outset of the project, prior to the recruitment of the GYRs: “What is the enabling environment (necessary conditions and structures) that ensures children and

¹ While Stoecker identifies six “decisional points”, a seventh could be added relating to evaluation of the research process. For the *From Rhetoric to Action* project, an external evaluator was hired to review the project in its entirety, including substantial participation from the GYRs, for the purposes of evaluating and learning from the project (Drew, 2016).

young people can influence decisions, have access to their rights, and have improved livelihoods?” The rationale for the research question – with its focus on enabling environments, and its three thematic areas as entry points for youth development – was even earlier determined by the commissioning organisations, as part of their consortium arrangement with the UK Department for International Development (DFID) (Restless Development, War Child UK & Youth Business International, 2014).

GYRs had the freedom to choose the research question for their own individual projects, with a few parameters: the research question had to fall primarily within one of the three themes (youth and participation, protection, or livelihoods); it had to focus on their own local context and the population located there²; be feasible within the three month time period; be completed using focus groups or semi-structured interviews only. While all projects were focused on youth, not all projects worked with young people as subjects.³ In guiding their selection of a research question, GYRs collectively explored the concept of “enabling environments” at the Global Young Researchers Lab in Berlin, using the CIVICUS Enabling Environment Index as a framework as a conceptual framework (CIVICUS, 2013)⁴. The three-day training lab was the only in-person gathering of all the GYRs, and occurred at the very beginning of the project. GYRs then returned to their home locations for the implementation of their research (more below).

The Youth Policy Labs editorial team reviewed the research questions as part of the completed research design template (below), and in conversation with the GYR, finalised the question.

(2) Designing the research

All GYRs used a standardised research design template, where they had to identify their research question, rationale, methodology (focus groups or interviews), participant recruitment, steps for obtaining informed consent, logistic information (ex. location, tools, data collection), as well as a risk assessment and mitigation/response plan (Youth Policy Labs, 2015a). Upon completion, the editorial team reviewed the research design template, and in conversation with the GYR, finalized the content.

(3) Implementing the research

GYRs were responsible for the implementation of the research in their home locations, according to their research plans. In case of a change to the research plan (ex. too difficult to recruit the participants intended, scope of research question found to be too large or not as relevant as initially thought), GYRs used their own judgment in adjusting their research plans, and consulted with the editorial team when needed. Regularly scheduled conference calls were held with the GYRs as a whole group, and in thematic groups, to enable peer

²There were three exceptions to this. Lawrence was located in Ethiopia, and focused on regional African Union youth participation structures. Gioel was located in the UK, and focused on youth entrepreneurship programmes that were carried out in Italy and Poland. Salim was located in Sweden, where he is exiled as a political refugee, and focused on youth-led civil society in Syria.

³ Three projects did not involve youth in the interviews or focus groups: Martti from Australia, and his research with adult youth workers; Tavarrie from The Bahamas, and his research with professionals in the juvenile justice system; Jake from the Philippines, and his research with policy experts on child protection policies in disaster scenarios.

support between the GYRs throughout their projects. The editorial team also had one-on-one calls with the GYRs, to check in on progress and trouble-shoot any issues encountered.

(4) Analysing the research data

All GYRs used a standardised analysis template, which included a section on rapid insights, main findings, findings in relation to the Enabling Environment Index framework, findings in relation to their area of thematic focus and the overarching research question, and further areas of research (Youth Policy Labs, 2015b). Upon completion, the editorial team reviewed the analysis template, and in conversation with the GYR, finalized the content. As described in the analysis template, the standardised format across the 18 “unique, context specific projects” enabled the editorial team to “conduct an overarching thematic analysis, to discover any global trends in the enabling environment for youth development” (ibid).

(5) Reporting the research results

Based on the completed analysis template, and additional insights from the conversation with the GYR, the editorial team drafted the written section as would appear in the report, and then circulated it back to the GYR to approve the text. As noted in the analysis template, the editorial team was responsible for drafting the section “to ensure that it is written in the same style and tone as the other GYR chapters, for consistency” (ibid). However, the text would not appear in the final report without the approval of the GYR.

The GYRs chapters, reflecting the insights and findings of their local research projects, made up one of the three research components of the report. The other two were: (a) the global survey of child and youth organisations and movements, targeting practitioners who work with or for young people (n= 827, 123 countries); (b) three case studies focusing on different national level, on-the-ground experiences of staff working in the commissioning organisations. The three research components, collated, synthesised and analysed together by the editorial team,

aimed to achieve a balance between understanding global trends in child and youth development, and capturing the experiences and voices of children, young people and those who work with them at the local level. It did this by mixing quantitative, globally-focused research with qualitative, locally-focused research. (Youth Policy Labs, 2015)

The result were thematic findings across the three data inputs, looking at: factors that enable and hinder child and youth development in the areas of participation, protection, and livelihoods specifically; other cross-cutting factors, including poverty, governance, civil society pushback, and resources; “Considerations for Action” on how to improve the conditions and structures affecting child and youth development.

GYR research directly informed both the findings and the “Considerations for Action”, and were cited clearly within the text. An example is outlined in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Excerpt from *From Rhetoric to Action* demonstrating link between finding, GYR research, and “Consideration for Action”

Finding: “Building trust between established youth organisations and emerging youth movements and activists would create opportunities for collaboration and support”

Relevant GYR research cited:

“Exploring the challenges that informal youth movements face in comparison to formal organisations, Rocío (GYR, Mexico) notes:

‘Many informal organisations in Mexico decided not to register formally. In their opinion, this gives them more freedom and independence in their work... The main reason for this decision is the fact that being formalised means that they would be seen as collaborating with the government, compromising their objectives, which would in turn deter their potential supporters.’”

“Ani (GYR, Brazil) identifies a distrusting relationship between formal youth organisations and informal youth movements in Brazil, with young activists viewing *‘official participation channels for youth, such as the National Youth Council, with scepticism, as they perceive formal political processes in Congress as corrupt.’”*

“Consideration for Action”: “Opportunities to create stronger relationships between child and youth organisations and youth movements should be established to build trust between groups that have different structures and ways of working. Work should focus on areas of mutual collaboration and support.”

Excerpt from Youth Policy Labs. 2015. “From Rhetoric to Action: Towards an Enabling Environment in the Sustainable Development Goals”. Pp. 81-84. *The Case for Space Initiative*. Youth Policy Press: Berlin. Italics in original.

(6) Acting on the research results

GYRs themselves were most immediately involved in raising awareness of the report’s findings as a whole, and also their own specific insights. In the year following the release, selected GYRs participated in launch and dissemination events held by the commissioning organisations in Bogota, Kampala, London, and New York, and also independently organised presentations of their projects at civil society or academic conferences in Brazil, Nepal, Uganda, and the United States.

However, the extent to which GYRs themselves were able to act on the research results beyond dissemination and promotion remains unclear. The “Considerations for Action” were aimed at a wide range of stakeholders:

[P]ublic, private, and civil society actors who can affect the enabling environment for child and youth development: young people themselves acting as change-makers, locally and globally; youth organisations, networks and movements; CSOs working on issues relevant to children and young people; professionals and volunteers working with children and youth; and governments, agencies and donors supporting child and youth development. (Youth Policy Labs, 2015).

Given that the conceptual frame of the report was the *enabling environment* for child and youth development, these recommendations cannot easily translate to action by any one GYR in their own local context. Rather, they require mass mobilisations of actors for systemic change at the environmental level. If such mobilisation occurs, on the initiatives of the GYRs, the commissioning organisations, or the target audience of the report, remains to be seen.

From Rhetoric to Action youth-led research: A critical reflection

From Rhetoric to Action provides a useful real-world example of youth-led participatory research, to reflect on the mechanics, as well as the opportunities and difficulties, of applying this format in local to global research. It also provides a useful case study to reflect on the methodology of youth PAR broadly speaking, as conceived in the literature.

GYRs as “insiders” versus “outsiders”

Rodriguez & Brown (2009) describe participatory action research as an empirical approach where “local researchers possess expert knowledge derived from their everyday participation in the contexts under investigation and their direct engagement with the issues under study”. The proximity to the issues under study varied among the GYRs. In some cases, GYRs were investigating a topic within which they were directly involved. For example, Rocio, Ani, and Salim are all activists, and all examined some aspect of youth participation in the activism circles within which they operate. In other examples, the connection to a research topic was simply derived from personal interest or previous expertise on a particular topic. This was the case, for example, of Jake and child protection in disaster risk reduction in the Philippines, Naim and youth digital participation in India, and Fayyaz and child labour in Pakistan.

Knowledge produced by the GYRs therefore was not derived from participation in a given context alone. This was not this a condition of the research process. Rather, young people with an interest in research and social change were asked to select a topic of their choosing, to maximise their autonomy over their research design. In a few cases, this happened to be a topic with which they were intimately involved and effective by, however when this happened, it was simply by coincidence.

In this sense, GYRs could be considered both as “insiders” (Camarota & Fine, 2008) and “outsiders” to the topics under investigation. They could all be “insiders” by virtue of: (a) being young people themselves, and (b) being embedded within the local social, political and historical context that they were investigating. However, they could also be “outsiders” (with exception to the three GYRs mentioned above) by not being from that particular community, sharing the experiences of those young people who are their subjects, or being personally affected by the issues under investigation.

Gaventa & Cornwall (2001) warn that participatory research methods can simply recreate the power structures in knowledge production that it seeks to dismantle. If GYRs cannot be considered “insiders”, as defined by definitions of PAR, then the project may not be considered fully participatory, and GYRs no different than traditional researchers in

conventional projects. It may be simply “reflect[ing] the reality of the moment”, and be limited in its ability to affect social change (ibid).

Moreover, while the project sought to recruit young people from all around the world, with various backgrounds and experiences, the minimum participant requirements included full fluency in English, a bachelor or master level degree in a related topic, and consistent access to a laptop or computer with strong internet access to participate in remote conference calls and submit deliverables. While the time and resource constraints of the project may have necessitated these requirements (i.e. budget could not provide full translation, computers for the GYRs), there is no doubt that those who are able to participate as GYRs were likely to be from higher socio-economic classes.

However, while Gaventa & Cornwall (2001) warn of replicating power structures, they also hazard against putting too much weight on the idea that knowledge produced from the “community” always yields more authentic or better research: “By reifying local knowledge and treating it as singular, the possibility is rarely acknowledged that what is expressed as ‘their knowledge’ may simply replicate dominant discourses, rather than challenge them” (Cornwall, Guijot & Welbourn, 1993, cited in Gaventa & Cornwall, 2001). Therefore the positionality of the researcher, the researched, and the “community” must always be considered (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2001), with “insider” knowledge not automatically assumed as superior.

It is also debatable to what extent a community member can maintain “insider” status when being a researcher, on others who are being researched. To an extreme, this can be considered unethical, particularly when working with young people: “By co-opting young people as researchers, this place them in an elevated position among their peers, emulating the adult/child relationship” (McCartan, Schubotz & Murphy, 2012). In the case of several GYRs, the “insider”/ “outsider” dichotomy does not neatly apply. For example, Nathalia from Colombia looked at livelihoods programmes that re-integrate child soldiers, given her background in studying child soldiers, however she was not a child soldier herself. Similarly with Brian in Uganda, who interviewed school-aged students (among others) who participate in road safety courses, but who himself is not a student but rather a trainer in these programmes.

Moreover, there exist methodological merits to peer-to-peer research, and also research by a so-called “outsider”. A peer-to-peer style used in qualitative approaches that involve face-to-face contact, such as interviews and focus groups, can allow for greater openness, particularly of young participants, who may be intimidated by “adult” researchers. This is a similar case with the “outsider” status of a researcher. Some participants who are critical or divergent within their communities may be more hesitant to share with others in their community. Sharing experiences and insights with a researcher who may not have a “stake” in the community can therefore yield more honest feedback from a participant.

[Local to global, micro to macro: Co-option or a new opportunity?](#)

While much of the literature assumes that PAR takes place at the local and micro levels among social movements and marginalised groups, Gaventa & Cornwall (2001) also examine recent trends to scale up PAR to regional, national, or global levels, adopted by large and

powerful institutions, including governments, development agencies, and universities. *From Rhetoric to Action*, commissioned by three large UK-based youth organisations, funded by DFID, with a global focus utilising GYRs from around the world in one unifying piece of research, falls within this category.

According to Gaventa & Cornwall (2001), participatory methods used by large organisations at a macro scale have both downsides and upsides. On the one hand, there are several difficulties associated with scaling up PAR, including the use of “blueprint” instead of flexible research processes, with rushed and superficial participation (ibid). On the other hand, global and macro-level research can have more far-reaching potential for change than local, micro action. Localism makes it difficult to intervene in large-scale social change (Brydon-Miller, Greenwood & Maguire, 2003). Moreover, large-scale programmes, in creating “spaces” for local action, can legitimate it and allow relatively powerless groups to gain capacity and leverage resources (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2001).

From Rhetoric to Action shows some of the limitations associated with using participatory research at a global level, such as the high cost of flying GYRs to Berlin for the training lab, which meant that only one international gathering of GYRs was possible. Moreover, given that the GYR research component was comprised of 18 individual PAR projects across various locations, a certain standardisation in the research process was required, in order to allow for thematic analysis *across* the projects – bridging the local to global. However, beyond the general fields given in the research design and analysis templates, GYRs had the freedom to choose their individual research questions, the target populations, and were responsible for their own analysis, as described earlier. The commissioning organisations nor the editorial team had no say in the results of the individual research projects, and GYRs approved all text that was published with their name in the full report.

It remains to be seen if *From Rhetoric to Action* will succeed in large-scale social change. What it did succeed in is providing the training, space and opportunity for young people to engage in research in an international project. For many of the GYRs, this is the first time that they participated in a project of this scale, with a global audience, with this degree of control over their research projects, and very few global level research projects can claim to do this. It has also generated a new network of young global researchers, where GYRs have continued to support, mentor, and share with each other long after the project has completed, including new spaces and opportunities for leadership and activism.⁵

Ways forward on youth-led participatory action research at the global level

From Rhetoric to Action was a unique opportunity to engage young people in high profile, global level research. Conducted at the crossroads of the end of the Millennium Development Goals and the beginning of the Sustainable Development Goals, the results of the research serve to guide the international development community on the enabling environment for child and youth development, as well as the strategy and programming of

⁵ An example of this is at the UNESCO Youth Forum in December 2015, where GYRs Gioel and Lawrence took the initiative to bring Salim on board, and speak of youth-led civil society activism in Syria: <https://salimsalamah.com/2015/12/26/salim-salamahs-keynote-speech-unesco-9th-youth-forum-paris/> Salim has since been appointed by the UN Secretary-General to the Advisory Group of Experts on for the Progress of Youth, Peace, and Security in August 2016: <https://www.oximity.com/article/Ban-Ki-Moon-Appoints-PLHR-s-Salim-Sala-1>

the three commissioning youth organisations. Reflecting on the project in relation to theoretical conceptions of PAR have generated many insights for the project itself, and also for the use of PAR generally when scaling up for global research.

When compared against various standards presented in the literature on youth PAR, *From Rhetoric to Action* experienced many challenges, but also provided some opportunities. In an effort to give free reign to GYRs in selecting their research topic, some GYRs selected issues and populations within which they were not directly a part of. In these cases, it can be argued that GYRs occupied the role of traditional researchers, lacking community insight, and potentially replicating power structures as opposed to challenging them. However, the “outsider” status may have also allowed those in local communities to speak more freely, together with the peer-to-peer approach. In scaling-up PAR to a global project meant that resources and time were devoted to international travel for the GYRs, which limited their gathering to only one event. Moreover, in bridging the local to global gap, which analysed various individual PAR projects across different locations to tease out certain patterns or themes that could be observed at a global scale, a certain level of standardisation had to be used in the research project, through the use of templates. However within the templates, GYRs had free reign to direct their research as they sought fit, and various insights could be generated across the individual projects through the thematic analysis.

Moving forward, some lessons can be learned from *From Rhetoric to Action*, for future projects involving youth PAR in global research projects. First, decentralised training in multiple localities at once, in local languages, as opposed to a centralised training in English, would allow for more inclusivity in the selection of the GYRs. While having budget and planning implications, this would open up the diversity of GYRs from various socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, and allow young people to participate who would otherwise not be able to simply for lack of linguistic capability, further challenging power structures that place non-English speaking researchers at a disadvantage.

Second, greater time and resources could be spent towards engaging GYRs in as many stages of the research process as possible. Due to time constraints, GYRs were not involved in reviewing the “Considerations for Action”, for example. Given more time, resources, and a highly involved editorial team, GYRs could also be involved in drafting the chapters themselves, as several authors of one report, achieving the consistent style and tone that was achieved by having the editorial team produce the text. This would increase the participatory nature of the project, allowing the GYRs to employ their unique insight to an even greater degree, and further deepening the research.

Other insights on PAR as a whole can be gleaned from our look at *From Rhetoric to Action*. One, there exists an obvious tension between having research which is hyper-local and context-specific, and that which is global with applicability in various contexts. PAR is difficult to fit into the latter. Yet, there is a desire for large-scale social change. The challenge is to balance flexibility with standardisation, localism with global insights. *From Rhetoric to Action* attempts to further support this gap by not relying on PAR methods alone, but also supporting analysis with purely quantitative data in the global survey, and organisational case studies, to broaden and deepen the insights that can be garnered at the global level.

Two, the “action” component of PAR becomes trickier at a global level. Given that PAR is typically conceived of occurring at a local level, with the aim of community mobilisation, this becomes difficult when the scale, and the so-called “community” is global. This is not to say that global action is not possible, however this may need to be conceptualised further. One example of alternative conceptualisations of action beyond traditional community mobilisation comes from Gaventa & Cornwall (2001), and their thinking on change that can occur at the individual, organisational, and institutional levels through PAR processes, which can contribute towards systemic social change.

From Rhetoric to Action, as a piece of global level research, has the potential to transform the post-2015 world, with insights and considerations for action on how to improve the enabling environment for child and youth development. Commissioned by three prominent UK youth organisations and funded by DFID, the findings have far reaching implications, for the strategy and programming of the commissioning organisations, and for the youth development world as a whole. Such an important piece of research, with its focus on children and youth, could not be considered legitimate with the substantial involvement of young people in the research and analysis of it. Future projects should reflect on the participation of young people, and how to maximise potential for social change that promotes justice and equity for young people at the policy, institutional, community, and individual levels.

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