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11 Participatory methodology in exploring citizenship

A critical learning process

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Introduction

In this chapter, we shift the focus from analysing citizenship practices to reflecting on learning *within the research process* of exploring everyday citizenship. To this end, we provide a narrative of our experimentation with participatory research methodology when investigating the daily practices and participation patterns of citizens in two districts in rural Uganda. “Experimentation”, in this context, refers to an endeavour in which we reflectively tested actualizing the participatory methodology that we considered the most appropriate for this research.

Participatory research methodologies have gained prominence in a range of research disciplines in recent decades. Considered a counterforce to the so-called traditional or extractive methods in the social sciences which are geared towards “data collection” by researchers, participatory methodologies broadly aim to develop the capacity among local people to co-produce and analyse knowledge, as well as determine and address the root causes of their lived problems and issues as they work for social change (Berryman et al. 2013; Williams 2005). In tracing the origins of participatory research methodologies, MacDonald (2012) posits three main strands: the action research developed by Kurt Lewin (1946/1948); the critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire (1972); and the different participatory (social) movements in promoted in development studies and other fields of research (Chambers 1994; Maguire 1987). Each of these strands, in their own way, converge in their strong commitment to working with grassroots groups to promote fundamental social transformations (Healy 2001, 94) by enabling “individuals to identify and analyse their own problems and influence their own situations” (Sohng 1992, 5). Participatory methodologies have also advocated change in the power relationships between planners and workers, adult educators and learners, and development agents and their beneficiaries. Increasingly, many fields of social research, including education and development studies, have adopted participatory research on the grounds that it allows people the space to determine their own development and participate meaningfully in the process of analysing their own solutions in order to lead to the design of relevant

interventions and sustainable development (Chilisa & Preece 2005; Attwood 1997; Chambers 1994).

For a long time, we – the first two authors of this chapter – have been passionately committed to participatory methodologies in our research and teaching at Makerere University, considering that their ideals provide a mutual learning and an empowering experience for the research participants. Additionally, we were also convinced that they comprise the best possible way to explore lived experiences of citizenship, as they enable co-construction of knowledge related to local citizenship practices rather than starting with definitions of citizenship provided by the research literature (Isobell et al. 2016; D’Cruz & Gillingham 2017). As our experimentation began however, we were also conscious of the criticism levelled against, and shortfalls of participatory methodology in general. These include its superficial use in order to legitimate pre-designed development interventions (Cooke & Kothari 2001), its utopian goals concerning the potentiality of research to contribute to societal transformation, and the impossibility of doing away with certain power and knowledge differences between researchers and research participants (Bergold & Thomas 2012; Pain & Francis 2003). Such identified discrepancies between the ideals and practices of participatory methodologies motivated us to undertake a critical analysis of our own research process. Therefore, in this chapter, we reflect on two things: a) how we implemented a participatory methodology in this particular research initiative; and b) in which ways tensions related to the actualization of aspirations for mutual learning and empowerment were manifested in the course of it. In what follows, we first describe the process of opting for a participatory methodology in the GROW project discussed in this book (see the Introduction of this volume), and the way it was used in practice in our research on lived experiences of citizenship in rural Uganda. Second, we provide a critical reflection of how and in what ways the discrepancies between ideals and actual practices manifested in this particular case and, finally, we conclude by elaborating on the lessons learned.

Designing the methodology: Opting for narratives and participatory approach

According to Berryman et al. (2013), participatory research is a process rather than an event, one that begins and ends with “people”. It is difficult to identify the exact starting point of this particular research project but, to be frank, it began with brainstorming among researchers rather than interaction with people, with some scattered ideas for GROW existing long before writing the approved proposal in 2014. These were further developed in the joint kick-off seminar in autumn 2015. The detailed design of the fieldwork methodology was scrutinized in a three-day project seminar held in Kampala in June 2016. The participants included the chapter authors together with two Tanzanian colleagues. At this seminar, we made a number of key decisions regarding the

nature and direction of the intended research. As we were committed to a general pragmatist perspective, we agreed to focus on lived experiences: the ways in which people in communities understand, give meanings to and practice citizenship (Kabeer 2005). At this point, the encounters between these lived experiences and interventions designed by civil society organizations to strengthen citizenship were also of interest.

As a result of our conversations, we agreed that narrative inquiry (Clandinin 2006) combined with a participatory methodology would work best at capturing lived experiences of citizenship. It would also provide an enabling conversational platform for research participants (Quaynor 2015; Minkler 2004) as well as build a strong learning relationship between researchers and participants (Berryman et al. 2013). Using the languages spoken and understood by the local communities, we designed a way to inquire into people's citizenship experiences, and to learn about the groups and communities of belonging of those taking part. For the latter aim, we opted to use one of the main tools in participatory methodologies – a *Venn* or *Chapatti*² diagram – in order to enable participants to identify the groups of significance for them, and further, analyse the extent of significance of these different groups in their everyday practices. Guided by participatory research principles, we aimed to enable participants to become co-researchers, co-learners and co-instructors of knowledge, meanwhile building a successful and trustworthy research rapport (Genat 2009; Isobell et al. 2016; D'Cruz & Gillingham 2017). The narrative approach guided us to inquire about stories of participation, and to prompt participants to offer practical examples of different events rather than merely listening to them listing the groups and their significance. The main tension confronting us at this stage was how to distance ourselves from our own, scholarship-informed notions of citizenship, and develop a methodology that would allow people to speak from their own perspectives. Practically, for instance, this meant struggling with the translation of “citizenship” into the local languages to be used in interviews so that it would not provide a fixed, ready-made interpretation but would allow room to investigate people's own meanings (see Ndidde et al., this volume).

Whose voice will be heard? Identification of the case NGO, study areas and research participants

The GROW project was interested in encounters involving NGOs promoting some kind of active citizenship with local communities. Our intention was not to evaluate the performance of these interventions as such but, rather, to reflect with the community members on how their interaction with the NGO had facilitated their potential growth into citizenship (Holma & Kontinen, this volume), and whether this was cascading into lived experiences of citizenship identity, belonging and practices. Thus, we set out to identify a case NGO based on the criteria of it having been involved in mobilizing and sensitizing citizens for development work and citizen advocacy, as well as having

a rich history and experience of working with marginalized sections of society. On this basis, three national gender-advocacy NGOs were initially selected and formally invited to be part of the project, and finally, after several meetings and negotiations with the NGOs in July 2016, we decided to work with Action for Development (ACFODE) (see Kontinen & Ndidde, this volume).

ACFODE suited our aims of investigating NGOs involved in strengthening citizenship. Established in 1985, it has been at the forefront of championing a women's empowerment crusade through consolidated advocacy of gendered policy formulation, research, capacity building, coalition building, mobilization and sensitization. Moreover, ACFODE has conducted extensive citizenship activities and interventions in all five regions of Uganda, focusing on building the capacities of communities and leaders to promote good governance and to improve their socio-economic transformation. The NGO also has a participatory attitude and has built good relationships with communities, which presumably decreased the suspicion of community members towards us as researchers. Moreover, the national coverage of its activities provided the research team with a variety of choices of districts in which to work. Based on this understanding, it was decided that the research would be conducted in two districts: Kiboga³ in central Uganda and Namutumba⁴ in eastern Uganda. The choice was influenced by the fact that the researchers had an understanding of the languages spoken in the two areas and would not need interpreters. The ability of researchers to interact directly with community members is important for the successful implementation of participatory research.

When it comes to the selection of research participants in the communities, a central concern in participatory methodologies is who will be included and excluded. Critical observations have claimed that those who attend participatory exercises are usually the most well-off and privileged members of a community (Janes 2016). In our case, the participants were selected from among those who had had encounters with ACFODE activities in their citizenship strengthening programs. With the assistance of the NGO's focal persons in the communities, 60 participants were identified for individual in-depth interaction in their homes and/or workplaces. The participants in Kiboga district were mainly local leaders who had received training in leadership and governance while, in Namutumba, participants were community members who had received training in livelihood and socio-economic transformation interventions. While participatory research often uses group-based methodologies, we opted for individual interviews for two main reasons: strategically, we did not want to involve participants in bothersome travel from their areas of residence to the location of participatory exercises, as this would have also brought in the logistical issues of transport refund and time delays; practically, we wanted to initiate a process of mutual learning with participants in their own everyday environments. Our choice of individual interviews therefore provided ample time and space to focus on individual

participant reflections and experiences, albeit this could have denied us the benefits that could have accrued from having joint discussion, engagement and analysis among group participants.

Getting consent from research participants is an important element of any research initiative, as it ensures that they willingly and voluntarily accept being part of it (Araali 2011). In this respect, we encountered a tension between “standardized” and “local practice” ways of obtaining consent. The team had a detailed, seven-page consent form translated from English into the local language, Luganda, as required by the Ugandan National Council for Science and Technology. According to these official requirements, the participants were expected to read, understand and sign the consent form as a confirmation of their willingness to participate in the exercise. If participants had any queries, the consent form advised them to contact the Finnish Principal Investigator (PI), either by phone or email. Such a consent form, standardized practice in “Western” research culture, smacked of the often-critiqued power relations embedded in North-South research collaborations (Bhattacharya 2007), despite it being a Ugandan institution that required its administering. Further, the consent form requirements also ran counter to both African social practices and the spirit of participatory research. In the African communal way of living, a visitor is treated as a visitor (Jegade 2009), so that once one has been accepted into somebody’s home, one is treated with the utmost sincerity and courtesy (Araali 2011). In addition to appropriate informal greetings and conversations, part of our rapport-building involved giving a detailed oral explanation of the purpose of the study and summarizing the contents of the voluminous consent letter to gain the actual consent of the participants. In the end, they willingly signed the consent form and agreed to having conversations audio recorded.

Coming down from the Ivory Tower: Positioning and revealing ourselves

In participatory research, reflecting on the positionality of the researcher is critical for mutual engagement and learning (Berryman et al. 2013; MacDonald 2012; Jackson 1994). It requires researchers to make their biases transparent (Berryman et al. 2013) and to be conscious of who they are and how their positions impact on the people with whom they are working. Initially, the two researchers – the first and second authors of this chapter – entered the communities and introduced themselves as coming from Makerere University, a premier university in Uganda and beyond. Locally, the name Makerere University is synonymous with power, knowledge and prestige. In common local parlance, Makerere University is popularly known as *Akasozi k’abayivvu* (the Hill of the Elites, the “Ivory Tower”). Being part of an elite class was an inevitable identity we carried into our interactions with the community participants. However, while we introduced ourselves as researchers from Makerere University, we hastened to emphasize that we were in the area as “outsiders” who knew little or nothing about local lived

experiences. We emphasized that we were in the community not as experts but as people who had come to learn. Before commencing the actual interview, we often engaged in informal chit chat with the participants in a conscious attempt to establish cordial relationships despite the expected power relations. We often politely declined to sit on the prearranged “special” seats usually reserved for “important” guests and insisted on sitting where we found the participant seated. We also conducted the interviews in the local dialects, Luganda and Lusoga respectively. A typical introduction to the research interaction was as follows:

Thank you very much mama. Let me introduce myself: I am called AK, from Makerere University. We are in your village of Bubago to converse with people like you about their views as citizens of this area. . . Like I explained before, we’re here to talk about *obutyamye* (citizenship) and *abatyamye* (citizens) and we’ll be pleased to hear your experience as a citizen, as well as your independent opinion on various issues we would like to discuss together. . . . One thing I’d like to emphasize is that we are not looking for specific or pre-conceived and/or right/wrong answers/responses from you but your unique experience as a citizen of this area.

(An introduction to the research participant, Namutumba district, May 2017)

These introductions and other pre-interview activities in the homesteads helped set the tone of the participatory interaction and the attendant Venn diagramming exercise. To some extent, it helped create an atmosphere of mutuality, respect and reassurance for the participants. In terms of the outsider/insider debate, the researchers had different levels of *outsiderness*. The first author is not a native speaker of either Luganda or Lusoga, albeit having a relatively strong functional knowledge of both languages. The second author is a native Muganda and fluent speaker but also with functional knowledge of Lusoga. In some cases, in Namutumba, we encountered participants who could not speak Luganda and therefore, a mixture of the two languages was used. In such circumstances, the self-introductions set the pace for the engagements and improved as the interaction proceeded. Revealing our self-identity and the declaration of minimal knowledge on our part evidently created a situation of trust and emphasized participants’ role as those who are knowledgeable. A typical prelude to the interview would go thus:

My name is AK, I’m here to have a conversation with you about your experience as a citizen (*omutuuzelomutyamye*) of this area. I am not a native Muganda/Musoga but I have some reasonable functional knowledge of the language. I can speak it and even listen to it. Where I can’t express myself properly, I will ask you to guide me. . .

It can thus be argued that, from cultural-linguistic perspective, the first author was an “outsider” in both areas, while the second author was an “insider” in Kiboga and an “outsider” in Namutumba; however, from a social status and education perspective, both were “outsiders”. Although we remained relative outsiders owing to our position as educated researchers who were not residents of the area but from a university and carrying files of papers and voice recorders, our consciousness and admission of these limitations played a key role in reducing power gradients during the interaction process. In addition, our expression of ignorance about contextualized experiences in the community disencumbered us of the burden of being seen as experts with authoritative knowledge. Indeed, as the interaction proceeded the participants easily “took over” from us as they reflected on the institutions in which citizenship is exercised and practiced.

Venn diagramming exercise: Imagining and reflecting on “citizenships”

The leading role of the participants became especially apparent in the course of the participatory method of Venn diagramming that actualized our narrative approach. Venn diagramming is an exercise often used to depict key institutions, organizations and individuals and their relationship with (or importance to) the local community (Sontheimer et al. 1999). In participatory research, this method is used to generate information on who and what persons or organizations are important in and for a community (Adebo 2000, 16). For us, the method facilitated interaction, generating narratives in the course of producing a diagrammatic representation of spaces of participation significant to the research participants. We explained the purpose of using the Venn diagram as a tool to illustrate the series of institutions or groups to which we belong and through which we perform our respective roles and exercise our rights in concert with others in our daily citizenship practices. We further explained that these institutions play different roles in shaping and influencing our own practices in our daily human interactions. We then asked the participants to name such institutions or groups in their everyday life and, as the interaction progressed, they were guided to draw them on the Venn according to their perceived degree of importance in participants’ daily citizenship practices. Our final aim was not merely to draw the Venns, but to use them in stimulating self-reflection and learning about citizenship practices in the communities. Typically, the explanations for the Venn drawing exercise went thus:

From what we have shared so far, it looks like you practice your citizenship through a network of institutions and groups. Now I request that we do an exercise to help us understand better the groups or organizations/institutions that you belong to and their importance to you as citizen of this area. We call this the chapatti exercise. We shall put your chapatti in the middle; for every group you think is most important and useful you

will draw a chapatti and put it closer to you in the middle. Those organizations that are not very useful will be put at a relatively greater distance from you.

(Interaction with a female participant, in Bubago Namutumba, May 2017)

The activity of explaining and drawing diagrammatic representations of the most and less significant institutions engaged participants in processes of thought, learning and reflection as they justified and explained the positions given to the various organizations and groups. This involved back-and-forth drawing and erasure until the participant was satisfied with the position allocated to a particular institution on the Venn. From the point of beginning to draw to the point of a finished Venn diagram, a wealth of interesting insights emerged.

Kibiga Women Solidarity Group should be closer than any other. . . we meet regularly. . . we have got friends, we know each other in the area now, we have that togetherness as women of Kibiga. We help each other in times of grief and happiness. When one has got a problem, you see all of them come to comfort you, and they help you in all ways and free of charge. Saucepans, plates, food and every necessary thing is brought, and you feel comforted in a way as they do everything. And we also started a savings scheme; we worked out something and we started saving. We no longer go to the banks to stake our property as security. We save every week and there is an amount of money that we decided we should all save every week, the money that one is able to manage, for instance, two thousand every week. Now if someone needs money, it's collected and given to her, and she then brings it back with a little interest.

(Female Participant, Kiboga, February 2017)

We were cautious with participants, ensuring that they got sufficient time to think about their views before finally putting them on paper. In some situations, we found participants in areas where it was not possible to draw visible Venns due to rough surfaces, very soft sandy surfaces, wet conditions or green compounds. In such circumstances, the level of participation and the flexibility in making changes on the Venns were slightly limited. We mitigated this by using manila paper and markers that we carried with us to draw the Venns with the participants. Further, in practical terms it was not easy to be consistent with either distance and/or size of the chapatti to represent the importance or non-importance of a particular institution or group to an individual. In the end the two would be mixed up as the exercise progressed. For example, the researchers used different explanations during the Venn diagramming exercise, with one emphasizing distance (Figure 11.1) and the other, size (Figure 11.2).

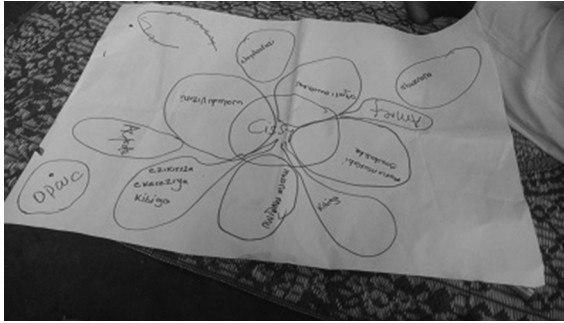


Figure 11.1 A Venn diagram drawn using distance to show groups of non/importance in Namunyuka Village, Kiboga District.
Source: Field photo



Figure 11.2 A Venn diagram drawn using size (and distance) to show groups of non/importance in Kajjere Village, Kiboga District.
Source: Field photo

Reflections on power relations, (co-)learning, empowerment and tensions experienced

Up to this point, our narrative has focused on describing the experiences of experimenting with a participatory methodology in research exploring everyday experiences of citizenship in rural Uganda. In what follows, we reflect on some of the key assumptions of participatory methodologies with regard to issues of co-learning, power and empowerment, and how these assumptions were actualized in our research, which, as in any practice, included tensions with issues that would not totally fit the ideal process of the participatory model.

Co-learning about citizenship through participatory methodology

The participatory research literature emphasizes the need to include research participants in processes of inquiry and knowledge production (Bergold & Thomas 2012). Participatory research methodologies, therefore, aim to empower marginalized communities by believing in their abilities to create and share knowledge through negotiated reflection on their reality (Cauto 1987; Jackson 1994). It is often suggested that participatory research promotes mutual learning and supports reciprocity, friendships and (self-)reflection among the researchers and participants (Genat 2009; Glassman & Erdem 2014). In our case, with the design of the methodology and its implementation from the time the team set foot in the homes of the participants to the conclusion of the interaction, we aimed to learn about how participants perceived their reality. Based on our reflections, we are confident that our participatory interviews presented critical learning opportunities based on mutuality, reciprocity, friendship and self-reflection among us and the research participants, while the diagramming exercise produced novel knowledge about different belongings and forms of participation as experienced by the participants (Kabeer 2005). Through joint analysis with the participants, we learned about the significance of community-based solidarity groups in which community members supported each other economically and socially. Moreover, the significance of religion became apparent when participants reflected on their own analysis:

From what we have drawn, I think everything should be put inside the circle/chapatti of the church. Without God, all these other activities and opportunities can easily collapse. Therefore, when I go to the church, I go there to pray, and I have other church activities which I do with others...
(Female Participant, Kiboga, February 2017)

Additionally, the back-and-forth reflection on local citizenship facilitated by the Venn revealed the lesser importance that seemed to be attached to “political” citizenship. The analysis showed that the importance of ACFODE’s programs for strengthening citizenship was linked to their ability to address people’s survival needs. In Namutumba district, where ACFODE was implementing a socioeconomic livelihood program, some voices praised it as *ómuzadde waffe* (our parent). During the interactive Venn drawing process, participants reflected on how ACFODE, through its training programs, had helped them to improve farming systems, such as planting in rows and improved post-harvest practices, as well as training them in adding value to their crops by, for example, making juice out of avocado, mangoes and oranges. In the course of the interviews, we also understood how such basic livelihood improvements had meanwhile strengthened the women’s self-esteem and agency.

During the Venn drawing process, strong voices and statements pointed to the preponderance of different groups, organizations and institutions

concerned with citizenship practices in the community. We contend that if we had used the traditional tools of data collection, such as a questionnaire or a simple interview schedule based on a theoretically-informed definition of citizenship, we would possibly not have been able to learn about the priorities and meanings participants assign to different citizenship practices. For instance, we might have ignored the utmost importance attached to religion (Figure 11.3), solidarity groups or a profession like teaching (Figure 11.4), in comparison to the NGO programs. While the participatory method provided a tool for the researchers to learn about the experienced citizenship, the participants themselves also appreciatively talked of how the Venn diagramming exercise had “opened their eyes” to look more critically at the role played by different institutions and groups in their daily lives.

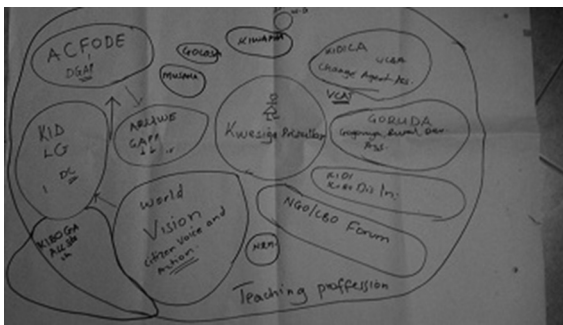


Figure 11.3 A Venn diagram of a female teacher and councillor in Kiboga District. She encircles everything with her teaching profession, arguing that her job at a local primary school was the main reason for her involvement in all the other activities and groups.

Source: Field photo



Figure 11.4 A Venn diagram of a male participant emphasizing the significance of religion. He drew a bigger Venn for his local church, Bubago Church of Uganda. “It’s because of God that am still alive and talking to you now”, he said.

Source: Field photo

Power relations and (the utopia of) empowerment

Participatory research claims to be a way of flattening power relations between researcher and participants and of empowering marginalized groups (Kabeer 2002; Minkler 2004; Berryman et al. 2013; Isobell et al. 2016). Committed to fostering egalitarian practices, participatory research is assumed to “allow community initiatives to guide the research thereby building capacity and the stimulating critical consciousness among mobilized participants to take action to bring about social transformation” (Isobell et al. 2016). In our case, we entered the communities as researchers from a prestigious university carrying research materials, holding smartphones and driving cars. In most rural areas, these are symbols of power, wealth, elegance, sophistication and elitism. Further, we explained the agenda of the research, gave most of the instructions for drawing the institutions and organizations on the Venn, and generally “dominated” the entire research process. Inevitably, as researchers, we had a kind of privileged status, even though we were guided by the philosophy and spirit of participatory research. However, we were aware that, as Reason (1994, 334) acknowledges, “participatory research cannot occur without the initiative of someone with time, skill and commitment, someone who will almost inevitably be a member of a privileged and educated group”. What was important to us was that we conducted ourselves with the community in a manner that did not seek to portray us as “powerful” people. For instance, we deliberately refused to sit on raised seats with participants on lower seats, we expressed our inadequate knowledge of the daily experiences of the participants, and we spoke the local languages of the participants. In turn, participants welcomed us and willingly shared their opinions. These actions entreated us to “act out mutual and interdependent power relations” (Hilsen 2006) and significantly created spaces for democratic distribution of power and evenness among the academe and the community knowers (Janes 2016). Our research practice contained the deliberate effort “to flatten the power relations between researchers and participants” (Berryman et al. 2013, 17) as it was our goal to make it an open process of sharing, although it was impossible for us to do away with our position as those structuring, guiding and inviting participants in the first place.

We cannot say much about the more general aim of participatory research to promote empowerment and transformative change (Williams 2005). The process of joint identification of problems and finding solutions for them through changes in local practices and power relationships would have gone far beyond the time and other resources allocated for this particular research project. Thus, based on our experimentation, we cannot claim that our work resulted in the long-term empowerment of research participants. However, based on their immediate feedback, we maintain that participatory interviews were empowering rather than extractive experiences. Participants freely engaged in explaining and interrogating their own notions of citizenship practices as we worked collaboratively throughout the research process to

such an extent that, by the end of the interactions, participants often jokingly told us that our status had changed from that of *bagwiira* (outsiders/aliens) to *batuize* (citizens) in the community.

Tensions in disrupting the conventional research process

One of the arguments in favour of a participatory methodology is that it counteracts the practices of more conventional research in the social sciences by emphasizing democratic engagement and the equality of all research participants (Healy 2001; Janes 2016; D’Cruz & Gillingham 2017). Despite our avowed philosophy, embedded as it is in participatory research, our initial physical appearance and contact with the community members were those of conventional researchers in every sense of the word. In rural areas, the common habit of conducting research follows a template of the “powerful” researcher/“powerless” researched relationship, whereby the former enter the community armed with questionnaires to “collect data” from the respondents. However, as our interaction in the communities continued, our approach potentially presented a disruption in people’s usual habits of “being respondents” and trying to provide the “right answers”. Instead, we introduced a new habit of doing research, by interacting with participants. This was practically exemplified by our declining to sit on the prearranged seats, and by declaring our cultural and linguistic limitations, which placed us in “a more advantageous position to learn and be guided by the participants in the community as the research turned into a process *with* people rather than *to* the people” (Berryman et al. 2013, 265). Indeed, as the interaction proceeded in the communities, members “took charge” of the process as they reflected on the institutions in which their citizenship is exercised and practiced.

On the other hand, our attempts to “do it differently” encountered some practical difficulties. For example, as the process of drawing Venn diagrams commenced, both non-literates and literates who had not held a pen for a long time⁵ had to adjust their everyday habits in order to cope with the task. Whilst some were not open to admit their inability to write and therefore often asked the researchers to do the drawing as they narrated their stories, others were visibly enthused to hold the chalk or markers to draw their Venns. Yet others, owing to their socio-economic status, found drawing on the ground a bit of a kindergarten exercise reminiscent of their infant life when they were beginning to learn to write (Figure 11.5). For example, when we introduced the Venn drawing exercise, a woman leader in Kiboga district said, “You expect me to bend down and start writing and drawing things in the sand like my grandchildren?!” Therefore, while we could see that the participatory method was an empowering and praised exercise for some, for others we had to be flexible about opting for alternative ways in order to ensure their being comfortable and not “forced” to participate in the way that we wanted.



Figure 11.5 A participant guiding the researcher in drawing her Venn diagram in Kiboga district. She argued that she could not write on the ground as if she was a child.

Source: Field photo

Conclusions

In this chapter, we set out to describe a process of experimenting with a participatory methodology to explore lived experiences of citizenship in rural Uganda, and to provide a critical reflection on the discrepancies between the ideals and actual practices of the methodology that was demonstrated in this particular case. Based on our experimentation, we can conclude that, in many ways, the participatory methodology we used, supported the aims of learning about the lived experiences of citizenship with people themselves, and contributed to the realization of the ideals of participatory research. First, we were able to create situations where researchers and participants consciously embarked on a tumultuous journey of flattening power relations. Second, the methodological principles made us acknowledge and appreciate the situated uniqueness of community perspectives and experiences on citizenship. Third, the research interactions conducted were able to promote co-learning and co-inquiry through appreciation of the positionality of researchers and participants. Fourth, the participatory interview enabled participants to reflect on and change their perspectives on their citizenship identity and belonging.

However, our experimentation also showed that, given the usual restrictions on time and other resources, deploying a participatory methodology in the course of a single research initiative often remains an isolated, short-term experience of empowerment and mutual learning for both the researchers and the research participants. While we were able to disrupt traditional research practices and undertake alternative models of research characterized by a

flattened power relationship and co-construction of knowledge, we did not, to our knowledge, contribute to any significant, long-lasting transformation of the research communities. Therefore, we suggest that rather than trying to fulfil all the ideals attached to participatory methodologies of their inherent ability to empower and transform research participants (Berryman et al. 2013; MacDonald 2012; Williams 2005; Schugurensky 2004), research should – while continuously struggling to attain the participatory ideals – also be content with small, incremental changes in research practices.

Notes

- 1 The first author has had overall responsibility of the chapter. The first and the second authors conducted the fieldwork analysed in this chapter, initiated the overall idea of the chapter and contributed substantially to each section. The third author is PI of the project, and has contributed to the overall methodological design of the fieldwork, and to the theoretical content and overall structure of this particular chapter.
- 2 Chapatti is a popular quick food snack made out of wheat flour and cooking oil. It is circular in shape and is often made instantly on many roadside stalls in urban areas in Uganda. Its circular form was used to compare it with the Venn diagram in order help the participants to understand the exercise.
- 3 Kiboga district is in the central region of Uganda. It is a multi-ethnic district and was the epicentre of the 1980–1985 guerrilla war that left most parts of central Uganda in total ruins. ACFODE has been operating in Kiboga district since 1986, and has implemented a number of interventions in the district purposely to improve women's participation in governance and decision making at local and national levels. It focused on training and equipping women councillors with skills and knowledge on gender, democracy and good governance to understand their roles and responsibilities in society better, assisting them in exercising their rights in the health and education sectors.
- 4 Namutumba district, located in eastern Uganda, Busoga sub-region, is considered a backwater district with some of the poorest development indicators. Its population growth rate is estimated at 2.7 per cent with an approximate population of 252,562 people (Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2016). From 2012 to 2014 ACFODE worked in the district, addressing famine and malnutrition by strengthening the capacity of households with knowledge and skills on food security, production, storage, value addition and marketing.
- 5 In rural areas, it is common for people to spend most of their time without writing, especially if they are ordinary citizens without responsibilities that require them to write or read often.

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