



University  
of Glasgow



Economic  
and Social  
Research Council

# KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Case studies from low and middle  
income countries research projects

RESEARCH REPORT

## Research report

This report presents case studies of knowledge exchange projects implemented during the COVID 19 pandemic by University of Glasgow researchers. It highlights good practices, approaches and online tools to conduct research remotely and ensure active engagement from stakeholders. The report was authored by Dr Yulia Nesterova - School of Education, University of Glasgow.

### Introduction

Rigorous academic research - whether it is empirical or theoretical - creates evidence that is critical for building prosperous, sustainable, peaceful, and cohesive societies. By providing 'innovation, leadership, and high-quality support,' universities can help to improve the communities and organisations they work with as well as the society and the economy (Universities UK, 2020). As Waks (2019) notes, however, academics often operate 'at great remove from the "real life" of the community' and 'the pressing problems in the "real world."

Nevertheless, a proactive, collaborative, and creative knowledge exchange that translates research into impact in society has become a key part of academic work (Universities UK, 2020). This is especially true for the University of Glasgow's College of Social Sciences where academic staff have been establishing partnerships with colleagues in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) and beyond to collaborate on research and knowledge exchange that has a positive and lasting impact.

Knowledge exchange – unlike a one-directional knowledge collection from and knowledge dissemination to research participants – can be useful for diverse stakeholders and can contribute to addressing a wide range of issues societies and communities grapple with, including various inequalities and injustices. Knowledge exchange also allows academics to co-create knowledge with participants and key stakeholders beyond academia in order to ensure its relevance, applicability, and local buy-in.

In order to achieve these goals academics can use a variety of knowledge exchange methods. This report presents nine case studies of knowledge exchange that showcase a range of mechanisms of conducting knowledge exchange in LMICs. These knowledge exchange activities were conducted by Glasgow researchers during the COVID-19 pandemic when travel was not possible. Whilst the worst of the pandemic may be over at the time of writing, lack of funding and time constraints researchers face made online engagement easier, and this report seeks to suggest a few methods that can be replicated. Additionally, online engagement enables people from all over the world to come together promoting

diversity and inclusion. The examples offered can thus help to increase impact, value, and benefit of academic research to communities and societies and to support the efforts of non-academic actors and stakeholders towards the change they seek to effect in their contexts (Nesterova, 2021).

Whilst the perspective of this report is written from that of academic researchers, it will be useful for other audiences such as international development professionals, policymakers, and other global development stakeholders with interest in strengthening the impact of their work through knowledge exchange and community engagement.

### Defining Knowledge Exchange

Knowledge exchange offers routes for academic researchers to build collaborative relationships with relevant stakeholders and actors to respond to real needs of and generate real world impact for the benefit of non-academic actors and stakeholders (Nesterova, 2021). It is a two-way process that includes engaging individuals and communities in different stages of research as partners, participants, co-investigators, audiences, and/or users of research to co-construct and/or share knowledge, experiences, ideas, evidence, skills, or expertise in areas of community interest and concern, for mutual benefit (AUCEA, 2006; LSE, n/d).

Beneficial outcomes and impact of knowledge exchange are varied and include 'tangible effect, change or benefit felt in the world beyond academia' (LSE, n/d), including commercial, environmental, cultural, and place-based benefits (Universities UK, 2020). National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement (n/d) identifies gaining new insights and ideas by academic and non-academic audiences, getting inspired and inspiring others, learning from others, and acquiring new skills as benefits of knowledge exchange. Other benefits include influence on public policy, advocacy, and community mobilisation; supporting community members in becoming agents of change; making activists more visible and outspoken; strengthening critical consciousness of the public and academics (Wellcome Trust, 2011); as well as influence on structures, processes, and decision making of business and civil society organisations and public debate and understanding (LSE, n/d). An academic benefit for researchers is generating a 'virtuous circle' of research, engagement, and further research as knowledge exchange opens fresh perspectives and allows to get involved with new research participants for new data, depth, and feedback (LSE, n/d).

### Challenges to Effective Knowledge Exchange

The four key challenges to knowledge exchange experienced by the researchers who provided the case studies below, and what is known from available literature, include the digital divide, power imbalances, necessary skill sets including languages other than English, and funding of knowledge exchange activities.

1. **Digital divide.** The divide between the haves and the have nots is even wider online than in physical spaces (Mihelj et al., 2019). A sizeable proportion of people in LMICs (as well as western countries, including the UK) still face barriers to digital engagement such as lack of proper equipment, necessary digital skills, motivation and confidence, and stable and strong Internet connection (e.g., The Knowledge Exchange, 2021). This means that most often than not, researchers may not be able to reach out to and engage the most disadvantaged, marginalised, and vulnerable people that they seek to work with and support. This also means that not all synchronous (and even asynchronous) online activities will be possible in some contexts and may be challenging to implement in many others.
2. **Power dynamics.** This includes UK researchers and partners in LMICs as well as in the community or group researchers engage with. First, a lot of LMICs where UK-based researchers engage, and work are very sensitive and ethically charged postcolonial contexts. A prominent Maori scholar, Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999), writing about such researchers, said: ‘They came, They saw, They named, They claimed’ (p. 80), highlighting how people in the global South contexts – LMICs – are sometimes mistreated and misled by researchers from the global North (Tuck & Wayne Yang, 2019). In such contexts, academic researchers have ‘discovered, extracted, appropriated, commodified and distributed knowledge’ about and to those they researched (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 5). This process rarely (if at all) has benefitted the people who shared their knowledge, perspectives, and experiences with them (Tuhiwai Smith, 2008). Such power imbalance and exploitative relations persist in some instances of international research projects and are thus also pertinent in knowledge exchange programmes. It is thus important to be mindful of how power plays out between researchers based in the West, local researchers, and different community members so that we do not reinforce it by, for example, controlling the entire process.
3. **Skill sets.** To design and implement effective and successful knowledge exchange, some additional skills may be needed. These include, but are not limited to, technology use (especially as new software and web applications emerge), arts-based and creative engagement methods, and impact evaluation techniques. These also include working with culturally and linguistically different people and engaging diverse actors and stakeholders that think differently, use different concepts to communicate, and have unique needs and priorities. Languages we use to engage with partners in LMICs is an issue that needs special attention. The use of English where English is not a widely spoken language may prevent effective engagement of local people especially with more vulnerable groups.
4. **Funding knowledge exchange activities is another concern.** Whilst universities now have special funding schemes to support knowledge exchange and impact acceleration activities and funders/donors allow to budget for impact in research grants, available funding is still limited. Also, when it is not part of a research grant, funding does not buy out of teaching and other work, which limits the time researchers can spend on knowledge exchange.

## Knowledge Exchange During the COVID-19 Pandemic

In this section, we present nine case studies with diverse engagement strategies to act as inspiration and/or templates for colleagues.

### Case Study 1: Online mapping of cultural and nonformal education at the community level in violence affected areas

Project: “Educational peacebuilding in Medellin and Acapulco: Understanding the role of education, culture and learning in responding to crisis”

Funder: The British Academy

Researchers: Prof. Evelyn Arizpe, Dr Sinead Gormally, Dr Alejandro Bahena

Institution: University of Glasgow, Scotland

Description of activity: The team set to conduct in-person participatory mapping of educational, cultural, and artistic activities in Medellin and Acapulco, both affected by violence. The main objective was to identify existing resources, opportunities, and capacities as well as gaps and needs to ultimately understand where positive social relationships take place and what actions, and activities contribute to promoting social cohesion and building a culture of peace. Participatory mapping enables researchers to work alongside communities to gain deeper and richer understanding of an issue under study, including a more nuanced and place-based insight into experiences and views of community members.

Second, from research with vulnerable groups, we also know that who in the public and the community we engage with matters (Nesterova, 2021). Different communities – be they geographical (e.g., city, neighbourhood), communities of interest (e.g., faith groups, online communities), communities of circumstance (e.g., groups of people affected by the same crisis), communities of supporters (e.g., groups within organisations) (Cabinet Office, 2011), or identity-based communities – have different power dynamics. When conducting knowledge exchange in the field with different communities, it is critical to understand who represents who in each community to reduce bias, include people with differing opinions (Wellcome Trust, 2011), and remove barriers to meaningful participation, including by supporting and providing needed resources to the most disenfranchised and vulnerable.

Unable to do such a collective mapping in person, the team turned to a virtual participatory mapping consisting of two phases. The first phase was a desk-based review of available documents of relevance such as documents of the local city council, organisations, and private initiatives that aimed to support survivors of violence, contribute to nonformal educational activities, and cultural programmes that address the impact of violence. The second phase included interviews with key stakeholders (e.g., local officials, grassroots, academics, and others) to explore available peacebuilding programmes, their impact, and stakeholders' roles. The interviews with local stakeholders helped to build a more comprehensive picture of ongoing activities as desk research does not always show all activities and interventions due to their sporadic nature.

For mapping, the team relied on the open-source software GeoJSON that allowed to input information collected during both phases of the research into one map. The software helped to ensure a more accurate place recognition and inclusion of multiple layers of information such as linking to other resources. Another usefulness of this online approach is the possibility of doing mapping in unsafe, hard to access, and unstable contexts such as conflict zones. Despite some challenges the team faced (e.g., poor Internet connection and lack of electronic devices), the team made necessary adaptations and were able to gain insights that would not be possible with traditional research methods.

The mapping activity helped the team to identify what nonformal and cultural infrastructure supportive of peacebuilding is available in the local context as well as what the impact of this infrastructure is and what opportunities and barriers are in place for local communities and initiatives.

Further reading:

Gormally, S. & Bahena, A. (2021). Briefing Paper 4: Mapping cultural and nonformal education at the community level in Acapulco. Glasgow, Scotland: Educational Peacebuilding & Centre for Research and Development in Adult and Lifelong Learning. [http://cradall.org/sites/default/files/briefing\\_paper\\_4\\_mapping\\_cultural\\_and\\_nonformal\\_education.pdf](http://cradall.org/sites/default/files/briefing_paper_4_mapping_cultural_and_nonformal_education.pdf)

Project Twitter account: @EdPeaceCities

## Case study 2: Online consultations and workshop with youth and international organisations on inclusive peace processes

Project: "Youth-led peace: The role of youth in peace processes"

Funder: Economic and Social Research Council, Impact Acceleration Account

Researchers: Dr Asli Ozcelik, Dr Yulia Nesterova, Dr Graeme Young

Institution: University of Glasgow, Scotland

Description of activity: The team expected to bring to Glasgow youth peacebuilders from conflict-affected countries and international organisations working on the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda. The objective was to share knowledge, perspectives, and experiences pertaining to the inclusion of youth in peace processes to support the advancement of the YPS agenda and the realisation of Sustainable Development Goal 16 on Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions. The project aimed to (1) discuss the challenges youth peacebuilders face and the opportunities they have, (2) share the strategies different organisations employ in efforts to promote peace and influence peace processes, (3) take stock of the progress of the YPS agenda, and (4) explore the pathways for promoting and investing in youth leadership and participation in peace processes.

Due to the pandemic, the project was done virtually, and was divided into two key activities. The first activity included conducting consultations in the form of focus group discussions and an online survey with youth-led peacebuilding organisations via Zoom. The organisations that participated in the project are located in different countries namely Afghanistan, Kenya, Liberia, the Philippines, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, Turkey, and Yemen.

The second activity was a two-day knowledge exchange workshop that was also held on Zoom and was an invitation-only and off-the-record meeting. The workshop brought together the youth organisations from the first activity and representatives from the following organisations: United Nations agencies (Office of the UN Secretary General's Envoy on Youth, UNDP, UNESCO, UN DPPA); the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office; and conflict-resolution organisation such as Beyond Borders Scotland, Search for Common Ground, Interpeace, Initiatives for International Dialogue, and Conflictus Conflict Resolution Training.

The workshop was designed with the input of representatives of youth-led organisations which was provided at the online consultation. It consisted of four sessions: (1) the role of youth in peace processes; (2) overcoming the challenges of youth-led peace; (3) rethinking inclusion holistically; and (4) pathways for youth-led peace. The workshop included presentations and discussions and thus facilitated a constructive, inclusive dialogue between researchers, policymakers, and practitioners on a range of topics that have been identified as of crucial importance for the involvement of young people in peace processes. The workshop provided a space for participants to learn from each other and develop new insights into the role(s) that young people play in promoting and sustaining peace.

The outputs of the project include a report and an article in an online magazine that focuses on promoting and contributing to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (see below). Another outcome of the project is a follow on ESRC IAA grant secured by Dr Asli Ozcelik and Dr Yulia Nesterova to continue

working with the same partners as well as other organisations. The follow-on project is building on the recommendation of the report to strengthen capacities of mediators of peace processes that work with youth peacebuilders and will rely on further consultations and workshops with relevant stakeholders to develop a capacity building resource. As of now, the researchers conducted an in-person international knowledge exchange event with key non-academic actors working in the field of youth and peace to workshop the guide and the data base they are developing and to draft new research and impact projects.

Further reading:

Ozcelik, A., Nesterova, Y., Young, G., & Maxwell, A. (2021). Youth-led peace: The role of youth in peace processes. Project Report. Glasgow, Scotland: University of Glasgow. [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=3853760](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3853760)

Nesterova, Y., & Ozcelik, A. (2021). Youth has a key role in peace processes. Impakter. <https://impakter.com/youth-role-peace-processes/>

## Case Study 3: Local partnerships and creative methods

Project: “Liveable regional cities in Bangladesh”

Funder: Centre for Sustainable Healthy and Learning Cities and Neighbourhoods (SHLC), Capacity Development Acceleration Fund, University of Glasgow

Researchers: Dr. Hanna Ruszczyk, Dr. Mohammad Feisal Rahman, Dr Alexandra Halligey

Institutions: Durham University, England; International Center for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD) – Independent University (Bangladesh); University of the Witwatersrand (South Africa)

Description of activity: The project explored what makes cities liveable from the perspectives of residents, officials, and other stakeholders with the goal to create open space for dialogue and develop insights and recommendations to help achieve Sustainable Goal 11 on Sustainable Cities. The project was conducted in two regional cities – Mongla and Noapora. The researchers relied on storytelling workshops, theatre performances, production of videos and blogs, and photo stories, in addition to traditional research methods (e.g., survey, interviews, focus groups).

Dr Halligey, who conducted similar research on daily life on Johannesburg prior to doing it in Bangladesh, led storytelling workshops and street theatre performances. These activities elicited responses from the public and opened an opportunity for a more critical dialogue on residents’ perceptions of liveability in their city. A five-minute film was created about this process. Together with reports (in English and Bengali), the

leads shared the videos and photograph exhibits with local and national policy makers in two local knowledge exchange events. Insights from the project were disseminated through varied means to government officials, academics, and non-governmental organisations at local, national, and international levels.

The project allowed to explore the connections between humanities and social science, build relationships between different actors, strengthen their skills, experiment with different methods, and develop a follow-on project.

Due to the pandemic, Dr Ruszczyk was not able to travel to Bangladesh to carry out the project and disseminate the findings. Instead, they partnered with local organisations who guided all activities in the country. This case study shows the importance of building and sustaining strong partnerships in LMICs.

Further reading:

Ahmed, I. (2020). “I (don’t) want to live here! Exploring perceptions of liveability in Bangladesh.” <https://www.urbanet.info/exploring-perceptions-of-liveability-in-bangladesh/>

Ahmed I., Halligey A., and Ruszczyk H.A. (2020). Liveable Regional Cities of Bangladesh, five-minute video, January 2020, part of Detroit’s Better Cities International Film Festival, 8-11 October 2020 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=61EqM0rWQI&t=1s>

Ruszczyk, H.A. (2020). What I learnt through Liveability, four minute video, 12 May 2020 <http://www.centreforsustainablecities.ac.uk/news/what-i-learnt-about-the-concept-of-liveability/>

Ruszczyk H.A. Halligey A, Ahmed I, and colleagues (2020). Photography exhibit from Regional Liveable Cities in Bangladesh Project, <http://www.icccad.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Photoes-with-Captions-for-exhibition-.pdf>

Ruszczyk, H.A. (2020). What I learnt about the concept of liveability. <http://www.centreforsustainablecities.ac.uk/news/what-i-learnt-about-the-concept-of-liveability/>

Ruszczyk, H.A. (2020). Learning about Liveable Regional Cities. Durham University Institute of Hazard, Risk and Resilience <https://www.dur.ac.uk/ihrh/research/themes/disruptedcities/liveable.cities/>

Selim S.B., Ahmed I., Halligey A. and Ruszczyk H. (2020). Life and liveability. Dhaka Tribune. [https://www.dhakatribune.com/climate-change/2020/05/05/life-and-liveability?fbclid=IwAR2PLy7zP1A\\_FUTZ26ZFdNMnctU0AwFMDrTKQgOccj0sBjUxWm9FbLIKDvo](https://www.dhakatribune.com/climate-change/2020/05/05/life-and-liveability?fbclid=IwAR2PLy7zP1A_FUTZ26ZFdNMnctU0AwFMDrTKQgOccj0sBjUxWm9FbLIKDvo)

'Ethics as Negotiated and Emergent in a Study of Liveability in Small Cities,' Sentio Journal - Special Issue on Ethics of Research Project Life Cycle, 91-93, <https://sentiojournal.uk/issues/issue-2-ethics/>, [https://sentiojournal.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Sentio\\_Issue\\_2\\_Reflections\\_07.pdf](https://sentiojournal.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Sentio_Issue_2_Reflections_07.pdf)

## Case Study 4: Documentaries on COVID-19 and climate change in Cuba

Projects: "Cuba & COVID-19: public health, sciences and solidarity" and "Cuba's life task: combatting climate change"

Funder: Economic and Social Research Council, Impact Acceleration Account, including ESRC IAA Covid-19 Response Call.

Researcher: Dr Helen Yaffe

Institution: University of Glasgow, Scotland

Description of activity: Following the launch of her book "We Are Cuba: How a Revolutionary People Have Survived in a Post-Soviet World" (Yale, 2020) coinciding with the start of the pandemic and a blogpost published first by Yale Press (<http://blog.yalebooks.com/2020/03/12/cubas-contribution-to-combating-covid-19/>) and then by the Latin America and Caribbean Centre at the London School of Economics (<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/latamcaribbean/2020/03/18/cuba-and-coronavirus-how-cuban-biotech-came-to-combat-covid-19/>) that went viral, Helen received numerous calls from journalists, invitations to speak at conferences and universities (Colombia, Rutgers, LSE, Chinese University of Hong Kong) around the world, and calls to do COVID-19 related projects. Given the growing interest on her research Helen applied for a small amount of money to create a documentary, Cuba & Covid-19: Public Health, Science and Solidarity. The plans to travel to Cuba to do interviews with participants had to be changed due to COVID-19 related travel restrictions. She decided to rely on her networks in the country. She collaborated with a video production team, Belly of the Beast Cuba, that includes Ed Agustin, an English journalist who writes for The Guardian and The New York Times to conduct and record interviews with participants. The team decided against doing interviews online due to potential issues with quality but also understanding that it will not be the same as having face-to-face interviews.

Throughout the process, they worked together, to get press authorisation from Cuban authorities, then to use Helen's previous research and contacts to locate the relevant interviewees, to arrange the interviews and questions, and send the footage back to the UK to the film maker who edited and produced the documentary. A key partner was a Cuban

medical scientist who works in England and was able to contact former colleagues in Cuban biotech institutions. The collaborators in UK and Cuba were in contact almost daily via WhatsApp to coordinate the process. Havana was in lockdown due to Covid in September 2020, which meant that the interviews could not begin until October. Interviews were sent back to the UK as soon as they were completed, one by one. Despite receiving the final interview only five days before the premiere, the team pulled through and displayed a one-hour documentary at the ESRC Festival of Social Sciences, with subtitles which were completed just a few hours before the premiere. The documentary was presented at other two Film Festivals (Havana-Glasgow Film Festival and the Selma Bridge Crossing Jubilee Film Festival in the US) and screened at dedicated events (major events included UK-based Alborada Net, US-based Cuba-US Normalisation Committee conference and the Saving Lives Campaign plus around 20 smaller screenings across the UK and in the US, with Helen as a guest speaker at many events). On 8 December 2020, it was posted on YouTube so it could be freely accessed from anywhere in the world with internet access and within one year it had been viewed close to 19,000 times ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGYHwldJ\\_gY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGYHwldJ_gY)).

After the first documentary, Helen applied for an ESRC IAA follow on fund to produce another documentary on Cuba's state plan climate change adaptation and mitigation, specifically to be shown at COP26 in Glasgow. The documentary is called Cuba's Life Task: Combatting Climate Change. This time, she managed to travel to Cuba in summer 2021 to have sit-down and walk along interviews with the participants herself, all carried out outdoors and wearing masks (except the interviewee during the filming). All the interviews could only be done in Havana as restrictions did not allow the team to travel outside the province. Despite this limitation, the team collected incredible material, interviewing high profile officials (ministerial advisors, the environment agency President, and so on) and members of the public at risk from rising sea levels. This time the team also worked on a tight deadline as they started the work on 12 July and the premiere was 1 November 2021, the first day of COP26. The actual work on constructing a 55-minute documentary after the interviews was intense given that, upon their return to the UK, the team had to quarantine as Cuba was unexpectedly placed on the red list while they were in Havana. For the premiere, the team invited an official member of the Cuban delegation to COP26, and, thanks to that, the whole delegation attended the event, including Cuba's Minister of Science, Technology, and the Environment, who addressed the event after the film. This was a lively and engaging event. The audience were mostly students and young environmental activists in Glasgow for COP26. The Cubans did a Q&A with the audience after the film screening.

Such work has helped Helen to generate more knowledge of the work that she does. For example, after the second documentary, she was invited to advise the new UK ambassador who will be leaving for Cuba in January 2021, on Cuba's environmental policy. She is now also the PI on

an ESRC standard grant application on the topic of Cuba's climate change policy which is close to submission and involves Co-investigators in England and Cuba).

It should be noted that the money received through grants were not sufficient to produce the documentaries as the first grant was £4,000+ and the second - £14,700+. However, Helen relied on her networks, including the international team and journalist in Cuba who treated it more as a collaboration than a commercial project, accepting payment below normal professional costs. Likewise, the film producer/editor and the Cuban medical scientist in England also waved commercial fees.

Further reading:

Written contributions (non-academic outlets):

Le Monde Diplomatique (France) <https://mondediplo.com/outsidein/cuban-medical-covid>

Counterpunch (US) <https://www.counterpunch.org/author/helyal0912/>

Tribune Magazine (UK) <https://tribunemag.co.uk/2020/07/cubas-model-vindicated>

New Left Review (US) <https://newleftreview.org/sidecar/posts/day-zero-in-cuba>

Interviewed for (print and online media): Financial Times newspaper (UK), Telegraph (UK), Washington Post (US), CNBC (US), Business Insider (UK/US), CBC (Canada), Medaparts (France), The Express (UK), Deutsche Welle (Germany), Al Jazeera (Qatar), Anadolu Agency (Turkey), TRT World (Turkey), La Vanguardia (Spain), Prensa Latina (Latin America), Flamman (Swedish)

Radio: (UK) Radio Times; BBC World Service, BBC Radio 4; (US) Pacifica Radio in New York City; WNUR-FM radio (Chicago), NPR radio (New York); WPFW, and KPFA radio and Radio Sputnik. Radio France International, (Germany) Deutschlandradio, the national German Broadcaster, (Slovenia) Radio Slovenia

Podcast interviews: Brendan James, Blowback Show; Cosmonaut; Radical Reflections, Breakthrough News (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NPslcjjuoxQ>).

## Case Study 5: Digital arts-based methods to discuss peace, conflict, and peacebuilding

Project: "Local, place-based, and community-driven approaches to peacebuilding"

Funder: The British Academy/Leverhulme Small Grant

Researchers: Dr Yulia Nesterova, Dr Eun-ji Amy Kim

Institutions: University of Glasgow, Scotland; Griffith University, Australia

Description of activity: In this pilot project, the team sought to explore traditional indigenous processes of peacebuilding and reconciliation as an alternative to the top-down approach utilised by international organisations. To achieve the objectives, the project set to understand (1) how local peacebuilders conceptualise peace and conflict in their diverse settings; (2) what challenges and opportunities they face; (3) what components and approaches peacebuilding should have to be effective, sustainable, and context-relevant; and (4) what role education and learning should play in these processes.

Unlike the other case studies described here, this project was designed as an online project intentionally. The rationale behind this decision was to be able to explore ways to reach people working on local peacebuilding initiatives in multiple contexts with no travel.

To achieve these aims, in addition to the traditional methods of online questionnaires and Zoom focus group discussions, the team relied on digitalising arts-based methods to allow participants to engage in a dialogue and express their views and experiences as well as best practices through storytelling and drawing. Two artists were engaged to facilitate online webinars. The storytelling webinars were facilitated by an Australian Aboriginal artist who created a safe online environment for the participants and guided them in telling their stories of what peace and conflict mean for them in their contexts. The drawing webinars were facilitated by a UK-based artist who gave the participants a simple method to enable them to create an artistic representation that shows their ideas of what good practices of peacebuilding look like. Another platform used was Padlet where participants could respond to different questions posed by the researchers and engage with the other participants. Unlike the workshops, Padlet discussions were asynchronous which allowed the participants to engage with the task at the time most convenient to them.

In addition to academic articles on the methodology and place-based peace and peacebuilding, one output of this project is a forthcoming report which will inform diverse actors and stakeholders in the field of what effective and inclusive peacebuilding should look like and how to support local communities affected by conflict and violence. Another forthcoming output is a media article. The PI has now built on this methodology to conduct in-person arts-based workshops on peace and justice with youth in Scotland, which allowed to enhance the methodology, hear, and document youth voices, get youth feedback, and build relationships with young people and schools.

## Case Study 6: Virtual exhibition at ESRC Festival of Social Sciences

Project: “Neighbourhood matters”

Funder: Economic and Social Research Council, Festival of Social Sciences

Researchers: Dr Sohail Ahmad, Dr Yulia Nesterova

Institution: University of Glasgow, Scotland

Description of activity:

As part of the research on the impact of urbanisation on education, health, and livelihoods conducted at GCRF Centre for Sustainable, Healthy and Learning Cities and Neighbourhoods (University of Glasgow), the researchers developed and presented a virtual photo exhibition “Neighbourhood matters.” The project sought to understand what a sustainable urban community and neighbourhoods means for residents of different cities in the countries the Centre works in, including Bangladesh, China, the Philippines, and Rwanda. Photography was utilised as photographs are a powerful tool to transmit messages in a more emotional way and overcome linguistic and cultural differences.

Photographers were asked to reflect on one theme – what sustainability means to them in their urban neighbourhood – and to capture that moment. The project received 35 entries from over 14 cities. Their photos were published on social media websites used by SHLC such as Twitter and Instagram. Social media followers were asked to choose top ten entries which were then presented at the virtual exhibition on Zoom where the photographers shared their own views on sustainability in their own local neighbourhoods. The exhibition showed that sustainability means many different things to different people, depending on what context they live in.

Further reading:

Centre for Sustainable, Healthy and Learning Cities and Neighbourhoods. (2020). Neighbourhood matters: A virtual exhibition for ESRC Festival of Social Sciences. <http://www.centreforsustainablecities.ac.uk/events/neighbourhood-matters-a-virtual-exhibition-for-esrc-2020-festival-of-social-science/>

Nesterova, Y., & Ahmad, S. (2020). What makes your neighbourhood sustainable? Lessons from a virtual photography exhibition. Centre for Sustainable, Healthy and Learning Cities and Neighbourhoods. <http://www.centreforsustainablecities.ac.uk/news/what-makes-your-neighbourhood-sustainable-lessons-from-a-virtual-photography-exhibition/>

## Case Study 7: Online symposium on lifelong learning policies and practices in the Global South

Project: “Developing inclusive lifelong learning policies and practices in the Global South”

Funder: Global Challenges Research Fund Small Grant

Researchers: Dr Yulia Nesterova, Dr Queralt Capsada-Munsech, Prof. Idowu Biao, Dr Vincent Manirakiza, Dr Benson Njoroge

Institutions: University of Glasgow, Scotland; Université d’Abomey Calavi, Benin; University of Rwanda, Rwanda; Mount Kenya University, Kenya

Description of activity:

This project was planned by an international team to be a four-day symposium held at Mount Kenya University in Kenya to facilitate exchanges between actors that rarely have opportunities to interact with each other. Due to the travel restrictions during the pandemic, the decision was made to hold the symposium online. Initially, the teams included partners in Benin, Kenya, Rwanda, and Zimbabwe with the partners from Zimbabwe stepping down due to the challenges caused by the pandemic. In addition, representatives of UNESCO and the African Union were expected to join but had to step down as the symposium was postponed a number of times due to various challenges presented by the pandemic in the various locations.

The project aimed to hold the symposium to re-evaluate and rethink existing lifelong learning policies and practices in the four countries to ensure they meet the needs and interests of communities, especially the most vulnerable. The other two aims were (1) to identify a topic for a collaborative multi-site action research project and (2) to build a partnership between key education actors (i.e., academics, policymakers, NGO workers, educators) in the five countries to develop and implement the project.

Using the virtual conference platform Whova, we held a three-day symposium that was structured around five questions:

- (1) the types of lifelong learning practices in the contexts of: Benin, Kenya, Rwanda
- (2) persons and groups that are excluded from lifelong learning provision and reasons for exclusion
- (3) the support of lifelong learning in national policies
- (4) what we envision an equitable, inclusive, and quality lifelong learning to be and
- (5) what steps should be taken to achieve the vision

By bringing together a group of individuals that otherwise have limited opportunities for discussion (i.e., academics, policymakers, NGO workers, educators) the project sought to bridge the divide between research and practice and share knowledge from diverse perspectives and contexts.

The symposium facilitated constructive, inclusive dialogue on lifelong learning between the participants and provided space to learn from each other and develop new insights into this critical topic. Despite being online, it was an engaging and lively experience thanks to the availability of such tools as Whova Networking to get to know each other, Mentimeter to conduct all sorts of polls, Jamboard to take notes, Google docs to write down recommendations, and break out rooms to work in small groups, to name a few.

As an output, the project is preparing a technical report with insights and recommendations to support diverse stakeholders and actors in their work towards inclusive and equitable lifelong learning.

## Case Study 8: Animation, policy brief, blogposts on education and spatial inequalities

Project: “Education and spatial inequalities in Bangladesh, China, India, the Philippines, Rwanda, South Africa, and Tanzania”

Funder: Centre for Sustainable Healthy and Learning Cities and Neighbourhoods (SHLC), University of Glasgow

Researchers: Dr Yulia Nesterova, Prof. Michele Schweisfurth

Institution: University of Glasgow, Scotland

Description of activity:

As part of the education portfolio of GCRF Centre for Sustainable, Healthy and Learning Cities and Neighbourhoods (University of Glasgow), the researchers prepared a number of non-academic knowledge dissemination outputs to share insights from their research with partners in LMICs as well as other stakeholders, including policy makers, international organisations, and the public.

Relying on in-country reports with secondary and primary data prepared by academics in each partner country, the researchers developed several outputs to lay the foundation for future outputs based on the primary data (household surveys and focus groups on neighbourhoods of different income) they have been collecting in 14 cities in these countries across Africa and Asia. These outputs include:

- a 2D animation highlighting the importance of studying education and learning at neighbourhood level
- a policy brief with insights from Bangladesh, India, and

Tanzania on the different opportunities and challenges across diverse types of neighbourhoods (from ultra-poor to high income) in these three countries

- blogposts published on the project’s website as well as on the website of UKFIET - the Education and Development Forum frequented by academics as well as representatives of international organisations and international non-governmental organisations.

SHLC has also now published a 2D animation on its impact activities through its Capacity Development Acceleration Fund across LMICs. You can watch the animation here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LWkFFQCUZFM>

Further reading:

Nesterova, Y. (2020). Is your neighbourhood your destiny? How the neighbourhood you live in determines your educational opportunities. UKFIET: The Education and Development Forum. <https://www.ukfiet.org/2020/is-your-neighbourhood-your-destiny-how-the-neighbourhood-you-live-in-determines-your-educational-opportunities/>

Nesterova, Y. & Schweisfurth, M. (2021). Educational opportunities and disadvantages across neighbourhoods in Dar Es Salaam, Delhi, and Dhaka. Centre for Sustainable, Healthy and Learning Cities and Neighbourhoods. <http://www.centreforsustainablecities.ac.uk/news/educational-opportunities-and-disadvantages-across-neighbourhoods-in-dar-es-salaam-delhi-and-dhaka/>

Nesterova, Y. & Schweisfurth, M. (2021). 2D Animation: Educational inequalities across neighbourhoods. Centre for Sustainable, Healthy and Learning Cities and Neighbourhoods. <http://www.centreforsustainablecities.ac.uk/news/watch-shlcs-first-animation-that-highlights-the-importance-of-studying-spatial-inequalities-within-cities-to-ensure-we-build-quality-inclusive-and-equitable-education-for-all-learners/>

Nesterova, Y. & Schweisfurth, M. (2021). Neighbourhood effects on educational opportunities: Insights from Bangladesh, India, and Tanzania. Policy brief #1. Centre for Sustainable, Healthy and Learning Cities and Neighbourhoods. <http://www.centreforsustainablecities.ac.uk/research/research-reports/neighbourhood-effects-on-educational-opportunities/>

## Case Study 9: Engaging with EU to break the deadlock in EU-Turkmenistan relations

Project: ongoing research of Prof. Luca Anceschi

Researcher: Prof. Luca Anceschi

Institution: University of Glasgow, Scotland

Note on this case study: This case study is different to the others included in this report. The reason for its inclusion is to highlight a way of engaging with a key international actor that can then have a positive impact on an LMIC such as Turkmenistan. Turkmenistan is a context that is one of the most challenging for academics to work in and with, and using

indirect ways, such as described in this case study, in order to influence policy and practice is important and unique.

#### Description of activity:

Since 1998, due to the concerns about Turkmenistan's human rights record and governance standards, the European Union has declined to ratify a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) with the country. Prof. Anceschi's research and targeted engagement with the European Parliament has helped to build a positive vote within the European Parliament and shape the implementation of a monitoring mechanism in Turkmenistan to measure progress towards protecting human rights. In particular, Prof. Anceschi's research showed that signing this agreement opened an unique opportunity for the EU to engage with Turkmenistan and to increase the likelihood of the Turkmen regime accepting human rights and rule of law benchmarks in exchange for improved trade conditions. This approach has a potential to bring about real human rights change within Turkmenistan. These findings informed Prof. Anceschi's advice to members of the European Parliament and led to his advisory role with the European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET).

Prof. Anceschi provided research-based advice to the AFET Rapporteur's team via formal and informal briefings and written reports. This advice outlined a way forward by highlighting the inconsistencies in the EU's interactions with Turkmenistan in comparison to its relations with Kazakhstan, thus creating a basis for bridging the differing stances of the European Parliament and the European Commission over the required standards for human rights monitoring. Drawing upon the research, Prof. Anceschi presented PCA ratification as a strategic priority for the EU and an instrument for promoting rule of law in Turkmenistan. He argued that economic circumstances might encourage the Turkmen leadership to consent to a tightly framed conditionality regime to be operationalised after PCA ratification and inclusive of measures on civil society liberalisation.

Prof. Anceschi's research subsequently underpinned a comprehensive range of targeted initiatives by the AFET Committee to build consensus among Members of European Parliament. This activity was pivotal to a positive vote on the draft resolution extension of the interim agreement (the framework for EU-Turkmenistan relations in lieu of a fully ratified PCA). Prof. Anceschi's targeted initiatives included a formal address to the AFET Committee as part of a workshop on 'EU-Turkmenistan Relations – Setting the Right Benchmarks.' A paper based on his presentation was eventually published by the European Parliament under the title *Engaging Turkmenistan at a time of Economic Crisis*. This paper outlined a series of conditionality benchmarks that came to form the core of the draft benchmark resolution that the Rapporteur brought before the AFET Committee for a formal vote. The AFET Committee prepared a Draft Interim Report on EU-Turkmenistan relations. This document was accompanied by an 'explanatory statement' to which Prof. Anceschi contributed significantly, drawing materially upon his

research findings. After that, Prof. Anceschi delivered a further presentation to representatives of each Parliamentary Group accredited in the European Parliament to reinforce the case for PCA ratification as a strategic priority for the EU.

Following Prof. Anceschi's programme of targeted initiatives, the European Parliament scheduled a plenary vote on the Draft Interim Report with MEPs voting in favour of the draft resolution extension. Following the positive vote, Prof. Anceschi's research has shaped the next step towards PCA ratification, which involves the implementation of a short-term human rights monitoring mechanism in Turkmenistan. This mechanism will be overseen by a fully-fledged EU delegation in Ashgabat.

Prof. Anceschi's research has played a significant role in overcoming a major obstacle to improving relations between the EU and Turkmenistan.

#### Further reading:

Anceschi, L. (2008) *Turkmenistan's Foreign Policy: Positive Neutrality and the Consolidation of the Turkmen Regime*. Series: Central Asian studies series. Routledge.

Anceschi, L. (2010) Integrating domestic politics and foreign policy making: the cases of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. *Central Asian Survey*, 29(2), pp. 143-158. doi: 10.1080/02634937.2010.498231

Anceschi, L. (2017) Turkmenistan and the virtual politics of Eurasian energy: the case of the TAPI pipeline project. *Central Asian Survey*, 36(4), pp. 409-429. doi: 10.1080/02634937.2017.1391747

Twitter account: @anceschistan

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on these case studies, key recommendations include:

**Recommendation 1:** Be careful when choosing the tools and platforms to engage with actors and stakeholders in LMICs. Discuss with your partners what will work best in their circumstances to meet their needs as well as the needs of your project. Partner with individuals and organisations on the ground who can help you overcome barriers to digital engagement. This may include partnering with organisations that have physical spaces equipped with necessary technology, even low-tech, or that can provide access to technology (e.g., low tech digital kits) to those excluded.

**Recommendation 2:** Drawing on previous recommendation, collaboration and partnerships are key for sharing resources and skills. Impact and knowledge exchange becomes more successful and effective when we commit to a long-term approach to collaborate with others and support mutual improvement and capacity building and strengthening.

**Recommendation 3:** Learn to speak with practitioners and policymakers in their own 'language.' Academics and non-academic actors work and think in different ways and have different objectives. It is important to learn to understand each other through collaborations and attending trainings and workshops.

**Recommendation 4:** Design knowledge exchange / impact project together with your partners in LMICs, giving them more power and agency to direct the design and implementation of such activities. This will help to address potential power imbalances and ensure local ownership and suitability of activities.

**Recommendation 5:** Know your audience – what are their barriers and limitations and what are opportunities and entry points to engage with them.

**Recommendation 6:** Know what works for different audiences and circumstances. Sometimes a broad theme and a bottom-up and flexible approach to deciding which questions to address will be effective; sometimes, it will not, and a more constrained theme will be more beneficial. As Duvic-Paoli (2021) notes, “online knowledge exchange works best when it is highly structured.” Although this may not always be true as audiences and objectives differ.

**Recommendation 7:** Develop a shared understanding of what an event / project is about: its objectives, audience, methods of engagement, intended outcomes, limitations, etc. Draft clear instructions, together, to ensure coherence and success.

**Recommendation 8:** Invest in building a relationship with your partners and stakeholders, especially if it is a purely or partly virtual community and people do not know each other well. You need to prioritise establishing a relationship of trust as well as a sense of belonging to a team.

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