



Centre for Capacity Research

*Advancing the science of capacity strengthening
for sustainable development*

Community Engagement (and Involvement) Tara Tancred Tuesday 27th July 2021



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Previous Seminars

Designing research capacity strengthening (RCS) components within proposals

Dr Justin Pulford

09:30-11:00, Tuesday 4th May

*How to create and use a 'Pathway to Impact',
Prof Imelda Bates*

09:30-11:00

Tuesday 18th May & Tuesday 22nd June

*How to manage research consortia
Nadia Tagoe (KEMRI-Wellcome Trust)*

09:30-11:00, Tuesday 1st June

Teamwork to prepare and submit grant applications

Lorelei Silvester, Imelda Bates, Susie Crossman

09:30-11:00, Tuesday 15th June

How to optimise multi-disciplinary research collaborations

09:30-11:00, Tuesday 29th June

Dr Yan Ding

How to measure research outcomes and impact (O&I)

09:30-11:00, Tuesday 13th July

Dr Justin Pulford

Forthcoming Seminars

Community Engagement

09:30-11:00, Tuesday 27th July

Dr Tara Tancred

Incorporating PhD studentships into projects: how to enhance the students' experience

09:30-11:00, Tuesday 14th September

Dr Taghreed El Hajj

Objectives: By the end of this session you should (hopefully) know...

- What community engagement is and what it is not
- When community engagement should be used
- How to do it
- How to write key aspects of community engagement into proposals

Is it or isn't it?

Assume an intervention that is improving the use of electronic immunization records (EIR) in five districts, with activities from primary facilities all the way to teaching hospitals.

1. Carrying out focus group discussions with community members to understand their recent experiences of immunization services
2. Hosting workshops with healthcare providers to understand how, from their perspective, EIR could be improved, and using this in design
3. Having monthly meetings with a German company that is supporting the EIR rollout
4. Relaying findings to decision-makers in tailored policy briefs

What is it?

- Simply put: it's engaging communities in research
- Many call something similar “public and patient involvement” or PPI
- Can be done by research teams
- Can be done by institutions (e.g. see Marsh et al 2008 “Beginning community engagement at a busy biomedical research programme...”)
- Can be done by governments
- Lots of funders want to see this (e.g. **NIHR**, **MRC**—“public engagement”, **Wellcome**—also “public engagement”, but at the **funder level**) (See Nelson’s “Empowering Meaningful Community Engagement and Involvement in Global Health Research: Critical Reflections and Guiding Questions”)

What distinguishes community engagement and involvement from something community-based? (Or just “public engagement”)

- Centres beneficiaries of the research within research processes
- Active (to the greatest extent possible), passive (sometimes)
 - Active: putting beneficiaries in the driver’s seat
 - Passive: anything one-way (e.g. disseminating information, hosting sensitisation events, etc.)
- Usually the closer the beneficiary is to the activities of the intervention/programme/campaign, etc. the more active their involvement should be. The more distal they are, the more passive this can be.

What is a “community”?

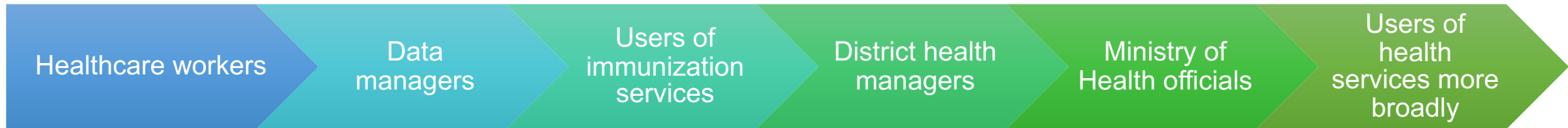
Consider the EIR example...

Who are the community members?

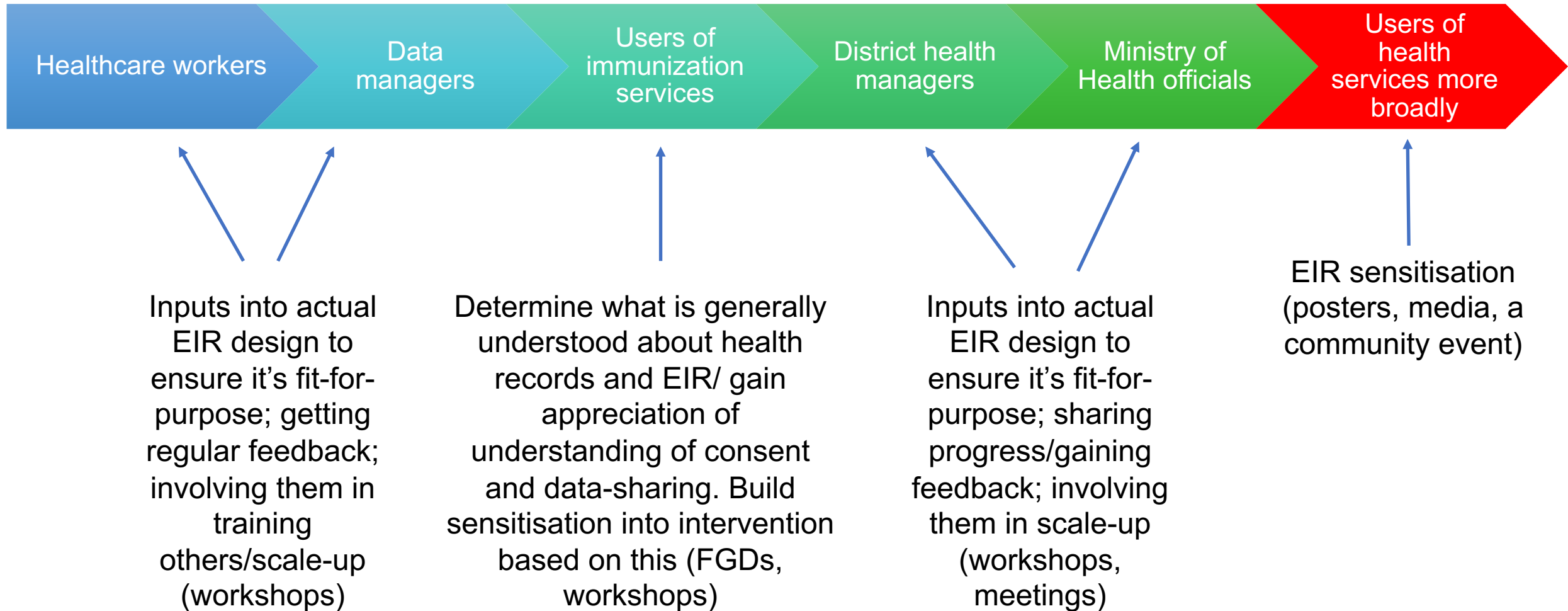
What is “community”? Who are “community members”?

- “Community” doesn’t necessarily mean “physical place of residence”—a community is merely a group of people with shared interests, values, etc.
- (Most of the time) Beneficiaries actually situated in the contexts where the work is expected to deliver benefits
- In the EIR example:
 - Health facility staff (across referral levels)
 - District health managers
 - District data managers
 - Ministry of Health representatives
 - Users of immunization services
 - Others?
- A tricky thing can be understanding who communities are (where there are “grey” boundaries), and how to manage the interests of all community members

Let's look at proximity to research (EIR example)



Who to engage and how?



Other types of community engagement

- Steering/advisory committee meetings—in a position to actually influence study/intervention/programme/campaign decisions
 - Consider power dynamics though—would all meeting attendees be able to participate equally?
- The intervention itself (e.g. participatory research—including quality improvement—approaches are necessarily community-led)
- Meetings, discussion forums, any form of public engagement
- Having community members on the study team
- Anything that enables the study team to connect with beneficiaries in such a way that they have influence across the research process

A few key questions to consider under the category of implementation and adaptation:

1. How will you put proposed research questions (and later research findings) into formats that are community-accessible? Do you have skills within your group to do that, or do you need to allocate funds for community-based expertise?
2. How will you create the necessary flexibility and potential for adaptation within the project so that the results of CEI are incorporated, or even potentially used to change course?
3. How will diverse types of knowledge be accounted for within the research process?
4. Have you built in mechanisms to acknowledge and engage with dissent or alternative views within the CEI process?
5. How will you manage different approaches to research and to CEI within the research consortia itself? Are there plans to surface implicit biases of team members, or to address honestly as a group the challenging power dynamics that can result from diverse disciplinary allegiances?
6. When considering the proposed research, ask yourself: whose knowledge counts most? Then ask yourself: what can be done to shift that dynamic so that this research draws on and generates knowledge that reflects more fully the lived experiences and needs of marginalized and vulnerable groups?

Nelson, E. 2021. “Empowering Meaningful Community Engagement and Involvement in Global Health Research: Critical Reflections and Guiding Questions”. Available at: <https://www.nihr.ac.uk/documents/empowering-meaningful-community-engagement-and-involvement-in-global-health-research-critical-reflections-and-guiding-questions/27361>

Why to engage along the research process?

Part of the research process	Why to engage	How to engage
Problem prioritisation/ intervention design	Ensures that interventions are actually fit-for-purpose, addressing problems that stakeholders agree is actually a problem	Qualitative methods (interviews, FGDs, observation); meetings; informal discussions; workshops; mapping exercises (look to participatory approaches!)
Intervention implementation	Ongoing feedback mechanisms to refine what is being implemented can optimise implementation such that the “end product” can be one that can/will be taken up	
Data collection	Understanding how to ask questions and who to ask—very useful insights from stakeholders. Sometimes they actually carry out data collection.	
Data analysis	Reflecting on findings with stakeholders—asking them to explain findings from their perspective; member-checking	
Dissemination	Stakeholders can provide useful insights around which information is the most useful, by whom, and how that should be communicated	

Writing community engagement into proposals

- Define your community/ies and how you will access them
- Indicate if there has been prior community engagement that this study builds from
- Define the parts of the research process that communities will be engaged in and HOW (which platform? how often? To what end?)
- Earmark funds for community engagement and make this explicit
- Have actual people on the study team responsible for community engagement (ensure they have allocated time and resources)
- Have community members **ON YOUR STUDY TEAM** and part of your proposals as and where it is possible! Make this clear

Bottom line

- Avoid tokenistic and extractive practices that benefit researchers more than community members (or without any tangible benefits to community members)
- It will be obvious to a reviewer if so!
- Community engagement helps to maximise these benefits

Pro tips

- Think about community engagement from the outset and DO write it into proposals (ideally, with community members!)
- Ensure there are resources (people, money, materials, time) for community engagement—this shouldn't be an “add on”
- Take time to build trust and to understand and navigate power dynamics
- Clear communication is key (and transparency—ensure expectations across parties is explicit and agreed upon)—may need series of communication activities to “demystify” technical language. May need to invest in capacity strengthening!
- Community engagement needs to be consistent—how will you achieve this? (Great to have some study members who are always “close to communities”)
- Keep track! What did you do/how often/with whom/what was **decided/how did this inform or change the research process?** Report this back to community members. (And also, things like: How did community members feel about this? How did they perceive their roles?)

Questions...answered

1. How to start it?
2. How to penetrate a difficult community?
3. How best can community engagement be done to improve health systems strengthening? (See George et al, "Community Participation in Health Systems Research: A Systematic Review Assessing the State of Research, the Nature of Interventions Involved and the Features of Engagement with Communities")
4. CEI on injury prevention, care quality improvement and disability prevention?
5. The role of behavioural change communication in community engagement?
6. The role of dynamic and effective Community Advisory Board?

Questions...answered

7. Types of community engagement?
8. How to measure the success of community engagement?
9. How can we mobilize individuals with lived experience who have become physically disabled as a result of unintentional injury?
 - How to deal with vulnerable populations?
10. How to stay engaged with overseas partners and community when working from home/not being able to travel?
11. Identify who we engage, how and where?
12. Engaging community in research data analysis?
- 13. How can social media be incorporated into research settings without ethical violation?**

Anything else? (After questions)

Tara.tancred@lstmed.ac.uk



Questions



www.lstmed.ac.uk/ccr
ccr@lstmed.ac.uk
@lstm_ccr