South-South Networks Catalysing Social Responsibility in Higher Education

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Abstract

This article interrogates epistemic injustice in global development discourse, challenging dominant narratives that define progress through a singular lens. Drawing inspiration from Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's (2009) caution against "the danger of a single story," we explore how universities – often positioned as knowledge authorities – (re)perpetuate these injustices by privileging Western epistemologies in defining development. We argue for the recognition of diverse aspirations and culturally embedded understandings of the good life, as articulated by scholars such as Catherine Odora Hoppers, who critiques the systemic marginalisation of Indigenous and non-Western knowledge systems.

Anchored in the Knowledge for Change (K4C) Global Consortium, a Global South-led initiative in Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR), this article presents a conceptual and practical framework for decolonising research through the creation of regional CBPR training centres in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Using narrative inquiry, we reflect on our lived experiences as coordinators of these centres, analysing personal stories to uncover themes of cultural negotiation, institutional challenges, and transformative potential.

We aim to demonstrate how these centres can serve as hubs for epistemic justice, fostering methodologies rooted in collaboration, equity, and contextual relevance. By embedding CBPR within higher education institutions in its training and research capacities, we envision a shift toward research led and sustained by the Global South, reframing development through cognitively diverse and participatory knowledge-making processes. Ultimately, we advocate for a pluralistic approach to development – one that honours multiple stories, cosmologies, and pathways to progress.

Keywords: *Epistemic justice, community-based participatory research, knowledge 4 change, social responsibility in higher education*

Introduction

The history of higher education institutions is deeply rooted in the broader history of social civilisations, and it cannot be defined or confined to a single civilisation. Knowledge flows through the development of various civilisations and should not be treated as a commodity predominantly used for commercial purposes. The knowledge development process must be connected to contextual development and social building, rather than being solely focused on product innovation purposes. Knowledge should be stored and shared by society and used to liberate society and future generations from any form of colonisation and domination, whether from within the society itself or from outside. Therefore, a global social connection of higher education must be promoted in order to produce a more balanced situation of knowledge production between society, academia, and industrial players. Society should not be treated as the recipients of knowledge and innovations as strongly exists in the world of consumerism but society must be involved in the knowledge production process. In our perspective, higher education institutions should be spaces of learning that catalyse social and ecological wellbeing.

However, the idea of nurturing a learned society and an enlightened generation has never been as tightly dictated as it is today. This emerging trend, often referred to as the post-modern higher education ecosystem, is increasingly governed – if not entirely guided – by global education standards shaped by colonial ideologies, and assumptions of development. Azhar (2020), in his book *Emancipated Education*, challenges this domination by emphasising the need to liberate higher education, and education in general, from capitalist ideologies. He advocates instead for a model that prioritises meaningful engagement between academia and society. Yet universities often struggle to offer practical solutions to strengthen this engagement.

The values and objectives of university-society engagement are inherently long-term, but they are frequently reduced to short-term outputs or deliverables. As a result, many universities depend on an output-based higher education ecosystem, promoted by commercial entities such as global university ranking agencies, reduced core funding, and short term grants. In the Global South, universities are caught in this colonial-capitalist quagmire, with academics seeking to demonstrate their academic merit through hyper-traditional practices that they hope will enter them into the gaze of the powerful ranking systems and funders, while trying to navigate local more relational accountabilities that embed learning and knowledge in shared action for long term social and ecological flourishings. In this article, we will present a movement for social responsibility in higher education that is driven by southern epistemologies, and we think provides a more realistic and pluralistic vision for the development of healthy societies, through community based participatory research and the Knowledge for Change Consortium.

This article grapples with epistemic injustice concerning the historical, social, and geopolitical power(full) narratives that drive constructions and decisions of development; or, as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie puts it in her popular TED talk from 2010, the danger

of a single story. In this article, we are interested in exploring the role of universities in (re)perpetuating epistemic injustice through claims of knowledge, particularly in formulating decisions about development and what development is. We believe that there are diverse aspirations and definitions of what entails a good life, and we contest the single American narrative and assumption of what the good life is, and what, consequently, development is needed. Professor Catherine Odora Hoppers, in her introduction to the edited book Bridging Knowledge Cultures (Lepore, Hall & Tandon, 2023), succinctly brings together the relationship between knowledge systems and narratives of 'development' and 'progress' through an epistemic lens:

> On entry to the system that associates the non-Western, the non-'developed' with 'bad', it quickly becomes known to indigenous and African children that what is relevant for the West, its insights, its values, its tastes and eccentricities alike, becomes the model for the world. From then on, everything one does and thinks is defined and compared using Western norms, leaving all else bundled together as the 'rural other', the 'non-urban', often equated with 'community'. This 'other' is the cosmologies of Africa, the Native American, Saami from Scandinavia, Asia, and Latin America – otherwise collectively known as the 'Third World' (np).

Ultimately, we agree with epistemic scholars such as Odora Hoppers (2021), Lepore, Hall & Tandon (2023), Ndawula (2017), Ibhakewanlan & McGrath (2015), Ndlovu-Gadsheni (2017) and many more, who have made strong cases that knowledge and knowledge construction is spiritually and ontologically embedded in social and geographical spaces and time. It is alongside these great scholars that we seek to share our small contribution towards change through our collaborative work in the Knowledge for Change Global Consortium, a Global South-led movement in community-based participatory research. The failure of higher education institutions to acknowledge diverse sources of knowledge, restricted from conventional academic practices, can be considered as 'epistemicide', which Hall and Tandon (2017, p.7) define as "the killing of knowledge systems". Hall and Tandon used epistemicide as a critical lens to describe how dominant systems, especially those shaped by colonial and capitalist histories, actively marginalise, suppress, or destroy entire knowledge systems that do not align with the Euro-Western worldview. The knowledge considered as valid from this system is often biased and only follows euro-centric procedures of knowledge creation. This has caused various tradition-led disciplines of knowledge, such as indigenous knowledges, to be forgotten, and not properly highlighted by academia. The issue is more damaging when the euro-centric approach of knowledge creation is also influenced by the capitalistic-industrial approach of higher education.

Higher education researchers have voiced their concern of this bias recognition of scientific knowledge and methodology. UNESCO for example, from its recommendation of Open Science (2021), highlighted four main pillars of equitable and open knowledge or science, including open scientific knowledge, open science infrastructure, open engagement of societal actors, and open dialogue with other knowledge systems. Among these four pillars, pillar three and four seem to be easily forgotten.

> *Open science represents a new paradigm that brings science closer to society, and makes scientific knowledge openly available, accessible and reusable for everyone, increasing scientific collaboration and sharing of information for the benefit of science and society, and opening the processes of scientific knowledge creation, evaluation and communication to societal actors beyond the traditional scientific community (UNESCO, 2021, p. 7).*

Scholars like Riyadh Shahjahan (2025) have successfully linked the issue of epistemic injustice to various contemporary higher education phenomena, especially university global rankings. In one of his recent works, he used the term 'decolonial chronopolitics' which means, "a framework critiquing dominant temporalities underpinning the coloniality of knowledge" (p.1). He came out with a clear argument that academia and society should resist the monopoly of colonial temporalities, not only by avoiding the use of colonial definitions of time such as in clocks and calendars, but the *entire cultural, institutional, and political apparatus* that defines what counts as timely, productive, and legitimate knowledge. Challenging this euro-centric definition of knowledge requires a strong commitment and openness to the existence of various knowledge systems.

The Knowledge for Change (K4C) Consortium was introduced to provide a legitimate platform for many learners within or outside academia to promote knowledge co-creation. The creation and strengthening of CBPR training centres in the Knowledge for Change (K4C) Consortium framework is a fundamental strategy for decolonising research and fostering self-determination in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. We will explore how the foundations of the three K4C Regional Training Centres are building a network of localised 'hubs' (explained later) co-defining community flourishing and co-creating pathways to get there. The centres promote methodologies that prioritise collaboration, equity, and contextual relevance, as well as dialogue between and across the hubs in each region. Our objective is to provide a conceptual framework and practical recommendations to strengthen existing CBPR training initiatives within higher education institutions, as well as to inform the design and implementation of these initiatives, to catalyse a new era of research led and sustained by the Global South itself.

We employ a narrative inquiry approach (Groom, R., Nelson, L., Potrac, P., and Smith, B., 2014) to deeply reflect on our lived experiences of creating and organising the three K4C regional centres (Africa, Asia, and Latin America) for training and networking of CBPR hubs and researchers in their respective regions. Narrative inquiry is particularly suited for capturing personal stories and understanding how individuals construct meaning around their experiences, especially in complex organisational and intercultural contexts. The aim is to analyse the stories of these coordinators to uncover themes related to challenges, successes, decision-making processes, cultural considerations, and the overall impact of their efforts within the framework of the Knowledge for Change Consortium. Our question for this article is: What are the opportunities and challenges of creating regional CBPR centres in the Global South? To answer the question we first had some discussions online, and agreed to develop independent reflections about the processes of setting up our centres,

as well as the challenges and opportunities we face. Following this we read each other's accounts and left comments and questions to each other using Google Docs.

We then met again online to discuss the reflections. Here, we had an extended discussion on the process of developing as southern networks without funding of any kind, and while continuing with our regular work. We saw it as both a challenge and an advantage, and most certainly aligned with the CBPR principles which emphasise long term relationships, not only when there is funding for a project. Another shift we made in this analysis session was to agree that we need to strongly root our reflections in the K4C foundations, and more firmly in the context of our hubs. This was again adjusted after reviewers' comments to make clear the difference between hubs and the regional centres. We all in fact coordinate both local hubs and regional centres. Elsewhere we have written and presented about our local hubs; here we are reflecting on the significance of regional centres, which coordinate the network of hubs. Another core adjustment we made in the reflective analysis of our writing was adding our own relationship, which we have purposefully been developing as we work together in developing each of our hubs. We see this relationality as fundamentally aligned with the development of our regional centres: we are very different, but we have shared values, and we see each other's success as directly connected to our own successes, despite being geographically far apart. Therefore, contributing towards the development of each other's centres is as important as developing our own. After the reflective analysis, we returned to editing directly in a shared document, using comments and suggestions to communicate and refine our work. Much of what we did was online because of the difference in timezones. We see the process of writing this paper as very much a part of our ongoing efforts to form our regional centres.

We, the authors, have worked closely with each other and with the founders of the K4C Global Consortium, first participating in the early mentorship *training* p*rogramme* and developing K4C hubs in our respective institutional locations (Uganda, Malaysia, Colombia), and now, as the consortium has grown and decentralised, establishing regional *centres* to sustain the network of existing local hubs and support the mentorship of socially responsible researchers and the development of new hubs in each of our regions. The regional centres that we coordinate are new developments in the K4C consortium, and at present we are the first and only regional centres. It is our collective development of these regional centres that we reflect on in this paper. We feel there is significance in the deep relationship we have developed across the oceans that has sustained the creation of our respective centres and which is embodied in this shared reflection.

There is also significance that the initial regional centres emerged in the Global South, and this is what has driven our interdependence and intertwined successes. We begin by briefly explaining the history and goals of the K4C consortium and the conceptual grounding of CBPR. We then each include a reflexive narrative of our distinct regional training centres, before returning to our collective reflection on how we hope, as knowledge ambassadors, to reframe single-story narratives of development and progress through participatory and cognitively diverse knowledge-making processes.

Historical Framework of the Knowledge for Change (K4C) Consortium

The Knowledge for Change (K4C) Global Consortium is a global initiative created in 2017 as part of the UNESCO Chair in Community-Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education, established in 2012 by Dr Rajesh Tandon (PRIA, India) and Dr Budd Hall (University of Victoria, Canada). As Lepore, Hall, and Tandon explain:

> *The K4C Consortium aims to develop research capacities for the co-creation of knowledge through collective action by community groups and academics working together in training hubs around the world on issues related to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, such as Indigenous wellbeing, water governance, poverty and inequality, climate action, gender equality, and violence against women (Lepore et al, 2021, p. 349).*

The strategy through which the K4C Consortium initiated the training of the next generation of CBPR researchers is the mentorship training programme. The MTP's pedagogical approach proposes training in three main areas: the first focuses on learning the theoretical and epistemological foundations of CBPR and the methods used to conduct research, the second focuses on the organisation of local nodes and the design of courses to be taught, and the third is the development of fieldwork that involves conducting research with a community as a partner (Tandon, Hall, Lepore & Singh, 2016).

The "nodes" Tandon, Hall, Lepore and Singh (2016) refer to are what we now call hubs, which are partnerships between a university and at least one community organisation. The K4C is thus a consortium of local hubs committed to bridging knowledge cultures and collaboratively negotiating shared futures. To join the mentorship training programme, one must be in the process of developing a hub (with an existing formal agreement committed to training both university and community), or part of an existing hub. The MTP is designed to support local hub leadership in the promotion of CBPR. Once trained, the local hubs develop their own training programmes for both university and community members. The K4C consortium has developed a network of 27 hubs in 16 countries, promoting community-based participatory research (CBPR) through collaboration between higher education institutions and community-based organisations (Sodhi, 2025).

During the World Higher Education UNESCO Conference (WHEC), held in Barcelona, Spain, on May 14-20 2022, the K4C Global Consortium had several meetings with the global hubs coordinators. One of the agreements made at this meeting was the need to decentralise the MTP to address the diversity that exists in the different regions of the Global South. This marked the beginning of the creation of three regional centres, representing Africa (Gulu, Uganda), Asia (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia), and Latin America (Bogotá, Colombia) whose purpose is to address the specificities of language, economic resources, and the possibility of connecting with more countries in each of these regions.

These centres were chosen because of their institutional commitment to the principles and practice of knowledge co-creation.

In October 2023, at the Engaged Scholarship International Conference, held in East Lansing, Michigan (October 4-5 2023), representatives from Africa, Asia, and Latin America were invited as a keynote panel to share their experiences as part of the K4C Global Consortium (Mercy, 2023). We used the opportunity of being together in person to extend the possibility of regional training centres. It was agreed that having regional centres adapt their training programmes and research activities to local, national, and regional needs and contexts was the best possible response to the ongoing increased interest in the K4C model of institutional CBPR capacity-building (Mercy, 2023). Through meetings over several days, chaired by Budd Hall, the initial structure of the regional centres was passionately co-constructed with the regional coordinators. Rajesh Tandon joined us online. We (the proposed regional coordinators) returned with great hope to our respective institutions to present our plans to our leadership and regional hubs, and to begin the hard work of establishing the regional centres. Since then, we have had countless online meetings to support each other as we have developed our curricula, facilitated courses, and shaped our regional networks.

Community Participatory-Based Research (CBPR) as a Pillar of Local Development

Research, at its core, seeks to understand and transform realities. However, traditional research models have often perpetuated asymmetrical power dynamics, especially in regions of the Global South. Africa, Asia, and Latin America, rich in cultural diversity and possessing immense human potential, have historically been recipients of externally generated knowledge, which has often resulted in decontextualised solutions or the underutilisation of local knowledge (Hall, 2023; Tandon et al., 2023). To address complex challenges such as poverty, climate change, social inequality and health crises, it is imperative to shift toward an approach that not only recognises but also empowers communities in generating knowledge relevant and applicable to their realities.

Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) is a collaborative research approach that equitably engages community members, researchers and other stakeholders in the research process, recognising the unique strengths each brings (Hall, 1985). CBPR seeks collaboration between university-based academics and communities to address everyday life challenges, emphasising lived and experiential knowledge to guide the research process (Tandon, Hall, Lepore & Singh, 2016; Monk et al., 2020). The goal of CBPR is to combine knowledge and action to generate positive lasting social change and epistemic justice (Flores, Astaiza, González & Lopera, 2023).

CBPR goes beyond being a simple methodology; it is a philosophy that conceives research as a collaborative and horizontal process, where the subjects of the study become active co-researchers and partners (Tandon, Hall, Lepore & Singh, 2016). Rather than being

mere informants, communities, local leaders, marginalised groups, and other relevant actors are actively involved in all stages of the research process, from problem identification through research design, data collection and analysis to the dissemination of results and the implementation of resulting actions (Wallerstein & Duran, 2006). An important differentiation we would like to emphasise in CBPR is that it is not about individual research projects that involve the community, but rather it is based on long-term relationships and networks of people and institutions who are interested in improving their community. Thus, research does not originate primarily in research or project grants; community improvement is a never-ending process that requires planning and social action.

It is this ongoing community development work that can inform and enhance research and grant writing to enhance longer-term visions and immediate community needs. The position of the researcher and institutions is one of consistent participation in the community, not only when funding is available. This is an important distinction. On the other hand, there is a specific goal of finding ways to integrate a diversity of knowledge into the community. This approach is particularly crucial in developmental contexts such as Africa, Asia, and Latin America, because of their rich diversity of multiple systems of knowledge creation. They are also seen through the gaze of the so-called developed world, which is trying to decide on their behalf what they should aspire to in terms of living well (development) through assumptions that countries in the Global North have achieved healthy systems of living and that everyone, including the Global South, should aspire to this model.

In other words, the northern story is the baseline for measuring living well, and development is seen as their story. Additionally, they assume that their version of industrialisation is the only way to get there. Of course, this egotistical assumption is based on the cultural and religious values underpinning a knowledge system that emphasises individuality and competition, centering and separating the human from the universe, and valuing worth through 'power over' (*puissance*), and in comparison with others, in a very hierarchical fashion. It is this world view that has brought the entire world to its knees. This is the danger of the single story. In the Global South, there exists a rich diversity of knowledge systems, largely driven by ontologies, such as Ubuntu, which value relationships between humans and respect and connections to other species. Thus, we see the following key potentialities of the CBPR movement:

Contextual Relevance:
Allows us to address problems from the perspective of those who directly experience them, ensuring that research questions are meaningful and that proposed solutions are culturally appropriate and sustainable.

Empowerment and Ownership:
Promotes community ownership of knowledge and solutions, strengthening the capacity to critically analyse their environment and mobilise for change.

Trust Building:
Bridging the gap between 'researchers' and 'communities' by building relationships of mutual trust and respect for ancestral knowledge and lived experiences.

Long-Term Sustainability:
By developing local capacities, the foundation is laid for research and innovation to continue beyond specific projects or the presence of external actors.

Ethics and Equity:
By promoting ethical practices that ensure genuine informed consent, data protection, and equitable distribution of research benefits.

In this sense, participatory research training centres are not mere academies, but catalysts for social transformation, where theory and practice intertwine to empower individuals and communities in the co-creation of a more just and equitable future. In the following section each of the authors reflects on the formation of the K4C regional training centres they have participated in developing. The regional centres emerged out of local K4C hubs, and thus each reflection includes the context of the regional hubs from which the centres emerged.

Knowledge for Change (K4C) Regional Training Centre – Imparting Local Hubs' Practices to Produce Regional K4C Mentors

K4C African Regional Training Centre – Gulu Hub

The African Regional Training Centre is hosted by Gulu University, and emerged as a result of the leadership in CBPR practice in the Gulu Hub. The director of the Centre is the Vice-Chancellor of Gulu University, Professor George Openjuru, who is a leader in the K4C and a global visionary in the movement for bridging knowledge cultures and social responsibility in higher education.

The Gulu hub was established in 2018 after the mentorship training programme in Arusha, Tanzania. The hub's work is linked to the university's mandate 'for community transformation' oriented toward serving the geographic space of Northern Uganda. It is a somewhat unique hub, because most of its activities are generated through informal community partnerships and networks.

Placing relationships first is at the core of the Gulu hub's multi-layered sense of community and research. The academic members of the hub use relationships with the community to advocate for a participative culture of research and learning within the university. Linked to this is the university's efforts to create enabling institutional policies for community engagement. The university promotes indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) through programme development and utilising IKS as the foundational culture of

community university engagement (CUE). This knowledge distinction is important to note in the context of community engagement by the Gulu hub, because the Gulu community is diverse, with influences from both IKS and Ameripean[1] (Ndawula, 2017) epistemic paradigms.

An IKS-based understanding of community engagement positions the university as one (important) actor within a learning ecosystem – an important departure from objective and linear understandings of research and the role of universities, which typically centre the university, or position it as the only ('uni') actor (Visvanathan, 2006). Odora Hoppers (2021) explains that universities (generally) associate knowledge production with university experts, and thus purposefully separate the university and its research from the lifestyles and lifecycles and cosmologies of the communities in which they are embedded. This separation fractures relationships and isolates universities. In contrast, IKS-based research and community engagement is relational and relies on shared experiences, transdisciplinarity and mutuality (Ndawula, 2017; Odora-Hoppers, 2021). IKS recognises research and knowledge production as a shared community responsibility emerging from deeply entangled relationships based on respect and reciprocity with all species, both now and in the future. Thus, using IKS as a framework for CUE repositions the university as 'multi' rather than 'uni', with a focus on relationships, participation, and actively seeking to promote cognitive justice.

This sense of interconnectedness provides a continuity of shared experience whereby the traditionally separated knowledge generation, validation and diffusion are entangled and shared as part of a longer term project of community wellbeing. Finding ways of integrating the useful technical elements of this 'conventional' research regime into a paradigm of democratic knowledge requires careful interpersonal and intercommunity communication (Monk et al., 2023). The African regional training centre has three core functions related to the K4C movement for social responsibility in higher education: We train the next generation of engaged scholars in community-based participatory research, we engage in regional and international policy dialogue and activism for CBPR, and we nurture a network of engaged researchers that are committed to promoting and learning from diverse knowledges.

The African regional training centre stands as a testament to the transformative power of relationships, and the integration of indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) into its core functions. At the heart of our mission is the commitment to train the next generation of engaged scholars in community-based participatory research (CBPR). This training is not merely a transfer of skills but a co-creative process whereby hubs across the African region actively shape the curriculum, contribute multilingual materials and facilitate training sessions. By embedding IKS into these processes, we ensure that the knowledge shared is not only diverse but deeply rooted in the lived realities of the communities we serve. As

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1   Ndawula (2017) uses this term to reflect the shared hegemony of White European and American epistemic cultures.

part of our training and network, we are actively seeking to develop rich local language and locally rooted case studies to strengthen the local learning materials and research examples available.

Our approach to regional and international policy dialogue and activism for CBPR is similarly grounded in relational values. The centre's policy engagements are informed by the collective wisdom of our network, and the centre nurtures an engaged network of researchers as a relational learning ecosystem. Mentorship, knowledge exchange, and solidarity are structured around reciprocity and co-learning, not extractivism. Just as the Gulu hub relies on informal community partnerships, the centre maintains and expands this model in both training and movement building. This participatory ethos ensures that our advocacy is not only inclusive but also reflective of the epistemic diversity that defines our region. Decision-making within the centre involves not only academic actors but also community representatives or regional collaborators, modelling deliberative and inclusive processes.

Thus far, we have delivered one cohort of training, with the residency taking place in Gulu. The two-week residency is the core space of learning from each other and building a network. It is here that we practice art-based inquiry and learn primarily through local knowledge practices, which are mostly experientially-based. It is a rich and dynamic learning environment where participants really set the foundations for their projects and plans at their hubs when they return. We are presently getting started with the second cohort; the residency will take place in South Africa to maintain our commitment to learning from the diversity of our hubs. We also see this shifting residency as an opportunity to bring international visibility to the work of the local hub. We are also developing a French cohort, likely to begin in 2026.

The core challenges that we face are time and funding to support participants to join the course, particularly for community partners. We find that while institutions are interested in the concept of CBPR, often they are not willing, or do not have the resources, to prioritise training of faculty. Likewise, the centre does not have core funding to support running the centre, recruitment of hubs, or the development and delivery of our curriculum. However, these core challenges also happen to be the core sources of our potential and opportunity. Because we do not have time or positions allocated for this work, we have to rely on the distributed leadership and experience that is within our network. This creates a space of negotiated and ongoing learning based on diversity, trust, and strong relationships, which is making our centre thrive. Likewise, not being dependent on a donor ensures that we are able to work with a long-term vision, and on our terms. We also see that those who join our programme do so out of passion and remain important contributors to our centre and to our training programme.

In essence, the African regional training centre is more than an institution; it is a movement for greater inclusion and participation across language and knowledge cultures. By valuing each other as people and embracing the messiness of co-creation, we are building a richer and healthier society.

Mizan Knowledge for Change (K4C) Hub, University Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM)

Mizan K4C Hub conducts academic training and research with regard to the field of village (rural and urban) sustainability, indigenous studies, leadership and spirituality, community engagement, and youth development. Our focus is to cater to the needs of the community from various backgrounds through multidisciplinary perspectives.

Mizan K4C Hub was established as a result of a collaborative research partnership between Mizan Research Centre (MRC), Faculty of Leadership and Management, USIM, with various community, private, and government-based organisations in Malaysia since 2014. Some of the research projects conducted by Mizan Research Centre (MRC) are the study of the indigenous community of orang asli, village sustainability, and community leadership and values. In 2017, the lead researcher of Mizan Research Centre, Dr. Mahazan Abdul Mutalib, was introduced to the UNESCO Chair in Community-Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education through a community confluence organised by the UNESCO Chair and team at Jinja, Uganda. This introduction to K4C has strengthened the engagement of Mizan Research Centre (MRC) with its partner organisations, namely Malay Agricultural Settlement of Kampong Bharu (MAS), Malaysia Youth Council (MBM), and National Centre of Excellence for Indigenous Pedagogy, Institute of Teacher Education, Tengku Ampuan Afzan Campus, Pahang, Malaysia (IPGKTAA), and also the Association of Indigenous Community Malaysia (POAM) when the centre officially joined UNESCO K4C consortium beginning 2019.

The university-community engagement structure is more visible after the official registration of Mizan and USIM in the UNESCO K4C network, and this has attracted many other organisations in Malaysia to participate with Mizan. Since 2022, International Youth Centre Kuala Lumpur (IYCKUL), an international youth training and community development centre, has joined Mizan and UNESCO K4C networking and has contributed significantly by hosting and arranging various K4C mentor residencies at the global and regional level. The structure is stronger since IYCKUL, through its connection, has linked Mizan and the UNESCO Chair to the Ministry of Youth and Sports Malaysia, as well as other NGOs such as Benevolent Malaysia and MyHumanitarian.

This organised arrangement is now creating more impact through the support that the 'team' has continuously received from the UNESCO Chair, UVic, and Pria. In 2024, USIM and Mizan K4C hub were appointed as a UNESCO Chair regional training centre (RTC), and now the hub and its partner associations (i.e, IYCKL and MBM) are organising the first UNESCO K4C CBPR Mentor Training Programme (MTP) for the Asia region (28th August 2024 to 23rd December 2024). Our first Regional K4C Residency will be held at IYCKL from 5-13 October 2024. The first Asia CBPR – MTP participants are among academics and civil society practitioners who come from Asian countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Brunei, Thailand, Cambodia, Taiwan and South Korea. Meanwhile, for cohort 2 MTP, Mizan K4C hub has received participation from some universities in Central Asia in addition

to existing networks. It is always important for the Mizan K4C hub to analyse how the partnership between USIM (Mizan K4C *hub*), IYCKUL and MBM could be strengthened and become the 'catalyst' to support knowledge sharing and development of other independent/ non-government-based community associations in Malaysia, such as the Association of Indigenous Community Malaysia (POAM).

The 'visible structure and governance' of Community-University Research Partnership (CURP) should acknowledge the different nature and governance structure or objectives of each community organisation involved in the partnership. Malaysia's National Blue Ocean Strategy (NBOS), which was introduced in 2009 to reform public service delivery (including public universities) to break the culture of working in silos, has faced some major problems due to its structure, bureaucracy, and understanding. Therefore, a specific small to medium scale case study conducted through the boundary spanning project in the context of CURP is timely for us. We can showcase how collaborative partnerships can be effectively conducted through the guides and experiences of the UNESCO Chair and other hubs across the globe. The Mizan boundary spanning case study will cover specific dimensions of CURP such as the importance of community engagement training and knowledge (we mostly get this from the CBPR approach), mutual understanding of university and community partners/ individuals, governance and structure, methods of setting up community-university projects, sharing of thoughts, ideas, and ownership and shared values. The case study will involve stakeholders such as USIM and community partners leadership/management, representatives from related ministries, major stakeholders of the engagement/partnership, or selected community members.

IAPaz Hub Colombia - K4C Latin American Regional Center for Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR)

The K4C Latin America Regional Center was founded in November 2024, with the support of the Vice Presidency for Research and Creation and the Faculty of Education of the University of Los Andes. After a year of negotiations with these university entities, the centre began operations. Although there are three hubs in Latin America that are part of the K4C consortium, Colombia, Cuba, and México, only the Colombia hub has participated in the creation and consolidation of the centre. This has been a major challenge for the centre, as a single hub requires more work to organise the mentor training programme (MTP) and recruit mentors. On the other hand, while Latin America has a strong tradition of working with communities using the participatory action research paradigm, this approach is not recognised within universities as a reliable way of producing knowledge. Conservative approaches to research from a rather extractive perspective prevail in many universities.

That is why the mission of the Latin American regional centre is to strengthen community-based participatory research (CBPR) capacities in the region. Through the training of mentors, the development of national and local hubs, and the generation of applied knowledge, we seek to promote social transformation and community work, in

coordination with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The center is organised into three strategic areas: training, research, and the dissemination and social appropriation of knowledge. This centre aims to establish itself as a benchmark in participatory research in Latin America, connecting higher education institutions and community organisations for the co-creation of knowledge and new national and local hubs. Through innovative learning strategies and an approach committed to the democratisation, decentralisation, and decolonisation of knowledge, we seek to generate impact on community development and strengthen research capacities.

The objectives of the centre are as follows:

1. To offer the MTP in Spanish as a certified microcredential,
2. to create and strengthen local participatory research hubs in various countries in the region,
3. to develop national-level IPBC training programmes adapted to the Latin American context,
4. to promote support networks between universities and community organisations in Latin America and with the other regional centres in the consortium,
5. to develop digital learning platforms for IPBC training and
6. to promote ethics and social responsibility in community research.

In the constitution of the centre, we defined the following ethical principles that guide the training, research, and strengthening of the K4C consortium network:

- *Respect for the community*: All research is conducted in collaboration with the community, respecting their knowledge, cultures, and needs within the framework of their rights in the case of indigenous communities.
- *Use of information:* All information generated within the centre must be used exclusively for the centre's research and training purposes. The information will not be used for personal, commercial, or purposes unrelated to the centre's mission.
- *Social commitment:* Working at CBPR is an option for social and political commitment that implies dedication, responsibility, and consistency with the values of social transformation. Participation in the centre requires a genuine and sustained commitment to both the communities and the processes.
- *Co-creation of knowledge and reciprocity*: The work is based on a co-creation process with the communities, ensuring that participatory research is an exercise in dialogue and co-construction. This implies that all research must be of direct use to the community, breaking with the traditional model in which only the researcher benefits from the results.

- *Relationship between the K4C consortium and the UNESCO Chair*: Any strategic or representative decision must be aligned with the guidelines of the consortium and the Chair to ensure consistency with the overall principles and objectives of the programme. The person authorised to make decisions on behalf of the centre is the director, who acts under the guidelines established by the UNESCO Chair and its co-chairs.
- *Accountability and transparency*: Work at the centre is based on good faith, trust, and mutual respect. All training, research, and collaboration processes are carried out based on the agreed-upon agreements and the principles of established ethical standards and social commitment. All decisions, actions and results must be communicated openly and accessible to all stakeholders.

In respect of the MTP, the design of the course we offer through UAndes Continuing Education at the University of Los Andes is based on the original proposal of the K4C Consortium Mentor Training Programme (MTP), but adapted to the needs of the Latin American Region. The centre started its first cohort of mentors in June 2025 with 15 participants from five countries: Bolivia, Colombia, Costa Rica, Spain (Basque Country), and Mexico. The MTP maintains the 21-week training structure, which includes a week-long face-to-face meeting held at the Universidad de Los Andes in Bogotá, Colombia. The centre is also conducting research processes such as a systematisation of experiences from the training courses offered by the Colombia hub through UAndes Continuing Education, as well as the Flourishing CBPR Capacity Building course offered at the Universidad de Ibagué, Tolima, Colombia. We are also conducting research with young Indigenous people from the INGA Awa in the region of the Putumayo Department, Colombia, in Villagarzón village. This research is a CBPR process to co-construct strategies that empower these young people's Indigenous identity and to identify alternatives to strengthen their territory. Finally, we are seeking funding opportunities outside the university by identifying potential funders interested in supporting the centre's operations.

Recommendations: Key Strategies for Implementation

The creation of CBPR training centres in Africa, Asia, and Latin America has grown on similar timelines, with similar goals, but in different contexts. Our curricula, including our 10-day residency, have been developed and adapted together, with significant input from the UNESCO chairs. As we write, we are all in our second training cohort, and we are trying to find space for our mentors in training to meet and learn from each other as part of this cohort's learning programme. Some differences exist in the foundations of the centres. The Asian centre is more firmly located within the University. It is also the only centre with an official community partner – something the other two centres are reflecting on. The Ugandan centre takes an approach of distributed leadership with all regional hubs driving decisions, and co-facilitating training. To this end, it also relocates the residency

in different hub locations with each cohort. The Latin American centre is the only centre offering credits for the courses they offer.

In what follows we bring together some of our shared reflections that we deem important, which are based on our individual presentations above and our collective discussions related to the individual presentations. We see them as learning points in our ongoing development.

Contextualised and Flexible Curriculum Design

Modular approach:
Develop training modules that can be adapted to the specific needs of each region or country, including topics such as participatory methodologies (participatory action research, participatory mapping, participatory rapid analysis), research ethics, community project management, effective communication of results, and advocacy skills.

Active and experiential pedagogy:
Prioritise practical learning based on real-life projects and case studies from the regions themselves. Encourage learning by doing, and by critical reflection on experiences. Getting out of the academic space is essential to learn differently together. The residency is the core of this programme, but the design of the curriculum forces practice in the community.

Integration of local knowledges and languages:
The curriculum must actively validate and integrate indigenous, ancestral, and local knowledges, recognising them as legitimate sources of knowledge and a basis for research. This requires encouraging the use of mother tongue languages as much and wherever possible; this can be done with the use of translation. Having mentors create case studies in local languages will build a repository of resources that can be used in the training programme. Having non-university participants in the course is also essential to learning grounded in local knowledge-making approaches.

Integrating facilitation techniques:
CBPR is deeply connected to collective learning. Facilitation skills are therefore important. Mentors also need support in developing their own training programmes, and learning how to facilitate them. Arts-based inquiry methods need to play a major role here as they shift the way we feel and engage in the world.

Training of Local Trainers and Network Building

Invest in facilitation capacity:
Prioritise the training of local facilitators and mentors who understand the cultural and social dynamics of their communities. These trainers will be key to replicating and scaling up training programmes. Mindfulness of the CBPR movement as being a partnership of

university and communities requires purposefully including communities in training and leadership.

Creation of communities of practice:
Establish networks of CBPR researchers at the regional and transcontinental (South-South) levels to facilitate the exchange of experiences, methodologies, and resources. These networks can function as platforms for mutual support and collaboration on research projects. Relationships of care are what drive the CBPR movement. Developing strong relationships locally and across regions is therefore as important an objective as the training programmes.

Innovative Sustainability and Financing Models

Strategic partnerships:
Seek collaboration with local universities, civil society organisations, governments and development agencies that share the vision of participatory research.

Engaging policy makers and funders:
Policy makers and funders need to be convinced about the impact of CBPR. They also need recommendations on aligning funding to be inclusive of indigenous knowledges and longer term partnerships, rather than short term research grants. To this end our participation in UNESCO Open Science positions and African Union higher education convenings has been valuable. We need to showcase more on the value of CBPR both as a methodology and an approach to higher education.

Diversification of funding sources:
Explore funding models that include support from international foundations, national development funds, community co-financing mechanisms, and, potentially, income generated from consulting services or specialised training. The goal is to reduce dependence on a single source of funding.

Not everything has to be about money:
We have significant experience, passion and knowledge across the K4C network. This is our greatest resource, and it is what has driven us this far. We should continue to build on it, as it functions both as a form of internal relationship building and engagement which is vital for the network, and makes our regional centres stronger.

Challenges and Opportunities in the Creation of Participatory Training Centres

The ambitious task of establishing and sustaining training centres for participatory researchers in Africa, Asia, and Latin America is not without its obstacles. However, each challenge also presents a unique opportunity for innovation and local capacity building.

Challenges

Resistance from traditional research paradigms:
Entrenched academic institutions and funding schemes often privilege conventional methodologies. Changing this mentality requires a concerted effort to demonstrate the value and rigour of participatory approaches.

Institutional and human capacity gaps:
In many regions, existing research infrastructure is limited, and there may be a shortage of facilitators with expertise in participatory methodologies and transformative pedagogies.

Language and cultural barriers:
The inherent diversity of these vast regions means that adapting training materials and methodologies to multiple languages and cultural contexts can be complex and costly.

Financial sustainability:
Securing stable, long-term financing is a persistent challenge. Many projects rely on temporary external funding, making it difficult to maintain training programmes.

Recognition and validation:
Knowledge generated through participatory research, especially when integrated with local knowledge, faces difficulties being recognised and validated in dominant academic and political circles.

Opportunities

Potential for social innovation:
Participatory research fosters creativity and adaptability, which is crucial for developing innovative solutions to complex local problems, from natural resource management to community health promotion.

Strengthening South-South networks:
The creation of these centres can catalyse greater horizontal collaboration between countries and regions in the Global South. Sharing experiences, methodologies and resources between Africa, Asia and Latin America can exponentially enrich learning and have a profound impact.

Community empowerment and local governance:
By empowering communities to lead their research, their capacity for informed decision-making and public policy advocacy is strengthened, promoting more participatory and equitable governance.

Research relevance and pertinence:
By ensuring that research questions and solutions stem from local needs and priorities, the resulting research is inherently more relevant and more likely to generate positive and sustainable impact.

Attracting funding with a focus on impact:
Donors and development agencies are increasingly interested in projects that demonstrate tangible impact and a focus on local empowerment. Participatory training centres, by generating capacity and solutions from the bottom up, align perfectly with these priorities.

Influencing the development of public policies:
Aimed at developing community engagement programmes and projects through CBPR, popular education, and lifelong learning.

Conclusion

In this paper we have claimed that universities should be spaces of diverse knowledge production oriented towards designing socially just and flourishing societies. We feel that to do this practically, universities need to diversify their knowledge approaches and be more inclusive in their processes. The vision of our K4C movement is a future where research can be a tool for local empowerment and social transformation in Africa, Asia and Latin America. As we reflect on our regional centres in this paper, we can see that they have an important role to play in strategically achieving this vision. The regional training centres are significant because they are driven by the rich stories of southern epistemologies and thus based in relationality, transdisciplinarity and interdependence. As we have argued, these centres are not merely educational institutions, but catalysts for change that dismantle traditionally Western knowledge hierarchies and validate the rich diversity of knowledge emanating from these regions.

By investing in contextualised curricula, active pedagogies, the training of local trainers and the development of robust networks, we can overcome the inherent challenges and capitalise on the vast opportunities these contexts present. Participatory research, at its core, is an act of epistemic justice, empowering communities to define their agendas, generate their solutions, and claim their place as active agents in knowledge production. The K4C CBPR movement is more than just a methodological approach to research however. It is a movement for more inclusive societies and a call for collaborative and diverse participation in the articulation of what we want our futures to be as well as the many pathways to getting there.

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